

THESIS

AFFORDANCE ALTERATION IN THE CONTEXTS OF VIDEOGAME COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

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This study analyzes a group of players within the online video game Grand Theft Auto 5 in the context of their relationships to affordances within the game and how they alter these affordances to curate the game to their desires. The group within this study has a rigid social hierarchy and limits their available affordances through the game for a more intimate knowledge of its functions and increased senses of accomplishment through group play.

This study utilizes Gibson's affordances to explain the relationship between player and world, social identity theory to examine the group dynamic and its impact on conceptualization of self and group, media system dependency theory to unravel the motivations of the players, and CTDA to analyze the group's utilization of the platform as a place for community gathering and meaning making. This study was conducted through 1:1 interviews with members of the group to understand their interactions, feelings, and motivations behind their restrictive brand of play and the difference between the spirit and the word of the rule set.

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INTRODUCTION

Rules and restrictions are often considered synonymous with monotony and boredom. Because of this, one may assume that increasing limitations on gameplay would make the process less enjoyable. On the contrary, rules and limitations can make tasks more interesting. To take a provided platform, place, artifact, etc., and make it your own; most things in life are but blank canvases, ready to be impressed upon. Your journey is your own, the tools and artifacts have been provided but it's up to you to create with the world around you. This is especially true in mediated spaces where almost anything can be altered.

The people described in this project willingly set limitations upon themselves, overlaying a preexisting medium of activity. For example, a rock-climber training on a wall may challenge themselves to complete the route without using their feet, called campusing. This is seemingly done to both get a better upper body workout as well as to signify to themselves (and others) that they can do it. In a similar fashion, cyclists are sometimes seen riding their bikes without using any hands; without an in-depth analysis, the motivations for this are of a wide variety. Either using their hands for their affordance for something different, to keep them warm on a cold day, or to just show off and claim mastery of the bike. The phenomenon of implementation of affordance alteration can be seen often. For instance, when people challenge themselves to do something as fast, efficiently, or even as inefficiently as possible. This can range from something as simple as chopping an onion in seconds, bringing all the groceries in with one trip, breaking the world record completion time on Super Mario 64, or even beating Halo in its hardest rendition, LASO (legendary difficulty, all skulls on).

“That’s the beauty of the game, there is no wrong way to play” – Settled, 2021

Affordance Alteration

Within the context of communication literature, ‘affordances’ are defined as reflections of possible relationships amongst actors and objects within a space; they are considered properties of the world (Gibson, 1979). They can be described as the tools and technology that surround us, able to be utilized for their respective purposes within those spheres. The act of affordance alteration, then, is to be defined as an individual willingly changing their use of available tools and technology whilst partaking in a game or activity. In video games, these affordances can be any object the player is allowed to interact with (or that interacts upon the player), from specific outfits and items to whole swaths of land.

Rationale and Overview

Investigating the sense of accomplishment that players can find from partaking in self-imposed challenges can help us understand the ways in which some players engage with and find enjoyment in games, specifically in groups. Players akin to the ones examined in this project implement both self- and socially- imposed restrictions to alter their gameplay. Potentially to make the game more interesting, challenging, immersive, or generally enjoyable for themselves. To further detail the motivations of the players discussed in this project, we can turn to Quantic Foundry (an organization that specializes in player engagement and motivation within games, both virtual and physical). Their gamer motivation profile and breakdown are extremely useful tools to denote the audience of game genres and their titles. For this project, it helps name the audience to which such challenges of affordance alteration are more likely to entice. There are three overarching groups within their motivation profile of gamers according to Yee (2012): Action-Social, Mastery-Achievement, and Immersion-Creativity. This project seeks to combine them in a novel way compared to their traditional use. The players in question are believed to

exist at the synthesis of all these categories in some way or another (which will be explained later, within the literature review). An overarching ordered classification for these players could be a “Social-Mastery-Creative” motivation as they are individually defined by Yee (2012). The scope of this project is that of analyzing players that alter their affordances and utilize a social group to do so (Social). This process is seemingly done to deepen the players’ interaction with and knowledge of the game (Mastery), as well as the alterations themselves requiring some favorability of creative play to create and abide by (Creative).

