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DESIGNING ROLE-PLAYING GAMES THAT ADDRESS THE HOLOCAUST

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Role-playing games offer powerful opportunities for players to engage with history, such as allowing players to fictionally situate themselves in a historical period. When it comes to the Holocaust, however, games face serious issues such as the potential trivialization of the Holocaust or players learning to blame the victims. In this design case, we show one way that these issues can be addressed through game design techniques. We bring together the literature on games and Holocaust education to define a set of design challenges for Holocaust-related historical role-playing games; we describe *Rosenstrasse*, a role-playing game in which players adopt the roles of Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in mixed marriages in Berlin between 1933 and 1943; and we illustrate specific game design decisions within *Rosenstrasse* that address the challenges identified in this paper. This work aims to help other designers address the same set of challenges in their own game design process.

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INTRODUCTION

Taking on alternate identities in the context of a game can broaden our perspectives (Klopfer, Osterweil & Salen, 2009). For example, games can center marginalized historical experiences, and they can provide a multiplicity of perspectives rather than a single dominant narrative (Carnes, 2014). The tabletop role-playing game *Rosenstrasse* seeks to accomplish both these things. Players take the roles of Jewish and non-Jewish Germans in mixed marriages living in Berlin between 1933 and 1943. In the first three hours of the game, players explore the relationships between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and children. The game culminates in the *Fabrikaktion*, a roundup to capture and deport the last Jews of Berlin, and the eponymous *Rosenstrasse* protests by non-Jewish women to free their Jewish husbands (Stoltzfus, 1996).

As a game that deals with the Holocaust, *Rosenstrasse* must address complex educational challenges. First, it must deal with the same issues that face other historical games, such as how to balance player freedom against the potential for misconceptions. It also must address concerns that are specific to games about genocide or other serious topics. For example, a Holocaust game could diminish the actual events of the Holocaust by making them tame or even pleasurable to explore (Totten, 2000). Finally, it must address issues that are specific to the Holocaust itself, such as not replicating the Nazi vision of Jews as helpless and faceless victims (Schweber, 2004).

In this paper, we define four areas of challenge for historical role-playing games that address the Holocaust. First, challenges of *history* relate to the way history is modeled by the game and understood by players. Second, challenges of *character* are about the roles available for play, and how players represent the characters they portray. Third, challenges of *agency* relate to the freedom and choice available within a game context, particularly when the historical context was far more constrained. Finally, challenges of *experience* relate to the overall player experience, and especially to questions of fun and pleasure.

We believe that these challenges are serious and should be taken seriously. However, we also believe that they can be

addressed through thoughtful design. We therefore explain specific design decisions of *Rosenstrasse* and demonstrate how they respond to these challenges. For example, we used the design of in-game narrative situations to help manage player expectations around how much agency they, and their characters, should have.

We do not believe that ours are the only possible responses to the challenges of the Holocaust as a game design space. In fact, we share our approach with precisely the opposite hope: that exposing our reasoning about our game design decisions will help other designers tackle the topic with respect, insight, and courage.

HISTORICAL AND SERIOUS ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Hammer et. al. (2018) identify key learning-relevant opportunities of role-playing games. These opportunities include portraying a character, manipulating a fictional world, generating an altered sense of reality, and sharing an imaginative space. These strengths can be applied to historical role-playing games in a range of ways. Most commonly, players take on the role of stakeholders in these historical events and explore them through the lens of their characters. For example, games in the Reacting to the Past series situate players in a Ming dynasty succession crisis, the trial of Anne Hutchinson, and the Indian independence negotiations (Reacting to the Past, 2018). Although many role-playing games incorporate fantastic or fictional elements, these elements can actually encourage players to research and reflect on history (Hammer & Heller, 2012). As a complementary strategy, some role-playing games allow players to adopt the roles and practices of historians, either by explicitly situating them in the role of historical researchers (Robbins, 2011) or by supporting player-initiated research as a key component of play (Hammer & Heller, 2012). Finally, historical role-playing games can help *concretize* aspects of history that might otherwise remain abstract.

Whether historical or otherwise, role-playing games can tackle serious topics from cancer (Stark, 2013) to slavery (Ellingboe, 2008). Role-playing games that address serious topics use both narrative design and system design to help the player take on a role that may lie outside their personal experience (Sampat, 2017). For example, *Dog Eat Dog* (Burke, 2013) explicitly deals with themes of colonialism and occupation. Narratively, it asks players to take on the roles of the occupiers and the colonized. In terms of system, the occupier may take a token from native characters anytime they break the occupier's rules. These two aspects of the game reinforce one another to illuminate what it feels like to live under an occupying force. As with historical games, serious role-playing experiences sometimes tackle difficult topics through the lens of fantasy. For example, the live-action game *Kapo* explores the social dynamics of an authoritarian prison camp, but it is set in an alternate version of the present day rather than in a particular historical period (Kapo, 2017).

