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Dungeons and Dragons and Data: The Demographics of Players and Their Impact on Character Creation and Game Play

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
Dungeons and Dragons and Data: The Demographics of Players and Their
Impact on Character Creation and Game Play

A Capstone Submitted to the
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With Honors

Department Of
Operations Management and Information Systems

By
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DeKalb, Illinois

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Capstone Approval Page

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Dungeons and Dragons and Data: The Demographics of Players and Their Impact on Character

Creation and Game Preference.

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Abstract

Research on the demographics of Dungeons and Dragons players and the influence on character creation has been sparse. The current study focused on collecting demographic data on a large scale and collect information about the respondents preferences in character creation for a Dungeons and Dragons campaign, or game. The survey was sent to various tabletop roleplaying (TRPGs) groups and posted on pages associated with the game. At the end of the data collection the results were put through data visualization software, so the results could be shown easily and effectively. The results show the association between demographics and character creation and the impact of certain demographics on game choices.

Dungeons and Dragons and Data: The Demographics of Players and Their Impact on Character Creation and Game Preference.

Tabletop roleplaying games have garnered more attention in the past years which has creates a resurgence of its popularity. Tabletop roleplaying games comprise of groups of people led by a ‘Game Master’ (GM). The players create characters and will make their way through a storyline proctored by the GM. Players describe their actions through speech and determine whether their action will have a good or bad result through chance, usually by rolling dice. Because TRPGs are becoming more popular it is important to understand who is playing these games and what kind of characters they are choosing to play. This study will focus on whether demographics has any impact on character preferences.

Impact of Roleplay

There have been several studies that show roleplaying, and roleplaying game, can have huge impacts on creativity, problem solving, and team building. A recent article was written about an English class where the teacher led his middle school students in miniature Dungeons and Dragons sessions during class. By having the students describe their actions verbally, they were unknowingly improving their creative writing. The teacher would have them be as detailed as possible when the students explained their actions which helped students with expressive language. However, this study didn’t only help with creative writing, but it also helped them navigate the everyday life of a middle schooler. By having students work through fantasy scenarios like battling spiders and evil scientists they were able to face their own issues such as ‘school bullies, distant parents, [and] studying for an exam’ (Otty, 2017). This article shows that a simple tactic like Dungeons and Dragons can unknowingly improve creative writing and help navigate social interactions.

Another article focused on how Dungeon and Dragons helped build personal connections in the workplace. A digital creative agency, Code & Theory, hosts a biweekly session for some of their departments. These sessions allow different department team members to come together in a low-stakes environment. Many of these team members have jobs that force them to work in cubicles where there is little cross-department interaction. By hosting Dungeons and Dragons sessions these team members are building friendships, improving collaboration techniques, and strengthening teamwork skills. Not only are these skills that employers want their employees to have, but these game sessions also improve employee morale, which in turn, improves productivity (Leporati, 2018)

These two articles, and countless others, show that roleplay through group collaboration and storytelling can greatly impact players in a positive way. By giving people the opportunity to participate in TRPGs they may be able to see changes in their everyday life, this may be in their workplace or in their other hobbies. Dungeons and Dragons allows people to work in a team-based setting, where they improve their collaboration skills, and pushes them to take part of a narrative which improves creativity and problem-solving skills.

The Present Study

This study focused on how the demographics of Dungeons and Dragons players impacted the way player built their character and how it affected their gameplay. I created a survey that asked respondents to identify themselves through standard demographic questions and then answer questions about their character preferences. This survey was created with the recognition that players have to be able to predict and simulate a character's emotions, much like an actor. I am hoping to see if participants created characters with similar demographics to make the acting aspect easier, since the characters and players would have the same mindset. This study also

focused on the diversity within the Dungeons and Dragons community, especially since representation can have such a strong impact on the represented communities. A study showed that black high school students who saw themselves represented in social media has high appearance self-esteem (Mastro, 2017). I am hoping to see a wide range in diversity among the participants to show people who are just starting out in TPRGs or who want to get involved that they are represented. By showing people they are represented they may be more inclined to participate in TRPGs and gain the benefits discussed earlier.

Methods

Participants

There were 432 responses to the survey, of these 32 were incomplete and will not be included for analysis. All participants were volunteers and were informed that they could leave the study at any time. Other demographic information will be discussed in the Demographics section because of its impact on the results.

