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Cruising to be a Board Gamer: Understanding Socialization Relating to Board Gaming and The Dice Tower

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CRUISING TO BE A BOARD GAMER:
UNDERSTANDING SOCIALIZATION RELATING TO BOARD GAMING AND
THE DICE TOWER

By
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Thesis
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ABSTRACT

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Communication Studies

Cruising to be a Board Gamer: Understanding Socialization Relating to Board Gaming and The Dice Tower

Chairperson: Dr. Joel Iverson

The Dice Tower consists of 30 professional board gamers and has the largest online following with 60,000 podcast listeners and over 140,000 YouTube subscribers (Dice Tower, 2017a). This study uses Kramer's Multilevel Communication Model of Voluntary Socialization (MCMVS) to understand how the Dice Tower gains followers and socializes others to become board gamers. This study applies MCMVS to a population with more ambiguous membership boundaries than volunteer organizations, specifically socialization to board game leisure. Through interviews of 18 participants and participant observation during a board gaming cruise hosted by the Dice Tower this study examines the role of the Dice Tower and similar organizations in socializing board gamers. Results indicate MCMVS successfully captures socialization to board gaming. MCMVS displays the socialization process of outsiders becoming insiders of an organization, but board gamers do not become members of the Dice Tower. Board gamers voluntarily associate (Putnam, 2001) with organizations such as the Dice Tower. The Dice Tower and similar organizations are *Socialization Gateway Organizations* (SGO), which serve as a socialization resource for recruitment, networking, and guiding board game purchases.

Keywords: socialization, voluntary association, multilevel communication model, board gaming, serious leisure

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Cruising to be a Board Gamer:

Understanding Socialization relating the Board Gaming and the Dice Tower

CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Rationale

Four people huddle around a table as they each struggle to terraform and colonize Mars faster and better than their competitors. This game plot comes from a board game currently ranked the 7th best game out of 14,222 board games (Browse board games | BoardGameGeek). Similar tabletop scenarios are becoming more and more common as sales in the United States have increased 5% annually since 2013 (NPD, 2017). The increased sales correlate with the creation of new board games and is highlighted in articles like “The 50 Best New Board Games” which ranks the top new board games of the year (Herkewitz, 2017). This growth fuels the growing popularity of board game cafes, board game bars (Schank, 2014), and hundreds of thousands of YouTube subscriptions to board game channels (Hutchcraft, 2016). The Dice Tower, as one organization, provides board game content, who in 2016, provided over 2,000 videos, over 1,000 reviews of board games, over 60,000 listeners to their podcast, and over 140,000 subscribers on YouTube (Dice Tower, 2017a) and raised \$295,132 just in 2017 (Kickstarter, 2018). Board game culture continues to grow, but a small body of literature examines board game socialization and board game organizations.

Socialization is commonly understood as the process of individuals transitioning from an outsider to an insider (Kramer, 2011a). This process can be generally understood with models, however, not everyone experiences socialization the same way (Bullis & Bach, 1989).

Socialization literature has previously examined organizational socialization in the workplace. In illustrating the socialization process in the workplace, researchers developed various models

depicting the socialization process. However, previous socialization models tend to view work organizations as a container with clear membership boundaries (Smith & Turner, 1995). This can be seen in studies where individuals are either in the organization and employed or out of the organization and unemployed. Applying socialization theory to volunteer organizations found previous workplace models did not appropriately depict the socialization process, and, volunteer organizations have ambiguous membership boundaries where neither the individual nor the organization can fully identify who is a member and who is not.

The discrepancy between workplace membership and volunteer organizational membership boundaries led to Kramer's (2011b) development of a volunteer socialization model, the Multilevel Communication Model of Voluntary Socialization (MCMVS). MCMVS, as a socialization model, approaches both a micro and macro perspective which considers the ambiguous membership boundaries as well as a tension between organizations and their own socialization processes. For example, a person may be a member of multiple organizations and socialization to one is different than socialization to another. Though MCMVS originally depicted volunteer organizations, leisure organizations share the concept of ambiguous membership.

Volunteer organizations and *voluntary associations* are two common ways for people to gather together. Volunteer organizations are formal non-profit organizations recognized by the IRS such as Kramer's (2011a) community choir. Like other organizations, voluntary associations provide gathering space for people around a common purpose or belief, but voluntary associations can be much less formal regarding membership such as the abolitionist and temperance movements (Putnam, 2001). Volunteer organizations and voluntary associations may both have ambiguous membership boundaries as noted in Kramer's development of MCMVS.

However, leisure activities such as board gaming draw on more informal social connections (Putnam, 2001) but may also connect to board gaming organizations such as BoardGameGeek or the Dice Tower. Since MCMVS is based in less formal organizations, it may prove useful to understand socialization to organizations and provide resources for board gamers, but not require formal membership.

Previous leisure literature discusses a variety of constraints to leisure and the tensions among these constraints include time and a lack of socialization into leisure activities (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991). Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) also created a model reflecting psychological and socialization in leisure consumerism, finding various factors contributing to increased consumerism such as brand loyalty. However, neither of these models examine the communicative socialization processes like the MCMVS. Socialization models, including the MCMVS, focus on the individual's experience and managing various socialization processes. Though the MCMVS explains socialization in a general sense, not every individual experiences socialization the same way.

Early Socialization Literature

Socialization is defined as “the broad overarching process by which individuals learn the attitudes and skills they need as they join, participate in, and leave organizations...” (Kramer, 2011b, p. 239). Other terms for socialization include assimilation, acculturation and enculturation. Regardless of term, the assimilation process transitions an individual from an outsider to an insider, however, this process is never finished (Kramer, 1993). Kramer explains, even after an individual successfully transitions to an insider, socialization processes occur through organizational changes such as adjusting to a new boss or receiving a promotion or transfer within the organization.

The general socialization theory consists of three phases: anticipatory socialization, encounter, and metamorphosis. The first phase, anticipatory socialization, begins before entering an organization, occurring as early as learning the meaning of work as a child (Bowes & Goodnow, 1996), or as late as researching an organization prior to an interview (Dailey, 2016). Anticipatory socialization occurs through activities such as watching online content, reading articles, hearing from peers, seeing advertisements, etc. which constantly shapes and reshapes an individual's impression of an organization. The organization actively participates in the anticipatory socialization processes. An example of an organization's effort in the socialization process includes filtering resumes through computer software to efficiently rule out applicants (Connelly, 2012). This early socialization phase helps individuals reduce uncertainty and anxiety in preparation for the second phase, encounter.

The second socialization phase, encounter, begins when a new employee first starts experiencing work on the job (Louis, 1980). The encounter phase may cause anxiety as newcomers and the organization work to reduce uncertainty. Activities such as orientation have proven to reduce anxiety, turnover, and even assist newcomers in learning to identify with the organization (Stephens & Dailey, 2012). Within the encounter phase, socialization is marked by change, contrast, surprise (Louis, 1980). Newcomers tend to seek more information to reduce uncertainty and increase familiarity during the encounter phase such as surveillance, observations, disguised conversations, test limits, monitor, and ask either direct or indirect questions (Miller & Jablin, 1991). After individuals' initial encounter with an organization, the third phase, metamorphosis, can begin.

During metamorphosis the newcomer begins to adopt organizational expectations such as attitudes and behaviors and is no longer considered an outsider by others already in the

organization (Jablin & Krone, 1987). Though a newcomer may have adopted organizational cues and customs, metamorphosis is never complete, an ongoing process with continuous variability (Kramer, 1993).

Socialization typically is applied to formal groups and organizations, but also works for associations and informal groups. Work and volunteer organizations are considered formal organizations with formal networking, which facilitate the creation of informal social connections (Putnam, 2001). An example of the development of informal networks is when individuals network at a Parent-Teacher Association meeting or at Dice Tower board gaming events, then the individuals become friends and meet outside of the organization (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009). The previous socialization literature overviews the basic principles for formal and informal social connections, but as individuals progress in socialization, it is important to know the newcomer's status to properly assist in the individual in furthering their socialization. Volunteer organizations include formal non-profit organizations such as those recognized by the IRS, but voluntary associations are community, church, and work-based (Putnam, 2001). Examples of voluntary associations include Parent-Teacher Associations, American Association of Retired Persons, and American Automobile Association. This study will examine the socialization process within board gaming.

Previous leisure research models do not examine socialization directly. Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) examines relationship between involvement, psychological commitment, and behavioral loyalty, but the model focuses upon psychological processes in consumer brand loyalty rather than socialization to activities or organizations, let alone communicative processes. Another leisure model called A Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints does mention socialization, but only as a constraint preventing an individual from engaging in more leisure

(Crawford et al., 1991). Neither leisure model explores the communicative process of socialization in leisure activities nor the connection to organizations which facilitate the leisure activities.

Extended socialization models. To better understand the socialization process, researchers developed models with phases. These models help organizations understand what stage or phase an individual may be in to effectively continue the socialization process. The most common model is Jablin's phase model which outlines the socialization process from anticipatory socialization to metamorphosis and added exit process (Jablin, 2001). Socialization occurs from two different sides, the organizational efforts and individual efforts. Jablin's phase model shows inculcation as the organization socializing the member. Conversely, the member's influence on the organization is called individualization or personalization (Kramer, 2011a). As effective as the phase model is, the model portrays work organizations with a clear boundary of membership indicated by employment status.

Jablin's model examines workplace socialization processes, but volunteer organizational socialization differs from workplace socialization because voluntary exit is nonlinear and often has ambiguous membership boundaries (Haski-Leventhal and Bargel, 2008; Kramer 2011a; Kramer, 2011b). Researchers found non-linear socialization exits as individuals exited ultra-Orthodox Jewish religion (Davidman & Greil, 2007) and exiting The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Hinderaker, 2015; Hinderaker & O'Connor, 2015). These studies indicated exit is non-linear as individuals jump to different exit stages rather than a clear linear exit. Haski-Leventhal and Bargel's (2008) volunteer socialization model also added a renewal component, which permits non-linear socialization processes. In addition to a nonlinear exit, exiting voluntary organizations also differs from workplace because volunteer organizations tend to

have ambiguous membership boundaries (Kramer, 2011a). Ambiguous membership means neither the organization nor the individual can decipher who is a member and who is not. This ambiguous membership is seen in community choirs (Kramer, 2011a).

Haski-Leventhal and Bargel, (2008) created a socialization model for volunteers like Jablin's but includes a unique phase, renewal. This socialization model illustrates a non-linear socialization process as members go through several phases but jump back to a previous phase. This jumping back to a previous phase is called renewal. Like Haski-Leventhal and Bargel's (2008) nonlinear model, Kramer's (2011b) model also permits nonlinear socialization. Kramer recognized an individual's socialization into an organization reduces participation or even cause exit from another organization. This macro perspective of socialization led to the creation of the Multilevel Communication Model of Voluntary Socialization (MCMVS).

Multilevel communication model of voluntary socialization (MCMVS). MCMVS explores an individual's relationship to an organization and depicts membership tension among several organizations. This socialization model expands the previous understanding of socialization which portrayed organizations as containers where individuals are either in or out of the organization (Smith & Turner, 1995). The container perspective worked for the workplace because it has clear membership boundaries of either employed or unemployed. However, some organizations have ambiguous membership boundaries (Kramer, 2011a; 2011b). Kramer uses a community choir as an example of an organization with ambiguous membership boundaries because neither the members or organization can identify who is or is not a member not (Kramer, 2011a). Some may be absent for various periods of time or leave for a time and rejoin. Previous socialization models also portray socialization as a linear process, progressing toward full

assimilation and cleanly exiting (Jablin, 2001). However, MCMVS explains socialization as a dialectic tension between organizational memberships.

Previous socialization literature often examines the organization's perspective which diminishes the individual's perspective in the socialization process (Bullis, 1999). Kramer's (2011b) Multilevel Communication Model of Voluntary Socialization (MCMVS) examines socialization of individuals and examines how various organizational memberships influence each other. For example, as individuals engage in the community choir, time commitments are negotiated to ensure appropriate time is still dedicated to work or family-based issues.

Though Kramer's model is designed to explain volunteer socialization, this study seeks to extend research and apply the model to leisure, specifically, board gaming and board game organizations. MCMVS specifically examines how individuals communicatively navigate the various tensions of organization's socialization processes. MCMVS incorporates a macro approach to socialization by incorporating Putnam and Stohl's (1990) bona fide group perspective. The bona fide group perspective (BFGP) overcomes the organizational container perspective by classifying membership tensions as changing because of multiple group memberships (Putnam & Stohl). BFGP previously examined small groups but Kramer (2011b) expanded the application to a larger organization. Kramer originally developed MCMVS after an ethnographic study of a community choir, but he urges researchers to apply and expand the model as needed (Kramer, 2011b). Applying MCMVS to board gaming will expand the model further, specifically by examining a larger organization with ambiguous membership boundaries.

To adapt MCMVS to board gaming and board game organizations, each component of MCMVS is analyzed relative to this research. MCMVS is comprised of three levels, first an individual's membership with a single organization (see Figure 1), second, how multiple

memberships affect socialization processes, and third, the socialization of multiple voluntary members in multiple groups (Kramer, 2011b). The first level differs from previous models because it does not project phases on the individuals but assesses an individual's status. The MCMVS permits ambiguous membership boundaries for both the individual and organizational perspective. Within the first level, members can have one of five different statuses, prospective, new, transitory, established, and former (see Figure 1; Kramer, 2011b).

