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# The Disadvantaged Sufferer

A diachronic transitivity analysis of disability within tabletop roleplaying game rulebooks

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Tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) often include disabling impairments and narratives in their rulebooks, but they are at the same time social and cultural products of their time. This study investigates how nine popular TTRPG rulebooks represent disability and what kind of disabled identities the rules allow players to inhabit. The texts are analysed with transitivity analysis to examine how the authors view the experience of disability. In addition, the methods of critical discourse analysis are used to find out the underlying ideologies and social context.

The TTRPG rulebooks were gathered from between years 2000-2025. The selected books had more than ten disability-related sentences, were well-known in TTRPG communities and were available to the researcher. The books were divided to three groups based on the decades they were from for diachronic comparison. The sentences were broken down to traditional clauses and analysed through transitivity analysis. The resulting participants were lastly categorized for easier analysis.

The results indicated that earlier books focused disability representation to the character creation, where disability was a negative feature of the character that limited the gameplay. TTRPG books from the 2020s included disability representation in the setting of the TTRPG books and removed the negative label associated with creating disabled characters. In addition, assistive devices increased in frequency and seemed to take the place of disabled characters as limiting factors in gameplay.

The direction of disability representation in TTRPG books is optimistic, but the subject could use further voices of disabled persons on the issue.

**Key words**: tabletop roleplaying games, disability, systemic functional grammar, transitivity analysis

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## Abbreviations

ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act

CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis

CDS = Critical Discourse Studies

GM = gamemaster

NPC = non-player character

PC = player character

SFG = Systemic Functional Grammar

TTRPG = tabletop roleplaying game

WHO = World Health Organization

TTRPG book abbreviations:

GURPS = General universal roleplaying system

L5R = Legend of the Five Rings

Pf2e = Pathfinder (2nd edition)

Pf2e: Player Core = Pathfinder (2nd edition): Player Core

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# 1 Introduction

Tabletop roleplaying games (commonly abbreviated as TTRPGs) are collaborative games, where players assume the roles of player characters (PCs) to interact with and within a fictional setting. This play is structured by a rule system, which is enacted by the host or guide of the game, generally called the gamemaster (GM). Roleplaying is a recreational activity with potential to strengthen the player's self-perception and confidence (Abott, Stauss and Burnett 2022). The fictional settings where the roleplaying is situated tend to mirror the real world and so integrate the values and ideals of our lived society into the fiction. This blending of fantasy and real-world concepts allows the games to weave together fantastical ideas with those that are recognizable to any player. One interesting concept within these fictional settings is disability. There is often a degree of freedom in what kind of PC a player can create, and this should include disabled characters. In addition, the PCs must often during their adventures navigate situations that can physically or mentally injure them. When this happens, it is up to the rule system to provide the tools to play a disabled character. The systems of TTRPGs are introduced in the main rulebooks, which instruct both the GMs and the players on the possibilities of the fictional world they are about to engage with. This area of TTRPG books has not been studied before, and yet it has the potential to facilitate identity construction for disabled persons.

There are approximately 1.3 billion (16 %) disabled persons in the world according to the World Health Organization (2022). Disability and being disabled still carries a stigma with it, and disabled persons face discrimination and societal isolation despite the strides forward for disability rights. This stigma creates challenges for disabled persons to interact within their environment and to identify themselves as disabled. At the same time, with the increasing discussion of disability rights and the changing views on disability, there is a certain discomfort from able-bodied persons to approach and interact with disabled persons (Gouvier and Coon 2002, 49). TTRPG games then seem like a possible way for not only allowing disabled persons to explore their identity without fully adopting it, but also for able-bodied persons to interact with disability (Ibarra and Petriglieri 2010, 17; Page 2024). For this to be possible, however, the TTRPGs must include disability in the games and rulebooks. TTRPGs have been studied from multiple angles, for example by examining the play or their rulebooks. Previous research has largely concentrated on the storytelling narratives (e.g. Wee 2024), educational value (e.g. Hammer et al. 2018), value as a therapeutic tool (e.g. Atherton

et al. 2025), and how stereotypes about women as well as racial and sexual minorities are perpetuated in the rulebooks (e.g. Garcia 2017, Berge 2021, Berge 2025). However, there is still a research gap on the language of TTRPG rulebooks and the representation of disability in them.

At first glance, disability representation in TTRPG books is minimal. Disabilities are a way to increase available attributes in character creation (e.g. choosing a disability increases the available points that can be used to buy abilities and talents), mechanical limitations based on impairments (such as vision impairment imposing a penalty to tests of seeing things) or consequences of being gravely harmed mentally or physically (such as losing a limb or becoming traumatized during play). Largely, disabilities are traits given to the PC at character creation which interact with what the PC can and cannot do. It is not a given that a player can even play a disabled person. If there are no mechanics in the rulebook, then the possibility hinges on the GM or the players coming up with their own set of complementary rules. For example, in the well-known *Dungeons & Dragons* 5th ed. (Wizards of the Coast 2014), there are little to no mentions of disability or assistive technology. Those players who want to play a disabled character must produce fan-made content and rules to do so. It is more than a paltry inconvenience: it pushes disability out of the official discourse of the game. Additionally, removing disability completely from a rulebook also removes it from the minds of those able-bodied persons, whose life disability and chronic illness have never directly touched.

The disability representation in the rulebooks seems on the surface to drag behind the disability rights movement. The idea that it is the medical impairment that causes a person to be marginalized as per the medical model of disability has been overtaken by social and cultural models of disability, which concentrate on the physical and attitudinal barriers of society, as well as the identity of disabled persons (Malhotra and Rower 2014, 2–4; see section 2.1). This dragging behind could be attributed to the rules' inherent biases and inequalities stemming from their creation within their cultural and social context (Garcia 2017, 234), meaning that newer books could be expected to be more conscious of disabled identities. It could also be a difficulty in the general design of games, as TTRPGs often attribute numerical bonuses or penalties to each ability and talent a PC can have. It is a complex issue, but as the rule systems model lived experiences for the players, having the option to be disabled within the game creates a unique possibility for the players to experiment and explore disabled identities with their player characters.

This study sets out to examine the language of TTRPG rulebooks regarding disability and what kind of disabled identities are possible within them. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, 30), language construes human experience across the years, and this experience can be interpreted from the functional grammar structures. They have suggested a tool for analysing the constructed experiences through transitivity analysis. The transitivity system examines the linguistic choices of verbal processes, participants and circumstances within a clause. This system is therefore used here to investigate the linguistic choices regarding disability within the TTRPG rulebooks, that is, how they construe the experience of disability. To determine how societal change has influenced language in the books, nine rulebooks from the years 2003-2024 are examined. The primary purpose of this study is to find out how the rulebooks represent disability by inspecting the resources used to refer to disability through transitivity analysis. As a secondary focus, the clauses and their placement in the rulebooks are also analysed through the methodology suggested by Fairclough (2015) for critical discourse analysis (CDA). The research questions for this thesis are:

1. What kinds of core transitivity processes are used by TTRPG rulebooks to discuss disability?

2. In what kind of text types and TTRPG book sections are the mentions of disability located?

3. How has the representation of disability changed diachronically?

My hypothesis is that disability representation in the books will reflect the changes brought by the social model of disability. It is to be expected that the language of the rulebooks will have changed from portraying disability as a negative impediment to an integral part of a disabled person's identity.

I will begin by introducing the history of the disability rights movement, relevant terms and the importance of disabled identity. This is followed by exploration of the general structure of TTRPGs and their role in identity construction. After these two chapters, I will introduce systemic functional grammar (SFG) and CDA before delving into the actual material and its analysis. I will then present the results, discuss their implications and finish with the conclusions.

# 2 Disability and disabled identity

Disability is a diverse concept that cannot be only defined by the impairments that disabled persons have. In 2006, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities described disabled persons as those with long-term impairments, who are hindered from equal participation in society (United Nations 2006). Nowadays, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines disability as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities" regardless of if they have a medical diagnosis (ADANN 2023). The World Health Organization (WHO) states that "[disability] results from the interaction between health conditions such as dementia, blindness or spinal cord injury, and a range of environmental and personal factors" (World Health Organization 2023). All of these definitions avoid confining disability to an impairment a disabled person has and consider societal as well as environmental factors as causing the disability. This is the influence of the disability rights movement and the effects of thinking about disability through a social rather than medical model of disability. It is important to consider the language used to discuss disability and disabled persons, as it is a reflection of the values of our society (Spencer, Peers and Eagles 2020). To elucidate this societal and cultural change, I will in the following sections introduce some of the main models of disability and discuss briefly the debates surrounding the terminology of disability. The last section of this chapter discusses the disabled identity and its importance to disabled persons.

## 2.1 The many models of disability

*Models of disability* are analytical frames that both define disability, as well as place disabled persons and the meaning of disability within societal context (Smart 2009). No single model can fully encompass all aspects of disability, but the models serve as reflections of the public opinion and the identity work of disabled persons that is continuously happening in the background. As an example of the influence of models of disability, let us look at the oldest model of disability. The *moral model* attributed disability as punishment from God (Henderson and Bryan 2011, 7; Pardeck and Murphy 2012, xvii). This kind of attribution heavily stigmatized disability, blamed disabled persons for their disabilities, and made them feel ashamed of it. This stigma and shame are still present in the background, even though our way of thinking about disability has changed.

The two most well-known disability models today are the medical model and the social model. *The medical model* focuses on individual treatment and rehabilitation of disability, approaching it as a medical condition to be treated (Smart 2009, 4). Disability is seen as a deviation from "normal" health. As the focus is on the diagnosis, the person with the disability is seen as the one responsible for the suffering caused by the disability (Dirth and Branscombe 2017, 415). That is, if a person with a vision impairment cannot cross the street by themselves, it is attributed to their condition, and it is the individual's responsibility to navigate this problem. The medical model has been criticised heavily for dividing the disability community by polarizing disabled persons into rivalling categories, for legitimizing the prejudiced treatment of disabled people by viewing disability as solely the concern of medical professionals, and for its incapability to acknowledge the social world of the disabled persons (Smart 2009, 4). It was the prevalent model until the emergence of the social model of disability.

The roots of the *social model* are in the disability rights movement, specifically in a paper published in the 1970s that defined disability as caused by society rather than physical impairments (Oliver 2013). Disability is therefore "imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society" (UPIAS 1976). This model separates disability and impairment into non-causal terms: impairments refer to the conditions the people have, while disability is caused by the societal response to their conditions. Although in the beginning this movement concerned only physical impairments, it was later extended to include others as well (Oliver and Barnes 2012, 21). The social model encouraged a movement towards social transformation and "liberation" from the idea that problems were caused by the disabled persons' physical limitations (Shakespeare 2014, 13). Additionally, it created a basis for a stronger sense of identity. Now the responsibility for a visually impaired person's difficulties at crossing a street lie on the society and community, and it is in fact their failure of providing the proper infrastructure and tools that disables the person.

The original social model has been widely criticised for having a rigid view on the social problems of disability, while ignoring the possible suffering caused by impairments (Oliver and Barnes 2012, 22). Especially Shakespeare (2014, 18) has pointed out that the possible emphasis on social arrangements may lead to ignoring the medical needs of impaired individuals. The pain, for example, still exists despite any social arrangements. Though these criticisms have been contested (see Oliver and Barnes 2012, Oliver 2013), the concern has

remained. Regardless, the social model of disability has had a lasting impact on how disability is viewed and has served as the basis for later models.

The *human rights model* is complementary to the social model, taking a rights-based approach to emphasize the human dignity of disabled persons (Degener 2017, Lawson and Beckett 2021). It considers the pain and deterioration of quality of life for persons with disability, encompasses social and cultural rights to allow minority and cultural identification and provides a basis for assessing stigmatizing public health policies (Degener 2017). The difference between the social model and human rights model is simple: while the social model explains the oppression and exclusion disabled persons experience, the human rights model strives to make a change to that.

Another model of disability that uses the social model as a basis is the *identity model*, where disability is seen as a marker of a membership in a minority identity, like gender or race (Brewer et al. 2012, 5). Disability is defined by the experiences disabled persons have in the social system that is not designed to include them. While these experiences are individual, they can be shared with an identity group (ibid.). Unlike the social model, however, the identity model is less interested in the way that policies and institutions oppress persons with disabilities. It instead concentrates on creating a positive definition of disability identity through minority groups. The *minority model* has a similar idea, as it considers persons with disabilities as a minority group that experiences discrimination and neglect of their basic rights (Henderson and Bryan 2011, 11). The model strives to empower disabled persons to change the social, physical and political barriers that oppress them (Pardeck and Murphy 2012, xviii). Certain laws and movements base themselves on specific models. For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is grounded on the minority model.

This study looks at disability through the social model. Taking into account its weaknesses, I will also borrow insights from the human rights and identity models to consider the pain that disabilities can bring to the disabled person's life as well as the effect on their identity. Since TTRPGs are heavily linked to identity work, which we will see in Section 3.3, I will especially rely on the ideas presented in the identity model on creating a positive definition of disability.

## 2.2 The terminology of disability

The terminology of disability has been highly contested throughout the years, as terms with negative connotations and associations have been replaced with new ones. This is called the *euphemism treadmill* (Pinker 1994), since the new terms often become seen similarly as the old ones with time: as having a negative connotation. To begin with, using the term *disability* is universally accepted in both person-first or identity-first language (Andrews et al. 2019, 113). *A person-first language* puts the focus on the person when discussing disability (e.g. "person with a disability"). However, this separation of the words has been accused of perpetuating the notion that disability is undesirable (Brown 2011; Andrews et al. 2013, 237). That is why some prefer to use *identity-first language*, which validates disability as part of the person's identity (e.g. "disabled person"). It however also places disability before the person, which can be seen as offensive. So far it seems to be a matter of preference which language is being used, with some people alternating between both (Dunn and Andrews 2015; Goegan, Delgado, and Ayeni 2025, 105). While there has been a lot of debate for other terms than disability, such as "special needs" or "differently abled", many of them are considered euphemisms within the disability culture (Andrews et al. 2019, 113; Shildrick 2020, 42). Monolithic terms, such as "the disabled" or "the blind", are generally avoided. This study will primarily use identity-first language, as its subject of study touches on disabled identity construction within TTRPGs.

As mentioned before, the terminology used to refer to disabilities changes when the previous terms are considered negative in some way. These terms may be categorized as offensive (e.g. "cripple"), depersonalising (e.g. "the handicapped") or as describing people by their impairments and diagnoses (e.g. "paraplegic") (Oliver and Barnes 2012, 15; Andrews et al. 2019). What they have in common is a generalizing aspect that refers to the disabled person through the impairment. Some insults also have their root in derogatory or old medical terms for disabilities, such as "lame" and "idiot" (Andrews et al. 2019, 113). In media, disabled persons are described through expressions such as "confined to a wheelchair" or "suffering from [x]" (ibid.), which paints the picture that disabled persons are victims of their tragic impairment. Media depictions affect not only how disabled persons perceive themselves but also how they are perceived and treated by others. Unfortunately, governmental and media efforts have been found to rather increase than decrease the use of disparaging terms (Lyle and Simplican 2015). Changing the language we use is not enough to change the image of disabled persons; instead, researchers believe that the stigma on disability must change

(Haller, Dorries, and Rahn 2006; Albert, Jacobs, and Siperstein 2016). Still, language perpetuates the values that cause the stigma to rise, so interest has to be taken in the language as well. Some terms have been reclaimed, such as “crip” or “gimp”, similarly as in queer circles the word “faggot” has been reclaimed as a positive identity (Sherry 2004). While for others reclaiming words works well, there are still people who feel uncomfortable with the associations and connotations tied to such words.

Much of the talk around terminology and language comes with good intentions, but does not quite work, such as replacing the word “disability” with “special needs”. For example, media may describe disabled persons as inspirational for overcoming their disability and succeeding in what is taken for granted for able-bodied persons. These kinds of depictions, which often consist of a visibly disabled person performing an activity with a catchy caption (Grue 2016, 839), are called *inspiration porn*. Young (2012), who coined the term, argues that these kinds of depictions assume that disabled people need extra courage to live the “tragic” lives they have, and to bring comfort to the able-bodied persons rather than to the disabled persons. In a similar way, calling a disabled child someone with special needs evokes the image that the help they need to live their life is somehow extraordinary. Though the terms are important in shaping society’s view on disability, it must be remembered that the central causes of disability rights movement are the rights of disabled people and their equal inclusion in society. As Shakespeare (2014, 19) puts it, “quibbling over” different terms is a diversion from this common cause. Regardless, understanding the terms and where they come from is important to grasp their connotations and intended function. TTRPG rulebooks are likely to use the current terms of their time, and these terms reflect both how disabled persons are seen and how disabled persons can construe their identities within the play.

## 2.3 The importance of disabled identity

Identity consists of our self-perception of who we are, as well as who we are perceived as and how we are reacted to in interpersonal interaction (Vignoles, Schwartz and Luyckx, 2011). Disabled identity is a complex one, as it is influenced by the onset of the disability as well as the social and cultural factors, such as media and the models of disability. People that are disabled from birth are more likely to identify as being disabled, while those that become disabled after an injury or disease must come to terms with their new situation before they can consider a disabled identity (Shakespeare 2018, 45–57). Other predictors of disability

identification are the severity of the disability and the limitations it imposes on the daily living (Bogart et al. 2017). In other words, the more severe or limiting the disability, the more likely the person is to identify themselves as disabled. Identification with a positive personal disabled identity often also leads to rejecting the idea of a cure for the person's impairment and increased likelihood of perceiving living with a disability as a valuable experience (Hahn and Belt 2004, 459; McCormack and Collins 2012, 157). However, several studies have also noted that a significant number of people deny a disabled identity (see Watson 2002, Nario-Redmond, Noel, and Fern 2013, Chalk 2016). The most likely cause for this is the perception of stigma and fear of facing discrimination or prejudice.

