



# Table-top role playing game and creativity

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## ABSTRACT

The current study aims to observe whether individuals who engaged in table-top role playing game (TRPG) were more creative. Participants total 170 (52 TRPG players, 54 electronic role playing game (ERPG) players and 64 Non-players) aged from 19 to 63. In the current study, an online questionnaire is used, adopting the verbal subtests of Wallach–Kogan Creativity Tests and the McCrae and Costa Big Five Personality Inventory. It is found that TRPG players score higher in divergent thinking tests. Priming and instruction giving methods lower the performance of all participants, in particular, when the instruction is memory provoking. ERPG players score lowest among the three groups. TRPG could be regarded as a form of improvisation. It could also be a preferable activity for the promotion of creativity. It is low cost and no formal setting is required to play. Many ERPGs are originated from TRPGs, therefore, with the popularity of ERPG, there should be advantages in promoting TRPG.

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## 1. Introduction

As pointed out by Plucker and Runco (1999), despite the discussion about the influence of nature and nurture on creativity, creativity can be enhanced because everyone has his or her inborn potential and such potential can be fully realized.

Training is one of the methods used to enhance creativity (Scott, Leritz, & Mumford, 2004). Inspired by table-top role playing game (TRPG), Karwowski and Soszynski (2008) developed a training method called “Role Play Training in Creativity” which aimed to enhance creative imagination. According to them, their method “proved to be one of quite a high overall effectiveness” (p.168).

TRPGs are not board games, card games nor board wargames. They are fantasy role-playing games, a kind of leisure activity. According to Williams, Hendricks, and Winkler (2006), a basic TRPG require players to “create fictional personas. . .within the rules and genre specified by the game, and then collectively engage in protracted storytelling” (p.3). Although the gamemaster will provide some information according to a rulebook, TRPGs are imagination demanding activities as the players are to create and experience an imaginative adventure together.

TRPG is getting psychologists’ attention. Kaufman (2009) expressed his interest in seeing “how imagination is used in creating role-playing game characters” (p.171). In view of the nature of TRPG and the method developed by Karwowski and Soszynski (2008), it is wondered whether TPRG players would score higher in creativity tests: would people without the TRPG training developed by Karwowski and Soszynski but with actual experience in playing TRPG on their own be more creative than people without the exposure to TRPG? Karwowski and Soszynski indicated that “it would be worth to make sure whether the effectiveness of the training session does not bear just a short-term influence on its participants” (p.168). Would being a more experienced TRPG player (i.e. a player with many years of playing practice) relate to the score obtained?

Electronic role playing game (ERPG) is certainly the most well-known form of role playing game. In the study of Yee (2006) about motivations of playing massively multiplayer online role-playing games, with a sample of 3000 participants,

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Yee found that one of the subcomponents found in the factor analysis is “Role-Playing – creating a persona with a background story and interacting with other players to create an improvised story” (p.773). Yee’s definition of Role-Playing points out a common feature of TRPG and ERPG.

The relationship between creativity and ERPG is unclear. Hamlen (2009) found that for upper elementary school students, playing video games had no influence on their creativity. Another study found that for university students who are media multitaskers, the length they were exposed to media had no influence on their creativity (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009). Would these findings apply to ERPG players?

In relation to priming manipulation in creativity tests, Zabelina and Robinson (2010) found that undergraduate participants scored higher in creativity tests when being asked to imagine themselves as 7-year-olds. Can such priming manipulation be regarded as an analogue of role playing that requires the retrieval of participants’ memory? Because both tactics require participants to lower their self-consciousness, and arguably, in a light-hearted manner, it would be interesting to find out if TRPG players would score differently under such priming manipulation.

The current study aims to explore the areas in the above questions by studying whether differences can be found in creativity level between TRPG players, ERPG players and Non-players under three different treatments, namely without priming (Control Treatment), with age-related memory-provoking priming (Treatment One) and with age-related imagination-enhancement role-playing priming (Treatment Two).

“Affect” is another component of creativity considered by Plucker and Runco (1999). The current study also collects data in relation to mood of participants at the time of answering the online-questionnaire and demographic data, such as age and nationality for further analysis. In the current study, data in relation to personality have been collected.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Play

Runco (2007) stated that to define “play” is not easy and pointed out that play is related to intrinsic motivation. Dansky (1999) viewed that the meaning of the word “play” has too many aspects, which makes defining it difficult. Therefore, he chose the term “playful behaviour” when talking about the links between play and creativity. He defined “playfulness” as “more to the quality of an activity” (p.393), in contrast, activities are playful if they are self-directed by intrinsic motivation as well as restricted less by external constraints. He also pointed out that playful activities are more likely to bring about positive moods like pleasure, joy, excitement or fun to people.

#### 2.1.1. Role playing game

As a hobby, role playing game (RPG) has many forms such as table-top (or pen-and-paper), live action, video or computer, online (from one to several, and even masses of players playing in real-time). Puchalska-Wasył, Chmielnicka-Kuter, and Oleś (2008) used the definition of Hughes (1988) and defined RPG as “shared fantasy” that “engage individual imagination that is guided by the rules of the game”.

#### 2.1.2. Table-top role playing game

In fact, in every table-top role playing game (TRPG), there is a game rulebook for the use of the gamemaster. The gamemaster acts like the director of a film. The gamemaster informs the players about information regarding the scenes, settings and scenarios. The gamemaster also needs to play all other untaken characters that appear in the shared fantasy world, such as a pedestrian. Player “adopts the role of character and then guides that character through an adventure. The player makes decisions, interacts with other characters and players, and, essentially, “pretends” to be his character during the course of the game” (Cook, 1989, as cited in Mackay, 2001, p.4). They usually design their own characters and speak in character while playing the game. Facial expressions and small gestures are often used during the game.

#### 2.1.3. Length of TRPG varies

It can be a few hours, or continuous episodes spread out over several months. Pen and paper are needed to serve the purposes for character record sheets and notes that need to pass between players. Dice of different sizes and colours are needed to determine results, such as fights (Mackay, 2001). An important nature of TRPG is that players and the gamemaster gather together for the game face-to-face.

#### 2.1.4. Electronic role playing game

For the purpose of the current study, electronic role playing game (ERPG) includes all kinds of role playing games, as long as they are in electronic forms, and not played face to face by players. Electronic forms may cover video (via console or other electronic devices such as smartphones), computer and online. With reference to the definition for massively multiplayer on-line games (MMOG) by Bainbridge (2010), the definition of such electronic role playing games include the following elements: (a) the games are set in a computer-generated world; (b) each player can choose to play a character; (c) players may or may not interact with other characters played by other players; (d) the games are under certain rule constraints; (e) there are goals for the players to achieve; and (f) players, even situated in the same room, when they play, they focus on the screen not on their fellow players’ face.

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