Historical and serious role-playing games provide *experiences* for players, but they do not necessarily produce transformation by themselves. To support learning outcomes, games can be embedded in formal learning environments and used as part of lesson plans (Clark et al., 2016). However, there are also informal approaches that are centered on play. For example, many games include a post-game debrief, which can induce reflection and transfer. Debriefs can be conducted by an instructor, by a game facilitator, or by other participants (Crookall, 2014; Atwater, 2016). An alternate approach is Kemper's *autoethnographic* method, in which self-directed reflective activities help connect the player's lived experience to experiences in the game (Kemper, 2017).

CHALLENGES OF HOLOCAUST EDUCATION GAMES

Making transformational games is a difficult challenge. The experience must be successful *as a game* if it hopes to leverage the benefits of play (Klopfer et al., 2009). At the same time, the experience must generate the desired transformational outcomes (Culyba, 2018). Existing work on transformational games emphasizes the concept of *alignment* between game design and transformational outcomes. For example, the EDGE framework for educational games seeks to align learning goals and game mechanics (Aleven et. al., 2010); the Transformational Framework supports alignment between purpose, audience, barriers, and more (Culyba, 2018); and the Tandem Transformational Design Process emphasizes alignment between design goals and prototypes (To et. al., 2016).

Dealing with the Holocaust in games introduces challenges over and above the broader challenges of transformational game design. A major question in the field of Holocaust education concerns the appropriateness of simulations and games as a pedagogical approach (ADL, n.d.). On the one hand, researchers raise serious concerns about whether a game-based approach might diminish the historical events themselves (Laqueur, 1994; Totten, 2000) and whether the benefits of games are worth the risk of misconceptions (Totten, 2000). On the other hand, empirical research on Holocaust simulations suggests that it is *possible*, with appropriate design goals, to use games and simulations for Holocaust education. For example, Schweber (2004) observed a highly successful classroom simulation that both effectively captured the historical experience and connected it to larger moral themes. Although Schweber attributed the success of the simulation to a uniquely gifted instructor, we believe that her work illustrates what games and simulations *can* achieve—if the challenges of designing with the Holocaust are kept in mind.

To define a list of challenges in this area, we turned to the literature on Holocaust education, with an emphasis on work related to games and simulations.

Additionally, we knew that game genre would affect which challenges were relevant, and how they could be addressed through design. We therefore also looked at research on analog role-playing games, which served both as a filter for our analysis of the Holocaust education literature and as a source of additional challenges. After generating a list of potential issues, we used affinity diagramming to group similar concerns, resulting in a list of eight challenges across four separate categories. These categories are challenges of *history*, challenges of *character*, challenges of *agency*, and challenges of *experience*. We now unpack each of these categories in turn.

Challenges of History

Research on history games shows that players can engage deeply with historical material in games, including exploring system dynamics, learning social history, and developing a sense of personal connection with the past (Squire et. al., 2006; Hammer & Heller, 2012; Schrier, 2005; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). However, the same freedom that lets players experiment, explore and construct meaning in games also comes with risks (Klopfer et al., 2009). For example, players may create meaning that is at odds with the historical record, particularly when they are engaging with games outside of formal learning contexts.

We therefore identify the risk of **historical misconceptions by players** as a key challenge. This risk is particularly salient for Holocaust education because of the ongoing challenge of Holocaust denialism. One strategy used by Holocaust deniers is to amplify or invent inaccuracies in the historical record, and then use them as evidence for their larger points. Players' misconceptions about the Holocaust, no matter how they are acquired, may leave them vulnerable to being targeted by denialism in the future.

Another challenge of historical games is selecting the perspective from which they portray history. All historical games are designed with a particular perspective in mind, whether they acknowledge this perspective or not. For example, *Oregon Trail* implicitly casts the player into the role of white male settlers, and treats indigenous people as either stereotypes or threats (Slater, 2017). *When Rivers Were Trails* responds by centering Anishinaabeg stories (ILTF, 2019). The contrast between these games demonstrates how designers' choices about perspective affect what is treated as relevant. For example, the displacement of indigenous people from their lands is barely touched in *Oregon Trail* and central to *When Rivers Were Trails*. Salvati and Bullinger (2013) frame this issue as "selective authenticity" and consider it key to the history-making process of game designers.