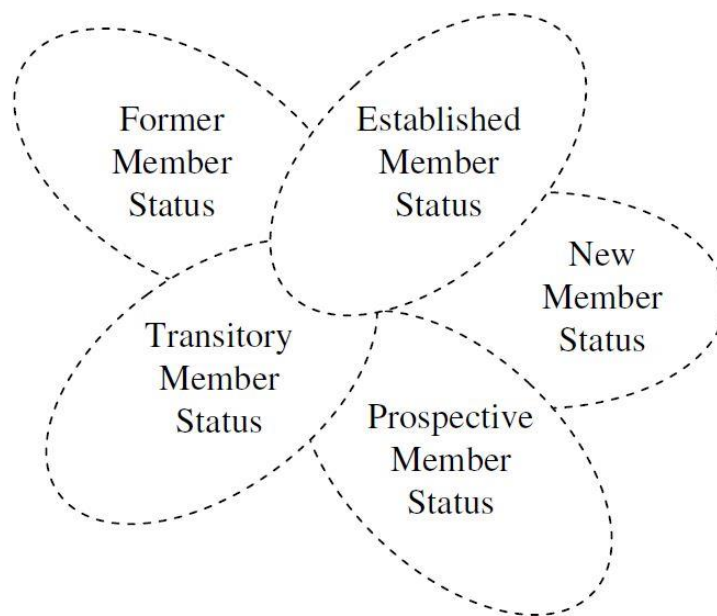


Figure 1. MCMVS Level 1. This level displays the five membership statuses an individual may have in an organization.

Prospective or potential members are identified by three types of communication: role development communication, reconnaissance communication, and recruitment communication. Role development communication allows potential members to learn membership expectations such as attitudes and skills. Reconnaissance communication regards information gathering which influences the potential member's choice of which organization to join. The third form of communication is recruitment communication. Established members engage in recruitment

communication in hopes the prospective member chooses to join their organization. Kramer clarifies recruitment communication can be as simple as a banner on a webpage or a personal and direct invitation to join (2011b).

In socialization progression, the next status is new member. Often new members and established members may not agree on membership status. New members engage in uncertainty reducing behaviors like the encounter phase in socialization, namely direct or indirect inquiries, observations, etc. (Miller & Jablin, 1991).

Established member status is the next status which are individuals easily recognized as no longer new members (Kramer, 2011b). The established member is aware of their own status and are more likely considered for organizational leadership positions because the established members embody the organization's values and attitudes in their communication habits. These members also become sources of information for new members.

Members may exit the organization and become former members. Kramer clarifies organizational exit can be an immediate transition out or fade out (2011b). Former member status is seen as a lack of communication with the organizations as the member severs ties with the organization.

Transitory member status is an in-between membership status. As membership in volunteer organizations do not have a clear boundary of insiders and outsiders, these members are individuals whose membership status is unknown to themselves and to the organization. Examples of transitory members include new members who never make the commitments to become an established member but are no longer considered newcomers to the organization.

Level two explores how multiple memberships affect the socialization process in an organization (see Figure 2; Kramer, 2011b). Socialization regards both the inculcation and

personalization processes. This level accounts for the inculcation, personalization, and matching. Matching is when both the individual's and organization's needs are fulfilled without any major changes.

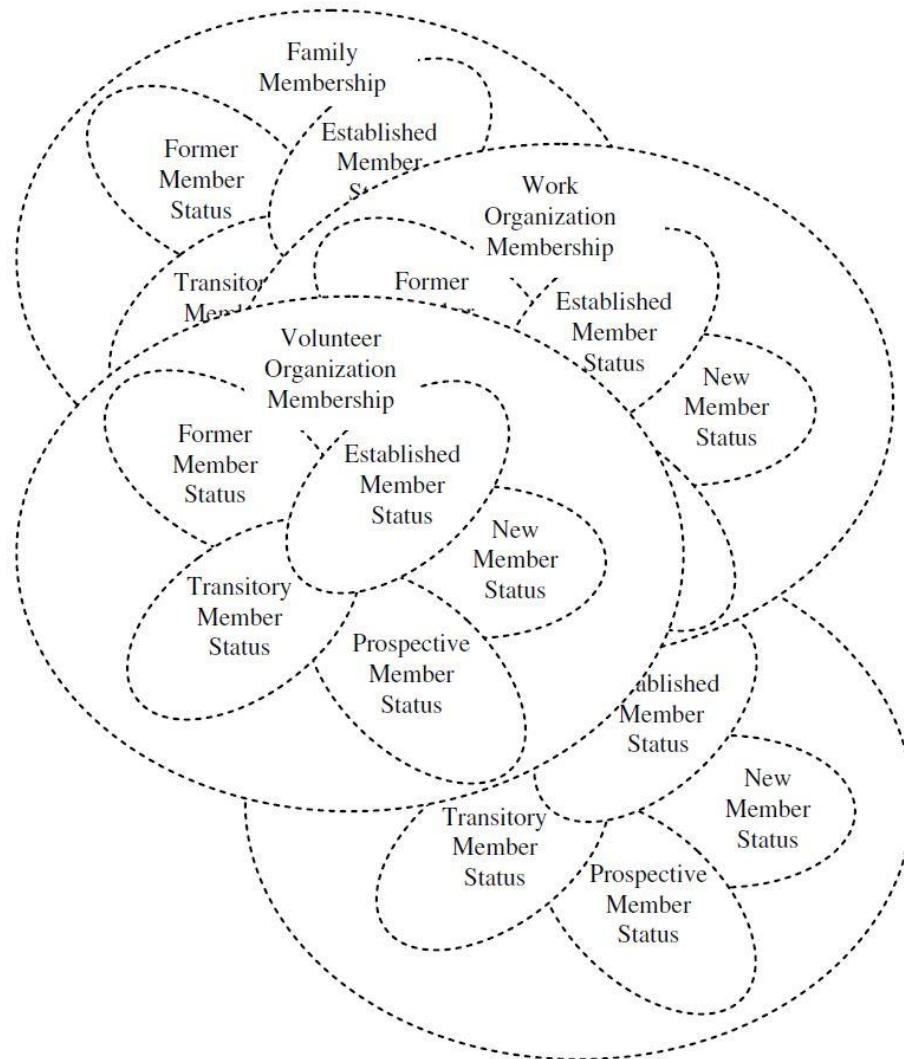


Figure 2. MCMVS level two. This figure depicts the five socialization statuses an individual may have to various organizations simultaneously.

The final level of MCMVS regards the “socialization of multiple voluntary members in multiple groups” (see Figure 3; Kramer, 2011b, p. 248). Level three explores the complicated effects of multiple individual socialization processes, specifically how individuals share multiple

memberships with each other. Multiple individuals experience multiple socialization processes, and this becomes more complicated when multiple individuals share membership in two or more of the same organizations.

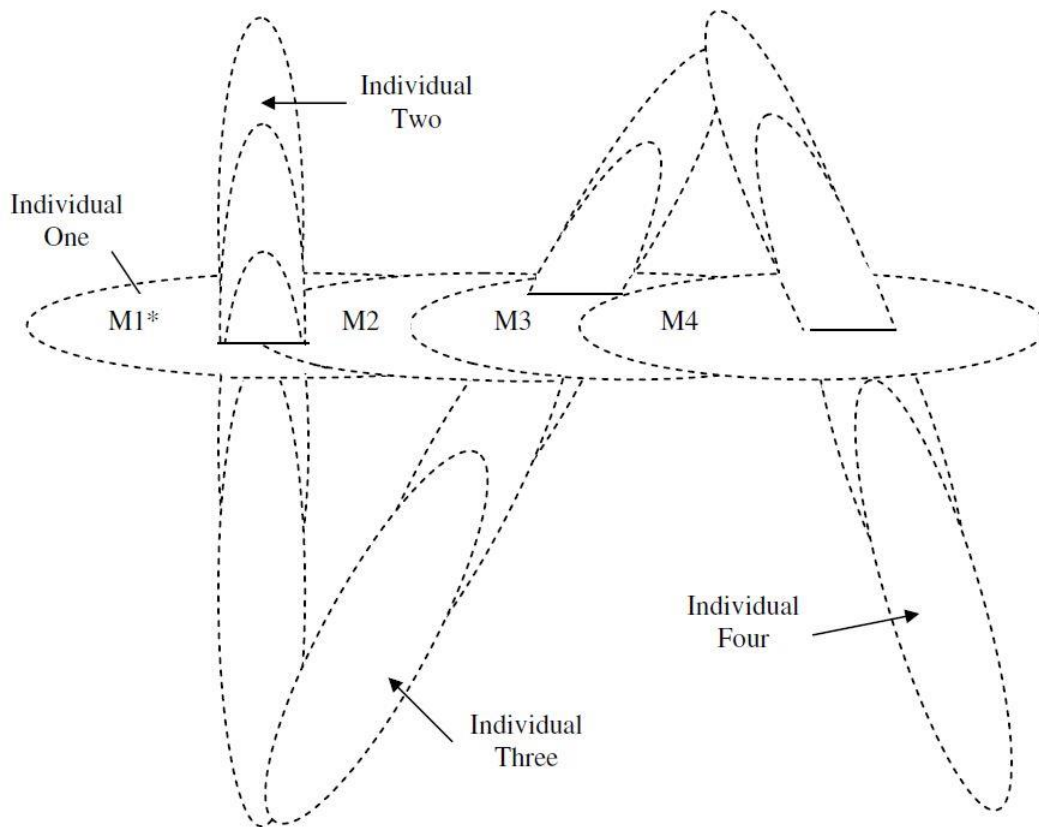


Figure 3. MCMVS Level Three. This figure depicts the intersection of membership in various organizations with various social circles.

Applying Kramer's MCMVS to board gaming leisure illustrates the possibility of a more complicated socialization process for leisure interest. The first level is an individual invests time to be socialized. The individual can play games with people or watch and/or read board game content such as the content produced by the Dice Tower. The more the individual interacts with board gaming related content, the more the individual learns how to be a board gamer. The second level of MCMVS is as an individual invests more time in board game leisure, less

attention may be paid to other organizations, associations, and interests. An example is as a board gamer engages more frequently in board game nights, then there may be less time allotted to practicing with a community choir, Netflix, visiting downtown, etc. MCMVS's third level illustrates the complexity of multiple individuals from different organizations or associations interacting. In board gaming, individuals may have a board game night and one or two of the individuals present are co-workers. In addition to co-workers in the game group, perhaps another member in the game group attends the same church meetings every Sunday with another member of the group. The socialization process in leisure becomes complex as the differing associations and leisure interests implicitly influence each other's socialization processes.

Kramer (2011b) explicitly states the model requires further development for various voluntary socialization situations. The wide range of model application include different types of volunteer activities, length of commitment, and dimension of volunteering (Kramer, 2011b). Kramer has extended socialization beyond traditional organization. This study provides an attempt to further expand socialization (MCMVS) through a case study application of the multilevel communication model of voluntary socialization regarding leisure board gaming. Specifically, the three levels as well as previous socialization models will provide framework for researchers and organizations to assess and classify the socialization process, but models are generated by the researcher and projected onto individuals (Bullis & Bach, 1989).

Board Gaming as Leisure and Recreation

Voluntary associations create relevant avenues for individuals to engage in leisure activities. Thinning the formal connections, individuals become more engaged in leisure through informal social connections such as, playing cards, joining bar cliques and bowling leagues (Putnam, 2001). Informal social connections may result in informal groups who meet to pursue

similar interests (Bull'ee, 2013). Sports is a particularly large facet of leisure and recreation, but sport socialization has been extensively examined (Beamon, 2010; Benson, Evans, Eys, 2016; Lenartowicz, 2016). This study examines how individuals juggle the tension among various groups including informal groups, in relation to leisure board gaming.

Some may consider leisure and recreation a waste of time; however, research has found many benefits to leisure and recreation. Serious leisure participants can become so involved in their activities that they forget about their problems, as sort of an escape (Stebbins, 2001). Serious quilting leisure facilitates an escape, relaxes participants, and fosters creativity (Stalp, 2006). The sense of community established in informal social connections helps individuals build their social networks (Huebner et al., 2009).

Leisure is classified into three categories: casual, serious, and project-based. Stebbins (1982) coined the term “casual leisure” or “unserious leisure.” Stebbins redefined serious leisure as “activities that require low time commitment, immediate reward, and no special training” (1997, p. 18). Stebbins later synthesized a definition from previous research stating:

Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience (as cited in Stebbins, 2015, p. 4)

A “leisure career” is not a work career because translating leisure to profession negates the nature of leisure.

Individuals who engage in leisurely activities, but are more serious than casual leisure, may refer to their leisure as a hobby (Alasuutari, Luomanen, & Peteri, 2012). The third kind of

leisure is project-based leisure, which is considered “[s]hort-term, moderately complicated, either one-shot or occasional, though infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time...” (Stebbins, 2005, p. 2) A hobbyist can range from minimal commitment with interest (Giles, 2016) to skilled and knowledgeable in activities not yet professionalized (Stebbins, 1992). Stebbins (1992) defined serious leisure to include hobbyists, amateurs, and professionals. This study may encounter individuals across the leisure spectrum in board gaming.

Board gaming is currently in renaissance, gaining popularity again as a leisure activity indicated by sales increasing 5% annually from 2013-2016 (NPD, 2017). The attraction to board games range from educational purposes like learning English (Wu, Chen, & Huang, 2014), and increase children’s arithmetic calculations (Elofsson, Gustafson, Samuelsson, & Träff, 2016), to the opportunity to compete, cooperate, negotiate, and bargain (Zagal, Rick, & Hsi, 2006). Each board game offers a different experience dependent upon the board game mechanics and the nature of the individuals participating.

Traditional board games typically engage participants in competitive behaviors where one player is considered a winner and the other(s) are considered losers (Jones, 2000). These competitive games are commonly known as board games like chess and checkers. More complicated board game mechanics may be introduced to create teams to compete or collaborate in competition with the board game mechanics. This study seeks to examine socialization of board gamers who pursue less traditional board games with more advanced mechanics than simple checkers or Battleship. The rise of new board games is growing as reflected by organizations who rank board games, such as *Popular Mechanics*’ “The 50 Best New Board Games” published in both 2016 (Herkewitz, 2017) and 2017 (Herkewitz, 2018).