The stigma around disability has changed in the past years. This may be because of the increase in knowledge and understanding of disabling conditions or identification with them (Grinker 2020). There is also increased empathy between disabled and able-bodied individuals, when before able-bodied persons avoided disabled persons due to their discomfort during mutual interactions (Gouvier and Coon 2002, 49). Negative stereotypes are being combated by a wealth of knowledge created by researchers and private disabled persons. It is easier to come into contact with disability, as for example many social platforms provide opportunities to hear the voices of disabled persons. Interactions with disabled persons have been shown to improve able-bodied persons' attitude towards disability and combat negative stereotypes (see e.g. Gouvier and Coon 2002, MacMillan et al. 2014, Hammer and Stutts 2025).

However, while the situation for disabled persons is improving, it does not mean that the stigma or discrimination is gone. *Ableism*, the belief that disabled persons are somehow lesser or the "other" due to their disability (Nario-Redmond 2019, 6), is still present in the society. These beliefs include feelings of pity or disgust incited by interacting with a disabled person, changing one's behaviour around them, or making assumptions about a disabled person based on their disability. In fact, the society at large still values a person's accomplishments and skills as part of their worth to the society. When people consider that being able to do less than what is considered the norm reduces a person's humanity and self-worth, it becomes ableism. This can also be seen in the idea of *compulsory able-bodiedness*, which refers to the compulsive idea that everyone should be "free from physical disability" and to be healthy enough to work (McRuer and Bérubé 2006, 9). McRuer and Bérubé (2006) claim that compulsory able-bodiedness assumes that disabled persons embody the idea that no one wants to be disabled. Disabled persons still face difficulties in entering the workforce, dealing with

the side effects of their medications and the possible social effects of their disability. This means that disabled persons have to navigate both their own impairments as well as the social meaning assigned to them by society (Forber-Pratt et al. 2017, 204). This may lead people to reject the disabled identity, as it will allow them the chance to also reject the social consequences of being identified as disabled.

Positive identification as a disabled person allows one to interact with the world from a different perspective. In Steve Mcdonald's (2009) research, a person diagnosed with dyslexia was reported to say: "I know I'm not thick, but I use (sic) to think probably I am […]" (2009, 131). The problems caused by dyslexia in their everyday life made them give themself a negative internal attribution: being stupid. Within the medical model, this attribution would likely stay, but within the social model the blame for the difficulties with reading or writing is placed on external factors. Research has shown this to lead to a more positive self-esteem and identity among disabled persons (Hahn and Belt 2004, Chalk 2016). Developing a positive disabled identity thus relies on the available resources, such as societal attitudes, available media and interactions with other disabled persons. Disabled persons utilize mirroring, modelling and recognition through their available identity resources to develop their identities (Forber-Pratt et al. 2017, 204). A study on the impact of mass media on the identity of disabled persons found that portraying the accomplishments of disabled persons affected positively the self-identity of other disabled persons (Zhang and Haller 2013). This happened even if the portrayals were considered unrealistic. It is interesting to compare this with inspiration porn, which is not seen as catering to the disabled persons or as inspirational. It highlights the impact of seeing one's own identity portrayed in a positive light in media, even if the person themself cannot do what the portrayed person is doing.

Just like there are personal identities, there are also communal disabled identities. They can provide their members with resources and support groups. Due to their own lived experiences with disability, they can also provide more understanding support than the able-bodied support groups (Forber-Pratt et al. 2017, 204). Communal identities can provide the aforementioned modelling and recognition for developing one's own disabled identity. These communities and how they are viewed vary based on the impairment experiences of their members and their portrayal in the society (Shakespeare 2014, 140). Mass media also plays a part in transforming and maintaining these communal identities (Haller, Dorries and Rahn 2006). Communities may, however, reject a disabled identity similarly as an individual might. For example, there are people with a hearing impairment who identify themselves as

culturally Deaf and see themselves as a linguistic minority rather than as part of the disability community (hence the uppercase D in “deaf”) (see Ladd 2003, Stokoe 2005, Wright 2021). Communal identities and communities can help people see their disabilities as part of their lives, rather than as a tragedy that befell them. They also provide support through understanding the condition and navigating it through their own experiences.

Disabled identities have also been studied from the perspective of a narrative identity, as the evolving personal story of the self that a person creates to make sense of their experiences and its different aspects (McAdams 2011, 100; Dunn 2014, 128). Finding personal meaning is an important aspect of disabled identity, and disability and illness narratives are a way for disabled persons to explore who they are with their impairment. This meaning making helps make sense of the possible suffering, illness and disability to not only the narrator, but to the audience (Dunn and Burcaw 2013, Couser 2016). In the case of TTRPGs, a narrative can help all the players, regardless of whether they are disabled or able-bodied, to increase their understanding of disability. However, when there is an audience for the narrative, the disabled person cannot control how the story is analysed, as the audience will have different tools and resources for processing the story (Alshammari and Abdelzaher 2025, 565–566). Within the play, the TTRPG players are both an audience for the GM’s narration as well as co-narrators of the play. Their own resources for understanding a disabled narrative may greatly vary, as they may experience their first explicit encounter with disability this way. However, TTRPG narratives are a way for disabled players to make meaning with their disability without putting themselves at risk, as well as for non-disabled players to explore such a narrative.

Narratives about disabled persons are, unfortunately, not always a good representation of disability. Many narratives treat impairments as limits for what the character should achieve (Grue 2016, 840). This becomes a problem mostly when these limits are decreed by the overarching narrative or ideology, or when they are portrayed as necessary or sufficient motivation to act. Additionally, narratives around disabled characters have been built on how their suffering has made them exceptional in some way (Rodríguez Díaz, Sánchez Padilla and Ferreira 2024), which equates the disabled person’s worth with their extraordinary skills. These depictions enforce ableist views by tying the disabled person’s worth to what they can and cannot do. A disabled character with exceptional skills is one of the most common stereotypes about disabled persons in films (Gallego, Ferreira and Arias-Gago 2025, 14). Other common stereotypes in films are disabled characters as monstrous and villainous

characters, as sources of inspiration for able-bodied characters and as passive victims to whom death is a fitting narrative end (ibid.).

Disabled identities are a resource for disabled persons to build their self-esteem and find a community of people with partly similar life experiences as them. It can be hard to accept a disabled identity due to the existing stigma around it, but as discussed above, a narrative can provide a safe way to explore it. In addition, able-bodied persons may not interact with disability for a large part of their lives, which causes them to rely on the assumptions and expectations society has taught them about disabilities. Disability narratives may allow them to explore disability and gain understanding of what it is beyond its stigma. With the increasing popularity of TTRPGs, disability narratives in TTRPGs also have an important role in increasing acceptance of disability and providing a resource for exploring it in a safe environment.

# 3 The language of tabletop roleplaying games

Tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) are generally played according to their rule systems, which are presented in a rulebook. Popular TTRPGs may have several books for rules as well as several editions of the game, which modify the existing rules. For example, Legend of the Five Rings (L5R) (Fantasy Flight Games 2018) has had five editions, with the basic concept of the game staying same, but many of the rules modified to better the game in some aspect or to respond to cultural and social changes. The 5th edition of L5R has a *Core Rulebook*, which instructs the reader on the basic rules and describes the fictional setting of the game, and a *Game Master's Kit*, which instructs the GMs on how to run the game. In addition to this, there are several adventure modules and additional sourcebooks, which add new spells, abilities and class variants to the game. It is somewhat common for TTRPGs to produce at least adventure modules in addition to the general rulebook. These books are full of both instructive and narrative texts dedicated to helping the player understand the game's inner workings. These *text types* are recognized through their linguistic characteristics and refer to the purposes of the text (more on this in Sections 3.2. and 5.2). In this chapter I will discuss the content of the rulebooks regarding their rule systems and settings, as well as what kind of text can be found inside them. The last section discusses the effect of TTRPGs on identity building and disabilities.

## 3.1 Systems and settings in roleplaying games

TTRPGs are interactive storytelling games with fictional settings, where the play is guided by the game's rule system. A rule system encompasses all the rules through which the decisions of the characters and their actions are initiated, done and resolved by (White et al. 2018, 66). The rule system is typically provided by a rulebook, which also explains the basic rules of the fictional world. Most TTRPGs have what Mackay (2001) calls "an episodic and participatory story-creation system", meaning that the GM and the players tell a series of stories together, governed by the rules put forth in a rulebook.

The players participate in the storytelling by roleplaying as their fictional characters (PCs) and interacting with the story prompts given by the GM. The story can take place in the GM's own or a commercial setting, and the story itself can be created either commercially, be the GM's own creation, or be a commercial story edited by the GM to better fit their own

narrative. The term “commercial” is used here to refer to marketed products, such as pre-written campaigns and settings sold in bookstores and the publishers’ websites. The rule system arbitrates how the PCs are created, what their roles in the story may be and how the players may then interact with the story and setting. Many TTRPGs use dice to introduce the chance of success or failure to the player’s chosen actions. For example, a player wanting to hide behind some barrels might have to roll the type and number of dice determined by the system to not be spotted.

The settings that the games are played in are fictional worlds, which often reflect reality or take heavy inspiration from fantasy or science fiction. If a king appears in the narrative, the players may safely assume that royalty is constructed in a similar way as in our reality. This may not always be true, but most often inspiration is found from our own history. This allows the players to immerse themselves easily into the fictional world without having to guess at how it works. In fact, the TTRPG books where the setting is introduced often include everything that the players need to know to play in the story. Like in other books, they help the reader to “place themselves properly” in the narrative through the information they offer (Goffman 1986, 149). Not all TTRPG sessions use a predetermined setting, and these play sessions often rely even more heavily on the implicit assumptions about fantasy worlds.

If the setting is not clear to the players, they will have to make assumptions about it as they play (Fine 2002, 192). These assumptions are likely to veer to what is considered *common sense*: the beliefs and opinions thought to be popular or held in common within a society (Gramsci 1978). For example, if a person has never interacted with disability or with disability narratives, they may not even consider disability as part of the setting for their TTRPG. Creating a setting based on these common-sense assumptions may be easy, but the GM and the players have a unique chance to experiment with how social reality is structured and create new knowledge about it (Pässilä, Oikarinen, and Kallio 2013, 169). This play with social reality can be encouraged or discouraged by the game’s rule system. For example, Zabala, Zvelebilova and To (2024) found that the game mechanics of queer TTRPG games were able to influence players’ conceptions of sexuality. The rule systems of these games facilitated identification with queer characters and the exploration of queer identities. While the common beliefs and assumptions held about these groups affect their representation, at the same time TTRPGs allow for the safe exploration and expression of stigmatized identities.

At first glance, TTRPG settings may seem just to be rule systems, arbitrating what can and cannot be done. However, they are not neutral in tone, as the language used to instruct the reader can carry values through the writer's word and structure choices. Similarly, values can be found in the narrative texts that complement the rules. These values are taken from the society surrounding the creators of the rule systems and settings, and their own experiences within that society. For disability to be something that TTRPGs can facilitate identification with or exploration of, it must be in some way part of the rule system or narrative.

## 3.2 The narrative and instructive aspects of the rulebooks

To understand the texts within the rulebooks, it is best to first discuss the way the books are written. TTRPG rulebooks are instructive manuals on how to create a player character and how to play the game, complemented usually by narrative descriptions of the world. Narrative descriptions and instructional rules have often been combined in instructional material (Wårvik 2009, 17), with the descriptions carrying implicit information to emphasise or clarify the instructions. The same can be seen in TTRPG rulebooks, where the rules are often padded with narrative examples. For instance, some abilities in the second edition of Pathfinder (Pf2e) (Paizo 2019) are described narratively before instructing the reader how the ability works:

> Cooperative Nature: The short human life span lends perspective and has taught you from a young age to set aside differences and work with others to achieve greatness. You gain a +4 circumstance bonus on checks to Aid (Bonner et al. 2019, 57).

In this example, the narrative description emphasises the cooperative trait of the character as the reason for their mechanical bonus. Here it is also interesting to point out the emphasis on second-person pronouns: the book talks directly to the reader, immersing and situating them into the character through this method (Cover 2010, 107). Many instructive texts also use second-person point of view to communicate what the reader should do and how (Werlich 1976, 122-124). The TTRPG books seem to often use instructive features even in narrative portions of the texts. While these instructions situate the author of the book as the one instructing, they also impart the author's implicit assumptions about the world to the reader (Hicks 1936, 717; Alford-Duguid 2025, 3). In the example above, this may be the implicit belief that every player character is striving to achieve greatness, or an inference could be drawn that other species than humans have longer lifespans and may be more selfish.

Rulebooks are structured to help the player learn the game. The books usually first introduce briefly the setting, before giving the player the tools to create a character and equip them. Some books (e.g. L5R (Fantasy Flight Games 2018) and Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games 2021)) first introduce the basic rules before character creation, while others place them after the character creation (e.g. Pf2e (Paizo 2019) and Ars Magica 4e (Atlas Games 2004)). In both cases, rules related to combat and spells usually come after character creation. Setting information is usually one of the last chapters of the book along with the section meant for GMs on how to run the game. The very last chapters may be pre-generated characters, adventures or bestiaries (compendium of creatures). Many TTRPG books have an introductory narrative in the beginning of the book that sets the mood of the setting. For example, L5R, which is a game inspired by the Japanese court and samurai, has a narrative piece about a discussion between two samurai, which gives a glimpse into the political intrigue and religion of the setting (Fantasy Flight Games 2018, 4-5). There is nothing explicitly instructive about the text, but implicitly it immerses the reader in the mood and the setting of the TTRPG.

The instructions offer information about the fictional world similarly to the narrative texts (Bergström 2012, 13). For example, if the Equipment section has a cybernetic item, the players may assume that cybernetics exist in the world and draw inferences from its availability to them. It may even spark the idea to play a character that uses cybernetics. On the other hand, the absence of an idea may only be noticed if attention is drawn to it. A narrative of a character that cannot move from their bed because their feet no longer work may make players assume that wheelchairs do not exist, or make them question whether they do. Rule systems suggest what is possible and what is not, so they influence the assumptions that players form about the game world and the possibilities for their characters. This information affects what kind of characters they can create and what kind of identities they can have.

## 3.3 Identity construction within the play

Players construct identities for the PCs they choose to play, whether they are premade characters or created by the player (Fine 2002, 186). The characters are often defined by what they can do within the rule system—their profession/class, talents and skill sets—and by the backstory given to them by the player. For example, picking “druid” as a class encourages a

connection to nature, because the system gives the character skills, talents and spells related to knowledge and manipulation of the natural world. Being a druid often becomes a big part of the character's identity, since it is related to eco-friendly and shamanistic narratives. Similarly in a sci-fi game, choosing a "hacker" profession gives the player the tools to hack and program things within the play, and the player will have to justify these skills through their backstory. It should be noted that not all GMs require a backstory from a player, in which case the identity of the PC may be built entirely during play, but this identity construction still relies heavily on what the PCs are able to do within the boundaries of the rule system.

Characters can be either one-dimensional or rather complex individuals with goals and feelings separate from the player. They have their own identity, and switching between the identities has been found to affect the player's perception of themselves and produce feelings of empathy after seeing life from a different perspective (Yee and Bailenson 2007, Meriläinen 2012, Banks 2015). It is therefore possible to gain an understanding of a life with different circumstances than one's own through roleplaying that identity. The boundary between the player identity and the character identity is not a strict one, but rather one that the player can flexibly cross during play (Waskul and Lust 2004; Calleja 2015, 221). For example, the player may "revert" back from their character to ask the GM for a rule clarification or to tell the other players something the player does not wish attributed to their character. Waskul and Lust (2004) divide roleplaying identities into three: the person (reality), the player (imagination) and the persona (fantasy). All of these identities are constructed through experiences, meaning that the PC personas are similarly influenced by the events within the game as the person is by the events in their life. Fine (2002, 4) argues that players have to additionally choose between playing the "guise of [a] character or playing the self of that character". In other words, players can immerse themselves to varying degrees to the character and even see the personas as extensions of themselves. This further influences how deeply they experience their character's perspective on life.

During play, the players "become" their PCs, encouraged by the rule system and setting to explore their identities through the personas within the game (Deen, Schouten, and Bekker 2015, 124; Daniau 2016; Hollander 2021, 318). In narratology, this assimilation between the person and the character is called the *character effect*: it describes how people identify with literary characters to the extent of feeling strong emotions for and with them (Bal 1997, 115). In this study, I will refer to this assimilation between a player and character as *immersion*, though the term has been debated due to its elusive and multifaceted nature (see White,

Harviainen, and Boss 2012, Bowman 2018, Liapis and Denisova 2023). Sarah Bowman (2018) categorizes immersion to six major categories: activity, game, environment, narrative, character, and community. Especially important for this study is character immersion, which is described as the “experience of enacting a character” (Bowman 2018, 400). Players experience different degrees of distinction between themselves and the character, and may feel more or less in control of the character as they play. Immersion then is another factor that affects how a player may explore different identities within the game. The players can become immersed in their character in several ways, for example through the setting and the characters that live in it, as well as through the act of creating a character (Cover 2010, 109, 114-115). Immersing oneself in and identifying with a PC can also help the player to interact with the story (Waskul and Lust 2004).

In summary, the player characters play a large role in allowing players to safely experiment with different identities while maintaining their own. The extent to which players can do this is influenced by their immersion, the setting and the surrounding characters (whether PCs or non-player characters (NPCs) controlled by the GM). Not only can this experimentation with identity help the player see life from a different perspective, but it allows them to engage in introspection regarding their own identity. A person that has recently become disabled may be able to explore that identity and their feelings regarding it within the safe environment of the play.

# 4 Theoretical Framework

In this study, the texts of the TTRPG rulebooks are analysed through *transitivity analysis*, which is part of the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). SFG is a comprehensive theory about how language creates and expresses meaning through its different functions (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 20). The first part of this chapter is dedicated to explaining the basic framework of the theory, with special emphasis on the transitivity system. The second part of this chapter introduces Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which studies "the relationship between texts, interactions and contexts" (Fairclough 2015, 58) and their hidden ideologies. These two theories complement each other well and have been used together in analysis of representation and identity (see e.g. Bartley 2022, Tang and Xu 2024). Therefore, this study will also combine these two methods to investigate the social and ideological lexical choices regarding disability in the TTRPG books.