Materials

This survey was created and hosted by Qualtrics. The survey was divided into three parts which included a welcome page, demographics section, and Dungeons and Dragons section. The welcome page consisted of a disclaimer and informed the participants that they had their right to withdraw from the survey at any point. The demographics section covered various demographic questions including age, education, gender, sexuality, race, and country of residence. Finally, the Dungeons and Dragons section covered general game content and topics that I felt were important to character building. The general game content included how many years the participant had been playing, what Dungeons and Dragons edition they preferred, how big their average group was, and whether they played in person or online. For the character-building

section, I asked their preference for race, class, combat style, and game play. I also asked questions about the demographics of the characters including gender, sexuality, and age so that it could be compared against the players demographic information.

Procedures

The survey was first distributed to local tabletop gaming clubs, gaming shops, and TRPG groups in DeKalb. People who received the initial survey link were encouraged to share the survey within their own TRPG groups and so on. The survey was then posted on the social media site Reddit, on their Dungeons and Dragons page. This allowed for a more diverse population of respondents that wasn't confined to the DeKalb area. The survey was live until April 29th when it was closed so that the data could be pulled for analysis.

Results

Demographics

As seen on Table 1, the participants were not as diverse as I originally thought, out of the 400 participants 293 were male. The most common sexuality among participants was straight/heterosexual, as seen on Table 2. By combining gender, race, and sexuality we found that our largest demographic group was white men who identified as straight/heterosexual with 120 participants. After this population, the next largest was white bisexual women with a population of 27. Even though the results may not have been as diverse as I would have preferred there was still a wide range of responses from across the world. Finally, the largest age group was 18 to 24-year-olds as seen on Table 3.

Game Content

As seen on Table 4 most survey participants have been playing for one to four years followed closely by less than one year of experience. This may be because TRPGs have seen a

revival in the past few years, prompting younger players to get involved. As seen on Table 5 the most commonly played edition of Dungeons and Dragons is 5th edition, with 343 of participants preferring it. 5th edition is the most current Dungeons and Dragons edition and is the only one Wizards of the Coast is producing content for. Table 6 shows that most people play in groups of four to six players, including the GM. From all of the respondents only one person stated that they played with ten or more people, this may be because the coordination of large-scale campaigns because more difficult when there are more players. Also, as seen on Table 7 most of the survey respondents meet in person for their game with only 47 participants meeting online. Surprisingly, several people said that they met both in person and online since they had several different groups that they were involved in. Finally, I focused on how players preferred to play their characters. From the participants more people liked role-playing over combat, but most liked a combination of both. To go along with this I asked if players preferred close combat fights or ranged combat, like before most people chose that they preferred a combination of both, but there was a slight preference for close combat.

Character Preferences

The largest section of this survey was race and class preference, I included the official races and classes produced by Wizard of the Coast. In Dungeons and Dragons race is what type of character the player has chosen, this ranges from standard fantasy races like human, elf, and dwarves to original Wizards of the Coast creations like Tabaxi, a cat-like race. On the other side of this class is the characters chosen specialization, such as a wizard specializing in magic or a ranger specializing in archery. Both character race and class will impact a character's skills and abilities. Out of the 400 response the top three races were human, elf, and half-elf which can be seen on Table 8. The top three classes were rogue, cleric, and wizard as seen on Table 9.

After race and class preference the survey was mostly focused on character demographics. First, I looked at if player gender and character gender was typically the same. Table 10 shows that there is a strong correlation between the players' gender identity and their characters' gender identity. Only 16-percent of participants played as a gender different than their own. The same is true for player and character sexuality, most people played characters with the same sexuality as them, however almost 19-percent played as a different sexuality than their own, as seen on Table 11. However, several participants wrote that they don't think about their character's sexuality or that they changed their character's sexuality based off of backstories. For both gender and sexuality tables, the answers 'Prefer to Self-Describe' and 'Prefer Not to Answer' were excluded since I could not determine how the player's gender and sexuality correlated to their character's gender and sexuality.

Discussion

Overall, this study shed light on how player demographics correlate to their character creations. 83-percent of characters had the same gender and 67-percent had the same sexuality as their player, which shows that most people prefer to play characters that are similar to them in some capacity. This study also shows the impact of gender on game play, while all genders preferred a combination of both "supportive" characters and "aggressive" characters, 25-percent of men preferred aggressive combat while 23-percent of women preferred supportive combat.