Dice Tower

As the Dice Tower reviews games and individuals view the content produced, individuals learn more ways to become board gamers. The Dice Tower is a small organization which relies on donations from both companies and viewers. To help facilitate these donations, the Dice Tower offers annual fundraisers to help pay for members of the organization's full-time and part-time salaries. In 2016, the Dice Tower raised \$259,096 to support salaries and equipment purchases (Kickstarter, 2016). Donating to the Dice Tower may be a result of socialization. In addition, the online content produced by the Dice Tower challenges casual leisure board gamers to learn different frameworks to think about games and become a more serious board gamer. Some of the content produced includes board game reviews, discussing game mechanics, promoting gaming events, and providing terms such as "worker placement" or "luck dice game". Worker placement gameplay requires the placement of worker icons on a board to help build one's organization and collect game advantage. The Dice Tower also breaks down games according to their complexity which ranges from entry level games to more expert gaming. These ratings account for gameplay length, complexity, etc. The online content teaches viewers to evaluate games progressively. A board gamer is not just someone who can play but can describe and explain why they like or dislike certain games.

In addition to providing viewers board game information, the Dice Tower teaches viewers board gamer etiquette. For example, in an episode from a weekly Board Game Breakfast series, Tom Vasel recently verbally attacked local game stores saying local game stores are unnecessary, but the Dice Tower is a trusted organization to review board games (Dice Tower, 2017c). After Tom's attack, several board game stores contacted him and expressed concern that not all board game stores are terrible. On a following segment, Tom apologized for his negative

comments and clarified if a game store is good, they deserve support (Dice Tower, 2017d). In this apology, Tom refers to the Dice Tower as a “third place.” Third places are considered neutral and public places and a place for intellectual fora (Oldenburg, 1999). Tom listened to feedback from his audience, denounced his negative tangent on a previous segment, and explicitly encouraged viewers to support good local board game stores. Resetting expectations and re-creating the Dice Tower as a third space models a peaceable attitude for audiences. Board gamers learn what it is like to be a board gamer, such as board gamers should be polite and respectful.

The Dice Tower uses the website BoardGameGeek.com to help board gamers socialize in online forums. Online forums enable board gamers to connect not only to producers of The Dice Tower, but also other board gamers. Boardgamegeek.com is not a website explicitly for the Dice Tower, but for general board gaming. A significant amount of content on boardgamegeek.com builds into board gaming leisure. Using boardgamegeek.com helps place the Dice Tower into board gaming leisure at large.

One section produced by the Dice Tower incorporates board gaming with children. This helps expand the scope of gaming to parenting with gaming. In game reviews, the host will recount what game mechanics utilized as well as how their child responded to the game. Viewers then learn what games are good with kids to buy games for their kids or potential gifts to parents.

Board gamers may learn how to be board gamers from the Dice Tower, but board gamers can also create intermediate places which may have their own variations and expectations of what it means to board game. Intermediate places both re-create place and provide a place to build community. Researchers first studied this phenomenon as Nebraska’s Cornhusker fans gathered to watch broadcasted games (Aden et al. 2009). This study applies intermediate places

to board gaming, specifically how players re-create place from watching the Dice Tower videos on YouTube and build their own community with informal social connections. To help board gamers engage in the socialization process face to face, the Dice Tower hosts events such as conventions, retreats, and the Dice Tower cruise. This study was conducted during the Dice Tower cruise to examine how board gamers are socialized to board gaming and to organizations like the Dice Tower. Specifically, this study explores the communicative processes of socialization of board gamers through an adaptation of the MCMVS model.

RQ 1: What does MCMVS reveal about socialization to board gaming organizations like the Dice Tower?

RQ 2: What does MCMVS reveal about socialization to board gaming as a leisure activity?

CHAPTER 2 - METHODS

This chapter outlines the qualitative methods utilized for research on board game leisure socialization and socialization to organizations like the Dice Tower. I collected data through interviews and participant observation in an ethnographic manner on a board game cruise. I used interviews and discussions of board gaming in interviews as well as observation to gather a range of experiences like the traveler metaphor posed by Kvale and Brinkman (2008). In the metaphor, the traveler leaves to a distant land, engages in conversation, learns new things, but also changes as an individual. In this study, I literally and metaphorically traveled with board gamers. This metaphor extends to view interviews not as the site of data collection, but one piece intrinsically tied to information collected and experienced. Key ethnographies have explored speech communities (Philipsen, 1976), the framing of history by tour guides (Carbaugh & Rudnick, 2006), and employees' emotional labor on cruise ships (Tracy, 2000). More specifically, volunteer choir membership (Kramer, 2011b). Kramer (2011b) inspired the creation of the multilevel communication model of voluntary socialization (MCMVS). This study applies MCMVS to leisure board gaming.

Data Collection

Study site. With written permission and approval of both the Dice Tower and my university's IRB, I conducted an ethnographic study during the Dice Tower Cruise which spanned from December 2nd to December 7th, 2017. The Dice Tower cruise is the preferred venue for researching socialization because the cruise is specifically geared toward the board gamers. Gaming conventions are less ideal to study socialization because conventions often attract more game designers, wannabe designers, artists, publishers, and game media (Dice Tower, 2017b).

Participant observation. During my time on the cruise, I wore a name tag identifying me as a researcher, played three to five board games each day, lasting between 30 minutes and to three hours each, and attended events on the cruise hosted by the Dice Tower. Participant observation permits the researcher the opportunity to not only observe but experience and reflect the experience (Tracy, 2013). While on the cruise, I learned and played new games with board gamers to help develop rapport with potential participants. In addition to playing games, I attended events held on the cruise such as the Dice Tower Live!, Werewolf with Tom Vassel, and Closing Night Game Show. I also ate in the dining area reserved for Dice Tower board gamers.

After each activity, I found a secluded area to record scratch notes and observations from my experience. To organize my scratch notes, I followed Hymes and Grumperz (1972) descriptive framework. This framework assisted in establishing thick description as I recorded setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre.

Interviews. To evaluate how individuals became board gamers on a board game cruise, I used interviews, a qualitative method for research. Retrospective interviews offered rich data to examine board gamers' socialization process. Detailed interview data eased the application of MCMVS.

I interviewed 18 participants including three board game developers to better understand socialization to board gaming. I audio recorded both in-person interviews during the cruise and phone call or Skype video conference calls after the cruise. The interviews lasted 20-30 minutes for individuals, but interviews with more than one individual lasted 30-40 minutes. I took a friendship model interviewing stance to keep the interview less formal and promote a more natural conversation (Oakley, 1981).

Interview Questions. To maintain a semi-structured interview, I adapted the interview guide from Kramer's (2011a) study of socialization of a local community choir (see Appendix A). An interview guide is designed to prompt candid conversation rather than force responses (Tracy, 2013). Because of my previous knowledge regarding the board game community, interviews permitted a unique insight while practicing reflexivity. I asked the following questions:

1. How would you describe a board gamer?
2. How do you see yourself fit that definition or not?
3. What are some key moments that led to where you are now as a gamer?
4. What things limit or conflict with your board gaming?
5. What role do the Dice Tower and similar organizations play in gaming for you?

Participants. This study included participants 18 years old or older and attend the 2017 Dice Tower board game cruise. The participants qualify as critical incident sampling as the board gamers on the cruise likely have a strong socialization to board gaming to attend a five-day cruise to exclusively board game.

During the cruise, the Dice Tower provided board gamers signs which read, "Teacher Wanted" or "Players Wanted." Board gamers used these signs to gather more players for a game or find a board game teacher. I played several games with board gamers who posted the "Players Wanted" sign. Prior to inviting board gamers to participate in the study, I typically played a game to help establish rapport. I established rapport to help potential participants more feel comfortable to accept the invitation to participate in my study.

When inviting board gamers to participate, I briefly explained my research. Depending on the participants cruise schedule, I conducted a couple of interviews while playing a board

game with the participants, interviewed between board games, or interviewed after the cruise via Skype or phone. If participants agreed to an interview between board games, we immediately left the main room to conduct the interview in a quieter area such as the top deck outside. Individuals who chose not to participate during the cruise provided their contact information for a phone or Skype interview. After the cruise, I emailed all individuals who provided their contact information to set up a time for a phone or Skype interview. All participants and prospective participants received the informed consent fliers to read both on the cruise and attached to the email. During each interview, participants were reminded that participation was completely voluntary, and they may stop participating at any time.

Data Analysis

I started analyzing the data with transcription of all 13 interviews which included 18 participants due to a few joint interviews. I transcribed five interviews and paid for transcription of the remaining eight interviews. Before beginning analysis, I reviewed the professional transcriptions to ensure accuracy and re-familiarized myself with the data. In the 13 interviews with 18 participants, the transcriptions amounted to 4,748 lines or 105 pages, single spaced, 12pt font, Times New Roman. I developed and adjusted scratch notes multiple times a day during the five-day cruise. I observed 509 people who registered and attended the five-day Dice Tower cruise. Each night of the cruise, I reviewed my scratch notes which amounted to 13 pages, single spaced, 12pt font, Times New Roman. While reviewing each transcript, I open coded each interview. After an initial review of each transcript, I axial coded to further refine themes.

I also manually coded all scratch notes and interviews. Coding permits a researcher to fully explore and examine the relationships between data and theoretical frameworks. Axial coding helps refine established relationships by merging categories or finding differences (Tracy,

2013). I engaged in the same process of coding utilized in Kramer's (2011a) community choir study. The process of coding and axial coding assists researchers in best utilizing principles and concepts of qualitative research.

In this study, I coded the first themes organically as the data emerged themes regarding socialization. A second round of axial coding enabled a more thorough exploration of which organic themes fit within the MCMVS framework, remained new insights, and provided a fuller understanding of the socialization process to board game leisure. I replaced participant names with pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality, but public figures such as the Dice Tower's founder, Tom Vasel, remained named since he was not interviewed. In addition, removing names of public figures like the Dice Tower hosts would cause difficulty in fully understanding the Dice Tower and similar organizations role in board gamer socialization.

After open coding, I engaged in a second round of coding, axial coding. Axial coding permitted direct comparison of the data to socialization literature (Kramer, 2011b), community, (Aden et al., 2009), and leisure literature (Stebbins, 2015). These frameworks guided a deeper understanding of the data in relation to voluntary socialization, communities, and board game leisure.

I organized data according to interview questions while reflecting on the three levels of the MCMVS. I then grouped the data according to themes which emerged to answer research question. The second round of axial coding refines the potentially broken or overlooked data from open coding (Tracy, 2013). This process allows the researcher to find recurring themes and potentially data saturation, where no new themes are developing but reinforces the established themes.

Credibility. To ensure the credibility of this qualitative study, I engaged in several qualitative measures such as long-term immersion, thick description in observation notes, member reflections, and self-reflection. Credibility is the qualitative equivalent of internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Attending a five-day cruise among 509 board gamers permitted long-term immersion in board gaming (Tracy, 2013). While collecting scratch notes, I followed Hymes's thick description to ensure notes were strategically structured and full of rich description. To collect data, I established rapport with board gamers and selected informants (Geertz, 1973) I also used member reflections for my results and data. Member reflections offer member insights to ensure the research properly represents participants and the surrounding context (Tracy, 2013).

As I was the research instrument and fully immersed in the Dice Tower board game cruise, I constantly self-reflecting to ensure my own biases did not influence the data (Tracy, 2013). Self-reflection required frequent breaks from the immersive environment to take scratch notes recording my perception of the experience. Having scratch notes permitted more extensive reflection when re-reading data collected to better filter general environment atmospheric data and personal thoughts and feelings. This filtering process provided more naturalistic data and assessment.

Overall, I utilized qualitative methods to explore how MCMVS fits with leisure board gaming and the Dice Tower's role in socialization. I engaged board gaming as a participant observer by playing board games, reflecting on my experiences and interviewing board gamers to develop a deeper understanding of the board gaming process.

CHAPTER 3 - RESULTS

People are constantly socialized to various organizations and these various organizations intersect with different social circles. Kramer's Multilevel Communication Model of Voluntary Socialization (MCMVS) outlines an individual's socialization to various organizations and how the individual's social circles intersect (2011b). This study applies Kramer's MCMVS to leisure to better understand how individuals are socialized to board gaming leisure. The data reveal several applications of MCMVS to board gaming and organizations such as the Dice Tower. This chapter outlines and details the various applications beginning with RQ 1, which then builds into RQ 2's results.

RQ 1: *What does MCMVS reveal about socialization to board gaming organizations like the Dice Tower?*

MCMVS illustrates socialization of an individual in a single organization, an individual in multiple organizations, and the social intersections of various organizations. The model examines a range of micro and macro memberships to map an individual's involvement in various organizations. The community choir in Kramer's study had members and formal leadership within the organization. In examining the role of the Dice Tower in board gaming socialization, the Dice Tower does not fit MCMVS because board gamers do not become members of the Dice Tower. The Dice Tower may have followers on YouTube, podcast listeners, and a head count at events such as the cruise or convention, but board gamers do not become members of the Dice Tower. The only traditional members of the Dice Tower are a few paid employees, which I consider professional board gamers. The average board gamer associates with the Dice Tower, but none of the participants indicated they were members of the Dice Tower.

Despite the uniqueness of the relationship, structure of MCMVS accurately portrays socialization of board gamers through the Dice Tower, but board gamers are members of the general board game community and subsequently, the Dice Tower board gaming community. The Dice Tower assists in socializing board gamers to their style of board gaming. Most participants knew the Dice Tower by watching YouTube or listening to podcasts. Some of the Dice Tower employees may know some participants by name. The lack of membership identification indicates the only members of the Dice Tower may only be employees of the Dice Tower.