## 4.1 Systemic Functional Grammar and transitivity analysis

SFG is a theory of grammar that sees grammar structures as systemic patterns of choice that make meaning (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 24). The choices do not need to be conscious to have a meaning, but rather, they are affected by the societal and cultural context they are made in. Functional grammar is closely concerned with the socio-cultural and ideological factors that influence our linguistic choices (Thompson 2013, 265). These systemic patterns of choice represent how we experience our reality. In SFG, texts (instances of language) are considered processes of meaning making in context (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 3). Therefore, the wordings chosen by the authors of the TTRPG books reflect their ideological assumptions and expectations of the world, whether conscious or unconscious.

SFG divides the functions of language into three metafunctions: *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual*. These metafunctions are each concerned with different dimensions of the language and thus complement each other in analysis (Thompson 2013, 30). This study concentrates on the *experiential* metafunction (a sub-category of ideational metafunction), which corresponds to the language and resources used to construe the human experience (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 29). Studying only one metafunction leads to a one-dimensional view of the text's meaning instead of a comprehensive one. This is, however, necessary due to the scope of the current study. The representations of disability within the rulebooks construct the experience of disabled persons in the setting, which makes the experiential metafunction

suitable for the purpose of examining disability construction. The experiential metafunction can be analysed through the transitivity system.

The transitivity system construes the world of experiences and events as "a manageable set of process types" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 213). In short, it examines the linguistic choices made in a clause and how they represent the world. It sees experiences as consisting of the process unfolding through time, the participants involved in the process, and the circumstances surrounding it. There are six different processes, which in turn have subcategories (summarized in Figure 1). Of these, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) consider material and relational processes to appear most frequently in the English transitivity system, with mental processes slightly behind them in frequency (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 215). Each process type takes different kinds of participants. These will be introduced along the process types below, along with the circumstantial elements.

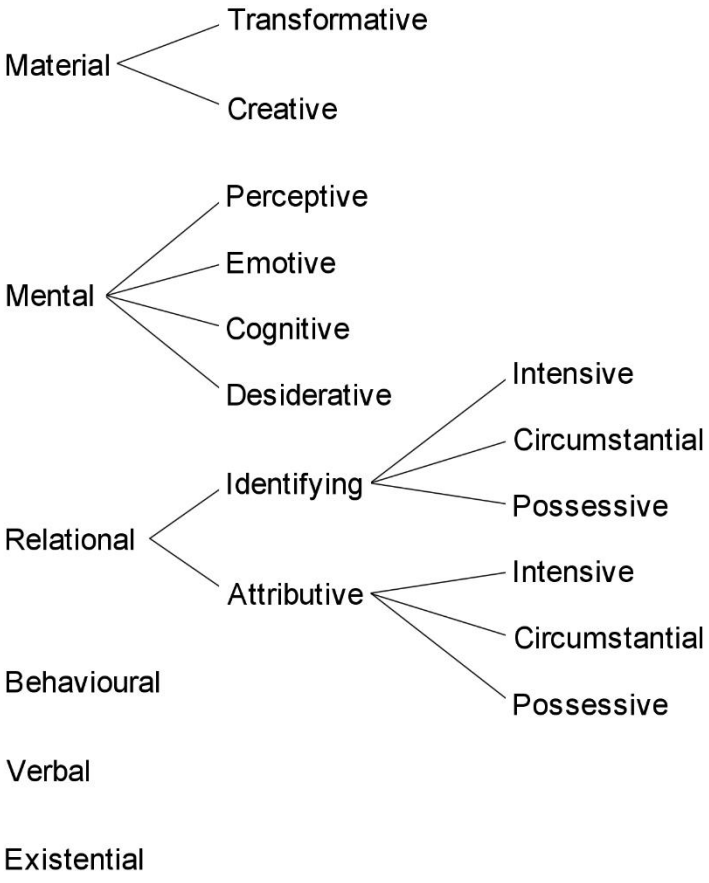


**Figure 1** The Process Types of Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) experiential metafunction summarized.

*Material processes* construct a change in the flow of events, brought about by an Actor unto a Goal (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 225). In simpler terms, it is a physical action of the Actor doing something to the Goal. The Actor may not always be directly mentioned in the clause, such as in passive clauses, but is considered to exist nonetheless (Thompson 2013, 95). Material processes can be divided to *creative* and *transformative* processes depending on whether the processes bring Goals or Actors into existence, or if the processes change existing Actors or Goals. Creative and transformative processes are illustrated in Example 1 and 2 respectively.

(1) The smith [Actor] makes [Process: Material, creative] a prosthetic [Goal].

(2) She [Actor] drank [Process: Material, transformative] the medicine [Goal].

The central participants in material processes are Actors and Goals. In addition to these, material processes can also have Scope or Beneficiary (Recipient or Client) as a participant (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 236). Beneficiaries are affected by the process, but the Scope is not. Scope consists of "Objects that do not seem very Object-like" (Thompson 2013, 112), usually expressing the process together with the verb. It cannot appear in the same clause with a Goal.

(3) The mother [Actor] gave [Process: Material, creative] birth [Scope] last night [Circumstance: Location].

The Scope may occasionally be difficult to identify. In these cases, I have followed Thompson's (2013, 113) advice: if the process does not affect the entity that appears as Object, it is labelled as a Scope. Beneficiary, on the other hand, is an indirect object that can appear with or without a preposition (such as "given *to* them" or "made *for* them").

*Mental processes* construct the internal world through processes of sensing, feeling, knowing and wanting. The participants are the Senser and the Phenomenon. The Senser must be a human participant (Thompson 2013, 98), but the Phenomenon that is being sensed can be a thing, an abstraction or even a fact. Mental clauses can project another clause, which Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, 254) call an *idea clause*, to denote the content that is being sensed. There are four sub-categories of mental processes: perceptive (sensing), emotive (feeling), cognitive (knowing, understanding) and desiderative (wanting). Two of these are demonstrated below.

(4) She [Senser] could not hear [Process: Mental, perceptive] anything [Phenomenon].

(5) The pain [Phenomenon] irritated [Process: Mental, emotive] him [Senser].

Phenomena are usually restricted to just one subcategory at a time. A clause cannot then be both perceived and thought, felt or desired at the same time (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 252).

*Relational processes* construe outer and inner experiences as ways of being (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 259). Relational processes can be divided to *attributive* and *identifying* processes: attributive relational processes establish membership by giving an Attribute to a Carrier, while identifying relational processes describe the Identified by the Identifier. These two can be difficult to separate from each other, so I have used Thompson's (2013, 104) guidelines: if the second participant is an adjective or indefinite nominal group, it is an Attribute. In short, in identifying clauses the two participants refer to "the same thing" (see Example 6), while in attributive clauses an attribute is assigned to the participant (see Example 7). Definite nominal groups or embedded clauses instead signify an identifying relational process. In addition to this, both attributive and identifying processes can still be divided to *intensive*, *circumstantial* or *possessive* types of relations. In intensive relationships, the entity has some class attributed to it, such as membership specification, an adjective, constructing knowledge, etc. In circumstantial relationships, the entity has a location or time attributed to it, often realized by a prepositional or adverbial phrase (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, 240). Possessive relationships denote ownership and possession, such as "having" something. The difference between identifying and attributive clauses, as well as intensive and possessive clauses, is demonstrated in Examples 6-8 below.

(6) The character [Identified] is [Process: Relational, identifying: intensive] a wheelchair user [Identifier].

(7) The character [Carrier] is [Process: Relational, attributive: intensive] blind [Attribute].

(8) The character [Carrier] has [Process: Relational, attributive: possessive] a wheelchair [Attribute].

In these examples, the "be" verb is used, as it is a common verb with relational processes. However, other verbs that equate the participants or prescribe an attribute to them also count as relational processes (such as "become", "indicate", etc.).

*Behavioural processes* are "processes of physiological and psychological behaviour" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 301). The Behaver, a conscious being, performs a Behaviour.

(9) He [Behaver] gave [Process: Behavioural] a quick laugh [Behaviour].

Behavioural processes overlap with material and mental processes, and the boundaries are admittedly fuzzy (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 301). For example, Halliday and Matthiessen (ibid.) categorise verbs such as "look", "listen" and "think" as behavioural rather than mental, when they represent processes of consciousness as forms of behaviour. However, the cognitive subprocess of mental processes also contains acts of thinking (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 203). In this study, this kind of ambiguous processes are considered behavioural when some kind of outward physical behaviour is indicated.

*Verbal processes* are processes of speaking and discourse. They set up dialogue between participants, where the Sayer (typically human) addresses a Receiver or directs the process towards a Target (Thompson 2013, 106-107). The message that is being said is the Verbiage (see Example 10), but it can also be Projected as a separate clause (see Example 11).

(10) The doctor [Sayer] told [Process: Verbal] them [Receiver] the bad news [Verbiage].

(11) He [Sayer] said: [Process: Verbal] "I want a new arm." [Projection]

Projections are analysed as their own clauses, while Verbiage is considered part of the verbal process clause. In Example 11, the projection would be analysed as a mental clause (desiderative).

*Existential processes* represent the Existent existing or happening. In narrative texts, they are often found in the beginning of a story, while in guidebooks they introduce features of interest (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 38). They generally begin with "there" and are followed up by verbs such as "be", "occur", "follow", etc (see Example 12). Existents can be divided to entities and events.

(12) There is [Process: Existential] a hearing aid [Existent: Entity] on the table [Circumstance: Location].

The word "there" only serves to indicate existence and is not a participant or a circumstance.

Circumstances are the background where the process is happening, as can be seen from Example 12. They often appear as adverbial or prepositional phrases (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, 311). They can denote time, place, manner, cause, contingency, role, matter or angle. When performing transitivity analysis, it is of interest what parts of the clause are part of the core processes and what parts are expressed in the circumstances. However, an analysis of the circumstances is out of the scope of this study.

The processes and circumstances explained here are but a part of the meaning-making. They can, however, be analysed for content and ideology to see how authors represent reality (Bloor and Bloor 2018, 155). Analysing them reveals how the authors of TTRPG books see disability and disabled characters existing in their fictional setting. This may not be a conscious ideology that authors are upholding, but the result of the social and cultural context. Here, SFG provides the descriptive analytical tools necessary for a critical discourse analysis, while the methods of CDA bring forward the context and ideologies present.

## 4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

*Critical discourse analysis* (CDA) is a wide interdisciplinary and multi-methodological field studying power, ideology, social change and similar social phenomena (Wodak 2013). It can also be called *critical discourse studies* (CDS), which has been suggested in order to dispel the idea that CDA is a method of analysis (van Dijk 2013). The difference between the terms is subtle and somewhat dependent on how they are defined (Catalano and Waugh 2020, 155). For example, CDS can be seen as a wider field of study, while CDA focuses on the field of linguistics. This study will use the term CDA, as it is the one Fairclough (2015) uses when discussing the steps of analysis.

*Discourse*, as defined by Fairclough (2015, 7–8), is language interacting with other elements as a part of social process. It is shaped by the *orders of discourse*, which are the "underlying conventions of discourse", and by the ideologies they embody (Fairclough 2015, 60). Discourse then both influences and is influenced by the social practises and social identities present in the social reality (Jäger 2012, 36). The orders of discourse are determined by society and "relationships of power in particular social institutions" (Fairclough 2015, 63). The disability rights movement and its influence on how disability was treated and spoken of (as discussed in chapter 2) is a good example of this. When the prominent model of disability

was the medical model, it legitimized unequal power relations for disabled persons in their interactions with doctors and society. In other words, it was "common sense" that disabled persons were responsible for their own conditions. As the ideology of the disability rights movement gained ground, the discourse around disability was influenced. It in turn influenced the subsequent models of disability, allowing for today's disabled identities and practices to become *naturalized*, that is, become part of the common sense. This is, of course, a simplified version of the events, but it shows the idea of how discourse influences the social identities of disabled persons and how disability is discussed today.

Fairclough (2015, 9) suggests that CDA studies the contradiction between expectations that arise in discourse and the actual existing reality. In the case of this study, CDA methods will be used to analyse the expectations and assumptions that the authors of the TTRPG books make about the lives of disabled persons and what kind of disabled characters they think a player should be able to play. The three stages of CDA as proposed by Fairclough (2015) are description, interpretation and explanation. In the *description stage*, the features of the texts are identified, and their experiential, relational and expressive values are considered. *Experiential values* are the text producer's experiences of the existing reality that can be found in the text (Fairclough 2015, 130). *Relational values* are traces of social relationships enacted in text, and *expressive values* represent the author's "evaluation of the bit of reality it [the expressive value] relates to" (ibid., clarification added). These two then have to do with social relations and identities.

In the *interpretation stage*, the mediated relationship between text and social structures is studied. In this stage, the common-sense assumptions and ideologies that lie in the background influence the interpretation of features of the text (Fairclough 2015, 163). The researcher draws on grammar and vocabulary to find out what interpretations there are of the situational and intertextual contexts of the text. In the *explanation stage*, the effect of the discourses on social structures is investigated. Fairclough (2015, 175) offers three questions for this stage, which prod at the power relations that shaped the discourse, the ideological characteristics that are present, and the discourse's position in relation to the power struggles at situational, institutional and societal levels. It is important to consider whether the discourse sustains existing power relations or transforms them. The examination of TTRPG books' texts and disability discourse allows for studying the changing assumptions and ideologies about disabled identity.

As CDA deals with interpreting text, it unavoidably includes also the researcher's own biases regarding the interpretation. However, a process of triangulation allows for an analysis to gain some validity (Creswell and Miller 2000, 127). Triangulation involves the convergences of different data, theories and methods to find common themes or categories in the same phenomenon. This is also used in CDA to reduce the researcher's own bias in interpretation, notably among discourse-historical approach (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 26). This study combines SGF and CDA to look at the data from two perspectives, while keeping in mind the constraints of the data.

The major criticisms of CDA are related to its objectivity, methodology and the integration of context and audience (see Breeze 2011; Poole 2010; Catalano and Waugh 2020, 219-240). Especially Fairclough's definitions and methods have been accused of being vague and interpreting texts on behalf of non-critical readers (Poole 2010, 140). In conducting analysis with the CDA framework, it is then important to pay attention to the context of the text and keep in mind the reactions of other readers to the text. Poole (2010, 145) recommends seeking evidence of the readers' or listeners' reactions to the texts. Researchers of disability discourse specifically have also been criticized before for only being interested in texts and not the day-to-day lives of disabled persons (Shakespeare 2014, 52). While this study falls guilty of studying disability representation and discourse within texts without tangible proof of readers' reactions to the text itself, it is motivated by the disabled persons in TTRPG communities discussing ways to increase disability representation. Critical discourse analysis is not meant to only analyse discourse, but also to encourage change in the discourse's existing social reality (Fairclough 2015, 5). This study too hopes to increase awareness of disability representation within TTRPG games. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind the criticism above and avoid making too many general assumptions about the text and the disabled persons' lives.

# 5 Material and Methods

The aim of the study is to investigate the transitivity processes used in TTRPG rulebooks to discuss disability, as well as where they occur and how they have changed. In the following chapters, I introduce the material as well as how it was collected and analysed.

## 5.1 The TTRPG rulebooks

Nine TTRPG rulebooks were selected for analysis based on a preliminary reading of potential materials from the past twenty years (2000–2025) that contained disability terms and were available to the researcher. The books had to include at least ten sentences clearly linked to a long-lasting disability. Well-known books were favoured, as they have a stronger impact on the general population. Their popularity was gauged by how often they appeared in online articles and forums as recommendations. Due to the scarcity of TTRPGs that matched all criteria, all genres of TTRPGs were considered for this study. Two of the chosen books belong to the Pathfinder franchise, because the disability representation in each was different. The nine chosen rulebooks are presented in Table 1 along with a simple explanation of their setting. Their contents are briefly discussed below.

**Table 1** The titles of the nine selected TTRPG books, with their publishing years, publishers, total number of pages, genres and summarized setting concepts.

| Year | Book | Publisher | Total pages | Genre | Setting |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ars Magica (4th ed.) | 2003 | Atlas Games | 272 | Fantasy | Mythic Europe in 1220s, PCs are magi and their companions. |
| GURPS (4th ed.) | 2004 | Steve Jackson Games | 575 | Any | Any |
| Rogue Trader | 2009 | Fantasy Flight Games | 396 | Science-fiction | Dystopian setting with fantasy elements. PCs work as Rogue Traders, who are explorers and merchants. |
| Shadowrun (5th ed.) | 2016 | Catalyst Game Labs | 492 | Science-fantasy | An alternate Earth with magic. PCs work as Shadowrunners, criminals that solve conflicts for money. |
| Legend of the Five Rings (5th ed.) | 2018 | Fantasy Flight Games | 336 | Fantasy | Fictional world of Rokugan. PCs are samurai. |
| Pathfinder (2nd ed.) | 2019 | Paizo | 638 | Fantasy | Fictional world of Golarion. PCs are heroic adventurers. |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hard Wired Island | 2021 | Weird Age Games | 397 | Science-fiction | An alternate Earth, where humanity went to space. PCs are people fighting for their livelihood and rights. |
| Pathfinder (2nd ed.): Player Core | 2023 | Paizo | 318 | Fantasy | Fictional world of Golarion. PCs are heroic adventurers. |
| Star Trek Adventures (2nd edition) | 2024 | Modiphius Entertainment | 377 | Science-fiction | Star Trek universe. PCs are part of the crew of a starship. |

*Ars Magica* (4th ed. Atlas Games 2003), *GURPS* (4th ed. Steve Jackson Games 2004), *Rogue Trader* (Fantasy Flight Games 2009) and *Shadowrun* (5th ed. Catalyst Game Labs 2016) have a rule system for exchanging points for "positive" traits in character creation. In most of these TTRPGs, "negative" traits increase the number of points available. These negative traits often include disabilities. For example, in *Ars Magica* (4th ed. Atlas Games 2003) a player can choose their character to be blind as a "Flaw" to gain a positive trait, called a "Virtue". The same is true for L5R (Fantasy Flight Games 2018), where instead of an exchange system, the players have to choose at least two advantages (called distinctions and passions) and disadvantages (adversities and anxieties). Both adversities and anxieties included disabilities.