When it comes to Holocaust education, Schweber (2004) frames this issue as a **lack of historical context.** Educators must show how the Holocaust was dependent on both active collaborators and passive bystanders, without encouraging learners to prioritize the perspectives of perpetrators over those of victims. Game designers in turn must decide what gets modeled in the game, and how, in terms of these different social roles.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">HISTORY</td><td>Historical misconceptions. Players might learn incorrect information about history, or take the wrong lessons away from the game.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lack of context. Players might fail to situate the experiences of the characters in the larger context of German society, including the roles of bystanders and perpetrators.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">CHARACTER</td><td>One-dimensionality. Players might stereotype or otherwise flatten the characters, particularly the Jewish characters.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Over-identification. Players might think that they 3 really get it" because of their play experience, which is disrespectful to the survivors and victims of the Holocaust.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">AGENCY</td><td>Blaming the victims. Players might think that they could make better decisions than real people could have.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unrealistic expectations. Players might try to solve in-game problems in ways that are inappropriate for the context or time period.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">EXPERIENCE</td><td>Inappropriate fun. Players might have playful or otherwise light-hearted experiences that could conflict with the seriousness of the topic.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Upsetting experience. Players might feel upset while dealing with intensely emotional themes and difficult subject matter.</td></tr>
</table>

TABLE 1. Challenges of Holocaust-related role-playing game design

Challenges of Character

In historical role-playing games, players typically take on the roles of characters within a historical setting (Hammer & Heller, 2012; Hammer et. al., 2018). In many such games, the characters are pre-generated, so that the designers can control the perspectives represented in the game (e.g. Reacting to the Past, 2018). Even when the characters are pre-defined, however, players still choose how to interpret their characters. In doing so, players draw on prior knowledge about how their characters should think, feel, and behave. Players can therefore turn to stereotypes or one-dimensional representations of marginalized groups (Hodes, 2019).

When it comes to Holocaust education, the problem of **one-dimensionality** can manifest in the flattening of Jewish stories into a single story of victimhood (Schweber, 2004). Images of Jews in Holocaust education emphasize propaganda images and images from death camps. Although there are valid educational reasons to choose these images, they also frame Jews through the eyes of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, and reflect antisemitic stereotypes about Jews as weak and pathetic. Because this framing is so common in Holocaust contexts, it can be challenging to give players other ways to understand Jewish stories.

Additionally, when players do the cognitive work of taking on a character, they can experience *bleed*, or a transference between player and character (Kemper, 2017). Role-players become famously attached to their characters, to the point where gaming organizations use a "Tell Me About Your Character" booth to raise money for charity (Big Bad Con, 2019). Players are willing to pay for the chance to talk about their characters to a sympathetic ear.

This deep connection between player and characters is one of the learning opportunities that role-playing games provide. However, in the Holocaust education context it can produce **over-identification.** Players may come to believe that because they connected with their characters, they truly understand what the victims of the Holocaust had suffered (Totten, 2000). This attitude is not only incorrect, it is disrespectful to both the victims and survivors. However, some degree of engagement with one's character is key to the role-playing genre. Historical role-playing games must walk the line between inappropriate over-identification, and none at all.

Challenges of Agency

Games are "the art form of agency" (Nguyen, 2020), in which players take on temporary goals and temporary limits to their capacities. Players are used to the idea that the challenges in games are scaled to their capacities, and they expect that skill and perseverance should result in the ability to progress. Although some games challenge this preconception, Sid Meier's framing of a game as "a series of meaningful choices" is something most players bring to the table.

This expectation may even be heightened in the case of role-playing games, because role-playing games typically allow open-ended input from players (Hammer et al., 2018). Participants use game rules, social negotiation, cultural norms, shared narrative understandings, artifacts such as character sheets, and more to agree on how they can contribute to the game, and on the consequences of that contribution (Hammer et al., 2018). For example, many groups adopt the social norm of "rulings not rules," which gives groups the freedom to interpret rules differently based on game situations (Wick, 2016).

In the context of Holocaust education, player expectations about agency can cause players to **blame the victims** of the Holocaust. In a game context, players expect to be able to make an optimum choice, or at the very least to grow in mastering the system. However, in the context of the Holocaust, there were often no good choices. This can lead players to believe that they would have made better decisions than the people who were living those choices, which reflects a naïve approach to social systems and can sometimes be used to blame the victims of the Holocaust (Totten, 2000).

Player expectations about agency can also create **unrealistic expectations.** Players may believe that they should be able to change situations that they are not able to change. They may try to solve in-game problems anachronistically, or in ways that ignore the social pressures and social context that is relevant to their characters. In turn, they may become frustrated when the strategies that they expect to be effective are repeatedly frustrated by the game's model of reality.

Challenges of Experience

Game scholars show that there can be a range of emotional experiences in games. For example, Hunicke and colleagues (2004) illustrate eight different types of fun in games, including the pleasure of tackling a challenge, the pleasure of connecting with friends, and the pleasure of physical sensation. Other taxonomies of fun include Lazzaro's Four Keys model (2004) and Yee's empirically-grounded account of player motivations in multiplayer games (2016). Games can include experiences that are not typically understood as fun, as demonstrated by the popularity of serious or difficult games. For example, *That Dragon, Cancer*, which deals with the death of the designer's son, demonstrates that players are *willing* to be serious in games.