Though the Dice Tower may not have members beyond paid employees, the organization does play an important role within the board gaming community. The relationship between the Dice Tower and board gamers fit the definition of voluntary association. Board gamers do not need involvement with the Dice Tower, but the Dice Tower enhances board gaming as a hobby and socializes board gamers to the Dice Tower board gaming community. Board gaming still has some stigma, but Fred explained, “Their, uh, sheer volume of the reviews they put out and into all the diverse places, convention, these cruises. They seem to add a lot of credibility to what a hobby is.” The Dice Tower helps board gamers with all stages of board gaming, ranging from beginners who require common jargon definitions to more seasoned board gamers who recognize and appreciate various board game mechanics.

Socialization Resource

Board gaming organizations are a resource to socialize in five main ways: recruit new board gamers, retain current board gamers, network board gamers together, provide information to guide board game purchases, and foster connections between board gamers and the

organizations. Organizations like the Dice Tower reviews board games and provides verbiage and classifiers such as gateway games, worker-placement, etc.

Resource for Recruitment

Board game organizations like the Dice Tower are a resource for socialization specifically recruitment. Some individuals are recruited by the Dice Tower through their online presence.

Robert recounted the board game organizations which led him to the Dice Tower:

Wil Wheaton had his show the Wil Wheaton Show, you know the Wil Wheaton Show...

There was actually a link to one of the Dice Tower videos you know like the recommended links, you know from YouTube. ...I always say, "Wil Wheaton opened the door, but the Dice Tower guys pushed me through it."

In conversation with Elton, he explained the show Geek and Sundry got him involved in board gaming originally because it was an entertaining show (personal communication, December 20, 2017).

The Dice Tower engages in recruiting themselves using YouTube's suggested videos and assists other board gamers in recruiting potential board gamers. Board game reviews provides potential board gamers the experience of a board game prior to playing to understand gameplay and receive a crash course of how to play the game prior to playing the board game themselves.

Resource for Reinforcement/Retention

The second socialization board gaming organizations assist is reinforcement and retention of current members. Board gamers use the Dice Tower, BoardGameGeek, and similar organizations to expand their own knowledge of the gaming world as they watch and read board game reviews. Shaggy explained, "I don't think the Dice Tower really gets people into gaming, but the minute you've played a game, and somebody starts throwing names around, Dice

Tower's kind of the one that leads you along and brings you through." Board game group facilitators often share reviews and walkthroughs to keep board gamers interested or excited for new board games. In an exchange, Fred mentioned how he, as a facilitator, shared information, "I'd send out an email with all the links to the videos." Another method to reinforce and retain board gamers is by interacting with viewers. When board gamers post in online forums to reach Tom Vasel from the Dice Tower, Vincent said:

Tom will usually always answer right away, you know, even if it's a game that he hasn't played. Sometimes you can post a recommendation on there and then you'll get like five, six, seven, eight, nine people that will also post the same and then he'll end up doing a video on it.

The Dice Tower responds and serves their mission as an organization by providing over 184,000 YouTube subscribers. One way the Dice Tower reinforces and socializes people is through their celebrity status. Vincent explained, "They don't take their kind of celebrity status that they have and approach it like they're better than anybody. Like, literally, they just sit down next to you. Like Zee just sat down right next me, you know?" Cid recounted he previously thought negatively about board gamers but after attending the board game cruise he explained, "[B]oard gamers, on top of fulfilling that role, in general, are very pleasant people, and are very enjoyable to hang out around. Because their view and outlook on life is very positive in general."

I too noticed board gamers really love and adore all members of the Dice Tower. Board gamers feel close to members of the Dice Tower and express their appreciation for who the Dice Tower members are and what they do. On one occasion, I was playing Road to Burgundy, the Card Game with Buck and Sal below deck when Sal saw Zee walk to a table about 20 feet from us. She excitedly told Buck she had seen Zee and excused herself from our game momentarily.

Buck then explained they had gifts for each member of the Dice Tower and were slowly catching and distributing the gift. Over Buck's shoulder I saw Sal standing next to Zee's table and produced a small gift bag with tissue paper. This was fascinating because Buck and Sal live in California but are consistent gamers and followers of the Dice Tower, and they used gifts to express their appreciation for all the Dice Tower does.

On another occasion during the cruise, I had the opportunity to play *Unearth*. I approached a table with a "Players Wanted" sign, asked if I could join, and immediately after I joined, a woman also asked to join. The board gamers who originally setup the game recognized the woman and asked specific questions like, "How are the girls?" but the woman did not ask specific questions to the couple. The woman who joined was Tom Vassel's wife, Laurel Vassel. At the time, I did not know who this mystery woman was, but I later learned from another board gamer that the woman was Laurel Vassel. Board gamers gravitated to Dice Tower hosts and were excited to play a game with one of the Dice Tower hosts or a hosts' significant other.

The Dice Tower people, content, and the Dice Tower events each provide ways for board gamers to socialize. The Dice Tower promotes more inclusive board gamers which provides space for socially awkward board gamers to still connect with other board gamers. Connecting board gamers together creates a more comfortable and welcoming environment.

Resource for Networking Board Gamers Together

The third way board gaming organizations socialize is networking board gamers together. Misty shared her experience using websites to network into a board gaming group, "I looked in Meetup to find the group in Austin. I also went on to BGG and there are threads in BGG where you can find out for any city that you're visiting, where the local gaming spots are." Misty also shared her experience meeting other board gamers at activities hosted by the Dice Tower,

“[P]arties and such are kind of not my favorite place to be, but in the Dice Tower convention I can kind of enjoy being a social butterfly. I know a hundred people walking around.

During the Dice Tower cruise, the main room where most board gamers played had several signs with either “Players Wanted” or “Teacher Wanted” for board gamers to use. The use of these signs explicitly invited board gamers to join other board games. I approached several games with “Players Wanted” signs and played with board gamers who were strangers. Occasionally, the board gamers posted a “Teacher Wanted” sign but no teacher came. However, the lack of a teacher forced all board gamers present to read the rulebook, learn, and teach each other. These signs were provided by the Dice Tower to help facilitate the meeting of other board gamers.

In addition to the board gaming signs, the Dice Tower had a section of the dining hall reserved specifically for board gamers. Board gamers also waited outside the dining hall until it the dining hall opened, so all board gamers attending the dining hall were able to attend and sit together.

Lastly, organizations like the Dice Tower also network board gamers with other board game organizations. Fred explained how he found the Dice Tower, “I think I found it through BoardGameGeek. Yeah, because like I said, uh, Scott Dixon mentioned BoardGameGeek in sort of his early videos.

In the previous section, the Dice Tower directly recruited and retained board gamers. In this section, the Dice Tower facilitates board gamers to network together using YouTube comments, BoardGameGeek forum discussions, and hosting events like cruises and conventions. Networking board gamers together creates a secondary connection to board gaming leisure, specifically capitalizing on the social aspects of board gaming.

Resource for Guiding Purchases

As board gamers became more familiar with organizations such as the Dice Tower and BoardGameGeek, they use board game reviews to guide their board game purchases. Misty used the Dice Tower to save her time, "...I don't have to go and talk to each of the vendors because [Tom]'s going to do it and I can, at my leisure, look at those things."

Board gamers become familiar enough with reviewers to gauge their own interest in board games according to who reviewed the board game. Ash explained:

The Dice Tower did top 10 worker placement games. So, I read through all that and uh, or listened to all that... Eventually over time, you know, listening to, to people over time, you eventually understand what their opinions are and how your opinions differ. It's just, you have to do it over a long period of time.

Overall, board game organizations that provide board game reviews influence board gamer purchases.

Board gaming organizations such as the Dice Tower provide board gamers entertainment while still informing board gamers of news and reviews. Buck and Sal explained when they viewed some particularly entertaining board game reviews:

Sal: Well, we found [No Pun Included] because they did a Seafall review.

Buck: Yeah, we heard Seafall was really bad.

Sal: So, we watched their review and-

Buck: And laughed and laughed.

Sal: It was very hysterical.

Sal and Buck's exchange clarified they learned not to purchase Seafall because it was, in fact, a terrible board game. Buck even explained, "We watch [the Dice Tower] for entertainment

but also it's our success rate at buying games has gone way up since we started watching their reviews." The Dice Tower goes beyond initialization and purchase, but Dice Tower content teaches about board gaming and helps viewers think like a board gamer.

During the cruise, the comedy never really stopped. Most board gamers were witty in their interactions and enjoyed Dice Tower jokes. Occasionally, Jason, a Dice Tower contributor and organizer of the cruise, Jason would use a microphone hooked up to the room's sound system and inform board gamers regarding important information such as making sure we leave a vote comment card for the people cleaning your rooms. The Royal Caribbean staff compete for recognition in outstanding work and Jason endorsed board gamer's participation in these cards. However, after the announcements conclude, there is usually a joke either from Jason or from the audience. It was as though board gamers are not allowed to have exclusively serious content, but there must be fun involved.

Organizational Community within Board Gaming Leisure

The Dice Tower and similar organizations recognize the gaming community at large, but also work to facilitate and regulate their own subsection of the board gaming community. This is seen as the Dice Tower operates in a subsection of the website BoardGameGeek. Tom Vasel has explicitly stated he promotes a specific atmosphere in his comments section on YouTube. An example of these comments is seen in the YouTube video BanHammer, Tom stated, "It's okay to have discourse. I will not tolerate foul or blasphemous language because the Dice Tower is a family friendly channel" (Dice Tower, 2016, 11:30).

The Dice Tower provides its own atmosphere regarding board gaming. Ash compared the Dice Tower with other board gaming organizations:

...[C]ompared to the other conventions, the best part about Dice Tower con, or the Dice

Tower cruise, is the people. I mean, that's what made me come back. Last year I went on by myself not knowing anybody... [But] everyone's super friendly, willing to teach games. The people that come are not the super competitive type. So, while everybody plays to win, nobody's like, flipping the table when they lose and getting angry. It's all about just getting together, having fun, and playing games.

The Dice Tower's community of board gaming promotes a friendly atmosphere, including family friendly. Steven commented, "It's a good family activity." During the *Closing Night Game Show*, a question prompted the joke from a Dice Tower host, "Let's get as nasty as we can." Tom laughingly but immediately interjected, "No, no, no, no." Though it was a joke to "get nasty," Tom actively worked to ensure the content provided to attendants of the cruise was still family friendly. During this same game night show, a member of the audience had the microphone and made a comment that could be considered more appropriate for a PG-13 kind of film. This PG-13 comment caused a board gamer from the audience to shout, "Family oriented!" to remind the board gamers presenting that there still were children present and the content presented should remain milder in nature.

The Dice Tower acknowledges other kinds of board gamers that may or may not share the same values and attitudes. Tom Vasel explicitly stated in a YouTube segment (Dice Tower, 2016) that he moderates comments to maintain a positive atmosphere. Tom explained that he does not mind board gamers disagreeing with board game opinions, but he will not permit comments that attack hosts or other board gamers.

Research question two sought to understand the role of organizations like the Dice Tower in the socialization of board gamers by applying MCMVS. The results show that MCMVS does not apply to the Dice Tower in its current capacity because board gamers are not socialized to

become members of the Dice Tower. Dice Tower membership is limited to a few paid employees. However, the Dice Tower is considered a resource in socializing board gamers, namely, recruiting, retention, networking, and guiding purchases. The Dice Tower also socializes board gamers to a certain community of board gaming through explicit and implicit cues or directives.

RQ 2: *What does MCMVS reveal about socialization to board gaming as a leisure activity?*

Volunteer organizations have undefined membership boundaries between members and non-members of the organization (Kramer, 2011). Like volunteer organizations, leisure has ambiguous membership boundaries, in part, because leisure refers to an activity rather than an organization facilitating an activity. An important difference between an organization and an activity is that the activity is something that individuals can engage in without the need of an organization such as biking or knitting. Results indicate that leisure activity remains a focal point of socialization in a manner somewhat like organizations with ambiguous membership boundaries with notable differences. The application of Kramer's MCMVS to board gaming leisure illustrates the socialization process and ambiguous membership boundaries. To fully understand what MCMVS revealed in board gaming leisure, the following section will review the three levels of MCMVS in board gaming. To review, the first level of MCMVS illustrates an individual's status in an organization. The second level becomes more macro by illustrating an individual's socialization status in various organizations. MCMVS's third level maps how an individual's organizational connections intersect social circles of other individuals.

Level 1: Individual Status to Board Gaming

The first level of MCMVS classifies the individual's membership status to an organization. There are five possible membership statuses: prospective, new, established, former, and transitory (Kramer, 2011b). The data confirmed these categories in the leisure activity board gaming as well. Analysis suggests board gamers revealed board gamers follow the same five memberships as Kramer's community choir. As the membership boundaries are more ambiguous in leisure compared to organizations, the boundary between membership statuses are also ambiguous. However, in this study I identify the general characteristics associated with varying degrees of membership and involvement to board gaming. The first membership in MCMVS is prospective members, but as this is applied to board gaming, I will refer to members as board gamers.

Prospective board gamer. Board gamers are not born with the innate understanding of board games, but individuals must be introduced to board games. Before individuals become board gamers, they are considered prospective members. Shaggy discussed potential board gamers saying, "I think everybody could be a board gamer." Shaggy's mindset coincides with MCMVS's prospective members as the use of "could" means that not everybody is already a board gamer.

Prospective board gamers often learn about board gaming from family and friends. Many participants explained their introduction to board games occurred when they were children as part of family traditions. Board gamers who introduce prospective members to board games engage in recruitment communication (Kramer, 2011b) which will be further discussed in the established board gamers section.

Prospective board gamers may also learn of board gaming from various media outlets. Ash recounted a time that he had already been introduced to board gaming, but explained how early media influenced him, "...The marketing on TV was like, this is a cool board game. I'm like, okay I want that." It is possibly that prospective board gamers could learn of board gaming through media and self-initiate into becoming a board gamer. Overall, respondents did not identify as prospective board games as they were on a board gaming cruise, but some recounted their process of becoming a board gamer meaning at some point they were prospective.