Almost half of the books had a section or a table for permanent injuries, aging or mental disorders that could be counted as disabling, though some of these were optional rules. These books were *Ars Magica* (4th ed. Atlas Games 2003), *GURPS* (4th ed. Steve Jackson Games 2004), *Rogue Trader* (Fantasy Flight Games 2009) and *Hard Wired Island* (Weird Age Games 2021). In addition, *Rogue Trader* has one character class that is blind by default (Astropath Transcendent), though the characters are "treated as if [they] can see normally" (Fantasy Flight Games 2009, 72).

Some books also had assistive devices and additional rules regarding them in the equipment sections. These were mostly the science-fiction TTRPGs, with one fantasy TTRPG as the exception: *Rogue Trader* (Fantasy Flight Games 2009), *Shadowrun* (5th ed., Catalyst Game Labs 2016), *Hard Wired Island* (Weird Age Games 2021), *Pathfinder (2nd ed.): Player Core* (Paizo 2023) and *Star Trek Adventures* (2nd ed., Modiphius Entertainment 2024). These devices were either mixed among the other equipment or had their own subheading (such as "cybernetics" or "assistive items").

*Hard Wired Island* (Weird Age Games 2021) was the only book to have extensive sections dedicated to disability communities and different disabilities across the whole book. These included history for disability rights, Space Sign language and NPCs that were clearly said to be disabled. *Shadowrun* (5th ed., Catalyst Game Labs 2016) also relates disability to its setting somewhat, but this is through pushing back on augmentation due to losing "a piece of yourself" (Catalyst Game Labs 2016, 23) with every prosthetic or augment. Lastly, it should be mentioned that *Pathfinder* (2nd ed, Paizo 2019) was the only book that had a separate disability section meant to instruct the GMs on how to adjust rules for characters with disabilities.

To make comparison and discussion of the data easier, the books were grouped by their decades into three groups:

1. G1: Ars Magica (2003), GURPS (2004) and Rogue Trader (2009).
2. G2: Shadowrun (2016), L5R (2018) and Pf2e (2019).
3. G3: Hard Wired Island (2021), Pf2e: Player Core (2023) and Star Trek Adventures (2024).

These groups are used to detect potential diachronic changes within the decades. This study does not claim that these books are directly representative samples of their decades, as those books that did not mention disability were excluded from the study. They can still be used to give an insight to the values around disability during their time of writing. In addition, science fiction books seem to deal more with assistive technology than fantasy books. However, each decade has at least one fantasy-based book and one science fiction book, which should help balance the results.

## 5.2 Data collection and classification

Each book was first read through completely once by the researcher, with each sentence that contained mentions of possible impairment and disability marked down into an Excel spreadsheet. All possible texts were considered, including paratexts such as image descriptions or headings. This was to increase the number of data, as the preliminary reading suggested there were not many direct mentions of disability. In science fiction books, cybernetics could be used as enhancing augmentations rather than medical augmentations. Only augmentations that counted as assistive technology, such as prosthetic legs, were picked

for the study. Any permanent injuries or conditions were accepted, as long as they could be counted as disabling. This included variants of terms (such as “mental defect” or “insanity” for mental disorders).

When all the books had been read and relevant sentences recorded, a second reading was conducted to catch any terms that the further understanding of the material would allow to identify. This was also to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. As transitivity analysis requires the clause to have a process, any data that did not have one were removed, such as lists. Clauses that were identical within the same book were counted as only one instance to avoid over-representation due to repetition. For example, in Rogue Trader (Fantasy Flight Games 2009), there are several tables that list the effects of critical damage on the character. These tables repeat an identical sentence structure, such as “[t]he target now only has one arm” (Fantasy Flight Games 2009: Table 9-11, Table 9-15 and Table 9-19, 252-256). In this case, the clause and the instances of the term appearing was counted only once. While this limits the true number of clauses from each book, it prevents skewing the data and drawing false conclusions from the data (for example, an oversaturation of attributive possessive clauses related to body parts may lead to the conclusion that disability is frequently represented by what kind of body parts the character has!).

The material was marked for three categories. The first category was whether it occurred in narrative text or instructive text. The second category was which section of the book it appeared in to answer the second research question, and the third category was for what type of disability it represented in order to answer the third research question. The criteria for whether the text was rule-based or narrative was based on the goal of the sentence, drawing inspiration from Werlich’s (1976) categories of instructive texts and narrative texts. That is, if the purpose of the sentence was to inform the reader about the fictional setting, it was considered narrative, but if its purpose was to inform about the game system, it was considered a rule. Certain linguistic features, such as modal verbs, second-person pronouns and demands to do something were considered instructive (Werlich 1976, 122-130) and therefore rules. First-person pronouns, third-person pronouns and past tense contributed to classification as a narrative text (Werlich 1976, 39, 57). There was a small group of sentences that were not classifiable semantically as either rules or narrative, as they did not inform about the system or narrative, but consisted of the author suggesting how to work with disabled persons and characters outside of the game. These were marked as a third category, “other”. The placement of the text also influenced its categorization. For example, the sentence “Do

not mistake my blindness for helplessness" appears in a box titled "Species Details", under a subheading of "Sample Values" (Modiphus Entertainment 2024, 101). Despite the sentence being a demand and an in the imperative mood, the purpose of the text by its placement and titles is to offer an example of a value the character may have. It is additionally in the first person, pointing towards a narrative text. It was therefore counted as a narrative text.

The book sections from which the data were collected were used to create a broad typology. This was done by marking for every sentence the book chapter or subchapter it came from. The chapters and subchapters were grouped into the following categories: Character Creation, Gameplay Mechanics, Directed Instruction, Equipment and Setting. Directed Instruction in this case includes both sections instructing the GM and the player due to the low number of data. For the same reason, sections related to creatures were combined with Gameplay Mechanics. Creatures could have also been part of the Setting group, but as the related data had to do with their statistics as monsters fought by the players, they represented the gameplay more than the narrative setting.

Lastly, disabilities have often been categorized to physical, cognitive, sensory, mental, behavioural, intellectual and developmental (Brewer et al. 2012, 39). This study used similar categories to see what types of disabilities were present. The final divide was general, physical, cognitive, sensory and mental disabilities. The general category refers to mentions of disability that did not refer to any category, such as "How does your character perceive disability?" (Weird Age Games 2021, 350). Cognitive disabilities consisted of developmental, neurological and learning disabilities, as these categories were not well represented in the data. Physical and sensory impairments that were disabling were counted respectively as physical and sensory disabilities. Mental disabilities refer to mental disorders that restrict or limit the way a person is able to interact in the society. Finally, a sentence could contain multiple types of disability, such as "Players with physical or mental disabilities might find themselves more challenged than abled players" (Paizo 2019, 485). Due to this, the total number of disabilities is different from the total number of clauses within the data.

## 5.3 Method

This study is largely qualitative in nature, with some quantitative data used to guide the interpretation of the data. All sentences gathered during the data collection were divided into clauses following Longman grammar (Biber, Conrad & Leech 2002), with both main and subordinate clauses included in the analysis. Disability representation sometimes occurred

only in a main clause or subordinate clause. When a sentence was only analysed for its subordinate clause, the main clause was kept to provide context for the subordinate clause and vice versa. To answer the first research question, all the clauses derived from the sentences were analysed with the transitivity system, identifying the processes, participants and circumstances. To ensure the reliability of the data, the researcher conducted a second round of analysis a month later to check for possible mistakes in the analysis.

When all the results from the transitivity analysis had been logged, each process type was examined individually. Inductive category formation was used to develop categories from the material for the main participants of each process (e.g. for material processes, Actors and Goals). These categories were named based on what kind of disability the participants represented. For example, a "hearing aid" was classified under "assistive devices", while "a blind character" was classified under the category "disabled character". This was done to enable comparing the data. As the categories differ for each process due to the inductive category formation, they are presented in Chapter 6 alongside the results. In addition, the placement of each clause in the book sections was checked again, and for those that occurred in character creation and represented a character's feature, their attribution was marked either as negative, positive or neutral. These attributions were based on the title of the section listing the features, so that words like "disadvantage", "flaws" and "negative qualities" were considered negative, and words like "advantage", "virtue", and "positive qualities" were considered positive. Features without a descriptor, such as "traits", were considered neutral for the purposes of this study. This was done to aid the assessment of ideology within disability representation.

Lastly, when discussing the results, the interpretation and explanation of ideologies and common-sense assumptions present in the data were considered and compared with the background knowledge of disability. The focus was on investigating how the TTRPG books construct disabled identities and their existing realities. As discussed in the previous chapters, attention was paid to the societal context and to avoiding overgeneralizations.

# 6 Results

In this section, the quantitative and qualitative data from the classification and the transitivity analysis are presented. I will first present the general results of the analysis. After this, I will present the results of each process type in its own subchapter.

## 6.1 Overview of the results

This study analysed altogether 437 sentences, which consisted of 593 clauses. The clause division across the books can be seen in Table 2. It should be noted that GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004) had at least twice the number of clauses than the other books. This is because it heavily concentrates on a wide variety of traits that a character can have. Its effect on the data will be accounted for when interpreting results and will be commented on when necessary. Since the data sizes differ, most of the comparison will be done by the frequency of specific processes and categories. While the frequencies are presented as percentages, they are always accompanied by the number of instances in the following format: x.x % (y) or y (x.x %), where x is the percentage and y the number of instances.

**Table 2** Number of analysable clauses per rulebook.

| Year | Book | Total Pages | Number of Clauses |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2003 | Ars Magica 4e | 272 | 44 |
| 2004 | GURPS 4e | 575 | 172 |
| 2009 | Rogue Trader | 396 | 92 |
| 2016 | Shadowrun 5e | 492 | 29 |
| 2018 | L5R | 336 | 51 |
| 2019 | Pf2e | 638 | 32 |
| 2021 | Hard Wired Island | 397 | 96 |
| 2023 | Pf2e: Player Core | 318 | 41 |
| 2024 | Star Trek Adventures 2e | 377 | 36 |
| TOTAL | | 3, 801 | 593 |

Around 60.6 % (265 of 437) of the data were classified as rules, 38.0 % (166) as narrative, and 1.4 % (6) as other. GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004) contributed significantly to the rule category, as without it the percentages were more even: 51 % (154) of the data were rules, 47.0 % (142) narratives and 2.0 % (6) other. The frequency of narrative sections increased towards later years when the data were grouped into decades (see Table 3), but the

trend was less noticeable when comparing the books individually. Only G3 showed an increased percentage of disability appearing in narrative sections. As there were only three books per decade and books with little to no disability representation were left out, individual differences between the books could affect these results significantly.

**Table 3** The division of narrative and rule classifications across decades, with the data without GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004) marked in brackets.
G1 = 2003, 2004, 2009, G2 = 2016, 2018, 2019, G3 = 2021, 2023, 2024, $f_i$ = relative frequency

| Group | Narrative | Narrative $f_i$ | Rule | Rule $f_i$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| G1 | 64 (40) | 26,6 % (37,7 %) | 177 (66) | 73,4 % (62,3 %) |
| G2 | 28 | 33,7 % | 51 | 61,4 % |
| G3 | 74 | 65,5 % | 37 | 32,7 % |

Almost half of all the sentences (203 out of 437, 46.5 %) occurred in chapters related to Character Creation. However, with the exclusion of GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004), this drops to 31.5 % (95). The second largest category of all the data was Gameplay Mechanics (99, 22.7 %), followed by Equipment (59, 13.5 %) and Setting (46, 10.5 %). In Gameplay Mechanics, the subsections concerned injuries, skill tests and spell effects. The Directed Instruction category consisted mostly of clauses from Pathfinder (2nd ed.) (Paizo 2019), and so it was the smallest category. There were several shifts in the frequencies of the categories diachronically. Disability representation in Character Creation and Gameplay Mechanics decreased in G3, while representation in Equipment and Setting surged up (see Table 4). Regarding the high number of Character Creation instances in G1, 108 of them came from GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004). Excluding it brings the total number to 31, which is more in line with the number of instances seen in G2. For Setting, while 35 out of the 41 in G3 came from Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games 2021), it is still a relevant increase from only two to three instances in the earlier periods.

**Table 4** The total number and frequencies of the book section categories across the groups.
G1 = 2003, 2004, 2009, G2 = 2016, 2018, 2019, G3 = 2021, 2023, 2024

| Group | Character Creation | Gameplay Mechanics | Directed Instruction | Equipment | Setting |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| G1 | 139 (57.7 %) | 84 (34.9 %) | 4 (1.7 %) | 12 (5.0 %) | 2 (0.8 %) |
| G2 | 45 (54.2 %) | 7 (8.4 %) | 23 (27.7 %) | 5 (6.0 %) | 3 (3.6 %) |
| G3 | 19 (16.8 %) | 8 (7.1 %) | 3 (2.7 %) | 42 (37.2 %) | 41 (36.3 %) |

The most common processes within the clauses were material processes (265, 44.7 %) and relational processes (234, 40.3 %). Mental processes were the third largest group (70, 12.3 %) of all the data. Behavioural (5, 0.5 %), verbal (12, 2.0 %) and existential (1, 0.2 %) processes were significantly less represented in the data, as could be expected based on previous research (see Chapter 4.1). The ratio between the processes stayed similar even when accounting for GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004). In the detailed analysis below, the participants and circumstances of these processes are discussed alongside the processes. The examples include only the analysed clauses and not the full sentences they were part of. However, the sentence context is explained when relevant.

Lastly, the types of disabilities that were apparent in the books changed throughout the years, as shown in Table 5. Physical disabilities were in general the most common disabilities to appear in text (160, 35.1 % of all instances) in all groups. They increased across the years, from G1's 32.0 % (72 instances) of all disability instances to G3's 44.6 % (54). Sensory disabilities, which were the second most common disability in all groups, decreased from being around 30% of all instances in G1 and G2 to 20.7 % (25 instances) in G3. Mental disabilities almost disappeared completely in G3, with only 2 instances (1.7 %), despite being the third most common category in total. Cognitive disabilities were the smallest group, with GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004) contributing 13 instances out of 20 in G1. General references to disabilities doubled in G3, going from 14.3 % (35 and 13 instances) in both G1 and G2 to 28.1 % (34) in G3.

**Table 5** The number of instances and frequencies of different types of disabilities within the TTRPG books

G3 = 2024, 2023, 2021, G2 = 2019, 2018, 2016, G1 = 2009, 2004, 2003

| Group | Physical disabilities | Sensory disabilities | Mental disabilities | Cognitive disabilities | General |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| G1 | 78 (32.0 %) | 71 (29.1 %) | 40 (16.4 %) | 20 (8.2 %) | 35 (14.3 %) |
| G2 | 28 (30.8 %) | 28 (30.8 %) | 15 (16.5 %) | 7 (7.7 %) | 13 (14.3 %) |
| G3 | 54 (44.6 %) | 25 (20.7 %) | 2 (1.7 %) | 6 (5.0 %) | 34 (28.1 %) |

## 6.2 Material processes

Clauses with material processes occurred most often in relation to traits that players could choose for their characters and descriptions of items. Many of the attributable traits were

negative (74 out of 95, 77.9 %) rather than positive or neutral. 169 instances out of 265 (63.8 %) were categorized as rule texts, and 92 (34.7 %) as narrative texts.

### 6.2.1 Actors

The Actors in material processes could be divided into fourteen categories (see Table 6). The largest groups of Actors were disabled characters and assistive devices, so they will be discussed in detail. The categories “disabled characters” and “characters” were differentiated based on whether they had a disability explicitly or implicitly mentioned in the text. Characters without disabilities that were Actors were often in a situation where they potentially could become disabled or were in the process of becoming disabled, such as having to choose a trait representing a disability if a condition (e.g. failing a roll, getting hit hard enough, etc.) was satisfied.

**Table 6** The categories of Actors in material processes and with number and percentage of relevant clauses

| **Actor Category** | **Number of clauses** | **Percentage of total clauses** |
|---|---|---|
| Disabled characters | 88 | 33.1 % |
| Assistive devices | 40 | 15.0 % |
| Player | 24 | 9.0 % |
| Passive | 23 | 8.6 % |
| Game | 18 | 6.8 % |
| Characters | 17 | 6.4 % |
| Disability | 17 | 6.4 % |
| Abstract | 11 | 4.1 % |
| Event | 9 | 3.4 % |
| Injury | 6 | 2.3 % |
| Gamemaster | 5 | 1.9 % |
| Body Part | 3 | 1.1 % |
| Item | 3 | 1.1 % |
| Institution | 2 | 0,8 % |
| Total | 265 | 100% |

Disabled characters were the most common Actors in the material processes (88, 33.1 %). This group included Actors that were directly identified by a disabling condition (see Example 13) or were indirectly connected to one (see Example 14, where it can be understood that the character is mentally disabled).

(13) A deaf character [Actor] critically fails [Process: Material, transformative] Perception checks [Goal] that require hearing (Paizo 2019, 487).

(14) You've [Actor] lost [Process: Material, transformative] your will to live [Goal]. (Steve Jackson Games 2004, 126).

Many of these clauses were concerned with what disabled characters could or could not do in game terms (see Example 13) or in terms of basic life functions, such as moving from place to place, using their assistive tools or interacting with the world. They were also used narratively to describe the disabled characters (see Example 14), but these clauses were almost exclusively related to mental disabilities such as depression or paranoia. Notably, 47 (64.3 %) of the 73 disabled character Actors were referred to as "you". This large number is the effect of GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004), which contributed 31 of 47 the second-person pronouns. It also contributed the most clauses to this category (32, 43.8 %). Without GURPS, disabled characters would still be the most common Actors, but they would be closer in number to characters as Actors.

The number of disabled characters as Actors decreased across the groups. While in G1 they consisted of 32.3 % (43 out of 133) of the Actors and in G2 33.9% (19 out of 56), in G3 they dropped to 14.7 % (11 out of 75) of the Actors. In G3, the most common Actor was "assistive devices" (18 out of 75, 24.0 %), which also was somewhat prevalent in G1 (12.0 %, 16) and G2 (10.7%, 6). It was the second most common Actor in total (15 %, 40). Assistive devices as Actors were largely mobility devices, such as wheelchairs or canes, and general terms such as "replacements", "bionics" or "augmentations". They generally modified game bonuses and penalties. Within Group 1 and Group 2, they acted as mitigators or healers of a disability (see Example 15), while in Group 3 the process of replacing something that was lost due to an impairment increased (see Example 16).

