

# Role for Initiative: Identity, Belonging, and Dungeons & Dragons

Jessica Pulliam, OTS University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

## Background and Purpose

- Identity is formed and maintained, in large part, through the participation of preferred occupations.<sup>1</sup>
- Social engagement plays a significant role in identity and feelings of belonging.<sup>2</sup>

*Does regular participation in the social occupation of tabletop roleplaying games support identity formation?*

## Methods

- Qualitative research design
- Targeted recruitment
- Focus group consisting of 5 adult tabletop role-players who have been playing together for more than 1 year
- Thematic coding and analysis
- Member checking

## Findings

*"[Gaming] has given me a group of friends [...] that I didn't always have."*

*"Take a part of your own personality [...] and then build a character pretty much out of that."*

**Belonging**

**Identity**



**Self-reflection**

**Exploration**

*"It's almost like free therapy."*

*"This is a really important and exciting creative aspect of my life."*

## Discussion

- Regular participation in Dungeons and Dragons promoted feelings of belonging, supported identity formation, encouraged self-reflection, and inspired exploration and creativity.
- Through collaborative story telling, members of the group are able to explore personality traits and interpersonal situations with limited real world consequence.

## Implications for Practice

- Occupational therapists may be better equipped to address identity after injury and illness onset by understanding the role participation in social occupation has on identity.
- Role playing games could potentially be used as a tool to help support identity and community formation.