An aspect of this study that I did not anticipate was the lack of diversity in the respondents. One of the main goals of this research was to show that anyone could participate in TRPGs and by collecting diverse demographic information which would encourage these groups to participate. However, more than 70-percent of the respondents were men and from this 56-percent were white men who identified as straight/heterosexual. This may be because of the

distribution channels which will be discussed in the limitations section. Even though the respondents were not as diverse as I would have preferred, I hope that people will still be encouraged to look into Dungeons and Dragons.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was exploratory in nature, meant to investigate the demographics of Dungeons and Dragons players and how they impact character creating and game play. Because of this, the study has several limitations, the most prominent is the survey's distribution. The first limitation is that the survey was initially distributed in the DeKalb area. Because Northern Illinois University is part of DeKalb, there are several demographics that could be skewed because of the high concentration of college students. Next, the survey was distributed on a social media site Reddit, even though this opened up the survey to people outside of Illinois it also introduced another limitation. Reddit is largely used by young males and this influences who is getting the survey and responding to it. Future research should concentrate on distributing the survey to a wider range of medias to gain a better range of participants

Another limitation to this study was updating the survey after it had already gone live. Several people responded to the survey pointing out errors or information that had been omitted, because of this the survey was updated. By updating the survey there were several participants who completed the older version of the survey and did not get the new options, this could impact their answers and the final data. Future research should use a trial run where a focus group takes the quiz and update the survey before beginning the final distribution.