(15) Glasses [Actor] cure [Process: Material, transformative] Bad Sight [Goal] while worn [Circumstance: Contingency, Condition]. (Steve Jackson Games 2004, 112)

(16) Artificial sensory organs [Actor] can replace [Process: Material, transformative] damaged or destroyed senses [Goal]. (Modiphius Entertainment 2024, 245)

Most of the phrases related to curing or removing disability refer to a game feature or penalty (such as in Example 3, where Bad Sight is a feature a PC can choose), with the exception of one narrative mention (see Example 17).

> (17) [While a small but vocal minority of people—mostly able-bodied "allies"—protested] extensive cybernetic modification [Actor] would erase [Process: Material, transformative] disability [Goal] […] (Weird Age Games 2021, 121).

The first part of this sentence is a verbal process, with the material process acting as its projection. The verbal process has been included in the example to showcase the context for the clause. Erasure of disability is here in a narrative text, where it is attributed to "allies" of disability rights. It can be interpreted, then, as mocking the idea that modifications could erase disability.

### 6.2.2 Goals

The Goals of material processes were divided to fourteen categories, similar to the Actors (see Table 7). Of these, the most common Goals were disabilities, game-related terms, assistive devices and body parts. The disability category contained disabilities and disabling conditions (such as "lost hand"). Body parts were mentions of parts of the body that were not directly indicative of a disability. Only the most common categories are discussed in detail here due to the scope of the thesis.

**Table 7** The categories of Goals in material processes and their total sums.

| Goal Category | Number of clauses | Percentage of total clauses |
|---|---|---|
| Disability | 54 | 20.3 % |
| Game | 37 | 13.9 % |
| Assistive device | 36 | 13.5 % |
| Body Part | 35 | 13.2 % |
| Disabled character | 26 | 9.8 % |
| No goal | 22 | 8.3 % |
| Abstract | 18 | 6.8 % |
| Character | 13 | 4.9 % |
| Event | 7 | 2.6 % |
| Health | 6 | 2.3 % |
| Language | 4 | 1.5 % |
| Injury | 3 | 1.1 % |
| Item | 3 | 1.1 % |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Infrastructure | 2 | 0.8 % |
| Total | 266 | 100% |

Disabilities were the most common Goals (54, 20.3 %) in material processes. They were often general terms for disabilities (“a debilitating illness”, “disability”, “a physical disadvantage”), effects of the disability (“your fear”, “hypersensitivity issues”, “loss of smell, touch or hearing”) or missing body parts (“a lost limb”, “damaged or destroyed sense”, “the missing eye”). Many of these Goals were the object of being gained or mitigated in game terms (see example 18) in G1 and G2.

> (18) [Actor: You] Restore [Process: Material, creative] a lost limb [Goal]. (Atlas Games 2003, 122)

The concentration of these Goals in G1 and G2 is due to the fact that disabilities as a Goal were much smaller group in G3 (7, 9.3%). They were the largest group in G1, even if the large number of data from GURPS (Steve Jackon Games 2004) was removed. The number of disabilities as Goals decreased slowly across the decades.

Game-related Goals were direct inferences to the system or the game itself. They were the second most common category with 37 entries (13.9 %). Large part of these Goals were tests or checks that penalties or bonuses were applied to or said penalties or bonuses (see example 19). In addition, the Goals were functions that were limited by the Actor in some way.

> (19) Such (blind) creatures [Actor] take [Process: Material, transformative] a -30 penalty to Weapon Skill Tests [Goal] (Fantasy Flight Games 2009, 364)

The game-related Goals are most prominent in G2 (11, 19.6 %), and in G3 there are only 3 (4.0 %) instances. There is no linear shift, since in G1 they were prominent (21, 15.0 %), but less than in G2.

Assistive devices are the third most common category of Goals (36, 13.5 %). As Goals, they are either used or worn by the Actors (see example 20), or they are being acquired or gotten in some way. There are also clauses of game effects or functions being applied to an assistive device.

> (20) You [Actor] use [Process: Material, creative] a crutch, cane, or other support [Goal] (Fantasy Flight Games 2018, 124).

Assistive devices as Goals increased through the decades: while in G1 they consisted of 7.5 % of all the instances (10 instances), in G2 this rose to 10.7 % (6 instances) and in G3 to 28.0 % (21 instances).

Body parts were the fourth most common Goal (35, 13.2 %), representing body parts that were not yet disabled. Instead, they are often body parts that are being destroyed or being lost, especially in G1 and G2. In G3 this disappears, and instead they are subject to being replaced (see example 21).

> (21) Jupiter [Actor] replaced [Process: Material, transformative] her legs [Goal] before the Disaster [Circumstance: Location] (Weird Age Games 2021, 330).

Notably, large part of the instances of body parts comes from G1. Over half of the instances (15 out of 24) in G1 came from GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004). There are, however, a number of body parts as Goal in G3 (7, 9.3 %) as well.

## 6.3 Mental processes

Mental processes occurred most often in character creation, in relation to traits that players could choose for their characters. These traits were largely negative (30 out of 36, 83.3 %), with no positive attributions given. The remaining 6 attributions were neutral in tone, such as “traits”. In addition to these, mental processes occurred in sections with items and gameplay mechanics related to injuries or afflictions. The spread between rules and narratives was fairly even, with 35 (50.0 %) being rules and 34 (48.6 %) being narratives (and one instance of not being either).

### 6.3.1 Senser

The Sensers of mental processes were divided to nine categories (see Table 8). They were mostly disabled characters (55 out of 70, 78.6 %), with every other category being near even on the numbers. The number of disabled characters as Senser decreased across the years: in G1, it comprised 90.9 % of all instances (30) and in G2 80.0 % (12), but in G3 it dropped to 61.9 % (13). The slight increase in Player as Senser occurred between G1 (1 instance) and G2 (2 instances), but it is not possible to draw conclusions out of this small number of data.

**Table 8** The categories of Sensers in mental processes and their total sums.

| Senser Category | Number of Clauses | Percentage of total clauses |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Disabled character | 55 | 78.6 % |
| Character | 3 | 4.3 % |
| Passive | 3 | 4.3 % |
| Player | 3 | 4.3 % |
| Assistive device | 2 | 2.9 % |
| Abstract | 1 | 1.4 % |
| GM | 1 | 1.4 % |
| Body part | 1 | 1.4 % |
| Society | 1 | 1.4 % |
| Total | 70 | 100% |

Disabled characters as Sensers were often either second-person pronouns (“you”) or references to the character (see Example 22). In fact, almost half of the disabled characters as Sensers were second-person pronouns.

> (22) How does your character [Senser] perceive [Process: Mental, cognitive] their disability [Phenomenon]? (Weird Age Games 2021, 350)

The subprocesses were evenly divided between cognitive, emotive and perceptive processes across the groups. Only in G2 perceptive processes encompassed exactly half of all the clauses with disabled characters, though most of these instances (8, 80.0 %) were from L5R (Fantasy Flight Games 2018).

### 6.3.2 Phenomenon

The phenomena, by their nature of being capable of being projections, encompassed a large field of concepts. They were divided into fifteen categories (see Table 9). The two largest categories were disabilities (17, 24.3 %) and indefinites (13, 18.6 %). The category indefinite consists of indefinite pronouns and adverbs, as well as indefinite phrases.

**Table 9** The categories of Phenomenon in mental processes and their total sums.

| **Phenomenon Category** | **Number of Clauses** | **Percentage of total clauses** |
|---|---|---|
| Disability | 17 | 24.3 % |
| Indefinite | 13 | 18.6 % |
| Emotion | 5 | 7.1 % |
| Language | 5 | 7.1 % |
| Game | 4 | 5.7 % |
| No phenomenon | 4 | 5.7 % |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Injury | 4 | 5.7 % |
| Assistive device | 3 | 4.3 % |
| Body part | 3 | 4.3 % |
| Environment | 3 | 4.3 % |
| Medical | 3 | 4.3 % |
| Character | 2 | 2.9 % |
| Disabled character | 2 | 2.9 % |
| Sense | 1 | 1.4 % |
| Player | 1 | 1.4 % |
| Total | 70 | 100% |

Disabilities as Phenomenon consisted of specific disabilities, often sensory (e.g. “blindness”) or mental (e.g. “dysphoria”), and their effects. There was a concept of “suffering” the disabilities in GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004) again, but also in L5R (Fantasy Flight Games 2018) and Star Trek Adventures (Modiphius Entertainment 2024). The suffering was counted as a mental process when the suffering in the clause did not include a physical component (see Example 23, where the bracketed word is added to give context to the clause).

> (23) After you [Senser] suffer [Process: Mental, emotive] such a (cognitive) lapse [Phenomenon] (Fantasy Flight Games 2018, 119)

Other than suffering, disability was something the sensers thought of in some way, such as finding it inconvenient, or something they experienced.

The indefinite category as Phenomenon consisted of words such as “anything”, “nothing”, “something” and “things”. They appeared almost exclusively in perceptive subprocesses and with disabled characters as sensers, as they related to the character’s ability to not hear/see/smell anything when they had a sensory impairment. Not surprisingly, these phenomena were linked with negation, and the modal verb “can” quite often (see Example 24).

> (24) A blind character [Senser] can't detect [Process: Mental, perceptive] anything [Phenomenon] using vision [Circumstance: Manner] (Paizo 2019, 487)

Only 2 of the 13 clauses with indefinite Phenomenon were related to cognitive functions, one to believing and other to recalling. In both cases, the sensers were also disabled characters.

## 6.4 Relational processes

Relational processes occurred mostly in trait descriptions of character creation (93, 39.7 %), equipment sections (37, 15.8 %) and in chapters dealing with injuries, harm and mental disorders (33, 14.1 %). The character creation traits had largely negative connotations (74, 78.7 %), though they had the largest number of neutral traits (15, 16.0 %) of all the processes. Rules (147, 62. 6%) were more common than narratives (85, 36.2 %) in relational processes.

### 6.4.1 Carrier / Identified

The Carrier/Identified of relational processes were divided to thirteen categories (see Table 10). As above, only the most common ones are discussed here. For Carriers, these were disabled characters (71, 41.0 %), characters (31, 17.9 %) and assistive devices (23, 13.3 %), whereas for Identified they were somewhat evenly divided between game terms (14, 23.0 %), disability (10, 16.4 %), disabled characters (10, 16.4 %) and assistive devices (9, 14.8 %).

**Table 10** The categories of Carriers and Identified in relational processes and their total sums.

| Carrier/Identified Category | Number of Attributive Clauses | Number of Identifying Clauses | Number of Total Clauses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Disabled character | 71 (41.0 %) | 10 (16.4 %) | 81 (34.6 %) |
| Character | 31 (17.9 %) | 2 (3.3 %) | 33 (14.1 %) |
| Assistive device | 23 (13.3 %) | 9 (14.8 %) | 32 (13.7 %) |
| Disability | 14 (8.1 %) | 10 (16.4 %) | 24 (10.3 %) |
| Game term | 7 (4.0 %) | 14 (23.0 %) | 21 (9.0%) |
| Body part | 9 (5.2 %) | 1 (1.6 %) | 10 (4.3 %) |
| Sense | 4 (2.3 %) | 3 (4.9 %) | 7 (3.0 %) |
| Abstract | 1 (0.6 %) | 5 (8.2 %) | 6 (2.6 %) |
| Injury | 5 (2.9 %) | 1 (1.6 %) | 6 (2.6 %) |
| Medical | 2 (1.2 %) | 4 (6.6 %) | 6 (2.6 %) |
| Infrastructure | 3 (1.7 %) | 0 (0 %) | 3 (1.3 %) |
| Cost | 1 (0.6 %) | 2 (3.3 %) | 3 (1.3 %) |
| Language | 2 (1.2 %) | 0 (0%) | 2 (0.9 %) |
| Total | 173 | 61 | 234 |

Disabled characters were referred to largely by pronouns, especially the second-person pronoun “you”, and as “characters”. Of the 46 second-person pronouns (56.8 % of all

Carriers/Identified), 25 (54.3 %) occurred in GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004). Attributive clauses (71, 87.7%) were more common in total than identifying clauses (10, 12.3%), and possessive attributive clauses were the most common relational process type (41, 53.1 %). The common processes were being like something or having something. Disabled characters were most often attributed disabilities (39, 54.9%) (see Example 25) and assistive devices (12, 16.9 %), especially through the possessive attributive clause.

> (25) A character with Unsteady Hands [Carrier] has [Process: Relational, attributive, possessive] mild shakes [Attribute] (Catalyst Game Labs 2016, 453).

Disabled characters were identified by disabilities (3, 30.0%, see Example 26), parts of bodies (2, 20.0 %) and by their disabled identity (2, 20.0 %). These were largely intensive clauses, with only one possessive identifying clause.

> (26) a character who [Identified] is [Process: Relational, identifying, intensive] deaf, hard of hearing, or unable to speak [Identifier] (Paizo 2023, 89).

The number of disabled characters as Carrier/Identified in relational clauses seems to stay relatively stable across the groups, with a slight increase in G2. In identifying clauses, disabled characters as Identifiers mostly appeared in G3 (7 out of 10, 31.8 %), while in attributive clauses they were present in all groups.

A large number of Characters as Carriers were referred to by pronouns (13, 41.9 %), mostly second person (6, 46.1 % of all pronouns) and third person (6, 46.1 % of all pronouns) pronouns. Clauses with characters as Carrier were mostly intensive (21, 63,6%) or possessive (10, 30.3 %). Characters as Carriers had most often disabilities attributed to them (24, 77.4 %) (see Example 27). Characters also had assistive devices attributed to them in Shadowrun (Catalyst Game Labs, 2009) and Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games, 2021). In these cases, there was a vagueness on whether the character was disabled or if the augmentation was done to improve unimpaired faculties, such as getting cat ears to improve even unimpaired hearing.

> (27) An Uneducated character [Carrier] is not [Process: relational, attributive, intensive] mentally impaired [Attribute] (Catalyst Game Labs 2016, 87).

Characters as Carriers in attributive relational clauses lessened across the years, dropping from being 24.0 % (24 instances) of all attributive categories in G1 to being 12.0 % (3) in G2 and 8.5% (4) in G3. Notably, there were 25 instances in G1 of characters as carriers, which

means they consist 75.8 % of all character as carrier instances. Of these G1 instances, 52.0 % (13) came from Shadowrun (Catalyst Game Labs 2016).

Assistive devices as Carriers/Identified were mostly items that assisted with mobility (10, 31.3 %), or prosthetics (6, 18.8 %). A large part also was just general setting-specific terms for assistive devices (8, 25.0 %), such as “bionic replacement” or “cybernetics”. Over half of the relational clauses with Assistive devices as Carriers/Identified were intensive attributive clauses (19, 59.4%). Intensive identifying clauses were the second most common relational clause type (7, 21.9 %). Assistive devices as Carriers were most often attributed with a degree of a quality (7, 30.4 %) (see Example 28) or simply a quality (6, 26.1 %). In addition, assistive devices were attributed other items (3, 13.0 %), such as belts that would keep the device on the character.

> (28) Not all prosthetics [Carrier] are [Process: Relational, attributive, intensive] good enough [Attribute] to count as Mitigators (Steve Jackson Games 2004, 147)

Assistive devices as Identified were almost exclusively identified through assistive devices (8, 88.9 %). This was usually either that a general assistive device was identified through its more specific parts, or a specific part was identified through its general category (see Example 29).

> (29) A set of corrective lenses [Identified] might take [Process: Relational, identifying, intensive] the form of eyeglasses or specialized goggles [Identifier] worn over the eyes (Paizo 2023, 293).

Assistive devices as Carrier/Identified increased across the years, with a large part of them coming from G3 (21, 30.4 %). These were largely from the science fiction TTRPGs.

The most common Game Terms as Identified were the features characters could take (7, 64.3 %). The game terms were largely identified through disabilities (5, 35. 7%), most often referred to with general terms (see Example 30).

> (30) a trait [Identified] that reflects [Process: Relational, identifying, intensive] a character's specific disability [Identifier] (Modiphius Entertainment 2024, 245).

Most of the game terms as Identified were present in G1 (8, 29.6 %), and least present in G2 (2, 5.6 %). Over half of the G1 came from GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004).

Disabilities as Identified were mostly identified through specific disabilities or their effects (5, 50.0 %), but these often doubled as game terms. In Example 31, “disorders” not only refers to a general term for disabilities, but in this context is also the term for a game mechanic that causes mental disabilities to the character. Disabilities as Identified could therefore also be counted as game terms and seem to generally agree with the findings of game terms above.

> (31) Disorders [Identified], which are [Process: relational, identifying, intensive] permanent mental afflictions [Identifier] (Fantasy Flight Games 2009, 296)

Disabilities as Identified occurred almost exclusively in G1, with only one instance in G2.

### 6.4.2 Attribute / Identifier

The Attributes/Identifiers of relational processes were divided to sixteen categories (see Table 11). The most common Attributes were disabilities (76, 43.9 %) and qualities (20, 11.6 %), while the most common Identifiers were disabilities (19, 31.1 %) and assistive devices (12, 19.7 %).

