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simulation ludology death resurrection funeral runes immersion community symbols salvation mage xbox 360PVE
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Special Issue

**Current Key Perspectives
in Video Gaming and Religion.**

by

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Video games, religious education, and literacy in comparative religion:

I am interested in how game systems can enhance formal and informal learning environments in the areas of religion and culture. The bulk of my work is in how game systems can be used to improve formal and informal learning environments. In particular I have been investigating teaching history and more recently, religious legal systems. My game *Jewish Time Jump: New York* is a mobile augmented reality GPS game for teaching modern Jewish history on site in Greenwich Village. Players take on the role of time traveling journalists who land on the eve of the Uprising of 20,000, the largest women-led strike in U.S. history. They receive images and artifacts from the places they stand, but from over a hundred years in the past. They can take on disguises and roles as they try to find a story "lost to time." The game explores immigrant history, women's history, labor history and Jewish history. Game play includes examination of digital artifacts including primary sources and ephemera and players interact with digital characters from the time period. In *Jewish Time Jump: New York*, (Gottlieb 2015a) I sought to build a vibrant environment in which students could dig deep in the historical sources on site at the locations.

Today, I am working with a team to build a game currently under the codename "Purple" to teach medieval religious legal systems in the context of community. The game is a tabletop strategy card game to be adapted for mobile devices. Just as games are rule-based systems, so are religious legal systems (Gottlieb interviewed by Strauss 2012, Gottlieb 2015). In the case of this game, we are working on modeling a community and the various responsibilities in the community. Civil religious law dictates behavior among neighboring players, but players have the chance to decide how they behave, while knowing the law. They can follow the law or break the law, while trying to keep their

family and community both afloat. Through the game system we seek to model the competing interests of individuals within a tightly bound community. Using researched historical and cultural milieus, the game is intended to provide a basis for deeper exploration of the time period, culture, and context of the law.

What methods and research questions do you recommend?

My research in games is most often centered on learning environments and the acquisition of cultural practice. I seek new learning theory and design knowledge to enhance formal and informal learning environments. Given the nature of the questions that I ask, I most often use design-based research (DBR). DBR is an umbrella category of research methods comprised of pragmatically selected mixed methods. DBR holds media and learning theory as suspect during a course of field iterations, data gathering analysis, and return to theory. For example, I will begin with learning theory and develop an initial pilot game which I will bring into the field and test with learners, gather data, analyze data, return to the theory and make changes and shifts to move closer to the learning goals. Then we repeat the cycle, working towards better learning outcomes and revision of the theory based on what I learn through observing learners.

Some of the kinds of mixed methods I use include participant observation (including video and audio), pre and post surveys, semi-structure interviews, review of server logs of player choices and movements, analysis of table talk, analysis of design artifacts (when learners participate in design workshops). Key to the outcomes of the research methods are providing warrants for claims and providing context, as each learning environment is unique. Hoadley (2013) states that DBR is particularly suited to highly contextualized settings in which people have agency.

Because it is so challenging to develop engrossing games that also includes learning objectives, I have shifted towards particular aspects of religious civilization that are suited to games, namely laws. Elsewhere (Gottlieb 2015b), I have argued of the relationship between rabbinic literature and game systems. Particularly relevant to choice of methods is my need to both iterate the design artifact in the learning environment and to be able to observe and analyze the processes that learners go through during play.

Do scholars have to play a game to analyze it?

Do film scholars have to actually watch a film in order to analyze it? Should a philologist actually read ancient manuscripts? Should a sports writer covering baseball have at some point in the past actually played a game of ball? We expect scholars and critics of various media to fully engross in that media. We expect anthropologists to live and hangout among the people about whom they write. Not having played a game does not preclude discussing the game, but if the game is central to the argument or analysis, then a first hand knowledge of the gameplay is ideal. Analysis of a game from the scholarly perspective should expect at the least a deep understanding of the mechanics, procedures, and a variety of play scenarios.

There are cases in which film scholars cannot watch the films about which they write, because in some cases the films are lost forever, as is the case with many silent films. In those cases, scholars go to great lengths to recover photographs, scripts, on-set accounts. Similarly, many video games today can no longer be played. There are not functional emulators for many video game systems of the past, and even with emulators,

[v=G4R2p3pWxCw](#), accessed 15 December 2015.

Strauss, E., 2012. Torah Games and the Future of Learning: Kids Can Learn More From Games Than You Think. *The Forward*, [online] 25 August. Available at <http://forward.com/articles/161502/torah-games-and-the-future-of-learning/?p=all#ixzz24I9FDOqK>, accessed 15 December 2015.