Acknowledgements

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Table 1

Participant Gender

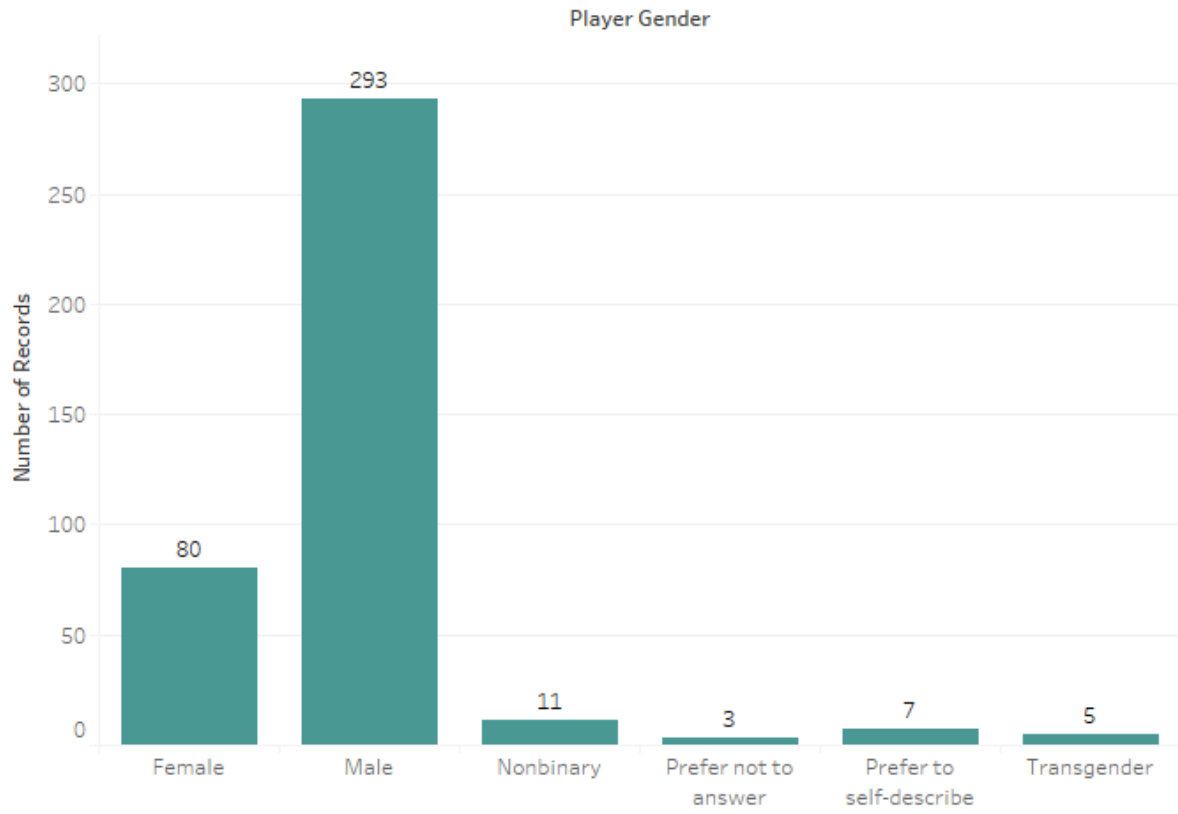


Figure 1. Number of responses correlating to participant's gender

Table 2

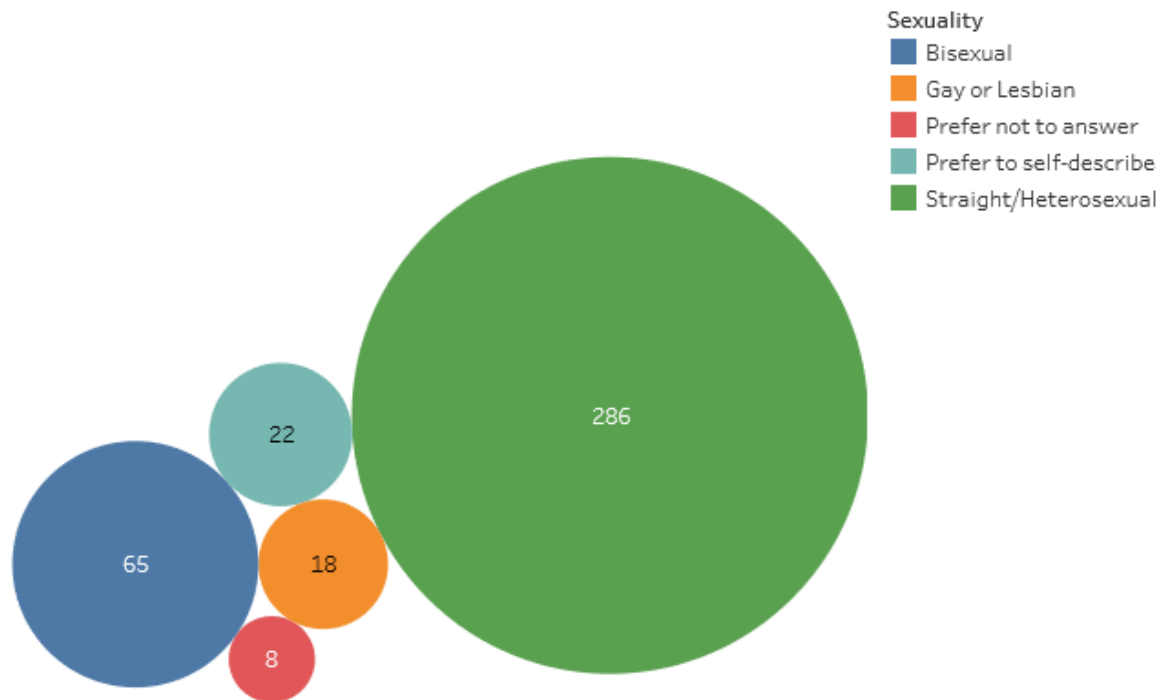
Participant Sexuality*Figure 2.* Number of responses correlating to participant sexuality.