It is important to understand the range of experiences that are possible in play, because Holocaust educators raise the concern that game-based learning might introduce **inappropriate** fun. If players are light-hearted or silly during play, it could conflict with the seriousness of the topic

and trivialize the events of the Holocaust (Laqueur, 1994; Totten, 2000). Even the most skillfully designed Holocaust education projects sometimes struggle to set an appropriate tone for participants, as illustrated by the Yolocaust project critiquing selfies taken at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (Yolocaust, 2019). Additionally, even if players are having a deep, respectful experience in a game context, they may not have the language to describe what they are feeling (viz. Schweber, 2004). If they describe what they are feeling as "fun," it can disconcert outsiders and communicate the wrong expectations about the experience.

When games get serious, they can also create **distressing or upsetting experiences.** For example, *Just a Little Lovin'* deals with the AIDS crisis head-on, tackling love and death and queer community in New York City between 1982 and 1984 (JALL, 2019). These are intensely emotional themes, and the game includes extensive workshops and other techniques to help people manage their own experience.

WHAT IS ROSENSTRASSE?

Rosenstrasse is part of the *War Birds* project, which creates analog historical role-playing games that seek to "brush history against the grain" (Benjamin, 2005) by centering women's stories in wartime. Previous releases in the *War Birds* series have dealt with queer women finding community in the WWII motor pool, a 1943 hate strike where white women refused to work alongside black women on the factory line, and the role of Danish women in the resistance to German occupation (Turkington et. al., 2017). As part of this project, *Rosenstrasse* seeks to engage players with a little-known piece of history, and to uplift the perspectives of both women and Jews.

Rosenstrasse is designed for four players and one facilitator, set in Berlin between 1933 and 1943, and intended to be played in a single four-hour session. During play, players describe the thoughts, feelings, and actions of their characters; players may also choose to act out what their characters do in some scenes. The facilitator presents game challenges, tracks secret information, helps players follow the rules, and manages the time allocated to each scene.

Rather than asking players to participate in open-ended role-play, the game is highly structured. The game is made up of 90 individual scenes for eight pre-generated characters. At the beginning of each scene, the facilitator refers to the game book (Figure 1) for instructions. For example, they might be asked to read a narration aloud to the players, to

FIGURE 1. Game materials.

skip to the next scene, or to check in with how the players are feeling.

Typically, the players are then asked to draw a card (Figure 1). Each card is targeted to one or more of the eight characters, and contains a situation that those characters face. The affected players read the card aloud so that everyone knows the situation their characters face. Each card ends with a prompt that asks the players what their characters think, feel, and/or do. The affected players respond verbally to the prompt, either acting out or describing their characters' actions. The facilitator helps them with this process as needed, for example by asking them provocative questions if they become stuck.

After the scene is complete, the facilitator checks the game book again for further instructions. For example, if a male character has come to the attention of the Reich, there may be consequences for him.

Scenes are played in a pre-defined order, moving forward through time. The game contains five sections: a Prologue (1921-1933), Act I (1933-1937), Act II (1938-1942), Act III (February-March 1943), and the Epilogue (1943).

Prologue scenes define the relationships between the characters, all of whom are in "mixed" marriages between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. These scenes give the players a chance to figure out how they are interpreting their characters, and to explore the foundations of what makes their relationships work.

In Act I, Hitler has just been appointed as chancellor. The country is economically unstable, politically polarized, and ideologically divided, and the civil rights of Jews are being slowly eroded. For example, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 forbade marriages between "Aryans" and Jews, while by 1936, Jews had been banned from all professional jobs. Scenes in this phase of the game show how the joys and challenges of daily life continue to exist side-by-side with the revocation of civil rights, and give players a chance to build out their relationships further.

In Act II, the net tightens—but the characters' intermarriages still protect them, to a degree. In 1939, approximately 30,000 intermarried couples remained in Germany (Kaplan, 1999). Marriages where the Jewish partner was female were in many ways treated as German families, while intermarriages involving Jewish male partners were far more affected by legal restrictions (Stoltzfus, 1996; Koonz, 2013). Nonetheless, intermarried German Jews did not have to fear deportation, even as the remainder of the Jews of Germany were being systematically executed. Scenes in this act reflect rising tension and fear, and ask the characters to explore how the pressure they are under affects their marriages and families, but without putting them at direct risk of death.

Act III tightens focus to the protest itself. On February 27, 1943, the Gestapo began a final roundup to capture and deport the last Jews of Berlin, including approximately 1,500 Jewish men married to non-Jewish women. Most of the men were taken to Rosenstrasse 2-4, where hundreds of women protested day and night, demanding their husbands' release (Stoltzfus, 1996). During this phase of the game, the players alternate between playing the imprisoned male characters, and the female characters at the protest.