Should a player present their challenge to the public in any way, some may see the affordances the player altered and decide to join in, altering their play style to try their skill at the same trial. The concept could be somewhat akin to trauma bonding (Olf, 2012), where it is proposed that people who go through stressful events together find a further sense of bonding than others, but what difference does it make when this ‘trauma’ is a chosen one? Self-imposed limits not only make things more interesting for the player but, as we’ll see, people seem to enjoy watching said player grapple with affordance alteration as well, harboring the potential to create a community of interest (Armstrong, 2000) around this tribulation.

Video game groups are built upon, and usually revolve around, the platforms provided to them by the game worlds they are based in. These groups work together to reach goals and gather resources to the best of their collective abilities, in this case with added restrictions. Videogames can provide third spaces that can promote a vibrant social structure and sense of belonging within said space, even one about being a renegade such as GTA (Grand Theft Auto) Online. This claim runs parallel to the classic “bowling alone” claim by Putnam (2000) that mediated experiences were lessening the consistency and value of human connection and social

capital that could, in his time, only come from in-person events. Social capital is defined by Putnam as:

Connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them... social capital calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (Putnam, 2000, p. 19)

The distinction between social capital in the present day as opposed to the days of yore is made within the integration of the internet into our social lives (and our videogames), even simple pastimes have become potential networked experiences. There is now some semblance of social capital to be had in their participation with the capability to play in solidarity rather than solitarily. Multiplayer games can be played within potentially flourishing social groups with hundreds of millions of players logging into several MMO's daily (MMO Population, 2021) and utilizing them as places to gather and be merry (i.e. third spaces). One group in particular, The Gorilla Kings, caught the attention of this researcher because of their unique interactions with implementing rules and affordance alteration in their community that plays a game based on rule breaking, Grand Theft Auto.

Grand Theft Auto and Los Santos

Grand Theft Auto (GTA) is an action-adventure game series developed by a company that is now known and referred to as Rockstar Games. The first iteration of this series was released in 1997 and almost immediately made a name for itself as the gameplay is generally true to its nomenclature (Grand Theft Auto being an American legal denotation for felony car theft). The story mode of these games is generally guided but an open world experience where the

players are prompted to run around completing various missions (usually of criminal intent) for non-player characters (NPCs) in order to climb the criminal ladder of the respective city the game is set in (Rockstar, n.d.).

Because of the series' well-known relationship with violence, these games are often used as the general call-to and scapegoat for anyone trying to epitomize video game violence as problematic as these actions are rewarded throughout the game (Borchard, 2015). In one recent instance, Grand Theft Auto was placed under fire for a rash of carjackings that was happening in Illinois (Clingenpeel, 2021). Claims like these are nothing new for the series, as it was declared the most consistently controversial video game series in history by Guinness World Records. They cited that as of July 2008 there were more than 4,000 news stories on the game as well as over 20 lawsuits through the United States legal system against the creators since its release (Guinness World Records, n.d.).

While the series does come with a large side of violence with your “Two number 9s, a number 9 large, a number 6 with extra dip, a number 7, two number 45s, one with cheese, and a large soda” (Harmon, 2004) (this is a GTA quote that achieved meme status), there's much more to be had within the game world aside from murder and mayhem. Art imitates life and videogames are an art form, there's a lot to be said within the realm of social commentary in the writing of GTA as its dystopian presentation of reality can help us make sense of our own (Ouellette, 2021). There's also an online element making way for the social “betterment” of GTA players, so long as they pay the attention necessary (betterment being subjective, there is always a possibility for toxicity in online play and these interactions are not rated).