Table 3

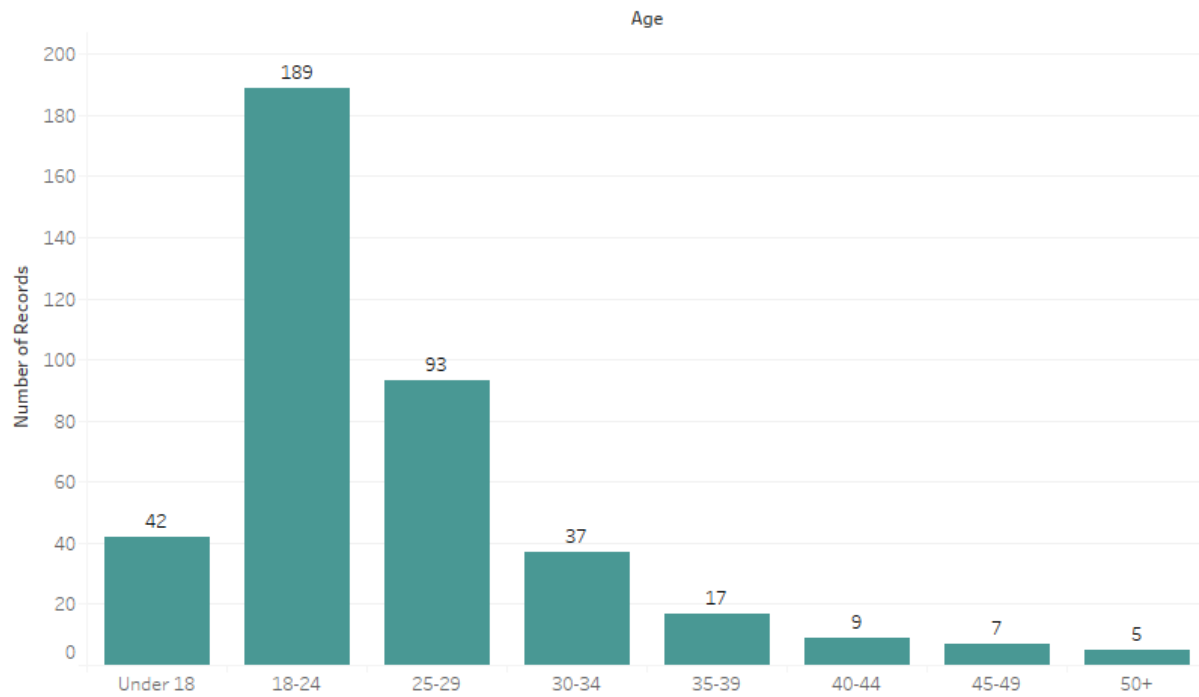
Participant Age*Figure 3.* Number of responses correlating to participant's age

Table 4

Years of Experience

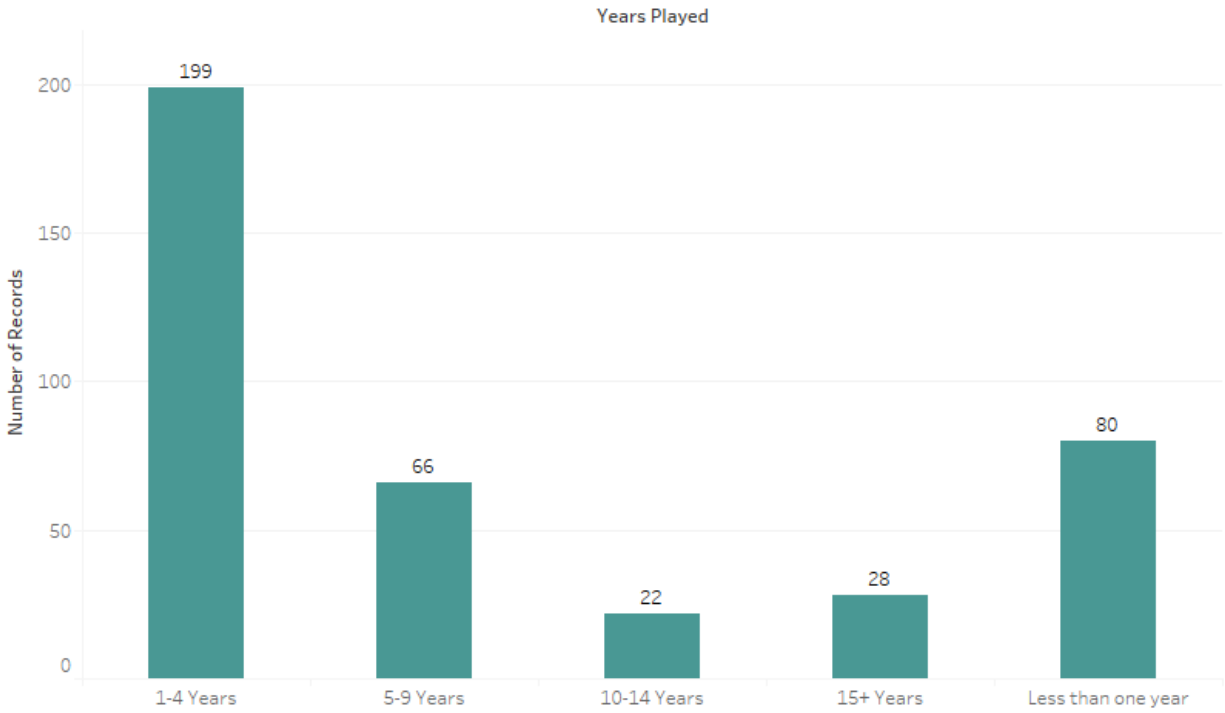


Figure 4. Number of responses correlating to how long participants have been playing Dungeons and Dragons.