**Table 11** The categories of Attributes and Identifiers in relational processes and their total sums.

| **Attribute/Identifiers Category** | **Number of Attributive Clauses** | **Number of Identifying Clauses** | **Number of Total Clauses** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Disability | 76 (43.9 %) | 19 (31.1 %) | 95 (40.6 %) |
| Assistive device | 17 (9.8 %) | 12 (19.7 %) | 29 (12.4 %) |
| Quality | 20 (11.6 %) | 1 (1.6 %) | 21 (9.0 %) |
| Degree | 14 (8.1 %) | 1 (1.6 %) | 15 (6.4 %) |
| Body Part | 10 (5.8 %) | 2 (3.3 %) | 12 (5.1 %) |
| Game term | 5 (2.9 %) | 6 (9.8 %) | 11 (4.7 %) |
| Abstract | 6 (3.5 %) | 3 (4.9 %) | 9 (3.8 %) |
| Ability | 5 (2.9 %) | 1 (1.6 %) | 6 (2.6 %) |
| Loss | 5 (2.9 %) | 1 (1.6 %) | 6 (2.6 %) |
| Disabled character | 1 (0.6 %) | 4 (6.6 %) | 5 (2.1 %) |
| Effect | 2 (1.2 %) | 3 (4.9 %) | 5 (2.1 %) |
| Item | 5 (2.9 %) | 0 (0%) | 5 (2.1 %) |
| Identity | 1 (0.6 %) | 3 (4.9 %) | 4 (1.7 %) |
| Medical | 1 (0.6 %) | 3 (4.9 %) | 4 (1.7 %) |
| Sense | 3 (1.7 %) | 1 (1.6 %) | 4 (1.7 %) |
| Cost | 2 (1.2 %) | 1 (1.6 %) | 3 (1.3 %) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 173 | 61 | 234 |

Disabilities as Attributes/Identifiers were mostly sensory (34, 35.8 %) and mental disabilities (24, 21.1 %). 80% (76 instances) were attributive relational clauses, and of these 53 (55.8%) were intensive. Identifying relational clauses were almost exclusively intensive, except for one clause, which was possessive. As discussed above, disabilities as Attributes were often attributed to disabled characters. Disabilities as Identifiers were often identifying disabilities or game terms, as also discussed above (see Example 31 and 32). Disabilities as Identifiers also had a higher number of mental disabilities (8, 42.1 %) than Disabilities as Attributes. Disabilities as Attributes/Identifiers lessen across the years in total, dropping from 68 (52.7 % of all categories) in G1 to 15 (21.7 %) in G3.

Qualities as Attributes were largely simple adjectives describing disabilities (6, 30.0 %), assistive devices (5, 25.0 %) or disabled characters (3, 15.0 %). They attributed the permanence of disabilities and injuries as well as the utility of assistive devices (see Example 32). The clauses were almost entirely intensive attributive clauses, with the exception of one possessive clause.

> (32) A common wheelchair [Carrier] is [Process: Relational, attributive, intense] ideal [Attribute] for everyday use [Circumstance: Cause] (Paizo 2023, 293)

Qualities as Attributes were most common in G3 (7, 14.9 %), and of these, Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games 2021) contributed 71.4 % (5).

Assistive devices as Identifiers were mostly general assistive devices (8, 66.7 %) rather than specified items. The most common clause type was intensive identifying clauses (9 out of 12, 75.0 %). They identified most often other assistive devices (8, 66.7 %), which were either more specific assistive devices (see Example 30) or general assistive devices likened to the ones they were Identified with. Assistive devices as Identifiers increased across the years, with G1 having the least (1, 3.5% of all categories) and G3 having most instances (10, 21.3 %). The G3 instances consisted only of Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games 2021) and Pf2e: Player Core (Paizo 2023).

## 6.5 Behavioural, verbal and existential processes

There were 12 verbal clauses, 5 behavioural clauses and 1 existential clause. They are grouped and discussed here together, as they have too few instances to have their own sections. It is also difficult to generalize anything from them, so they are discussed on a more individual basis with this understanding.

### 6.5.1 Verbal processes

Verbal processes largely occurred in the descriptions of negative traits in character creation in G1 (5 out of 6, 83.3 %). In G2 there were only two instances, in L5R (Fantasy Flight Games 2018) in character creation and in Pf2e (Paizo 2019) in the chapter discussing disability. In G3, all four verbal processes occurred in Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games 2021), specifically in the chapters explaining its setting. These four were also the only narrative clauses, with the other eight being rules.

Disabled characters were the most frequent Sayers (4, 33.3 %), with other categories gaining 1–2 instances. The other categories are assistive devices, able-bodied characters, GM, disability and the pronoun “some”. Disabled characters as Sayers were divided evenly between G1 and G2, and the processes were marked by negation. Communication by disabled characters was in all cases described as somehow impaired. In G3 there were no disabled characters as Sayers, but rather able-bodied characters emerged as the Sayer in Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games 2021). In the two instances, able-bodied characters protested cybernetic modification and perpetuated harmful myths about disabled characters.

There were only two Receivers, both occurring in G1. They were centred around players interacting with game mechanics, such as a PC being the receiver of sign language communication. Verbiages consisted of what disabled persons can or cannot do either in the terms of the game or setting, such as there being a false belief that disabled persons cannot exist without a certain setting-specific company.

### 6.5.2 Behavioural and existential processes

Behavioural clauses appeared twice in G1, twice in G2 and once in G3. In G1 and G2, they solely appeared in chapters related to character creation, among negative traits. In G3, the sentence was in a chapter related to setting. Behavers were disabled characters in three cases, and in one an authority figure (the boss of a disabled character) and in another a body part (a

disabled character's hands). These clauses explained the Behavers' behaviour through rules: pretending to listen due to having impaired hearing, not being able to think clearly and reacting anxiously to certain situations. The authority figure as behaver was discriminating against a disabled character, which was counted as behaving, since it implied both mental (disapproval and conscious effort to discriminate) and material (taking discriminatory actions) aspects. Similarly, the hands of the disabled character "flew in a flurry" (Fantasy Flight Games 2018, 119) as she spoke in sign language, indicating both a mental (desire or need to speak hurriedly) and material (the actual signing) aspect.

There was only one existential process, occurring in Shadowrun: "people notice there is something less (or more) human about that" (Catalyst Game Labs 2016, 52). This clause refers to the augmentation of people, which includes prosthetics and assistive implants. This is an important part of the narrative and rules of Shadowrun (Catalyst Game Labs 2016), where the more the player augments their PC with cyberware, the less human they are.

# 7 Discussion

The discussion of the results is divided into three sections. In the first section, experience of disability is discussed primarily through the results of the transitivity analysis. Section 7.2 concerns the creation and possible identity of a disabled character, aided by the text types and book sections of the material. Section 7.3 sums up the diachronic changes in the data and lastly, the limitations of the study are discussed in Section 7.4.

## 7.1 Disability as an experience

Disability was constructed as an inconvenient experience that impaired the disabled person's life in some way. While disabled persons were often active participants in the analysed clauses, their actions focused on their disability or to their inability to do what the rule system considered as the norm. Disability itself was something that was permanently impairing, with heavy emphasis on limited physical, sensory or mental abilities. This is consistent with other fictional narratives, as discussed in Section 2.3, but it also has been noticed in newspaper texts (Potts, Bednarek and Wathrarow 2023, 420). This major focus on the limitations of disabled persons in the material could be attributed to the large number of clauses coming from the features in character creation. The role of these features (whether disabilities or not) is to instruct the player on how the feature affects the play, and when these features are marked as negative, they are traditionally intended to limit the play in some way. As disabilities were more common in the data as negative features than as positive or neutral ones, this affects the disability construction as a limiting and difficult experience. This portrayal is influenced by the power that the image of disability as a tragedy has had in the society: disability has been seen as a limiting impairment that a person cannot be happy to live with. When disability became a feature in an TTRPG game, this image of disability was transferred. A possible solution would be to avoid categorizing disabilities as good or bad, but rather to conceptualize the "negatives" of disability through the difficulties that society causes for a disabled person due to their impairment (see e.g. Femia 2025, 114). Fortunately, there is a change in the material in the 2020s, where the negative stigma of disability begins disappearing from the categorization of the features.

Disability as something undesirable within TTRPG games can also be inferred from the almost complete lack of desiderative mental processes. The inner wanting and wishing is denied not only from disabled characters, but from most clauses related to disability. While it

is difficult to say whether the lack of desiderative mental processes is a basic trait of TTRPG rulebooks' texts without further research, it still contributes to the portrayal of disability as something unwanted. Wanting and wishing are connected to independent actions, which many disabled persons cannot accomplish without the support of the society (de Carvalho, Athayde Gonçalves and de Queiroz 2023, 50). This power that caretakers and society have to restrict a disabled person's wants and wishes is another aspect of a disabled person's life that they have less control over. In a TTRPG, this wishing and wanting could then freely be expressed. However, the data were only collected from sentences that mentioned disability. It is therefore possible that such mental processes were expressed in clauses that were not directly connected to disabilities, but still were options for disabled characters as well. Nevertheless, the lack of desiderative mental processes contributes to the construction of the inner lives of disabled persons in the narrative.

Disabled characters experienced frequently the effects of their disabilities, which were often physical, sensory or mental disabilities. Cognitive impairments, such as learning (e.g. ADHD) and developmental (e.g. epilepsy, autism) disabilities, were constructed very rarely in the later decades. This may be due to physical, sensory and mental disabilities being more known in popular culture. Physical disabilities have been noted to be easier linked with inspiration porn (Potts, Bednarek and Wathrarow 2023, 418), which could be a factor for their frequency within the material. Additionally, operationalizing cognitive impairments into simple penalties could be seen as undesirable in the later decade. In the same vein, mental disabilities decreased greatly in the 2020s. It is possible that it is also related to the generalization of disability traits and the increase of assistive devices representing disability within the texts. Assistive devices that are designed for mental disabilities, such as electronic calendars, special mobile applications and weighted blankets (Ebuenyi et al. 2023, 5), do not appear in the material and are less likely to be directly connected to a disability. The later decade adopts as a whole a more general perspective on disability, abandoning the specificity and giving freedom to the player to choose what their disability means. This however requires the player to possess knowledge about the disabilities to roleplay them respectfully. This gives more power to disabled players with the know-how to play a disabled character (as long as the GM also possesses similar understanding of the disability).

Assistive devices, when they appeared in the text, were often constructed as mitigating the effects of disability or even "curing" it. This is counterproductive to the aim of assistive devices, which is to facilitate disabled persons to exercise their human rights and participate

in the society despite its barriers (Borg, Larsson and Östergren 2011, 154). Impaired vision is not “cured” or mitigated by glasses, but they are an assistive device that allows the vision-impaired person to navigate the world. The fact that assistive devices are mostly related to mobility or prosthetics has to do with how well-known and acceptable these devices have been culturally and socially.

## 7.2 The creation of a disabled character and narrative

Disability representation in the nine TTRPG books was concentrated around the creation of a disabled character, whose disability was constructed in many cases as a negative and limiting aspect. Additionally, disability representation could be seen in the rules of the gameplay, as the PCs experienced injuries, mental burden and aging. In both aspects, there was a change in the 2020s: the disability representation became a larger part of the narrative and began to be constructed through assistive devices and the setting instead. The focus thus shifts from the features of the character to their assistive devices and the setting they live in. This mirrors the shift from the medical model to the social model, where disability is not a disadvantaging feature of the disabled person, but a problem of the society the character exists in. This is a reflection of the current society, where blame for their disability should no longer be on the disabled person or their impairment, but on what is being done to facilitate their ability to function in the society.

When disability was represented in G3 by a trait in character creation, it was a general trait meant to signify any disability the player chooses. There are diverse experiences of impairment among disabled persons (Shakespeare 2014, 140), and a general trait gives the player the power over how the disability looks and how it affects the character’s life in the game. This also avoids generalization of disabilities into set bonuses and penalties. The player and the GM, however, may have a different idea on the experience of the impairment, which may lead to a dissonance during the play. As there are no rules for what the disability is, the depiction of the impairment and disability relies heavily on the GM and the player. This reliance has also been noticed in other TTRPGs that have loose mechanics for representing disability (Femia 2025, 84).

Disability becoming part of the narrative enforces the idea that disabled persons are part of the setting’s world in a more substantial way than solely as monsters. They are no longer only

bodies that elicit reactions from an audience, like in previous films (Snyder and Mitchell 2019, 167). Additionally, if only the PC is disabled in the world of a setting, they easily become the target of pity or fall victim to inspiration porn. In other words, they become a metaphor for otherness (Gallego, Ferreira and Arias-Gago 2025, 103). However, with a stable presence of disability representation within the setting, the PC can exist safely on their own merits. It is still dependent on the ideology of the player and the GM how the disability is played out within the game, but a narrative setting that includes disability representation can challenge a person to reconsider their views on disability.

The image of a disabled character as a pitiable figure was present in a few of the TTRPG books. This was constructed through their "suffering" of a disability, emphasising the idea that a disability is a tragic occurrence rather than a neutral or even a positive part of a disabled person's life. Especially in GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004) this ideology was fairly visible despite the large number of disability representation in the clauses analysed. In the later books, this was less prominent, and even in books where it appeared (such as L5R (Fantasy Flight Games 2018)), disabled characters were often still portrayed as capable as able-bodied characters. This works against the suffering being part of a tragedy narrative, though once more links the disabled character's worth to their skills and abilities. On the other hand, TTRPG books should not shy away from discussing the pain that a disabled person may experience because of their impairment, as long as it is not drawn out for pity. Disabled persons can live diverse lives filled with achievements, limitations, pain and joy (Shakespeare 2018, 6). That is to say that just because a book uses the word "suffering" does not mean they are enforcing an ableist narrative.

TTRPG games often allow players to create their characters' identity through the abilities and skills the characters have. This gives the GM and the player a framework through which they negotiate how the character can interact with the setting and how the setting interacts with the character. The character's identity relies on their narrative backstory and their abilities as framed by the system. In the material, disabled characters' identity as a disabled person was constructed through the disabling impairments as features and the assistive devices they had rather than identifying them through a role, name or definition. This is because the characters were often defined by their abilities and skills, which in turn were limited by the disabled character's impairments. In the context of the discourse around disability and a disabled person's identity in a society that associates ability as humanity (Campbell 2019, 147–149), this raises the question whether this kind of game system fails at portraying disability with the

understanding we have today. It is possible to create characters in different ways. For example, in 13th Age (Pelgrane Press 2013) the player invests points to different facets of the character's background instead of skills. This means that a character with a point in a background called "apprentice monk of the Sanctuary" would have the experience and skills related to being an apprentice-level monk in the place they come from (Sanctuary in this case). A possible background might be "monk with cerebral palsy", but it is hard to say whether this would be desirable without consulting disabled persons on the matter. In Femia Giuseppe's (2025, 114–115) game design workshop, the participants (who self-identified as neurodivergent) still created features that affected the character's skills and abilities, though these were named after traits (e.g. "anxiety" or "special interests") rather than diagnoses (e.g. "autism"). A complete dissociation between the character's disability and their skills may thus be undesirable.

In the nine TTRPG books, the disabling impairments as features chosen at character creation were often reduced into static conditions and limitations. While the titles of features are understandably short to condense the information, the narrative descriptions of the features rarely included examples of the spectrum of disabilities. A character with impaired vision isn't necessarily fully blind, but they may instead have reduced depth perception, peripheral vision or only see through pinholes. When the descriptions do not acknowledge this, they refuse to acknowledge the spectrum of disability or how disability can be a positive aspect of a person's self-identity, and perpetuate the ideological assumption that disability is in some way a monolithic burden on disabled persons. Simplified descriptions reflect the authors' (conscious or unconscious) expectations of what disabilities are and what it is like to live with them. Similarly, the large representation of physical and sensory disabilities indicates that when authors consider what kind of impairments disabled characters may have, they concentrate on physical and sensory disabilities. Both disabilities are usually visible disabilities, that is, a person with a wheelchair, white cane or a hearing aid may be quickly recognized as having an impairment. However, disabilities that are harder to notice, such as mental and cognitive disabilities, were much less represented in the material. This might be because invisible disabilities are not part of the common-sense assumptions (Perin and Lynch 2016, 26; Denisen 2026) or the fact that persons with invisible disabilities are considered more competent than persons with visible disabilities (Granjon et al. 2024). Regardless, the generalization of disability traits and the increasing representation through assistive devices push out invisible disabilities out of the text and the minds of the rulebooks' readers.

As mentioned, assistive devices formed a substantial part of disability representation in the later decades in the data. They were almost exclusively seen in science-fiction TTRPGs. Science-fiction as a genre indeed has a long history of exploration of the relationship between technology and humanity (for a longer discussion of the science-fiction genre and disability, see Allan 2013). The only exception in the fantasy genre was Pf2e: Player Core (Paizo 2023), which had a subsection within the Equipment chapter that describes assistive devices and wheelchair rules. This implies a difference in ideology: fantasy TTRPGs in their avoidance of assistive technology push the idea that assistive devices are not important enough to have a place in the equipment section. At worst, they enforce compulsory able-bodiedness through the missing assistive devices and the many spells meant to fix disabling impairments. Assistive devices often hold personal importance for their users (Ravneberg and Söderström 2017, 3), and so may become part of their identity. The lack of assistive devices in fantasy TTRPGs thus discourages the construction of a disabled identity in the narrative. This should not necessarily be seen as science-fiction TTRPGs being more progressive in relation to disability. While science-fiction TTRPGs have technology more readily available for disabled characters, this is because it is also available to able-bodied characters as cosmetic prosthetics. However, this may also cause disabled persons to disappear behind able-bodied persons' designs of objects and tools that fail to truly empower them (Ashley Shew 2022).

Shadowrun (Catalyst Game Labs 2016) and Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games 2021) were the only TTRPGs to directly address disability in their setting. In Shadowrun (Catalyst Game Labs 2016), there is a problematic ideology that the augmentation of a person reduces their humanity. This ideology mirrors the discomfort of able-bodied persons interacting with disabled persons, who often use assistive technology to navigate in the society. It leads inevitably back to the role of a disabled person being a deficient person. While Shadowrun's (Catalyst Game Labs 2016) narrative enforces ableist beliefs, Hard Wired Island's (Weird Age Games 2021) narrative constructs ableist worldviews as the verbiage of "misguided" able-bodied persons. The book itself is littered with paratexts discussing the efforts of the disabled community in the development of accessible places and fight for rights. It therefore constructs the disabled persons as active participants in their community, who have the power to strike against those that discriminate against them.