In 2013, within the release of the seventh iteration of main series games in GTA (GTAV), there came an online portion called Grand Theft Auto Online (GTAO). They are both

based in the same location, San Andreas (like the fault line), and the setting is a satirical take on modern day Southern California with the capital city being Los Santos (as in Los Angeles). Some characters from the offline story mode make appearances in missions etc. to give the two a more cohesive feel. Having over seven hundred and fifty logged hours within the game, it is from a place of experience that it's claimed that while still brimming with chaos and crime, GTA0 unfolded a new chapter of GTA in its potential for camaraderie with fellow players as opposed to only working with NPC (non player characters) teammates. While gameplay is still mostly comprised of crime, in GTA0 you have potential to be organized about it. GTA0 affords players to start two different types of syndicates to raise their funds and "clout"; the "above board" business organization (where players can steal, upgrade, and resell cars as well as deal in armaments and the finer things in organized crime such as art and jewelry) and the more underground motorcycle club (featuring the sales of various drugs, forged documents, and roughing up rival NPC biker gangs to gain supplies and show them who runs this town) (Martin, 2015). There are some activities that both types of groups can do, but each comes with their own stigma and aesthetic feel of play as they influence how you interact with the world around you in the vehicles and real-estate space available for you through them. Motorcycle clubs have their missions start at stereotypical biker-gang hideouts with the biker bar atmosphere complete with a dartboard, posters, murals, and garage [Appendix B].

Some players take their positions a little more seriously than others but in essence, GTA is a game about breaking rules and destroying things in the most unrealistic ways possible, which is where the Gorilla Kings come in. The Gorilla Kings Motorcycle Club (GKMC) is a multinational motorcycle club within GTA0 that has a strict set of bylaws outlining affordance alterations and explicit rules that its members are expected to follow. There's a hierarchy of

membership involving over ten roles for their members, they have weekly meetings, and have been around for nearing five years at the time of research. With this group and their relationship with rules in mind, the idea for this project came to fruition.

Gamers, et al.

Anyone who experienced the “New Normal” within the COVID pandemic has somewhat of an idea of what an online community can do for a social psyche when needed. As will be shown in this paper, the players immersed within these online realms experience them as “real”, there’s nothing faux about these communities. Online games can serve as a neutral ground and meeting space, participants are free to log in and out as they please and their lives allow. These games also work as social levelers insofar as these spaces do not disclose identifying factors of the person playing, from income to disability to someone’s past (Steinkuehler, 2006). The same reasons parents often tell their children not to talk to strangers online is the same reason that these online groups work so well. In these online spaces, one can essentially start over and join or create their own social structures, typically around a shared experience. Some will implement alterations, providing an additional focal point as a structure and reason to play more advanced than to just make money, these rules have brought these players together.

The group that exists in this space will be examined through their alterations of the affordances of the game platform and its social structures and cultural creation within such. Affordance theory (Gibson, 1979) argues that the mechanical systems of an environment have a powerful influence on how users perceive their options and actions affordances being defined as “Reflect(ing) possible relationships among actors and objects, properties of the world. Conventions, conversely, are arbitrary, artificial, and learned” (Norman, 1999, p. 42). This approach highlights the importance of not only the social norms and roles of the group, but also

the structure of the environment itself in terms of features such as game mechanics, character design, and visual representations.

To study this group, a textual analysis of their public website was conducted to understand the explicit power structures at play, followed by interviews to gain information sought about the players' relationships with the affordance alterations in play. These will consist of the same questions across the board, with slight adjustments in nomenclature to accommodate for the hierarchical position of the interviewee.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring and explaining the rationale behind how and why players alter affordances is both relatively novel and important. There have been projects that explain player-game interaction in accordance with topics such as player motivation (Yee, 2012), player-avatar relationships and social structures (Bowman, 2021), as well as social influence on experience (Eklund, 2015). How players alter the games to fit their gameplay desires, though, is particularly understudied. To argue the importance of studying this particular phenomenon, we shall start by using exemplary instances of other game related communities in which affordance alteration is utilized to get a baseline of where this research is coming from and where it will impact. These are all to show that the concept of restricting yourself and what you can do in a game, whether sanctioned by the developers or not, entices players of all genres of games.