Table 5

Preferred Edition of Dungeons and Dragons

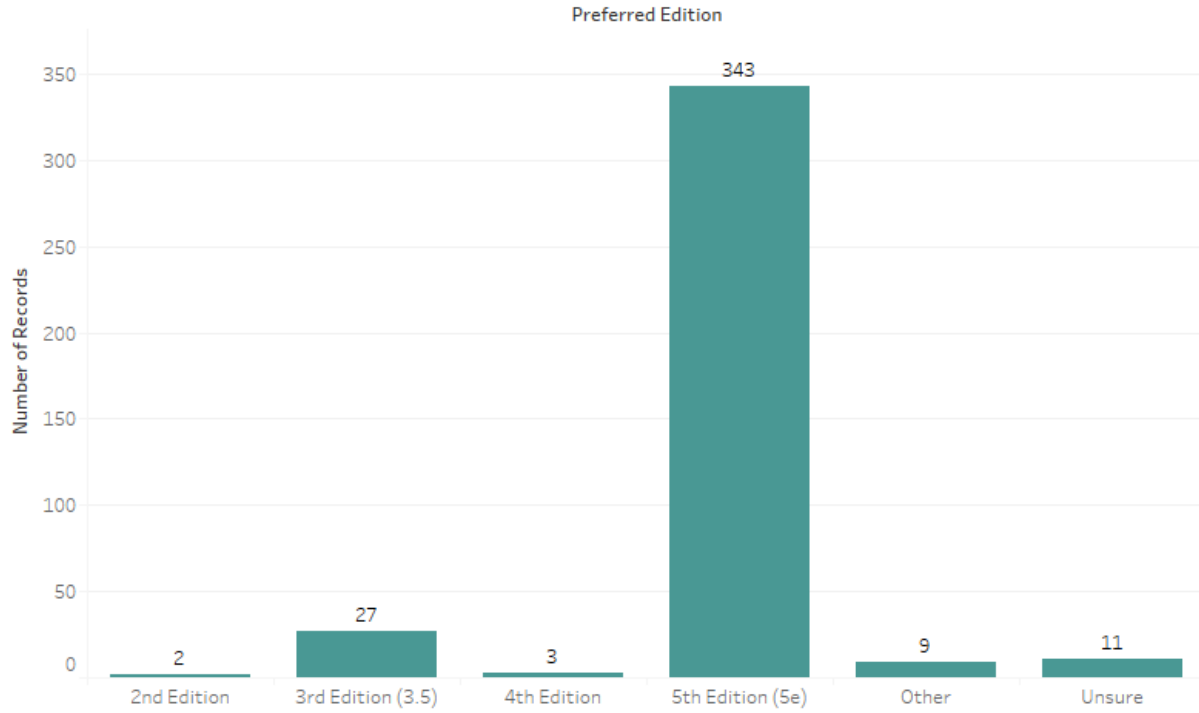


Figure 5. Number of responses correlating to what edition of Dungeons and Dragons participants preferred.