Finally, the epilogue shows the fate of the male characters, who might be released, sent to a prison camp, or murdered. The fate of each male character depends on the choices they, and their spouse, have made during the game.

Rosenstrasse is specifically and explicitly a Holocaust game. It seeks to challenge dominant narratives about the Holocaust, and to use that challenge to motivate people to protect vulnerable populations today. It is easy to think of the Nazi regime as an unchallengeable, powerful evil. Although that is a reasonable story, it is also not the whole truth. In the Rosenstrasse protests, a group of ordinary women, who were themselves in vulnerable situations, looked the Reich in the eye and demanded their husbands back—and the Reich blinked. This story tells us that we cannot use the overwhelming power of an evil regime to excuse ourselves from action. The game challenges players to consider the idea that there might have been more that could have been done to protect Jews at the time, and to consider what they might be able to do to resist injustice today.

Rosenstrasse also aims to start conversations about activism and resisting oppression. Engaging with difficult topics through the medium of a game makes it easier to start conversations that might otherwise be fraught. When players tell stories about how they resisted oppression in the game, they can also start talking about what resistance to oppression means today. In our work with the game so far, we have observed that players are not only able to make these connections, but also tie them to action (Hammer et al., 2018).

DESIGN RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGES

As designers, we knew we needed to respond to the challenges of Holocaust-related historical role-playing games described earlier in this paper. However, our responses to those challenges were not one-to-one, a single design choice for each challenge. Instead, we made a set of key design decisions that, taken together, helped us address these challenges. (To see how the design decisions match up to the challenges we identified, see Table 2.)

These design decisions were typically not *just* taken because they helped us address the challenges we identified. They also moved us in positive directions toward our design goals. For example, as we will see below, the decision to have two

Historical misconceptions	Playing relationships Situation and prompt design Facilitation guidance
Lack of context	Playing relationships Designing for complicity
One-dimensionality	Playing two characters Playing relationships Situation and prompt design
Over-identification	Playing two characters Designing for complicity
Blaming the victims	Situation and prompt design
Unrealistic expectations	Situation and prompt design Facilitation guidance
Inappropriate fun	Defining the player experience Situation and prompt design
Upsetting experience	Defining the player experience Ongoing consent process Facilitation guidance

TABLE 2. Design responses to the challenges of Holocaust-related role-playing games.

characters per player helps with several of the challenges we identified.

However, this choice also helped us center women's voices and stories, without decentering the voices of Jewish men.

Defining the Player Experience

The first key decision we made was defining the player experience we wanted to create. It is not easy to find the right emotional tone for a game like *Rosenstrasse*. On the one hand, it should not be a "beer-and-pretzels" game—light-hearted and humorous. On the other hand, the game should not be overwhelmingly distressing, to the point where players are unable to engage with play or learn anything from the game.

To address this question, we brainstormed keywords that would help center our vision. We came up with a list of words that evoked the tone and feel of the game: elegaic, vulnerable, and tense. Looking at the game literature, we could see that we might draw on the pleasures of fellowship (players connecting with one another), discovery (what card would be drawn next?), and expression (how would characters react to the prompts they were given?) as ways to sustain player engagement with these feelings (Hunicke et al., 2004).

Second, we thought how the emotional experience of the game might vary over time. At a high level, the game draws the emotional tension tighter and tighter over the course of the first two acts and the beginning of the third act. Only at the very end of the game can the characters (and players) achieve the emotional release of being able to *do something* about the increasingly dire situation they face. As described below, for the vast majority of the game, players are only offered scenes that limit their agency. They must experience their characters as vulnerable, helpless, unable to resist the power of the Reich. Only at the end of the game are the female characters offered scenes of resistance—and by then the players are typically willing to leap at the opportunity.

Understanding the variance in the game's emotional experience also allowed us to draw on lessons from Shakespeare and other dramaturges about incorporating joy into tragedy. Having moments of happiness gives players room to breathe—and heightens the grief and horror of the rest of the game. For example, one situation card places Izak and Ruth at their joint family Seder. The players are asked to play out the joyful Jewish ritual of *afikomen*, in which parents make promises to their children in order to retrieve a ritually significant piece of *matzah*. On the one hand, this is a playful moment. On the other hand, the players know that Ruth and Izak may not be able to keep their promises as the world darkens around them. This "double consciousness" brings an elegaic quality to even the most joyful, potentially silly scenes.

Finally, our consent process (detailed below) helped make it acceptable to address darker tones and themes. Although the material is distressing, players know what they are getting into when they agree to play the game. The process of discovery, embodied in the card deck, is one they know will be one of journeying into darkness. But because they know, they agree, and can prepare, it becomes possible to

aim for a meaningful and challenging game rather than one that is always pleasurable.