## 7.3 The change in TTRPG disability representation

There were clear diachronic changes in the disability representation of the nine TTRPG books, as has partly been discussed in the above chapters. The disability representation began to appear more in narrative texts in G3, as well as changing from appearing as character creation features to assistive devices and setting. Even when disability representation appeared as a character creation feature, the language became much more neutral, and disabilities were no longer under categorized as negative features. This change from negative attributions to neutral helps separate disabilities from the stigma of being a burden and unwanted aspect of a person's life. Disability as a neutral feature often didn't represent a specific disability but could be interpreted as any disability. This means that the effect of a disability on gameplay relies more on the GMs' and players' knowledge and assumptions about the disability than the rules. This shows a reluctance to operationalize disabilities as a negative (or positive) influence on the gameplay and moves them to be a part of the character's identity outside of the rules. They may still affect the gameplay, but the negotiation of that is transferred to the GM and the player, rather than the rules offering a clear arbitration on this. Disability thus seems to have become a larger part of a character's backstory, which separates it from the characters abilities and skills and allowing them the same rules as to any other character. At the same time, it posits the player as the expert on the character's disability rather than the rules.

Another clear diachronic change could be seen in the participants of disability representation clauses. Assistive devices increased over time as the doers in the clauses, while the number of disabled characters decreased. This shift shows a change in how the limitation of functions became attributed to assistive devices instead of disabled characters. The participation in the impairment is then directed at the assistive devices rather than the disabled characters. This could be partly due to the general increase of assistive devices in TTRPG books. In addition, where in G1 and G2 the books mentioned the loss of a limb, G3 TTRPG books described replacing an impaired function with an assistive device to facilitate continued participation in the society. These changes also mirror the changes that the social model has brought to the general culture.

## 7.4 Limitations of the study

There were a few limitations for this study. As mentioned in Section 4.1, the experiential metafunction is but one of three metafunctions, and thus results in a one-dimensional view of the material. The large number of data was analysed and categorized manually, which means it could have benefited from another researcher reviewing the categories and their placements. Additionally, the data for this study were taken from nine popular books from various subgenres. There appeared clear differences between the science-fiction and fantasy TTRPGs, especially regarding equipment, and this may influence the apparent increase of assistive devices in the data. A study investigating only one genre of TTRPGs may be able to take a more representative sample of its TTRPGs and include nuances from the genre's history with disability. This may especially be the case with the complicated relationship between humanity and technology in science-fiction narratives, and what it means for disabled characters. Focusing on one genre would allow the inclusion of smaller TTRPGs that may have more disability inclusion. For example, Rich Oxenham has made an educational TTRPG based on Arthurian legends, Inspirisles (Hatchling Games 2022), for teaching sign language during play. Focusing on one genre would then reveal if the general results of the present study still apply inside the genre.

# 8 Conclusion

This study shows that TTRPG books have historically treated disability as a negative part of a character's identity. Its representation has focused on how it limits the character's ability to function within the game, and thus largely appeared in the sections of the books needed to create a character. In the last decade, there are indications of disability becoming a larger part of the narrative, with disabilities being a neutral facet of a character's identity, and assistive devices becoming more normalized within the equipment section. The generalization of disability representation as traits and assistive devices may however be pushing more invisible disabilities away from the common consciousness of TTRPG players. At the same time, it does not stop persons with the knowledge of those disabilities from playing a character with an invisible disability.

While the results of this study guide the understanding of disability representation in current TTRPGs, it would be important to interview disabled players on what kind of representation they want to see in TTRPG games. Despite the tragedy narrative of disability in GURPS (Steve Jackson Games 2004), it is still seen by some as a good setting for playing a disabled character due to its many choices. Future studies should therefore study what kind of disability representation is wanted by disabled persons in TTRPGs.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Finnish summary

Johdanto

Tämä tutkimus käsittelee vammaisuuden käsitettä pöytäroolipelien sääntökirjoissa ja sitä, minkälaisia vammaisia pelihahmoja voidaan niiden pohjalta luoda. Pöytäroolipeleissä pelaajat omaksuvat luomiensa pelihahmojen roolin ja roolipelin sääntöjen mukaisesti pelinjohtajan johdattelemana ottavat osaa yhteiseen tarinankerrontaan. Pelit sijoittuvat yleensä fiktiiviseen maailmaan, joka heijastaa oman aikansa käsitteitä ja uskomuksia (Garcia 2017, 234). Roolipeleissä pelaajalla on siis periaatteessa vapaus olla kuka vain, mutta roolipelien sääntökirjat usein vaikuttavat siihen, minkälaisia hahmoja voidaan tehdä.

Vammaisia on Maailman terveysjärjestön (WHO 2022) mukaan noin 1,3 miljardia (16 % koko väestöstä). He voivat kohdata syrjintää jokapäiväisessä elämässään. Vammainen henkilö määritellään yleensä henkilönä, jolla on pysyvä vamma, ja jonka yhdenvertainen osallistuminen yhteiskuntaan on estynyt ympäristön tai henkilökohtaisten tekijöiden takia (ks. United Nations 2006, ADANN 2023, WHO 2023). Vammaisuuteen liittyvä stigma voi kuitenkin vaikeuttaa samaistumista vammaisen identiteettiin. Tätä ei myöskään helpota tietämättömyydestä ja epävarmuudesta johtuvat kankeat vuorovaikutustilanteet ei-vammaisten (eng. able-bodied) ja vammaisten välillä (Gouvier ja Coon 2002, 49). Roolipelit voisivat siis olla turvallinen tapa tutustua vammaiseen identiteettiin sekä vammaisille että ei-vammaisille ihmisille (Ibarra and Petriglieri 2010, 17; Page 2024).

Ensisilmäyksellä vammaisuus esiintyy pöytäroolipeleissä hahmon luonnissa ja seikkailujen aikana tapahtuvissa loukkaantumisissa. Ominaisuudet, jotka kuvastavat erilaisia vammoja, yleensä säätelevät sitä, mitä pelihahmo voi tai ei voi tehdä, tai vaikeuttavat tiettyjä tekoja. Esimerkiksi näkövamma voi rajoittaa havainnointiin liittyviä taitotestejä. Vammaisen hahmon luominen ei kuitenkaan ole edes mahdollista jokaisessa pelissä. Esimerkiksi suositussa Dungeons & Dragonsin (5. laitos, Wizards of the Coast 2014) sääntökirjassa vammaisuutta ei juuri näy. Vammaisuuden jättäminen pois sääntökirjasta ikään kuin puskee sen taka-alalle, jolloin ei-vammaisten ihmisten ei tarvitse miettiä tai käsitellä sitä millään tavalla.

Pöytäroolipelien sääntökirjojen kieltä tarkastellaan tässä tutkimuksessa Hallidayn ja Matthiessenin (2014) systeemis-funktionaalisen kieliteorian kautta. Valitut transitiiviset

verbiprosessit ja niiden osallistujat rakentavat kuvaa kirjoittajan kokemuksista ja ajatuksista (Halliday ja Matthiessen 2014, 30). Näin voidaan tutkia vammaisuuden kokemuksen rakentumista pöytäroolipelien sääntökirjoissa. Tutkimuskysymyksien kautta selvitetään, minkälaisia transitiivisia prosesseja pöytäroolipelien sääntökirjoista löytyy sellaisista lauseista, jotka käsittelevät vammaisuutta, ja missä kirjan luvuissa vammaisuutta ylipäätään esiintyy. Tämän lisäksi kiinnostuksen kohteena on se, kuinka vammaisuuden kokemus roolipelikirjoissa on muuttunut sosiaalisten muutosten myötä ja vammaisten oikeuksien lisääntyessä. Transitiivisuusanalyysin lisäksi analyysissä käytetään Faircloughin (2015) kriittiseen diskurssianalyysiin ehdottamia menetelmiä.

Tausta

Vammaisuuden käsite on muuttunut paljon vuosien varrella vammaisaktivistien luodessa tietoa vammaisuudesta ja vaatiessa yhteiskunnalta oikeuksia. Kaksi tunnetuinta vammaisuuden mallia ovat lääketieteellinen ja sosiaalinen malli, joista lääketieteellinen malli on vanhempi. Sen mukaan vammaisuus määritellään sairautena, joka pohjautuu ihmisen toimintavajeisiin ja normista poikkeaviin pysyviin vammoihin (Smart 2009, 4). Tällöin vammaisuus on vammaisen ihmisen ongelma, jota lääkärit ja muut lääketieteen asiantuntijat hoitavat (Dirth and Branscombe 2017, 415). Tämän mallin sivuutti myöhemmin sosiaalinen malli, joka puolestaan erottelee vammaisuuden ja vamman käsitteet toisistaan: vammaisuus johtuu ulkoisista tekijöistä, jotka estävät vamman omaavia ihmisiä ottamasta osaa yhteiskuntaan (UPIAS 1976). Vastuu vammaisuuden syystä siirtyy siis yksilöltä yhteiskunnalle. Sosiaalinen malli ei ole täysin ongelmaton, sillä sen painottuminen yhteiskunnan tekijöihin voi jättää huomiotta vammaisen ihmisen vammaan liittyvän kivun ja avun tarpeen (Shakespeare 2014, 18). Siitä onkin haarautunut monia erilaisia malleja, kuten identiteettimalli, joka huomioi vammaisuuden identiteettinä. Tämä tutkimus käyttää yhdistelmää sosiaalisesta mallista ja identiteettimallista tutkiessaan vammaisuuden käsitettä roolipelien sääntökirjoissa.

Vammaisuuden termit vaihtuvat vammaisliikkeen ajaman politiikan ja yhteiskunnan muutosten mukana, sillä vanhat termit yhdistetään kielteisiin mielikuviin. Tämän takia myös pöytäroolipelien sääntökirjoissa voidaan nähdä monta eri tapaa puhua vammaisuudesta. Nämä vanhat termit yleensä viittaavat vammaiseen henkilöön ainoastaan hänen vammojensa tai diagnoosiensa kautta (esim. ”the handicapped”) tai jotenkin erityisenä (esim. ”special needs”). Englanniksi väittelyä on ollut myös siitä, miten vammaisia ihmisiä pitäisi kutsua: ihminen

ensin (esim. ”person with disability”, eli ihminen, jolla on vamma) vai identiteetti ensin (esim. ”disabled person”, vammainen ihminen). Tämä tutkimus käyttää tapaa puhua identiteetistä ensin, sillä sen kohteena on vammaisen hahmon identiteetti. Tutkijat uskovat, että pelkästään kielen muuttuminen ei riitä, vaan vammaisuuden stigman tulisi muuttua (Haller, Dorries, ja Rahn 2006; Albert, Jacobs, ja Siperstein 2016). Esimerkiksi vammaisten ihmisten esittäminen inspiroivina tai säälittävinä vahingoitttaa heidän yhdenvertaisia oikeuksiaan. Kielen muutos voi kuitenkin edesauttaa stigmankin muutosta.

Vammaisen ihmisen identiteetti on monimutkainen, sillä siihen vaikuttavat monet sosiaaliset ja kulttuuriset tekijät. Merkittävä määrä ihmisiä ei halua ajatella itseään vammaisena (ks. Watson 2002, Nario-Redmond, Noel, ja Fern 2013, Chalk 2016) siihen liittyvän stigman ja mahdollisen syrjinnän vuoksi. Ableismi kuvastaa uskomusta siitä, että rajoittunut toimintakyky tekee ihmisestä jotenkin huonomman (Nario-Redmond 2019, 6). Se onkin taitoja arvostavassa yhteiskunnassa vieläkin laajasti levittäytynyttä, ja lisää vammaisten ihmisten halua hylätä vammaisen identiteetin. Identiteetillä on kuitenkin monia positiivisia vaikutuksia, kuten itsetunnon paraneminen (Hahn ja Belt 2004, Chalk 2016) ja mahdollisuus osallistua vammaisten ihmisten yhteisöihin. Nämä yhteisöt voivat tukea vammaista ihmistä ja auttaa häntä kehittämään omaa identiteettiään yhteiskunnassa.

Vammaisten ihmisten identiteettiä on myös tutkittu narratiivisen eli tarinamuotoisen identiteetin kautta, jossa ihmisen oma tarina kehittyy hänen kokemuksiensa kautta (McAdams 2011, 100; Dunn 2014, 128). Vammaisuuteen liittyvät tarinat auttavat ihmistä selvittämään hänen kokemaansa kipua ja syrjintää sekä hänelle itselleen että tarinoiden yleisölle (Dunn ja Burcaw 2013, Couser 2016). Pöytäroolipelien tarinat voivat siis toimia tällaisena keinona tutkia omaa tai toisen vammaista identiteettiä. Monet vammaisuuteen liittyvät tarinat kuitenkin keskittyvät vammaisen ihmisen rajoittuneisuuden tai kärsimyksestä saadun yliluonnollisen kykyyn (Grue 2016, 840; Rodríguez Díaz, Sánchez Padilla ja Ferreira 2024), mikä vahvistaa ableistisia uskomuksia. Stereotyyppisiä vammaisia hahmoja tarinoissa ovatkin yliluonnollisen taitavat vammaiset, hirviöt, viholliset tai sellaiset hahmot, jotka mieluummin kuolevat kuin elävät vammojensa kanssa (Gallego, Ferreira ja Arias-Gago 2025, 14). Vammaisten ihmisten tarinat roolipelikirjoissa ovat kuitenkin tärkeitä vammaisuuden hyväksymisen lisäämiselle, sekä turvallisen ympäristön takaamiselle niille ihmisille, jotka haluavat selvittää identiteettiään sen kautta.

Pöytäroolipelien sääntökirjat ohjaavat pelin kulkua. Kirjoista voi olla monia eri laitoksia, joissa pelin konsepti pysyy samana, mutta säännöt ovat muuttuneet. Kirjoissa on usein sekä ohjaavia että narratiivisia tekstejä, joista molemmat auttavat pelaajaa ja pelinjohtajaa ymmärtämään roolipelin säännöt ja fiktiivisen maailman (Bergström 2012, 13). Nämä tekstit eivät ole neutraaleja, vaan niihin liittyy myös niiden tekijöiden arvoja ja oletuksia maailmasta (Hicks 1936, 717; Alford-Duguid 2025, 3). Pelin säännöt määrittävät miten pelaajien hahmot luodaan, mitkä heidän roolinsa tarinassa ovat, ja miten he voivat vaikuttaa tarinankerrontaan. Pelaajien toimintoihin vaikuttaa myös heidän mahdollisuutensa onnistua, mikä yleensä ratkaistaan noppaa heittämällä. Esimerkiksi jos pelaaja haluaa hahmonsa piiloutuvan tynnyreiden taakse, hän saattaa heittää noppaa, jotta pelinjohtaja voi määrittää näkeekö kukaan häntä.

Pöytäroolipelien maailmat ovat fiktiivisiä, mutta ne lainaavat käsitteitä historiasta ja oikeasta maailmasta. Koska roolipelaaminen tapahtuu osittain spontaanisti, siinä esiintyvät käsitteet perustuvat pelaajien oletuksiin. Jos fiktiivisessä maailmassa on kuningas, voidaan siis olettaa, että maailmassa on jonkinlainen kuningaskunnan tapainen valtajärjestely. Pelaajien oletukset perustuvat siihen, mitä yhteiskunnassa odotetaan tietyiltä käsitteiltä (ks. Gramsci 1978). Jos siis pelaaja tai pelinjohtaja ei ole koskaan ajatellut vammaisuutta tai se ei ole koskettanut hänen elämäänsä, hän ei myöskään välttämättä oleta vammaisuuden esiintyvän pelin fiktiivisessä maailmassa. Hänellä on kuitenkin ainutlaatuinen mahdollisuus leikkiä erilaisilla fantastisilla yhteiskunnilla (Pässilä, Oikarinen, ja Kallio 2013, 169), joissa vammaisuutta käsiteltäisiin eri tavalla kuin oikeassa maailmassa.

Pöytäroolipelien kirjat on yleensä järjestetty niin, että pelaaja ensin lukee tarinan tyylilajista ja hieman sen maailmasta, minkä jälkeen esitetään säännöt hahmon luomiselle. Tämän jälkeen tulevat yleensä säännöt tappeluille, loitsuille ja maailman taustatarinalle. Viimeisenä ovat yleensä pelinjohtajalle tarkoitetut luvut, kuten lisäsäännöt, valmiiksi luodut hahmot ja erilaiset otukset.

Pelaajien hahmot rakentuvat heidän taitojensa, roolinsa ja taustatarinansa kautta. Esimerkiksi ”hakkeri” rooli voi yleensä antaa hahmolle taitoja ja tietoa kyberrikollisuuteen ja hakkerointiin liittyen, ja pelaaja perustelee taustatarinansa avulla osaamansa taidot. Hahmon identiteetti voi myös rakentua pelin aikana. Pelin aikana pelaajat vaihtelevat oman ja hahmonsa identiteetin välillä sujuvasti (Waskul ja Lust 2004; Calleja 2015, 221). Tämä vaihtelu voi vaikuttaa pelaajien minäkuvaan positiivisesti ja auttaa näkemään maailman

toisesta näkökulmasta (Yee ja Bailenson 2007, Meriläinen 2012, Banks 2015). Roolipelaaminen siis rohkaisee kokeilemaan eri identiteettejä ja syventymään hahmon tunteisiin. Syventymiseen, eli siis pelaajan immersioon, vaikuttaa hahmon luonti ja se fiktiivinen maailma, jossa hän pelaa (Cover 2010, 109, 114–115). Immersio siis voi myös auttaa häntä samaistumaan luomaansa hahmoon.

Teoria

Teoriapohjana tutkimukselle on systeemis-funktionaalinen kieliteoria ja kriittinen diskurssianalyysi, joita on ennenkin käytetty yhdessä tutkimaan representaatiota ja identiteettiä (ks. esimerkiksi Tang ja Xu 2024, Bartley 2022). Systeemis-funktionaalinen kieliteoria käsittelee sitä, miten kieli luo ja ilmaisee merkityksiä eri osiensa kautta (Halliday ja Matthiessen 2014, 20). Kriittinen diskurssianalyysi puolestaan tutkii tekstien, vuorovaikutuksen ja kontekstin suhdetta toisiinsa (Fairclough 2015, 58) sekä niiden ideologioita.