Prospective board gamers are individuals who may know about board games from personal contacts or media, but simply have not experienced playing board games themselves. During the cruise, I did not interact with prospective board gamers because individuals present were already strongly involved in board gaming.

New board gamer. Prospective board gamers know of board games, but the transition from prospective board gamer to new board gamer has different requirements depending on the individual. The transition from a prospective board gamer to a new board gamer has ambiguous membership boundaries and evidence of this ambiguity is seen as participants indicated three different qualifications to become a board gamer: characteristics of a board gamers, completely inclusive, and board gaming is a sub-genre of gaming. Characteristics of a board gamer are a combination of personality brought to the board gaming hobby and traits learned and taught in the hobby. Some participants indicated that to be a board gamer, membership is received or earned through actions, specifically, an individual must simply play a game regardless if it is a card game, video game, or board game. The last kind of qualification becomes narrower than the completely inclusive because a board gamer must not play any game, but specifically play a tabletop board game.

Classification 1. Participants indicated characteristics of a board gamer, both regarding new board gamers and more established board gamers. In this section, I review common characteristics of a new board gamer, new board gamers are predominantly interested in the social aspect of board gaming. Ash shared that a board gamer is, “Somebody who enjoys activities, or just doing stuff with people locally. And dealing with social interactions. Obviously, the games are, help facilitate those types of interactions.” Buck recounted his experience with his cousins:

...[P]robably my favorite gaming moments were playing The Game of Life with my cousins because there were six of them. All different ages so then suddenly we’re playing this huge Game of Life. It would take hours and hours and hours.

Prospective board gamers know of board games, but new board gamers have engaged in the activity of board gaming. A crucial factor to transition a prospective board gamer to a new board gamer is people, or the interest in socializing.

Classification 2. Classification 2, 3, and 4 are both membership qualifications regarding actions, or enacting a board gamer membership. The first category of responses indicated complete inclusivity with the least requirements to qualify as a board gamer. Participants explained “[Board gamers] come from all walks of life. So, it’s hard to define” (Link). The difficulty defining a board gamer also indicates a difficulty to become exclusive or define a non-board gamer. Eveline stated, “I, I, I think of a board gamer as somebody who plays the hobby games, tabletop stuff, all of the, the stuff that are all over this room.” The games all over the room included games actual board games, card games, and other interactive gamers, but all were played on tabletops. In addition to including card and board games together, one participant extended board gamer membership to role-playing games saying, “He counts all games” (Link).

During a group interview, Shaggy explained, “I think everybody could be a board gamer. It’s just there’s different genres and people don’t realize that that’s out there. You don’t need to know how to play Axis and Allies to be a board gamer.” Daphne and Velma nodded in agreement with Shaggy’s comments. This definition provides a wide array of definitions and any amount of board gaming creates the status of insider.

Classification 3. The definition of a board gamer may also require a variety of board games played. Steven downplayed the importance of knowing who designed board games, but felt it was important to appreciate a variety of games. He stated, “I do think that you have to take it as an art form seriously and be interested in playing a lot of different games.

Misty reinforced the idea that a board gamer requires the individual to play board games:

I would have to say that a board gamer or a modern board gamer is somebody who plays one of the new Euro games, or the other games that have come out since the Catan and Empire Builder Resurgence in the mid-1990s.

Sal reinforced the importance of playing uncommon board games and rejecting mainstream board games saying, “...[W]e just talk to our friends at work or wherever, ‘What are you going to do?’ ‘Oh, we’re going to play board games.’ ‘Oh, like Monopoly?’ [Buck and Sal both shaking their heads] Yeah.”

Classification 3. The third classification also requires participants to engage in action. However, this classification requires board gamers to play a tabletop board game. When referring to card players, Misty clarified her understanding of board gamer qualifications:

...I consider them to be gamers and card gamers, but not board gamers. And I don’t really count the Pathfinder, Dungeons and Dragon-y people as board gamers. Those are also

role-playing games and not actually board games. ...Not that I'm uninclusive [sic] and they're not allowed to be in the gaming community, but I don't call them board gamers. Ash shared a similar view to Misty when he discussed the translation of board games into digital platforms such as apps, "Um. I wouldn't consider playing on the app a board game, because while the game itself is a board game that's translated into a video game, that's still a video game." Though board gaming falls into the general gaming genre, board gaming is a sub-genre because it differs from card games and role-playing games. Interestingly, the sub-genre group still hold the definition that all who play a board game fit, but they narrow the definition of the activity by specifying what a board game is.

Established board gamer. The change from new member board gamers to established board gamers is seen when a board gamer learns of and plays board games that are less mainstream. Like new board gamers, there are varying qualities of an established board gamer including internal characteristics, but established board gamers have external habits dedicated to board gaming and engage in recruitment communication.

Established internal board gamer characteristics, like new board gamers, are considered intelligent and socially awkward and have an interest in the social aspects. External established board game characteristics are ways in which board gamers enact board gaming which includes a lifelong investment to board gaming, and even design board games. The last set of established board gamer indicators is the engagement of recruitment communication involving gateway board games and gateway contacts. The established board gamer that successfully recruits a prospective or new board gamer to become an established board gamer is considered a gateway contact. The board game a gateway contact uses is considered a gateway board game.

This section is first a review of internal established board gamer characteristics then a review of the external manifestation of established board gamers. The last portion of this section reviews gateway contacts and gateway board games.

Internal board gamer characteristics. New board gamers exhibit interest in socializing with people and this characteristic is also exhibited in established board gamers, however, established board gamers also exhibit other characteristics that set them apart from new board gamers. Established board gamer characteristics can be either an internal characteristic like social awkwardness, interest in the social aspects, and the enjoyment of puzzles or an external characteristic such as board gaming as a life investment and designing board games.

The first internal characteristic is a continued interest socializing with people. The second internal characteristic of an established board gamer is social awkwardness, which is seen as board gamers become fascinated with the actual game and potentially focusing less upon the individuals present. The third internal characteristic of an established board gamer is the enjoyment of puzzles, which likely causes outsiders to perceive board gamers as socially awkward.

Intelligence and social awkwardness. The first characteristic seen in both new and established board gamers is social awkwardness, however, only a few participants indicated social awkwardness was a common board gamer characteristic. Tommy shared his understanding of board gamers, “Okay, uh, board gamers are often very intelligent with a little bit of social awkwardness at times. ...Not the entire group of people who participate, but there are some social oddities in the average board gamer.” Tommy associated a board gamer’s social awkwardness with programmers, who are commonly considered socially awkward individuals. Vincent emphasized the nature of a board gamer’s social skills when he said, “We’re a very socially

awkward bunch.” Though several participants described board gamers as socially awkward, not all board gamers fit the common narrative. Tommy described his board gaming group, “Our game circle is a little more edgy. We all like to consume alcohol while we drink, and we’re not as socially repressed as some other people.”

During the cruise, I noticed the main ballroom where most board gamers played, the room lacked food or drink vendors. However, a couple nights of the cruise, there was growing attendance at the top-floor bar. Rarely did anyone acquire alcoholic beverages and bring the drink back to the main ballroom, but more people purchased drinks as they attended the top-floor in the evening. The board gamers who played near the bar also seemed like a younger crowd who did not have family commitments. Regardless, not all board gamers are alike, however, there is still a general narrative or a set of common characteristics and experiences.

Though several participants described board gamers as intelligent but socially awkward, from my observations, only a small portion of board gamers fit the socially awkward stereotype. Most board gamers present were fascinated in board games but were really interested in the people. Board games offers a puzzle component to facilitate social interactions. Intelligence and social awkwardness are common characteristics of established board gamers. Established board gamers may be socially awkward, but that does not hinder their interest in social interaction.

Interest in the social aspects. The second characteristic seen in both new and established board gamers are an interest in the social aspects of board games. Vincent explained a board gamer is, “Someone who enjoys more of the social aspect of gaming. Who wants to sit down and physically play with a group of people versus online. ...A social gamer. It’s the social exercise.”

An interest in social aspects includes the desire to collaborate. Velma stated, “...I love the social games where you can fight together, lose together, and die together.” Scott also shared

his collaborative interest when he discussed his gaming group, “[T]he concept of the magic circle is sitting around the table with an agreed set of the rules when on this table, when you roll a six-sided die, so that kind of collective understanding about what is going on.”

Desire to solve puzzles. The desire to solve puzzles may drive board gamers to focus on a board game’s function and mechanics while becoming oblivious or ignorant of social cues. Sal described her internal motivators for being a board gamer, “It’s like you crave that experience, I think... [I]t’s an interesting puzzle to figure out. And each game gives you a unique puzzle to solve. Plus, there’s the experience.” Buck reinforced Sal’s comments about puzzles when he described a board gamer, “Someone with insatiable curiosity who enjoys a puzzly sort of competition but in a social setting. I think the most board gamers enjoy playing with other people.”

Ash reinforced the desire for solving puzzles, but with a competitive edge. Ash explained, “So, while everybody plays to win, nobody’s like, oh, flipping the table when they lose.” It is inferred that board gamers like to solve puzzles first, thereby earning the win. However, if a board gamer loses, it is less about the competition, but simply enjoying the opportunity to engage in a puzzle in a social environment.

Internal characteristics are motivators to engage in board gaming. These characteristics draw individuals to fit well into board gaming as board games fosters intelligent participants, is a social activity, and is a puzzle to solve. The next section reviews external established board gamer characteristics as board gamers use the internal characteristics to manifest external hobbies and habits.

External characteristics. Internal characteristics reflect on a board gamer's personality and drive, while external characteristics regard habits specific to board gaming. The two external characteristics of established board gamers include a lifelong investment in board gaming and designing board games. External characteristics do have an internal drive, but external characteristics are manifestations or enactment of board gaming. This is like Kramer's study of a community choir in that participants enact singing and enact choir membership through activities such as attendance, participation, and performances.

Established board gamers display their lifelong investment through consistent game play and/or keeping up-to-date on news in board gaming development and trends.

Life investment. New board gamers play on occasion, but established board gamers consider board gaming more permanent in their life. Rose captures this sentiment in her interview:

It's like, sees board gaming as a big part of their life. Um. Their main leisure activities.

...It's not just like, "Ah, I've been playing a few board games lately." It's something like you see it's a thing I like to do, and I will continue to do it.

Like Rose's idea of board gamer as a permanent part of life, Sal explains, "So uh, being a gamer is always in that uh gaming experiences is important. You know, it's a hobby. An official hobby." Both Rose and Sal share the view that being a board gamer means a long-term investment in the hobby. Some participants explained board gaming was part of family traditions.

Established board gamers are typically lifelong committed board gamers. This lifelong investment becomes not just a hobby, but a part of the board gamer's life. Established board gamer is the highest level of socialization to board gaming leisure.

Designing board games. Some characteristics describing board gamers only seemed to fit more established board gamers. One characteristic that sets established board gamers apart is interest in designing board games. Established board gamers may even begin developing their own board games. In an interview, Eveline discussed her role in developing board games. “I met this guy who was making games... 30 years ago at this point. Um. And I was working with him and we started a little company... And we were pouring little plastic pieces in the molds.”

Eveline was not the only board game designer on the cruise, but the designers of Quest for the Antidote were also present. In a discussion after the interview, Shaggy explained he was working on designing a board game himself and Vincent discussed when he first created a board game:

I actually went into my schooling for video game design. We had a game design class that we had to do and, in that class, we actually had to design a game. And it was a board game that we had to design.

After the interview, Shaggy explained he had attended a board game designer workshop during the cruise. Shaggy explained that anyone could make a game but making a good one was difficult.

Established board gamers have both internal and external characteristics. The internal characteristics are an established board gamers personality and internal drive while the external characteristics are enactment of their board gaming. Not all board gamers fit these qualifications, but most established board gamers exhibit these characteristics. Another way established board gamers enact board gaming, is by engaging in recruitment communication, specifically gateway contacts and gateway games.

Gateway Contacts and Gateway Games. Transitioning from a new board gamer to an established board gamer often begins with an established board gamer friend introducing the new board game to less mainstream board games. The established board gamer who introduces less mainstream board games to a new board gamer is considered a gateway contact. The less mainstream board game introduced to the new board gamer is called a gateway game. The idea of a gateway game is to ease new board gamers to understand the variety of board games available. I examine gateway board games and gateway contacts. Recruitment communication was previously mentioned regarding prospective board gamers in receiving recruitment communication, however, established board gamers are the individuals who engage in recruitment communication to help transition individuals become an established board gamer.

Established board gamers often engage in recruiting prospective members and new members. Gateway contacts are individuals who introduced new board gamers to less mainstream games. Gateway contacts will often introduce new board gamers to gateway games. The gateway games are non-mainstream games to ease new board gamers into becoming established board gamers. An example is of a gateway contact and gateway game is seen with Fred and Daphne. Fred and Daphne are dating, but Fred recruited Daphne to become an established board gamer. Daphne recounted her experience:

Yeah, I just started gaming when I started dating him [motioning to Fred]. The subculture was not one that I knew existed. I only knew board games as Monopoly, Clue, Life, that type of thing. And he introduced me to this whole new world, a whole new realm and everybody coming along with it. That's how I met these two [motioning to Shaggy and Velma] was that he was gaming with them one weekend a month? [Fred nodded]. And then it just kind of grew from there for me.

Gateway contacts can often be friends. Fred and Shaggy discussed their gateway contact, a mutual friend, who helped both, transition to established board gamers:

Fred: Yeah. We didn't really start gaming until, what about three or four years ago?

Shaggy: Yeah, I thought it was only about two, but it's been a little longer.

Fred: It's been a little longer... Yeah. Once I tried to drive down to Rochester. They tried to drive up to Minneapolis.