Ongoing Consent Process

Because of the tone and themes of the game, it was important for us to have clear and ongoing consent for players to participate. Making sure that players consent reduces the chance that the play experience will demotivate players and induce reactance (Heeter, 1992). Ongoing consent also gives us more leeway to introduce difficult topics and themes without distressing players beyond what they can bear. Although the historical events were devastating, it is important to meet learners where they are.

Our ongoing consent process begins with the meta-structure of the game. *Rosenstrasse* is explicitly a voluntary game for adults. It may not be used with minors, nor must it ever be made mandatory. For example, we have agreed for the game to be used as an optional teacher training for instructors who want to better understand the Holocaust, but not for the game to be assigned in college classrooms. Although we know that once the game is released we lose control of how it is used, the game book contains explicit instructions that warn against ever requiring people to play the game.

Before play begins, we include calibration workshops to help players identify which storylines they most want to engage with, and to help players be aware of other participants' personal relationships to the Holocaust. As part of this, facilitators explicitly instruct participants that player experiences come before the game itself. Treating players as human beings first, and players second, helps maintain consent from the human beings to participate in the activity of the game.

Finally, consent is framed as an ongoing process throughout the game. Facilitators have explicit instructions for what to do if a player says they have to stop or take a break. They are instructed to support players in taking care of themselves, and have a written plan for what to do if one or more players drops out midway through. By having explicit instructions for facilitators, we do not leave it up to their personal judgment about whether or not to stop the game, and we reduce the mental cost to them of figuring out the necessary steps for taking care of their players as human beings.

Playing Relationships

Rosenstrasse asks players to take on the roles of pre-generated characters, rather than to create their own. Each character is designed not individually, but as part of a pair. Annaliese and Max, Kurt and Inge, and Klara and Josef are all married couples; Ruth and Izak are brother and sister, who are both married to non-Jews (played by the facilitator as needed). Figure 1 shows the relationships among the characters; note, each player takes the role of two characters, which is further discussed in the next section.

Players may not have prior knowledge about the Holocaust, an assumption which has been borne out in playtests. Instead, *Rosenstrasse* uses the characters' experiences to link between players' prior knowledge about human relationships, and new knowledge presented in the game. For example, Max and Annaliese must move into a much smaller apartment due to the Rental Relations Act. The players can link their understanding of the relationship between the characters to the facts of the Rental Relations act.

This design technique allows us to address the issue of *one-dimensionality*, because the character pairs serve as *contrasting cases* (Barron et. al., 1998). Contrasts *between* each pair of characters illuminates a different facet of life under the Reich. For example, siblings Ruth and Izak are part of a close, warm Jewish family, while Kurt and Inge are, on the surface at least, the perfect image of an Aryan couple. Annaliese and Max are economically vulnerable, while Klara and Josef begin the game as successful intellectuals. These differences of racial category, economic position, family status, and more help players see the diversity of Jewish life and resist reducing Jews to faceless victims. Players get to experience two of these different stories through the characters they play, and watch the other two play out as other players take center stage. Our game is not one-dimensional—it is eight-dimensional, and each character's story helps players reflect on the others.

Players can also contrast *within* each relationship to situate their characters in a larger social system. For example, we observed that players contrast siblings Ruth and Izak in ways that help them understand the social structures of the Reich. When describing their frustration at how Ruth and Izak are treated differently because of their gender, players become able to articulate how racism and sexism interacted under Nazi rule. This design choice helps address the problem of lack of context in Holocaust-related games.

Playing Two Characters

In *Rosenstrasse*, each player has two characters: one male, one female. Izak, Ruth, Max, and Josef begin the game knowing they are Jewish, while Kurt and Klara discover their Jewish classification during play. Every player therefore has at least one female character, and at least one Jewish character. The character pairings are decided in advance. For example, the person playing Annaliese is also the person playing Izak. At the beginning of the game, players participate in brief calibration activities to help the facilitator decide which player gets which pair of characters. See Figure 1 for which characters are assigned together.

Players can compare and contrast not only between the two characters in each relationship, and between the four relationships represented, but also between the two characters they are assigned. This helps address the issue of one-dimensionality. Players get to experience characters

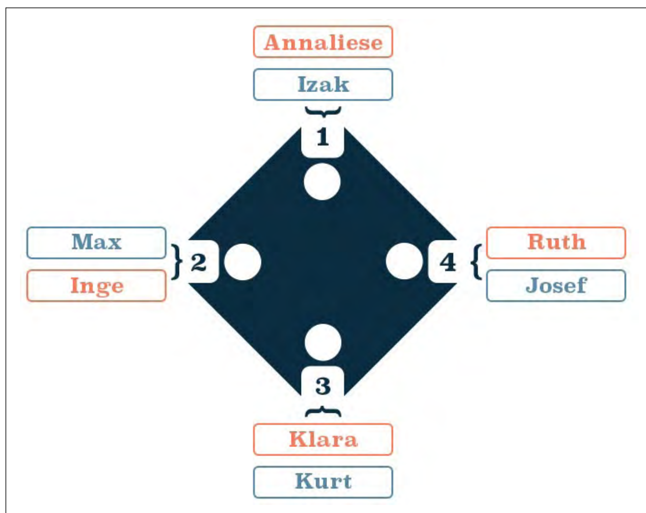

FIGURE 2. Character assignments at the table.