Table 6

Average Group Size

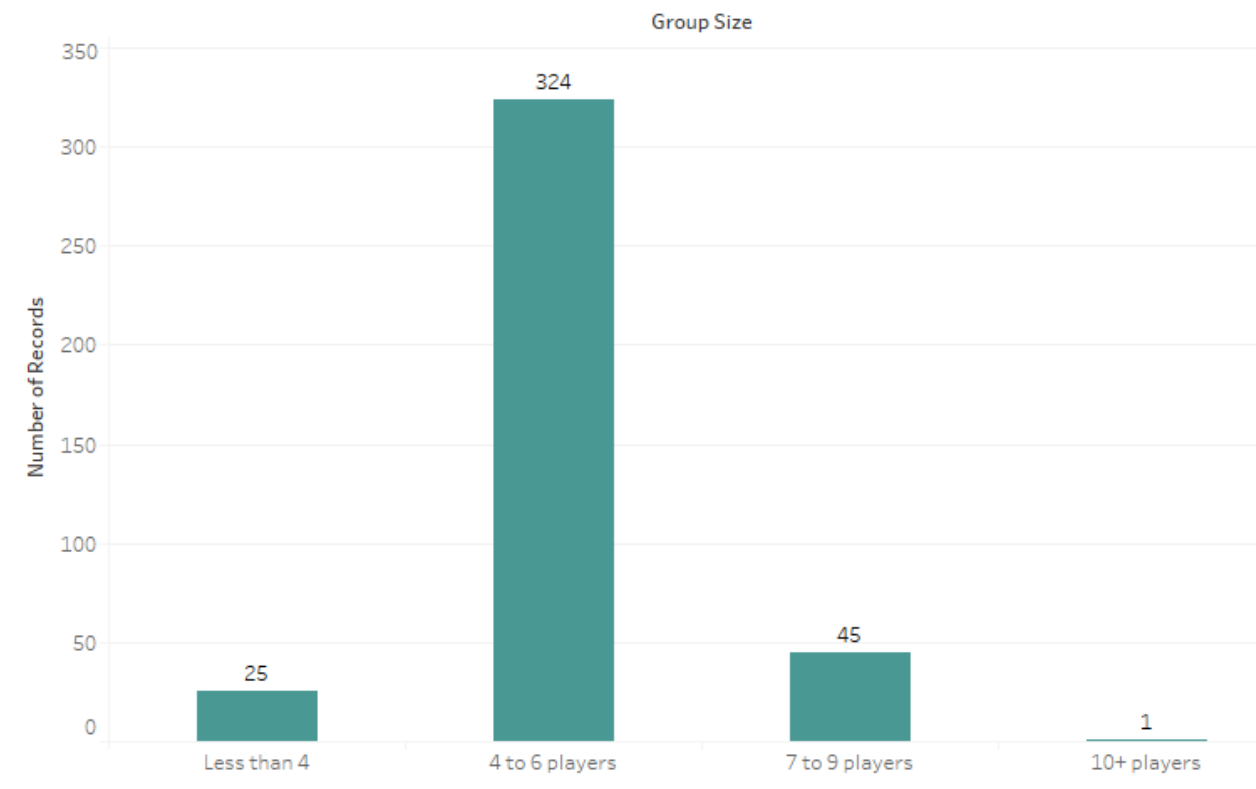


Figure 6. Number of responses correlating to the average group size of Dungeons and Dragons groups.

Table 7

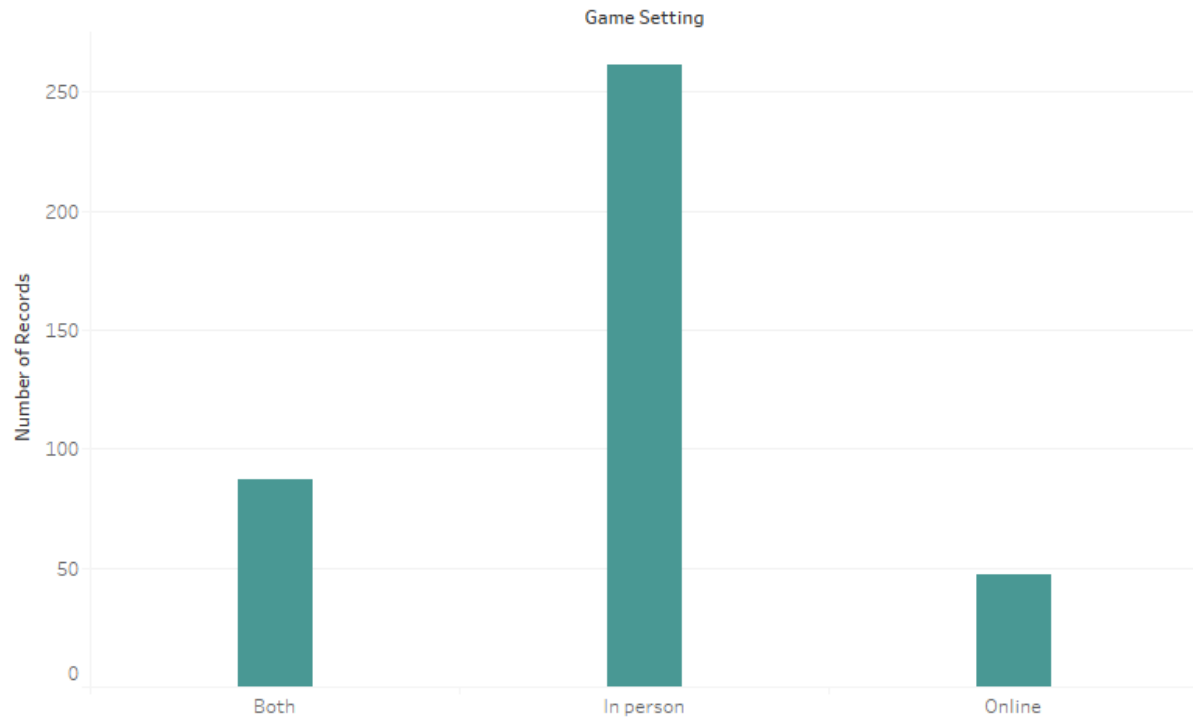
Meeting Online vs. In Person

Figure 7. Number of responses correlating to whether participants met with their Dungeons and Dragons group in person or online.