Shaggy: Our common friend wanted to kind of get the gears moving, so, he actually introduced me to [Fred] and their gaming. And we just kind of collaboratively started a gaming group

Ash shared a similar experience to Fred and Shaggy. Ash explained, "A friend of mine from work introduced them to me. I'd never really thought of board games as more than Monopoly or Scrabble or things like that."

Newly established board gamers often recruit while simultaneously participating in an existing board game group. Some board gamers even recruit others to establish a board gaming group of their own. Board gamers recruit from established social circles such as friends, family, romantic partners, church, etc. Ash recounted when a friend talked to him about board games:

And he's like no, there's all these other games. All right, whatever. And eventually I started playing. And then eventually he moved to a different company and much further away, and so that void was gone. That you know, this person would facilitate all this board gaming. And so, I became the next guy that researched and bought all the board games. And now I'm facilitator for everyone.

Ash was recruited, but then became the recruiter when his friend moved away. Misty explained her role in recruiting board gamers, “I have tried to introduce some people to board gaming, and I like, talk to my coworkers about it. I’m, I consider myself a board game evangelist. Yes, that’s true.” Misty lived up to her claim as after we concluded her interview, she asserted herself as a recruiter for my study. Misty and I marched into the dining hall where all the other board gamers were eating and strategically chose a table with only two seats left. Misty was instrumental in recruiting Fred, Velma, Shaggy, and Daphne. Scott and his gaming group engage in recruiting board gamers. He explained, “[W]e try to constantly increase the pool of people so that we more often than not can play something that’s more than a one-timer or some other two player game.”

Gateway games are instrumental in changing a new board gamer’s perspective of the gaming world. In explaining a gateway game, Shaggy said, “If you want to go the non-strategy route, you can try like Dixit...You don’t want to throw a million tokens at them.” Dixit is considered a relatively simple game with few rules and just a deck of cards. Other popular gateway games include Settlers of Catan, Ticket to Ride, and Pandemic.

Most board gamers were new members to board gaming as children, however, some board gamers were introduced to less mainstream board games as a child. Rose recalled her experience in childhood with board games:

...[W]e had some other interesting games that were not like the standard ones. Like we had this cool garden game where you had to like plant them and in the right place. And you know. You have a garden bed. And then we had this pirate one. Which uh, actually, you had a little cannon thing.

Rose’s awareness and experience playing less mainstream qualified her as an established board gamer at a young age.

Though gateway games are more likely to spark serious board gamers, not every gateway game successfully draws in the new board gamer to become an established board gamer. Scott explained, “I was aware of other games other than the classics like chess, backgammon, monopoly, snakes and ladders, and whatever. But it didn’t pique my interest. That came later.”

Scott later explained:

I played Settlers of Catan like 15 years ago and it didn’t trigger me at all. I was in a different place in my life and it bore no interest to me. I’ve played it since and I liked it enough and I also understood why I wasn’t enamored with it fifteen or twenty years ago. The first real gateway game that I got and played regularly was, it doesn’t have a board but it had tiles was the game Takenoko. Which also has, it looks good on the table. And it’s fairly light. You can explain the rules and actually get to play and not waste your time. Yeah, that was my gateway drug.

Sometimes the transition from new member to established member requires the right gateway contact too. Sal recounted how she and Buck played with Sal’s co-worker, Marge. Sal recounted “So, we had [Marge] come over and we played Mechs Vs. Minions. Oh, and it turned out that her boyfriend worked for Riot Games.” Buck wondered why Marge did not play with her boyfriend and Sal responded with an impersonation of Marge, ““Oh yeah, he mentioned something about that.’ I’m here, ‘Oh my god! You gotta come play!’”

In some instances, new board gamers move themselves to established board gamers. An example of self-initiated transition to established board gamers is seen with Steven and Rose. Steven and Rose are married and discussed how they became established board gamers. Steven knew of less mainstream games such as Chomp, but he explained became more established in his board gaming because, “...[I]t’s a nice couple’s activity.” Rose clarified that Steven started

buying more board games while they were dating, which transitioned them both to established board gamers. Rose explained hers and Steven's transition to established board gamers came with the aid of a local board game store:

A big thing for us in, in that would lead to this cruise is we had a game store open not that far from where we are. ...I just like going there and just wandering around and looking at the shelves.

Popular culture may also serve as a gateway contact. Franchises such as Star Wars may market a franchise themed board game that helped transition prospective or new board gamers to established board gamers. Tommy shared his experience shifting from popular culture into card games and eventually to board games:

...The Cipher, that's a game company, came out with Lord of the Rings the collectible. It's similar to magic, you build decks... That's how I got into gaming.

Tommy continued:

[W]e transitioned to board games almost my entire group, almost simultaneously. Like Sid Meier's Civilization, Descent the first edition, and other games that were around 12 years ago or so that we played. That's how we got into board games.

If established board gamers cannot recruit from their established social circles, they often seek other established board gamers to play with. Misty explained, "When I'm traveling, it's harder to find gaming when I'm traveling because you don't necessarily know people. But I did a project in Austin, I found board gaming community there in Austin and played games there."

Rose also shared how she and Steven sought established board gamers after recently moving to Silicon Valley where they had not yet established social circles:

Next Door, it's a social media for... your real-life neighbors. So, it's a good thing for like posting, "Hey I need a shovel. Can anyone lend me one for the day?" Or, like, "Does anyone have a good recommendation for a dentist" or whatever. So, we had posted.

Board gamers seek each other out because the hobby is about playing and socializing.

Established board gamers are at the peak of board gaming leisure. They have internal characteristics to drive board gamers to develop external characteristics such as hobbies and habits. The excitement and satisfaction established board gamers feel from enacting board gaming, naturally fosters the desire to share board gaming with others. However, established board gamers still reflect membership within leisure board gaming. Leisure is a luxury and life circumstances are constantly in flux, permitting time and activities at one point of life but restricting or constraining activities at another point of life. The next section reviews board gamers who have life changes reflected in their board gaming habits.

Former board gamer. The fourth membership status, former board gamer, indicates board gamers stop qualifying as board gamers. To stop qualifying as board gamers, individuals stop all engagement of board gaming including no longer board gaming on a regular basis and no longer following the board gaming community. Rose and Steven as they discuss the qualifications of a board gamer, specifically, how to become a former board gamer:

Rose: I could see saying, like, "I used to be a, a gamer. Like, but now I'm not."
Like if you don't play anymore.

Steven: It's not a, once a gamer, always a gamer... You can pass out of it.

Rose and Steven described the transition from established board gamer to a former board gamer requires the lack of enacting or engaging in board games and indicates that board gamer status is dependent upon consistent enactment and engagement in board gaming. Steven considered board

gaming status as “gamer-fluid,” which reinforces the notion that board gamers can change membership status easily. Board gamers can easily shift between board game membership status.

Board gamers stop board gaming for a variety of reasons including a board gaming group dispersed, gateway contact moved away, birth of grandchildren, etc. Link shared his experience passing out of board gaming, “He stopped gaming for a while when he graduated college. Because he didn’t have anyone. He bought games. But he didn’t play it.” Sal and Buck discussed the reason they stopped board gaming:

Buck: And then we had gran-kids.

Sal: Yeah, grandkids. Those are fun.

Board gamers may exit board gaming but can just as easily come back to board gaming. Sal and Buck explained their grandkids were later the reason they returned to board gaming:

Sal: Then they got old enough to play games and

Buck: Yeah. It was right around the time that we got back into this.

Established members frequently engage in recruiting communication and become gateway contacts not only introduce new board gamers to become established but re-introduce former board gamers to again become established board gamers.

Transitory board gamer. Kramer (2011b) considered transitory members as individuals whose membership status was uncertain. Membership uncertainty is due to possible changes in membership or simply inconsistent commitment to the hobby.

Transitory membership may be inferred, but there is not clear evidence. Several participants expressed the association of an established gaming group such as Scott’s “magic circle” and Tommy’s “game circle.” These associations establish the board gamer as a consistent board gamer. In contrast, if a board gamer does not have an established gaming group, the board

gamer may only sporadically engage in established board gaming behavior. Another example of transitory membership includes board gamers who have stopped playing, but it is unclear if board gaming may begin again in the future. The transition from established board gamer to former is ambiguous and the fully nature of a transitory member may only fully be understood in retrospect.

Participants of the Dice Tower cruise were all established board gamers and reflected on past experiences which indicated placement in one of four membership categories: prospective, new, established, and former. This data set does not support transitory membership within board gaming.

Level 1 of MCMVS focuses on the micro perspective of socialization, limiting perspective to one individual and their membership status within an organization. Individuals fit into one of four membership statuses in an organization. These four membership statuses include prospective, new, established, and former. The data does not support the fifth membership, transitory membership, but is likely conflated with new membership or unclear membership status. Level 2 and 3 progressively examine a more macro approach of socialization, specifically, an individual's status within multiple organizations and the social network between various organizations.

Level 2: Socialization to Multiple Organizations and Activities

Level two of MCMVS focuses on an individual's socialization process to multiple organizations. As board gaming is a hobby and not an organization, this study extends the application of MCMVS to include hobbies and organizations. Level two contextualizes board gaming socialization with other organization or activity socialization. Activities and hobbies do not have formal membership, but participants indicated socialization to board gaming. To better

understand the more influential organizations and activities board gamers are involved in, participants were asked what activities or organizations restrict or limit their board gaming. The question framing permitted responses with more salient organizations and activities. Participants indicated a variety of organizations and activities that restricted board gaming. Socialization processes from other organizations and activities constrain or enable board gaming

Constraints. Most participants declared work as a limiter to their board gaming habits. Robert stated, “Oh, well, work for one thing would be a big limit.” Tommy had a similar answer, “Okay, I guess, work is an answer. I mean, I own my own business. I work six days a week...”

Another limiter to board gaming is family involvement. Some family members are not interested in board gaming and investing in the family reduces time for board gaming. Scott explained how other people’s schedules limited his board gaming, “[W]e’re single men in our early 40s. We have an abundance of free time compared to other my other friends who have a family and two or three children there.” Tommy fits Scott’s description because Tommy games regularly, but also makes time for his wife who does not play board games. Tommy explained, “So, my wife is not a gamer and it’s not that I defer to my wife, but at the same time I like spending time with her.” Board gamers socialize and maintain familial relationships.

Some board gamers become progressively more established in board gaming, reducing investment and socialization of other hobbies. Ash explained, “it’s gotten to the point where I, if I’m hanging out with people, I don’t want to ever play ...video games, I only want to play board games.” Steven expressed a similar sentiment as his activities progressively became more board game focused, “So, it really does kind of occupy a space that maybe books, but not to the same extent that they used to. And now games occupy a chunk of that. And I also follow video games

less and things.” Misty spent time exploring different hobbies, but eventually found her passion in board gaming, focusing her time. Misty explained, “You know I did a board game and um I made pottery and I uh, you know, did some dancing things. So. Yeah. I, I went to various meetups, board gaming clicks best for me. I love board gaming.”

Board gamers find board gaming fulfilling, but the activity does not fulfill all needs. Most participants indicated board gaming could not solely occupy their time, but activity variation is occasionally needed. Misty explained her reason for voluntarily taking breaks from board gaming, “We do try to occasionally do something outside of board gaming with my closest friends. So. Um. Because board gaming is not physical enough, so you need to get some physical activity in there.” Tommy shared a similar view that board gaming is not everything as he is “an avid cyclist and a swimmer.” Scott explained other activities that may limit his board gaming which also included exercise, “I’m a bit of a movie buff and in the summer. I bicycle a lot, but not in an organized form. It is not a sport, but it is the way I exercise. It takes some hours a week.” In contrast, Cid explained that he would be board gamer, “but, to a certain extent, because I have... other things that I partake in, like video games.” As Cid was a newly established board gamer, he was not yet interested in reducing his involvement with video games.

Level 2: Socialization to multiple organizations and activities captures the tension board gamers face as they are socialized to various organizations and activities. Some activities constrain or limit board gaming such as work or family commitments. In contrast, as more time is dedicated to board gaming socialization, less time or socialization is permitted in other organizations and activities. Level one focused on socialization at a micro perspective of an individual in an organization or activity while level two takes a more macro approach displaying

various organizations and activities competing to socialize the individual. Level three is an even more macro approach as it displays the social connections between various organizations or activities.

Level 3: Board Gaming as a Social Connection

Level 3 of MCMVS illustrates how different social circles intersect with various organizations. In applying MCMVS to board gaming, this study revealed board gamers do indeed have intersecting social circles. Intersecting social circles is common as established board gamers engage in recruitment communication with family, friends, romantic partners, etc. Scott explained, “My gaming group is mainly people that I know or have been friends with at work or from my student years. And so, there's always already a lot of knowledge about the other players.” Ash had a similar experience, “I also started getting uh, people that I go to church with involved. And so, small groups and exposing them to board games.” Sal recounted how she and Buck play with Sal’s co-worker, Marge, “Yeah! So, we had her come over and we played Mechs Vs. Minions... Of course, she’s good with strategy and you know, she’s a programmer. She’s very good at that and she got into that.”

Board gamers typically play with board gamers within their established social circles, however, board gamers can develop friendships from board gaming groups. Misty explained, “It’s a great way to meet friends.” Misty became friends and later roommates with board gamers she played with. Misty stated, “We now all live together in the board game palace. And um, and, you know. Have a massive collection of games and play games all the time.” What started as a mutual interest in board games grew into a close friendship.

Recruit co-workers. Board gamers also may recruit from their workplace. Sal and Buck discussed steps Sal took to introduce board games her co-workers:

...I would bring games to play at lunchtime you know, little games. Oh, King of Tokyo I introduced to people at work because that's something you can play at lunchtime pretty much.