with two very different stories. For example, Kurt and Klara are played by the same player. Both characters discover during play that they are classified by the Reich as *mischling*, or partially Jewish, despite having through of themselves as non-Jews all their lives. However, the characters are in very different social situations. Kurt is deeply invested in the ruling regime, including depending on them for his paycheck. Klara has rejected the implicit assumption of Aryan superiority in order to embrace secular humanism and the life of the mind. Although the player has the freedom to decide how these two characters respond to their different situations, the player can use those differences in their situations to deepen and reflect on their own character-related decisions.

Finally, having two characters helps address the issue of over-identification. Players cannot claim they know how it "really" was, because they are faced with not one but two experiences of the story. There is no single story, only a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. Additionally, players must repeatedly switch back and forth between the perspectives of their two characters. They rarely have the chance to play the same character for two scenes in a row, except during the protests when the focus is on the women. This helps create psychological distance between the player and their characters, which can help prevent them from becoming inappropriately enmeshed.

Situation and Prompt Design

On the surface, the scene cards of *Rosenstrasse* are deceptively simple. Each card includes instructions about which characters are affected by the card, a few sentences of text setting up the situation, and a concluding prompt that asks players to respond. However, there are very specific design principles for creating these situations and prompts that help us address the challenges of Holocaust education games.

First, we use the design of the situation cards to embed history into the situation, so that the players can respond to the prompt from a position of *human* rather than *historical* expertise. For example, one situation card explains that Max and Annaliese are not permitted in the bomb shelters because Max is Jewish—a fact players did not need to know before being presented with the situation. The prompt then asks the players to explore how Max and Annaliese comfort one another while hiding in a coal cellar. It deliberately does not ask them to figure out where to hide, because that would take historical knowledge. However, loving and comforting one another needs only their knowledge of how humans behave. This reduces the chance of historical misconceptions, because players are primarily improvising human interactions and not the history.

Second, situations and prompts deliberately limit the character's agency, and hence the players' expectations of what characters can accomplish. The Max/Annaliese situation described above is one example of this; Max and Annaliese can neither stop the bombs from falling nor remove themselves from vulnerability, only respond by loving one another. Another example is our Kristallnacht scene, directed to intellectuals Klara and Josef. The scene does not take place *during* Kristallnacht, which might invite players to think they can intervene. Instead, it takes place in the aftermath. Klara and Josef must decide whether to invite social censure by helping a Jewish business owner recover from the destruction of her shop. No matter what they choose, they cannot stop the violence, only respond to it.

Finally, the situation cards are not uniformly tragic or gloomy. As described above, our desired player experience includes the ordinary joys and struggles of a marriage, right alongside the restriction of civil rights and the fear of death. Scene cards have a canonical order to them; although some cards can be skipped depending on the choices the players make, cards are never played out of order. This allows us, as designers, to control the emotional flow of scenes. The early parts of the game include more scenes of joy, pleasure, relief, and love. These scenes tell the players what the characters have to lose. For example, Inge swells with pride when her son receives an award and her husband publicly credits her for all her work with the home and children. This makes future threats to these aspects of her life credible. Later in the game, the challenging prompts come thick and fast, as the characters experience persecution and must make more and more difficult choices.

Designing for Complicity

In the second act of the game, a new mechanic is introduced: complicity cards. A pair of cards is handed to one player. That player must read both cards and choose which to inflict on someone else. Narratively, the scenes depicted on the cards are scenes where ordinary Germans reinforce

or enforce the values of the regime. For example, in the complicity card directed to Max, Max takes a risk to take Annaliese on a special treat—a movie, which Jews are not allowed to attend. Someone, we don't know who, reports them, and Max must deal with the consequences.

The design of this mechanic reflects the narrative content. Although all other scenes are directed to particular characters, these cards are directed to *players* rather than to characters. The player, as a human being, takes on the role of the regime. They cannot hide behind "it's what my character would do," nor blame the facilitator. They must pick between two difficult and hurtful situations, and they must own that choice. The discomfort this produces is meant to help players recognize what it means to be complicit.