Table 8

Preferred Dungeons and Dragons Race

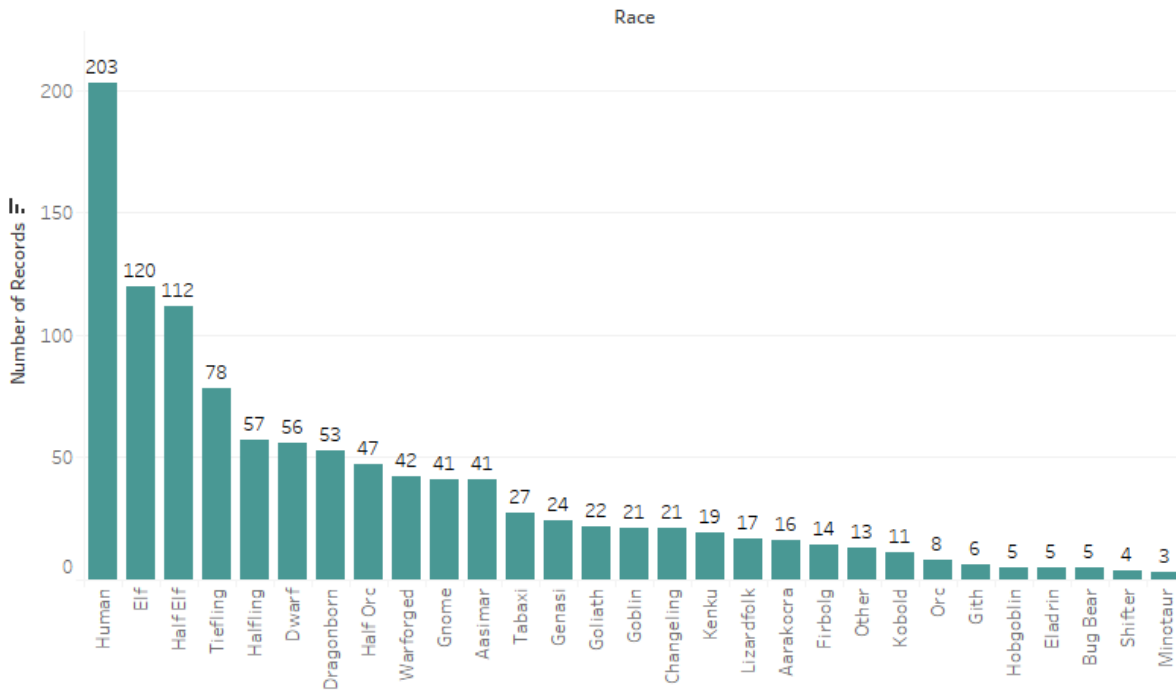


Figure 8. Number of responses correlating to what race participants preferred to play.

Table 9

Preferred Dungeons and Dragons Class



Figure 9. Number of responses correlating to the class participants preferred to play as.

Table 10

Player Gender vs Character Gender

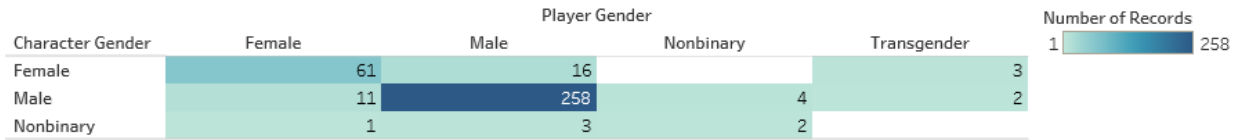


Figure 10. Association between player gender and character gender, the darkness of the box correlates with the number of records.

Table 11

Player Sexuality vs Character Sexuality



Figure 11. Association between player sexuality and character sexuality, the darkness of the box correlates with the number of records.