Sal then discussed how much effort she put in to introduce board games to co-workers, "I took [the Pursuit of Happiness] and...I re-themed it for the workplace. So, I was 'Okay, now you're on this team,' you know, cause you're on this work team and you're trying to do these projects." Buck followed up with, "It was specific to [workplace name]. It was specific to your work." Sal works full-time, which helps foster a strong connection between her and her co-workers. This strong connection between Sal and her co-workers permits Sal to know what kind of board game to introduce to her co-workers as well as appropriately re-theme the game to gather more interest from her co-workers.

Not all board gamers may be able to recruit from work. For example, Buck explained, "I can't say the same. I don't want to hang out with my work people." Not all board gamers want to recruit from work but may recruit from other social circles such as friends.

Recruit friends. Another established social circle ripe for recruiting includes friends. Sal and Buck recounted their board game recruiter who came from their friend circle, "Our friend James Philip, yes. Before that, we played Pictionary and Uno. You know, the basic stuff." Later in the interview, Buck and Sal explained more games James introduced them to:

Buck: So, it's wonderful. Soon he introduced us to that and Guillotine. Was it Emily and Rick? Yes. Guillotine is a little card game, but these are things that we didn't even know existed.

Sal: Citadels, the University of Citadels

Ash was originally recruited by his friend, but then became the board game facilitator. Ash shared his experience then recruiting friends:

I also started getting uh, people that I go to church with involved. And so, small groups and exposing them to board games. And usually every time I'm in a different group of, at, at church you know, I get kind of pigeon-holed as the board game guy.

Sal and Buck excitedly recounted their board game recruiting outside of the workplace. Buck stated, "John, introduced him to Catan. He went out and bought a copy, right? Is that him?" Sal responded, "He went and bought Catan on his own." Sal continued by saying, "And then, oh. Even Jeffrey, he bought RoboRally." Sal and Buck had several individuals they had recruited and were excited to share their experiences.

Friends are individuals that people voluntarily associate with for one reason or another, but friends infers that individuals willingly associate with each other. It is natural for board gamers to recruit friends to board gaming as they already know and like each other.

Recruit family. Board gamers often spend a significant amount of time with family and naturally recruit family to become established board gamers. Sal and Buck are examples of recruiting family members because they consistently teach their grandkids new board games. Sal explained, "[W]e're teaching my grandchildren who are almost ten and nine now. But we started them out with like, you know, Mice and Mystics. You know, teaching them games, getting into them." In addition to playing with their grandkids, Sal and Buck play with their son and daughter-in-law. Sal explained, "And then my, then my son and daughter-in-law. They come play with us. They're our Gloomhaven, uh, group." Buck immediately responded, "Yeah, we sucked them into Gloomhaven and they backed the Kickstarter and bought two copies of it."

Not only did Sal and Buck recruit their son and daughter-in-law to play board games with them, but the son and daughter-in-law have become board game enthusiasts themselves and backed a game on Kickstarter. Scott may not have recruited his own family, but a member of his gaming group does. Scott explained, “it’s usually one guy sometimes brings his brother, another one ‘can I bring my friend from work?’ and it’s all possible.”

Family members often have similar likes and interests due to shared family history and the desire to associate with each other. Board games are activities that facilitate social interaction, making it an ideal activity to keep connected with family members.

Recruit romantic partners. Board gamers also recruit their romantic partners. As previously discussed, Fred and Daphne are dating, and Fred recruited Daphne into board games. Fred shared, “Well, I mean, I brought a few games to, you know, the gateway games to play and I introduced, ‘Hey, you want to watch Dice Tower? Or watch it played?’ In the same group interview, Velma and Shaggy are dating. Velma shared when Shaggy recruited her.:

And then [Shaggy] would go gaming and I didn’t have anything to do and he was like, “You should come and check it out sometime” and I was like, “Okay!” So, I did, and I actually really enjoyed it. I didn’t think I would enjoy it as much as I did, but it’s a lot of fun.

Neither Velma nor Daphne indicated their likelihood of becoming board gamers without the association of their romantic partners. As board games help facilitate social interaction, it is a great date activity, or in the case of Fred, Daphne, Shaggy, and Velma, a double date activity.

Recruit board gamers into other social circles. Previous sections discussed the recruitment of board gamers from already established social circles, but board gamers may recruit each other to become more than just board gamers. An example of board gamers becoming friends is seen with Misty. Misty explained:

That weekend after the meetup there was our local three-day board game convention was that weekend. And at that convention, I met um, two lovely young men who are 25 years old and um, a couple, and we became very close friends because we both have very eclectic, omni-gamer type tastes in games.

Misty later explained, “We now all live together in the board game palace. And um, and, you know. Have a massive collection of games and play games all the time.” Misty’s affiliation with board gamers led to individuals becoming some of her best friends and later roommates.

Level 3 of MCMVS illustrates a macro perspective of the various social connections that intersect with socialization to multiple organizations. Level 3 specifically displays board gamer recruitment from established social circles, but also board gamers recruit other board gamers into social circles.

Research question 2 examines the relationship of MCMVS in board game leisure. During the Dice Tower Cruise, board gamers indicated board game leisure membership may have ambiguous membership boundaries, but membership still follows the five membership statuses. Level 1 illustrates an individual’s membership status in an organization or activity. Level 2 demonstrates the various socialization processes an individual is involved in; either organizations or activities. Level 3 explores the underlying social connections that intersects socialization to various organizations or activities.

CHAPTER 4 -DISCUSSION

This chapter explores the overall insights to understand what the results contribute to the current body of literature, specifically, the Dice Tower community, community efforts to recruit, and the ideal board gamer. This study supports the MCMVS model of socialization by extending it to a new context: board gamers. Rather than socialization into an organization, the findings suggest that the Dice Tower exemplifies a socialization gateway organization (SGO). Though board gamers do not have formal membership, there is a level of membership in the Dice Tower community. Building from this community perspective, it does take a community to successfully recruit new members. The Dice Tower's work also gives viewers the ideal board gamer to strive to become more like the ideal board gamer.

Dice Tower Community

Participants expressed board gaming membership, not Dice Tower membership. Participants did consider the Dice Tower a valuable resource for board game reviews and networking. Participants indicated the role of the Dice Tower and other organizations during interviews and most participants had a strong involvement with the Dice Tower and similar organizations. In this way, the MCMVS socialization model is supported, but The Dice Tower functions as a SGO by facilitating a sense of community as intermediate places (Aden et al., 2009).

Aden et al. (2009) first applied intermediate places to Nebraska's Cornhuskers as sports fans watched their sports teams on T.V., but fans still enacted rituals in their own homes or at bars. Similarly, board gamers watch and learn from organizations like the Dice Tower. Board gamers create and re-create their own rituals in small groups. One difference is that sports fans often identify with their team such as, "I'm a Cornhusker," whereas board gamers do not express

“I’m a Dice Tower-ite.” Further, the Dice Tower worked in concert with other organizations to socialize members into board gaming communities. Many of the participants such as Buck and Scott disclosed their association with various board game organizations.

Board game communities are not limited to broadcasts like YouTube videos, but extend community to the online forum using websites like BoardGameGeek.com for a variety of purposes. Online forums connect subsections of a board gaming community because board gamers communicate with each other for discussions, questions, organizing game nights, etc. Participation in the online board game community can be as simple as reading board game reviews, but users may return to the same website for entertainment (e.g. Lampe, Wash, Velasquez, and Ozkaya, 2010). For example, Buck explained they learned and found the Dice Tower’s Top Ten Worst Games list and found it quite entertaining.

Organizations like the Dice Tower provide opportunities for board gamers to physically engage in rituals with other board gamers such as conventions and cruises. These events serve to connect board game community members in person. The MCMVS model demonstrates that in-person events and virtual resources are used to socialize people into a board gaming community.

Community to Recruit

Further, the results point to a wide range of recruitment efforts into gaming groups. New board gamers do not always find sustainable interest in board gaming with their first encounter with non-mainstream board gamers. Established board gamers may attempt to recruit new board gamers, but the recruitment may be unsuccessful. Recruiting new board gamers may require attempts from various individuals. In other words, it may take a community to recruit individuals to become board gamers. An example of community recruitment is seen in the account of Sal and Buck as they discussed Sal’s coworker, Marge. Sal brought a board game to work to play

during lunch with co-workers. Marge loved the game and accepted Sal's invitation to play board games at Sal and Buck's house. Through further discussion, Marge revealed her boyfriend works for a major board game company and had been trying to recruit Marge to play board games all along, but recruitment took the efforts of two different established board gamers. In this instance, Marge's boyfriend was not the gateway contact and did not provide the gateway game. Sal was the gateway contact because she successfully introduced Marge to a gateway game that sparked Marge's interest to transition from a new board gamer to an established gamer. New board gamer recruitment requires the right gateway game with the right contact.

The Ideal Board Gamer

As seen in RQ 2's results, board gamer membership varies according to a board gamer's perspective. Some participants defined a board gamer based upon activity. Thus, the definition of socialization is connected to the *who* of board gaming. As a result, it is impossible to completely remove identity from socialization.

Evidence of identity and socialization as connected occurred when participants themselves compared to conceptualized ideal board gamers, fitting Wieland's (2010) concept of identity as discursively constructed expectations. Some participants defined a board gamer and explained they do not quite fit the definition they provided. When Shaggy, Fred, Daphne, and Velma explained board gamers, Daphne and Velma did not consider themselves a full board gamer. Similarly, Rose compared herself to Steven when she explained she was less of a board gamer than Steven. These statements indicate an ideal board gamer exists, but some participants do not feel they meet that standard despite being on a board game cruise. The processes of socialization also communicatively enact identity. The ideal board gamer is learned through the Dice Tower's and similar organizations' discourse. Participants defined a board gamer according

to the expectations of an ideal board gamer learned from discourse, then reflected how they compared to the ideal board gamer.

The Dice Tower is comprised of serious board gamers who became professional board gamers, portraying the ideal board gamer. Professional board gamers are considered ideal board gamer as they play and review thousands of board games. The Dice Tower's nature is to play and review board games because the average board gamer cannot afford the time and money to purchase and play every board game. Many leisure board gamers view the Dice Tower as the ideal board gamer, thereby, communicating habits, jargon, and opinions to the average board gamer. Dice Tower content socializes board gamers to understand what qualifications constitute a professional gamer. Though the average board gamer will likely never become professionals themselves, they understand what professional board gamers are and are not. The average board gamer may not want to be professional, but still use the ideal board gamer to compare themselves. The communication around board games not only portrays the ideal board gamer, but also sets expectations for the ideal board game.

The Dice Tower rates and awards board games, in turn, creating discourse and socially constructed expectations of the ideal board game. Employment organizations award ideal examples with titles like "Employee of the Month," which not only recognize effective behavior but communicate to other employees what an ideal employee looks like. Similarly, the Dice Tower awards board games awards like the "Dice Tower Essentials." This award communicates the expectation that to be a board gamer, one must own the game. The Dice Tower Essentials and reviews also contribute to this process. Overall, the ideal board gamer and top games socializes and sets expectations about what is possible.

CHAPTER 5

Exploring the application of Kramer's Multilevel Communication Model of Voluntary Socialization (2011b) to leisure extends organizational communication literature and provides practical applications for organizations such as the Dice Tower.

Theoretical Implications

Board gamers fit Kramer's (2011b) Multilevel Communication Model of Voluntary Socialization. MCMVS was designed for organizations where individual membership is not a paid position, but a volunteer position. One key characteristics of volunteer organizations is ambiguous membership boundaries where neither the organization nor the members can fully agree on membership qualifications. Board game leisure follows MCVMS but displays more ambiguous membership boundaries than Kramer's community choir study (2011b).

Board gaming's membership ambiguity is due to the lack of a formal organization regulating all board gaming. In the study of the community choir (Kramer), the choir had formal leadership that took attendance, emailed members, etc. Board gaming leisure's informal membership boundary better fits Putnam's classification voluntary association (2001) because voluntary associations lack formal leadership and membership and facilitate informal social connections. Though board gaming as leisure has more ambiguous boundaries, MCMVS's first level regarding the five membership statuses of socialization (prospective, new, transitory, established, and former) still apply to board gaming.

MCMVS illustrates socialization to the Dice Tower with some modification. Rather than five membership statuses, it is five voluntary association statuses. This study extended MCMVS to apply to leisure, specifically, board gaming. Board gamers use the Dice Tower as a resource to improve their own understanding of board gaming and keep up to date with board game news.

The Dice Tower is a form of community that provides intermediate places for board gamers to network and play board games.

Kramer studied socialization to the Middleton Community Choir (MCC; Kramer, 2011b), which the MCC socializes members to their organization, but the choir is within broader activity, singing. The community choir acts as both an organization to be socialized into and a *socialization organization* (SGO) facilitating socialization to singing, specifically, choral singing. Other singing sub genres include bar karaoke, shower or car singing, recording solo performances, barbershop, etc.

Applying MCMVS to the Dice Tower reveals the Dice Tower and similar organizations do socialize board gamers, but not to membership. The Dice Tower and similar organizations are SGOs because they help facilitate socialization to an activity rather than socializing individuals to an organization. The Dice Tower works to obtain followers on YouTube, but followers have no formal allegiance to the Dice Tower.

SGOs provide a wide range on content to appeal to individuals of various levels of the activity. For example, the Dice Tower produces segments such as Dan and Cora where Dan is the father of Cora, who is a young child, and they review a board game together. Another segment the Dice Tower produces is The Top 10 Gateway Games for New Gamers which reviews the games that the Dice Tower are best for introducing new board gamers. The Dice Tower produces content for audiences with varying levels of experience or socialization into board gaming. Similar SGOs include temp agencies as they facilitate socialization into job placement. Board gamers do have varying levels of membership, but organizations such as the Dice Tower are voluntary associations. Altering MCMVS to reflect levels of voluntary

associations rather than levels of membership accommodates the nature of socialization to leisure (see figure 4).