This design choice helps address the problem of lack of context. While the players are taking the role of two main characters, complicity cards force them to engage with the larger social forces that enable the persecution. They also force them into the roles of less sympathetic characters. It is relatively easy to see oneself in a Jewish man who is persecuted by the regime, or a heroic non-Jewish woman who stands up against it. It is less easy and comfortable to see oneself in the block leader who reports on Jewish misbehavior, or the Nazi officer who exploits the situation for sexual predation. This helps players not over-identify with their central characters—because the game asks them to take on many roles, and not all of them are comfortable ones.

Complicity is represented in other scenes as well, even when the players are not asked to take on the roles of the complicit. For example, Klara and Josef must decide whether to help a local woman recover from *Kristallnacht*, as described above. What makes it a difficult decision is that they are being watched by others. To do the kind, compassionate, community-oriented thing would ordinarily be obvious—but the cost is that they don't know who is looking, and what those people will do as a result. This theme is reinforced by a game element known as risk tokens. If the male characters come to the attention of the Reich, they receive tokens that help determine their eventual fate. There is a mechanical impact to "who is watching you."

Finally, complicity is designed into Kurt and Inge's entire storyline. These two characters begin the game affiliated with the Reich in a number of ways—philosophically, familially, emotionally, and pragmatically. After Kurt is defined as a *Mischling* by the regime—Jewish enough to be persecuted, if not quite Jewish enough to be murdered yet—he and Inge must find a way to reconcile their social position and commitments with this new classification by the state. These are reflected in specific scenes offered to these characters. For example, Inge is pressured by her family to divorce Kurt, while Kurt is offered the chance to serve as an orderly and round up other Jews. The players playing out these scenes get to grapple with these questions from the inside. However, because the two other players (and the facilitator) are *watching* these scenes, they also get to see complicity with the regime explored.

Facilitation Guidance

Despite all these design decisions, we recognize that playing *Rosenstrasse* can lead players into tricky historical or game-related situations. We therefore thought it was important to make *Rosenstrasse* a facilitated game. However, we did not want to require the facilitator to be a history expert or a veteran role-player. We therefore created a facilitation guide for the game, from pre-game workshops to post-game debriefs.

The facilitation guide needed to accomplish three things. First, it needed to help less-expert role-players successfully facilitate the game. Second, it needed to support facilitators who were less expert with the history. Finally, it needed to reduce the cognitive load of running the game so that facilitators could focus on player interaction.

We accomplished these goals by separating the facilitator guide into two sections. First, we wrote an overview of the different game elements and components. This section included descriptions of the different card types (e.g. scene cards versus complicity cards), as well as visual illustrations of the physical game elements with pointers about how to use them. Second, we created a full walkthrough of the game full of just-in-time information about what the facilitator should do, from workshops all the way through to debriefs.

In the walkthrough section, the facilitator always has the information they need in front of them. For example, although we have a card deck with each scene printed on a card, we reprint the cards in the facilitator's guide. That way they do not have to remember the scene after they hand the card to players; they can still see it in front of them.

Alongside each card, we include explicit instructions for the facilitator about things they should do or not do. For example, some cards are optional and can be discarded based on player choice. This is explicitly called out at the top of the page: "If X, then immediately discard this card and draw the next one." If the facilitator has to play a character in the scene, they are told what character to play, along with guidance about how that character should behave. For some scenes, there are common historical misconceptions that come up, for example that a Jewish family would have access to a telephone (they would not). The facilitator receives explicit instructions for how to respond if the players try to introduce these common historical inaccuracies, including scripts for what to say and ideas for what they can offer instead. This explicit instruction, given at the same time that the facilitator will have to actually run the scene in question, reduces cognitive load because the facilitator does not have to remember it from scene to scene.

Finally, alongside each scene we provide design notes for what the scene is trying to accomplish. That helps facilitators improvise when players do something unexpected—as players will always do in the context of these open-ended role-playing experiences. Because facilitators know *why* the scene is happening, it can help them decide *what* to do. Taken together, all these things help the facilitators correct historical misconceptions and manage player expectations about what is and isn't possible for their characters.

After the game is complete, facilitators run a debrief session for players. Typically, these sessions become lively discussions about what was historically accurate and what might not have been. In our playtests, we have observed that many groups immediately begin researching the events of *Rosenstrasse* and the lives of intermarried Jews under the Reich. We therefore include resources for the facilitator to support player-led research and allow players to correct their own historical misconceptions, rather than requiring the facilitator to have expert knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have synthesized eight challenges for historical role-playing games that engage the Holocaust across four domains: challenges of history, challenges of character, challenges of agency, and challenges of experience. We then explain the analog role-playing game *Rosenstrasse*, and demonstrate how design decisions from the game address the eight challenges we identified. We believe that this work can be of service to other game designers who seek to address the Holocaust in their work, and can serve as a model for Holocaust educators to evaluate the educational appropriateness of specific proposed games. We look forward to seeing further design work in this space.

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