Systeemis-funktionaalisessa kieliteoriassa sanavalinnoilla on merkitystä, ja niihin vaikuttavat sosiokulttuuriset ja ideologiset tekijät (Thompson 2013, 265). Valinnat myös heijastavat sitä, mitä henkilö ajattelee maailmasta ja miten hän kokee sen. Näin ollen myös pöytäroolipelien vammaisuuteen liittyvät tekstit heijastavat sekä aikansa ja kirjoittajiensa tietoisia että tiedostamattomia aatteita ja oletuksia vammaisuudesta. Tässä tutkimuksessa keskitytään systeemis-funktionaalisen kieliteorian eksperientaaliseen metafunktioon, joka on ideationaalisen eli maailmaa hahmottavan metafunktion osa-alue. Tämä tekee tutkimuksesta yksiulotteisemman, sillä se keskittyy ihmisen elinkokemuksen hahmottamiseen kielen resurssien avulla (Halliday ja Matthiessen 2014, 29). Eksperientaalista metafunktiota voidaan tutkia transitiivisuussysteemin kautta, joka jakaa kokemusmaailman prosessi- ja osallistujatyyppeihin. Materiaaliset prosessit konstruoivat tekoja, jotka tekijä tekee kohteelle. Ne voidaan jakaa alatyyppeihin perustuen siihen, onko lauseen kohde tai tekijä jo olemassa, vai luodaanko se lauseen sisällä. Mentaaliset prosessit puolestaan konstruoivat aistijan sisäistä maailmaa, kuten mitä hän aistii, tuntee, tietää tai haluaa. Relationaaliset prosessit konstruoivat kahden osallistujan suhdetta joko määrittelemällä osallistujan jonkin ominaisuuden, tai identifioimalla osallistujan suhteessa toiseen osallistujaan tai olosuhteeseen. Myös relationaaliset prosessit voidaan jakaa alatyyppeihin perustuen siihen, liittyykö suhde johonkin piirteeseen, olosuhteeseen tai omaisuuteen. Nämä kolme prosessia ovat kaikkein yleisimmät prosessit englannin kielessä (Halliday ja Matthiessen 2014, 215).

Harvinaisempia prosesseja ovat sanalliset prosessit, käyttäytymisprosessit ja eksistentiaaliset prosessit. Sanallisissa prosesseissa puhuja sanoo tai kertoo jotakin jollekulle, kun taas eksistentiaalisissa prosesseissa jotain on olemassa. Käyttäytymisprosessit ovat materiaalisten ja mentaalisten prosessien väliltä, eli ne ovat prosesseja, jotka liittyvät sekä fyysiseen että psyykkiseen käyttäytymiseen. Jokaiseen lauseen prosessiin voi myös liittyä olosuhteita, jotka osoittavat esimerkiksi sen ajan, paikan tai tavan.

Kriittinen diskurssianalyysi selvittää vallan, ideologioiden ja sosiaalisen muutoksen vaikutusta diskursseihin, eli kielen vuorovaikutukseen muiden sosiaalisten osien kanssa (Fairclough 2015, 60; Jäger 2012, 36). Yhteiskunnalla ja vallalla on vaikutus siihen, mitkä diskurssit ovat ideologisesti hyväksyttyjä. Esimerkiksi vammaisuusaktivistit ovat pystyneet muuttamaan vammaisuuden diskurssia ja siihen liittyviä aatteita. Fairclough (2015) on ehdottanut kolmea vaihetta diskurssianalyysiin: kuvailu, tulkinta ja selitys. Kuvailussa tekstin piirteet ja arvot tunnistetaan, ja tulkinnassa tutkitaan niihin vaikuttavia olettamuksia ja ideologioita. Selitysvaiheessa selvitetään diskurssin ja vallan vaikutusta sosiaalisiin rakenteisiin. Tutkimusta tehtäessä on tärkeää pitää mielessä tekstin konteksti ja sen lukijoiden reaktiot, sillä Faircloughin menetelmät ovat saanet kritiikkiä näihin liittyen. Vammaisuudesta puhuessa olisi aina hyvä saada myös vammaisten ihmisten omat mielipiteet mukaan. Koska tässä tutkimuksessa niitä ei ole saatu mukaan, on vältettävä tekemästä liikaa olettamuksia heidän elämästään.

Materiaali

Materiaaliksi valittiin yhdeksän pöytäroolipelien sääntökirjaa vuosilta 2000–2025 perustuen niiden saatavuuteen, suosioon roolipeliyhteisöissä ja siihen, kuinka monta vammaisuuteen liittyvää lausetta kirjoissa oli. Valituiksi tulivat Ars Magica (4. painos, Atlas Games 2003), GURPS (4. painos, Steve Jackson Games 2004), Rogue Trader (Fantasy Flight Games 2009), Shadowrun (5. painos, Catalyst Game Labs 2016), Legend of the Five Rings (5. painos, Fantasy Flight Games 2018), Pathfinder (2. painos, Paizo 2019), Hard Wired Island (Weird Age Games 2021), Pathfinder (2. painos): Player Core (Paizo 2023) ja Star Trek Adventures (2. painos, Modiphius Entertainment 2024). Nämä kirjat jaettiin julkaisuvuosikymmeniensä perusteella kolmeen ryhmään, jotta aineistossa tapahtuvia diakronisia muutoksia voitaisiin tarkastella.

Neljässä kirjoista (Ars Magica, Rogue Trader, Shadowrun ja Legend of the Five Rings) vammaisuus näkyy hahmon luonnissa valittavina negatiivisina ominaisuuksina, jotka

kolmessa kirjassa antavat mahdollisuuden pelaajalle valita enemmän positiivisia ominaisuuksia. Melkein puolessa kirjoista on luku tai taulukko pysyville vammoille, ikääntymiselle ja mielenhäiriöille. Suurimmassa osassa valituista sci-fi- eli tieteisfiktio kirjoissa oli luku varusteille, joihin sisältyi myös apuvälineitä. Fantasiakirjoista ainoastaan Pathfinder (2. laitos): Player Coressa oli tällainen luku. Hard Wired Island ja Shadowrun (5. laitos) olivat ainoat pöytäroolipelikirjat, joissa vammaisuus näkyi myös sen maailmassa.

Tutkimusta varten kirjat luettiin läpi huolellisesti kahdesti, ja niistä poimittiin ne lauseet, jotka liittyivät vammoihin tai vammaisuuteen. Tämän jälkeen poistettiin lauseet, joissa ei ollut verbiprosessia, kuten listat. Poimitut lauseet merkittiin kolmella tavalla: oliko lauseen tarkoitus olla narratiivinen teksti vai sääntö, missä kirjan luvussa (hahmon luonti, pelaamisen säännöt, suorat ohjeet pelaajille/pelin ohjaajille, varusteet ja maailman tarina) se sijaitsi, ja minkä tyyppistä vammaisuutta (aistivamma, fyysinen, psyykkinen tai kognitiivinen vamma, vai yleisnimitys) se edusti. Lauseiden jaossa narratiiviseen tekstiin tai sääntöihin tärkeä ohjenuora oli lauseen tarkoitus ja Werlichin (1976) ehdottamat tavat tunnistaa ohjaavia ja narratiivisia tekstejä. Tämän jälkeen virkkeet jaettiin lauseisiin, joiden osallistujat ja prosessit analysoitiin transitiivisuusanalyysin keinoin. Prosessien vertailun helpottamiseksi osallistujat jaettiin aineistolähtöisesti eri kategorioihin. Ne lauseet, jotka ilmestyivät hahmon luonnin ominaisuuksissa, merkittiin myös joko positiiviseksi, negatiiviseksi tai neutraaliksi perustuen ominaisuuden otsikkoon tai luvun nimeen. Esimerkiksi ”negative qualities” (huonot puolet) merkitsi negatiivista ominaisuutta.

Tulokset

Tutkimuksessa analysoitiin 437 virkettä, jotka koostuivat 593 lauseesta. Yhdessä sääntökirjoista, GURPS:issa (Steve Jackson Games 2004), oli huomattavasti enemmän lauseita kuin muissa kirjoissa, joten sen vaikutukset tuloksiin otettiin huomioon tapauskohtaisesti. Noin 60.6 % lauseista oli sääntöjä, 38.0 % narratiivisia, ja 1.4 % muuta. Vammaisuus lisääntyi narratiivisissa teksteissä 2020-luvulla. Hahmon luontiin liittyvät luvut olivat yleisimpiä lukuja, joissa vammaisuuteen liittyviä lauseita esiintyi (46.5 %, ilman GURPS:ia 31.5 %). Ryhmiä verratessa vammaisuus väheni näissä luvuissa 2020-luvulla, ja lisääntyi varusteisiin ja pelimaailmaan liittyvissä luvuissa. Fyysiset vammat olivat kaikkein yleisimpiä (35.1 %), ja lisääntyivät vuosikymmenittäin. Aistivammat olivat toiseksi yleisempiä, mutta vähenivät diakronisesti. Samoin psyykkiset vammat katosivat melkein täysin. Kognitiiviset vammat olivat kuitenkin pienin kategoria.

Materiaalisten prosessien tekijät olivat useimmiten vammaisia hahmoja, joiden tekeminen tai eläminen oli jollain tavalla rajoittunutta. Heidän määränsä tekijöinä väheni kuitenkin 2020-luvulla, jolloin apuvälineistä tuli yleisempiä tekijöitä. Apuvälineet olivat aineistossa usein liikkumiseen liittyviä välineitä, jotka lievensivät vamman aiheuttamia vaikutuksia taitotesteihin. Ne myös esiintyivät vamman ”parantajina” 2000- ja 2010-luvulla, tosin apuvälineisiin liittyvät lauseet olivat yleensä yhteydessä hahmon ominaisuuksien poistamiseen. Materiaalisten prosessien kohteina olivat vammat, pelitermit, apuvälineet ja kehon osat. Vammoista kärsittiin, tai niitä lievennettiin ja saatiin. Pelitermit olivat usein hahmon taitoihin liittyviä, sillä ne joko lisäsivät tai alensivat taitoihin liittyvien tekojen onnistumisen mahdollisuutta. Apuvälineet olivat tekijöiden päällä, heidän omiaan tai heidän saamiaan. Kehon osia menetettiin tai hävitettiin 2000- ja 2010-luvulla, kun taas 2020-luvulla niitä korvattiin.

Mentaalisten prosessien aistijat olivat useimmiten vammaisia hahmoja, jotka tunsivat, ajattelivat ja aistivat vammaisuuteen liittyviä tai määrittelemättömiä asioita. Vammaisuus koettiin epämiellyttävänä ja ärsyttävänä, ja siitä kärsittiin. Tässäkin tapauksessa vammaiset hahmot vähenivät aistijoina vuosien kuluessa. Määrittelemättömät asiat liittyivät vahvasti lauseisiin, joissa aistivamman omaavat ihmiset eivät voineet aistia mitään.

Relationaalisten prosessien osallistujina oli vammaisia hahmoja, ei-vammaisia hahmoja ja apuvälineitä, kun hahmoille määriteltiin vamma tai kuvailtiin apuvälineiden laatua. Identifioidessa yleisiä olivat pelitermit, vammaisuus, vammaiset hahmot ja apuvälineet, jotka rinnastettiin vammoihin ja apuvälineisiin. Vammaisille hahmoille määriteltiin yleensä jokin vamma tai apuväline omistamisen kautta, kun taas ei-vammaisille hahmoille määriteltiin tuleva vamma. Apuvälineet liittyivät yleensä fyysisiin apuvälineisiin tai proteeseihin, joille määriteltiin tietty laatu. Vammoja käytettiin myös pelin ominaisuuksien niminä, jolloin näitä vammoja identifioitiin yleensä tarkempien vammojen perusteella.

Sanallisia prosesseja ja käyttäytymisprosesseja oli vähiten. Niissä vammaiset hahmot olivat usein puhujina ja käyttäytyjinä, joiden puheet ja käyttäytyminen liittyivät heidän vammoihinsa tai vammaisuuteen. Aineistossa oli vain yksi eksistentiaalinen prosessi, joka esitti ihmisyyden vähentyvän implanttien ja proteesien lisääntyessä Shadowrunin maailmassa.

Pohdinta

Vammaisuus esiintyy roolipelikirjoissa laajasti hahmon luomisvaiheessa, varsinkin negatiivisina ja peliä rajoittavina piirteinä. Tämän lisäksi se on osa haavoittumista ja ikääntymistä. Osassa kirjoissa oli myös nähtävissä ns. ”traaginen” vammainen, joka kärsii vammoistaan. Kuitenkin 2020-luvun kirjoissa vammaisuudesta puhutaan neutraalimmin, ja se muuttuu hahmoa sitovista säännöistä osaksi varusteita ja koko pelin kertomusta. Tämä ei vain heijasta nyky-yhteiskunnan muutosta, mutta lisää myös toivoa sen suhteen, että vammaisuus normalisoituisi osaksi pelin kokonaiskuvaa. Vammaisuuden normalisoituminen auttaa myös luomaan turvallisen ympäristön vammaisen identiteetin tutkimiselle ja haastaa ableistisia käsityksiä vammaisuudesta.

Pöytäroolipelit perustuvat usein pelaajan hahmon taitoihin, sillä ne määrittävät miten hän voi toimia ympäristössään. Hahmon identiteetti perustuu siis hänen taitoihinsa ja taustatarinaansa. Vammaisten hahmojen identiteetti vammaisena perustui tutkituissa roolipelikirjoissa valittaviin piirteisiin ja apuvälineisiin, sillä ne vaikuttivat taitotestien onnistumisen mahdollisuuksiin. On olemassa myös pöytäroolipelejä, jotka eivät painota taitoja yhtä vahvasti kuin pelaajan taustatarinaa. Tällaiset pöytäroolipelit voisivat erottaa vammaisuuden käsitteen yhteiskunnan edellyttämistä taidoista ja kyvystä tehdä asioita.

Vammat hahmojen valitsemina piirteinä olivat melko staattisia ja yleistettyjä. Näkövammainen ihminen ei ole välttämättä sokea, mutta pöytäroolipeleissä tämä oli usein ainoa vaihtoehto. Ideologisesti tämä ratkaisu nojaa kirjojen tekijöiden odotuksiin siitä, mitä näkövamma on ja minkälaista sen kanssa on elää. Vammaisuuden moninaisuuden sivuuttaminen antaa tilaa myös muille vakiintuneille oletuksille vammaisuudesta, kuten ajatuksen siitä, että se ei voi olla positiivinen osa ihmisen elämää. Psyykkisten ja kognitiivisten vammojen harvinaisuus kielii siitä, että mahdollisesti näkymättömät vammat ovat jääneet myös näkymättömäksi pöytäroolipeleissä. Niiden vähäisyys ja yleisten termien käyttäminen vammaisuudesta 2020-luvulla aiheuttaa myös sen, että ainoastaan näkymättömämmistä vammoista tietävät voivat lisätä ne hahmoihinsa nojautumatta liikaa vallalla oleviin oletuksiin.

Fantasiaroolipelien sääntökirjoissa apuvälineet eivät olleet yleisiä, vaikka apuvälineet ovat hyvin tärkeitä vammaisille ihmisille (Ravneberg ja Söderström 2017, 3). Ne ovat myös osa heidän identiteettiään, jolloin niiden puuttuminen vähentää vammaisuuden näkymistä roolipelikirjoissa. Vaikka sci-fi-pöytäroolipeleissä avustavaa teknologiaa oli enemmän, nämä oli myös suunnattu ei-vammaisille ihmisille ns. kosmeettisina toimenpiteinä.

Vammaisuus oli osa pelimaailmaa vain kahdessa kirjassa: Shadowrunissa ja Hard Wired Islandissa. Shadowrun esitti lisääntyvän teknologian ja ihmisen kehon muutoksen ihmisyyden vähenemisenä. Tämä ideologia on vahingollinen vammaisille ihmisille, sillä osa heistä tarvitsee apuvälineitä ja hyötyy paljon niiden käytöstä. Tämä ei kuitenkaan tee heistä vähemmän ihmistä. Hard Wired Islandissa vammaiset ihmiset olivat laajasti mukana maailmaa, sillä sääntökirjassa puhuttiin heidän roolistaan yhteiskunnassa, heidän omista yhteisöistään, ja miten he ovat taistelleet oikeuksiensa puolesta.

Vammaisuus kokemuksena oli aineistossa epämieluisa, pysyvä ja ihmisen kykyjä rajoittava. Sitä lievittivät apuvälineet, jotka saattoivat jopa ”parantaa” vammaisuuden. Tämä on osaksi apuvälineiden tarkoituksen vastaista, sillä niiden tulisi helpottaa vammaisten ihmisten kanssakäymistä yhteiskunnassa sen esteistä huolimatta (Borg, Larsson ja Östergren 2011, 154), ei parantaa vammaisuutta.

Diakronisesti selviä muutoksia tapahtui paljon vuosikymmenten välillä. Vammaisuus alkoi näkymään enemmän narratiivisissa teksteissä, ja kirjojen kieli muuttui neutraalimmaksi vammaisuutta kohtaan. Vammaisuus siirtyi osittain enemmän hahmon taustatarinaan, sekä pelaajan ja pelinjohtajan päätettäväksi. Näin vammaista hahmoa pelaava on oman hahmonsa terveydentilan asiantuntija. Apuvälineet tulivat yleisemmäksi virkkeiden tekijöinä, korvaten vammaiset hahmot tekijöinä. Lauseet, jotka ennen rajoittivat vammaisia henkilöitä, rajoittivatkin nyt apuvälineitä.

## Päätelmä

Pöytäroolipelit ovat pitäneet vammaisuutta negatiivisena ja traagisena osana vammaisen hahmon luomista, mutta yhteiskunnan muutosten myötä tämä ideologia on myös muuttunut. Nykyaikana vammaisuus vaikuttaa lisääntyneen kertomusten taustatarinoissa ja olevan neutraalimpi osa pelaajan hahmon identiteettiä. Vammaisten piirteiden yleisempi luonne kuitenkin voi johtaa siihen, että vammaisuuden pelissä sivuuttavat ne, joiden elämää se ei ole koskenut millään tavalla. Tämä tutkimus ei kuitenkaan voi kommentoida sitä, minkälainen representaatio olisi paras vaihtoehto, vaan tähän tarvittaisiin vammaisten pelaajien ja pelin ohjaajien mielipiteitä.