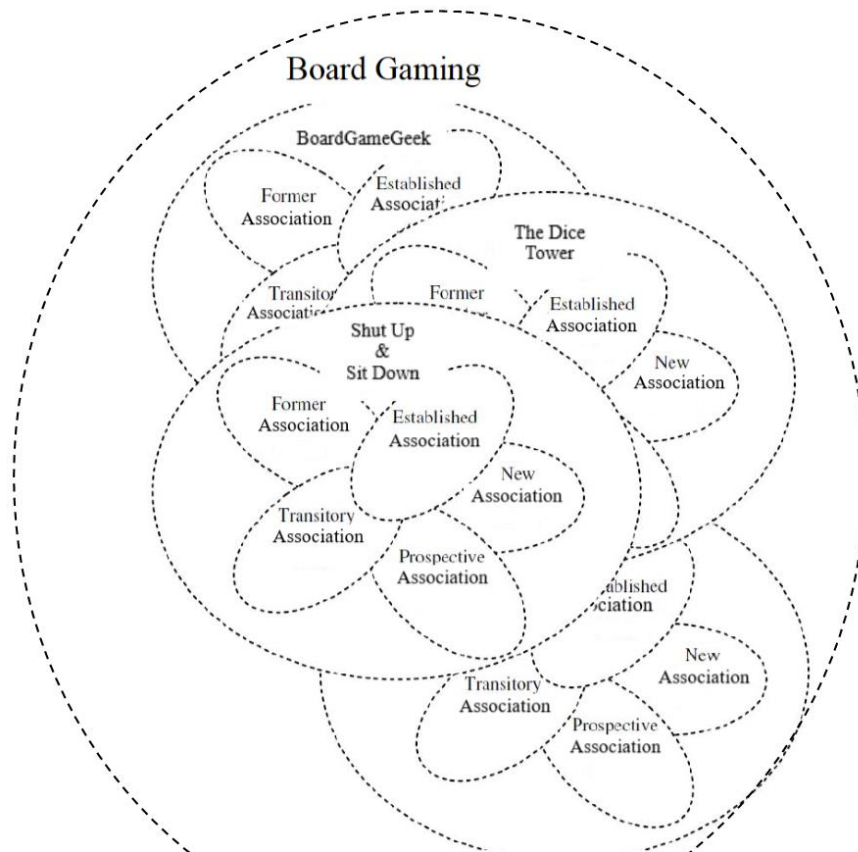


Figure 4. Board Gaming and Socialization Gateway Organizations. This figure depicts a macro perspective of the Dice Tower in relation to other board gaming SGOs.

Specifically, the Dice Tower cruise served to enhance socialization to gaming by providing a space for gamers to enact their identity. Socialization in this case is more like being a customer as a newcomer (Rollag 2012) than joining a choir. Moreover, to extend Rollag's work indicates customer socialization is a role-making process. The Dice Tower content and events provide a means of socialization to board gaming. Yet, the Dice Tower cruise and the organizational content is not the same as a customer because as Figure 4 indicates, board gaming and connecting from other organizations may serve to enhance connection to the Dice Tower,

not compete like Apple competes with Dell. Rather, by providing an array of content and events, the Dice Tower uses other organizations like BoardGameGeek to enhance socialization to both the Dice Tower and board gaming. This concept extends not only to socialization to leisure activities but serves to illuminate how organizations like the Dice Tower engage in socialization.

This study provides a case study of applying and extending the Communication Model for the Socialization of Voluntary Members to board gaming leisure. In examining individual's journey from casual to serious leisure, the results of this study will reinforce, enhance, and/or expand the current socialization model. Socialization changes individuals from outsiders to insiders. As individuals learn more about board gaming, they learn behaviors of what board gamers should and should not do. The Dice Tower is one organization which produces online content reviewing board games, announcing upcoming board games, etc. The Dice Tower can create their own intermediate place promoting their values and attitudes.

Board gamers do not identify as members of the Dice Tower, but do utilize the Dice Tower as a resource for upcoming board games, events, etc. At any time, board gamers may stop watching or following the Dice Tower, but viewers have strong loyalty. The two years the Dice Tower hosted the cruise, they sold out and had international board gamers attend from Portland, Silicon Valley, Mexico, Belgium, and Denmark.

This study helps articulate the socialization process on an individual level, and in relation to organizations such as the Dice Tower, complementing the socialization model. In addition to academic benefits, this study's results may be an example of effective marketing techniques to other markets and hobbies. Though many studies have examined sport leisure socialization, this study will examine and identify socialization processes in a different leisure other than sport

leisure. These socialization processes may be key in fostering member identification, growth, and retention.

Practical Applications

The Dice Tower consists of professional hobbyists with a following of board gamers, which makes the Dice Tower capable of creating and influencing the board game community using public discourse. The Dice Tower explicitly and implicitly regulates their fans and followers. Tom Vasel, the main Dice Tower host, explicitly regulates when he talks about what kind of comments he deletes from his YouTube channel section and who he bans from commenting on their channel. Some implicit approaches include teaching viewers how to act as the Dice Tower only reviews more family friendly games or presents reviews with sermon-like spiels. More succinctly, we can see how organizations, even leisure-oriented organizations, contribute to shaping public discourse and promoting beliefs and values. The Dice Tower is one of many organizations who review board games, but the Dice Tower is the most funded, viewed, and followed board gaming organization.

As organizations seek to build a following and establish relevancy to their field, it is important to follow the example of SGOs like the Dice Tower. Some key points to follow from the Dice Tower include becoming masters of their craft, establish a fun and inclusive environment, and foster strong networking with other SGOs and companies.

Board gamers use the Dice Tower as a form of research to learn what games may be worth purchasing because members of the Dice Tower are considered experts in board gaming. Similarly, other growing SGOs require masters of their hobby or craft to build a following. Becoming a master requires in-depth understanding of a hobby and up-to-date information and

content. In turn, like participants perceive the Dice Tower, SGOs should provide a level of credibility to the hobby.

Another key component of SGOs is a fun and inclusive environment. The Dice Tower promotes positive experiences for board gamers and does not tolerate personal attacks or non-family friendly behavior and comments. Staying consistent with this open and inclusive environment creates ease for board gamers to follow and become a member. There are clear expectations of what a board gamer should be in this community. Another way to establish inclusivity is to engage with the hobbyists who do participate. This is seen in Tom Vasel and other Dice Tower members engaging with viewers with online comments or simply engaging individuals in attendance of events. The idea is to become less of a celebrity with social distance, but to be relatable and personable with community members. Creating an inclusive and consistent environment leads board gamers to support the SGO through donations and attendance of events.

Lastly, building a prominent SGO requires a network with other SGOs and companies. The idea is to establish relevance in the industry or activity. Strong connections with other SGOs and companies will facilitate up-to-date news and content for production. This networking also reflects more community inclusivity as multiple SGOs work together to increase credibility and progression in the hobby.

Board gaming is a game and an activity to foster social networks (Huebner, et al., 2009), provides an escape from every day cares (Stebbins, 2001), and relaxes board gamers while fostering creativity (Stalp, 2006). SGOs and similar organizations provide a service to the community by facilitating leisure.

Limitations and Future Research

This study offers several insights and offers direction for future unexplored studies regarding established board gamer variety, the socialization of professional board gamers, the relationship between identity and socialization, and the relationship between SGOs and customer socialization.

Level 1 of MCMVS explores an individual's membership status within a single organization. Through observations and interviews, established board gamers have a large variety ranging from board gamers who identify as casual or novice board gamers to professional board gamers such as employees of the Dice Tower. The varying levels of interest and commitment to the hobby would be profitable to explore as there may be more sub-categories within an established board gamer. Building from this possible variation, future research should also investigate whether prospective, new, former, and transitory board gamers also have a large variation within the membership category.

The variation of established board gamers includes professional board gamers which poses the questions, how do professional board gamers communicatively transition from leisure board gaming to professional board gaming. Tom Vasel of the Dice Tower released videos on the Dice Tower website recounting the growth and evolution of the Dice Tower from early beginnings to what it is now. These narrative videos likely offer unique insights in understanding the socialization of professional board gamers.

This study focused on the socialization processes in which organizations inform individuals how to become insiders. A direct consequence of socialization is individuals identify as members of the organization (Stephens & Daly, 2012). The relationship between identity and socialization primes research to further explore the relationship between MCMVS and the idea

of crystallized identity (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Tracy and Trethewey explain an individual's identity is crystallized meaning identity has a variety of facets. Not all facets are on display at once, but all identities are interconnected and influence the communicative expression of each identity. Crystallized identity coincides with other literature including identity work and identity management. Future research should examine the connection between MCMVS and crystallized identity to examine where theories differ or complement each other.

Serious leisure or hobbyists often construct their identity using their hobby as a foundation (Baldwin and Norris 1999; Stebbins 2001) and strategically frame their identity when disclosing membership because of potential stigma toward the leisure activity such as gun enthusiasts or even skydiving (Anderson and Taylor, 2010). In addition to foundational identity, individuals engaging in serious leisure build their identity on "sub cultural themes and institutionally embedded 'identity stories'" (Loseke, 2007). Serious leisure identity construction is constantly negotiated with all other identities (Anderson and Taylor, 2010).

To help illustrate the processes of identification in serious leisure, Jones (2000) created a model mapping the process and development of leisure identity. However, the model of serious leisure identification "does not explain why individuals drop out of such activities" (Jones, p. 295). This study is less focused on the identity aspects of leisure but focuses on the socialization processes. Implementing MCMVS will help expand the understanding of leisure socialization by examining the tensions of various organizational socialization processes which may pull individuals away from an activity. Future research should also examine the intersection of between MCMVS, crystallized identity, and leisure to understand where theories may differ or complement each other.

The last area of future research regards customer socialization (Kollag, 2012). Fully examining customer socialization research may offer important insights in more wholly understanding the role of organizations like the Dice Tower. Though the Dice Tower does not focus on marketing their own merchandise and services, the Dice Tower does work to socialize board gamers to purchase certain products such as “The Dice Tower Essentials.” Board games on the Dice Tower’s essentials list receive a strong endorsement from the Dice Tower, consequently increasing the board game’s sales. A full investigation and comparison of customer socialization literature may be a great direction for future research.

Conclusion

Socialization is the process of transitioning from an outsider to and insider (Kramer, 2011a). Understanding socialization in organizations led to the development of the MCMVS which illustrates membership status within organizations with ambiguous membership boundaries. Kramer developed the MCMVS which accommodates for organizations with ambiguous membership boundaries and non-linear socialization into the organization. The MCMVS examines an individual’s membership in a single organization, an individual in several organizations, and maps social intersections of these organizational memberships. The first level of the model explores an individual’s variable status in a single organization. Level two illustrates an individual’s membership in multiple organizations. Lastly, level three maps the intersection of social connections with multiple organizational memberships.

Using qualitative research methods such as research interviews and participant observer fieldwork permitted me to reflect and properly represent board gamer experiences and perspectives. My own experience as a board gamer privileged me insider status to more easily understand and relate to board gamers on the Dice Tower cruise to theoretical framework and

academic terminology. Field observations provided a clearer understanding of the social context surrounding board gaming on the Dice Tower cruise, thus increasing credibility of this study. I iteratively analyzed interviews and field notes to ensure authentic results and permitting the data to speak for itself. I thoroughly read and reviewed each interview to increase familiarity and refresh my account of the interview, including the context surrounding the interview opportunity. Analyzing the data with initial open coding allowed me to analyze data according to emerging themes regarding socialization principles. Axial coding refined the themes as they were constantly compared to participant accounts, personal observations, and the MCMVS. These qualitative techniques focused research on examining participant accounts within board game leisure context, which provided more accurate and organic data.

This study applied MCMVS to examine the socialization of board gamers to both board gaming and the Dice Tower which captured how board gamers learn to be board gamers and the role of organizations like the Dice Tower in socializing board gamers. Board gamer socialization follows the same three levels of MCMVS. The first level of board gamer membership follows the four of the five membership statuses. Transitory members were difficult to identify, but this may be due to conflation with other membership statuses. An important note is that established board gamers engage in recruitment of friends, family, co-workers, romantic partners, and the Dice Tower themselves. Participants also indicated varying requirements to qualify as a board gamer such as familiarity with non-traditional board games or membership being dependent upon enactment of a board gamer by consistently playing.

Though the MCMVS applied to board game leisure and the Dice Tower revealed board gamers socialize to board gaming like community choir members, the MCMVS in its current capacity does not illustrate the role of the Dice Tower. Organizations like the Dice Tower do not

socialize board gamers to become members of the Dice Tower, but function as a resource to recruit, retain, network, and guide board gamer purchases. A minor modification to the MCMVS to incorporate varying degrees of voluntary association (Putnam, 2001) rather than membership calibrates the model to properly illustrate the role of organizations like the Dice Tower in board gaming socialization.

Understanding socialization to board game leisure and the role of organizations like the Dice Tower benefits organizations like the Dice Tower and leads to possible theoretical and practical applications to other forms of leisure. The wide variety of content presented by the Dice Tower permits board gamers of every level to find content that relates to their current socialization while simultaneously socializing the board gamer further.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Opening

1. Explain my purpose
2. Review informed consent
3. Inform them that they will have a chance to read and comment on what I've written about them

Main Questions

4. How would you describe a board gamer?
5. How do you see yourself fit that definition or not?
6. What are some key moments that led to where you are now as a gamer?
7. What things limit or conflict with your board gaming?
8. What role do The Dice Tower and similar organizations play in gaming for you?

Demographics

9. Where are you here from?
10. What is your occupation or job?
11. What is your current family or marital status?
12. Do you have any children at home?
13. What is your age?
14. Gender (record)
15. What other activities are you involved in besides work and the community choir?

Closing

16. Thank them for their time
17. Explain again how it has been valuable
18. Ask if I can contact them again for further information/clarification
19. Ask one last question: What else do you think is important for me to know?
20. Ask what questions they have for me.