Genres of games are similar to genres of music in general appeal to their target audiences. There are many available genres, some people play a wide variety and others stick to the one they like the most. There are documented connections between genres and players as researched by Quantic Foundry (2012) [Appendix C], but there is no set rule of who enjoys what. Consistent with this, no matter the genre and game, there is probably an affordance alteration available and documented within it. The most basic example of altering gameplay is the developer implementation of difficulty levels to be chosen by the player within games, i.e. easy, medium, and hard. Some games and gamers, though, go above and beyond with their alterations of gameplay based on these difficulties.

History of Games Studies as a Social Experience

Video games as they exist today can be useful as a distanced social experience (Marston, 2020) and can lead to an increased sense of connectedness for those that engage in them with groups (Schell et al, 2016). This possibility has come about on the heels of the single player dominated era of early home consoles that did not possess internet capability. Considering the phenomenon of amusement arcades full of game cabinets by Atari, Nintendo, Sega etc., social capital is not necessarily a new thing within video games. Before the internet became more widespread, some consoles still had mild capabilities to connect to one another through Local Area Networks (LAN), but this required all players to be in close proximity (within the length of a cord). The notable development comes from the ability to network at a distance.

As video games became more prominent parts of society, they began to be analyzed as experiences, texts, and narratives (Consalvo, 2006) by those that consider them such and worthy to have been analyzed (Juul, 2000; Banks, 1998; Kinder 1991). These studies have looked at everything from portrayal of women (Kennedy, 2002), to avatar-player relationships and exploration of self (Bowman, N. D., & Banks, J, 2021), as well as the ability to learn and retain information through VR play (Downs, 2022). The social structures able to be formed within games, especially MMO's, have also been studied essentially since their conception in the mid 90's (Bartle, 1996). What started as limited contact between players in what were dubbed "MUD's" (multi-user dungeons) and eventually expanded into MMO like games such as the seminal pieces of EVE Online and Star Wars Galaxies (both released in 2003). Connected ways of gaming started as ways to engage with offline friends in mediated spaces, which gave way to the rise of online gaming as a social experience.

Within the studies that have analyzed the social structures within online gaming, there are many facets of focus. For instance, virtual ethnographies of cultures within these spaces (Herring, 2004), social experiments of space and group interaction (Martey, Consalvo, 2011), as well as social identification and differentiation as evident through avatar creation and play (Bowman, Banks, Downs, 2021). Within the COVID-19 pandemic, there have also been strides made within this space as people of all demographics utilized these online spaces for social interaction (Marston, Kowert, 2020). What was held by some as a waste of time on your screen quickly became a lifeline of social stimulation amid the virus. Despite the pandemic creating a space for these groups to become more mainstream, they have existed for many years beforehand, as mentioned.

The novel route of this study is the approach of studying how the players themselves alter the game, but only socially. There have been studies in this space on how players alter the code of the game they play through the act of modding or finding hacks to change their character or the game itself (Fuller, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Whelan, Kapell, 2020) to affect their experience. This is quite different as these players restrict themselves whilst leaving the ability to play without hindrance open, but choosing not to do so as to abide by the social contracts they've engaged in.

Affordances, Real and Imaginary

Originally defined by Gibson, “the *affordances* of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill” (p. 127) (emphasis in original). Affordances are all around us, they are in our public infrastructure, our natural spaces, our homes; the list is only limited to one's imagination. There are a few caveats included in using the term “affordance” though. Due to the loose structure of application and the term's explanatory

power with technological impact and influence, it has become a buzzword in communication technology studies (Shaw, 2017). Shaw also claims that the term's existence has deterministic roots but does not exist within a deterministic sphere in use, the social utility side being more prevalent in the field of communication (Shaw, 2017).

Affordances, Offline

Gibson first metaphorized affordances in reference to the natural world and how we have altered aspects of the planet based upon its utility to us and our perceptions. Humans have taken the world's resources and reshaped them to better fit our needs, for better or worse (p.129). This human-centric reshaping of our environment, the creation of mixed metals and distillation of minerals into fossil fuels are original examples of affordance alteration. "Why has man changed the shapes and substances of his environment? To change what it affords him. He has made more available what benefits him and less pressing what injures him" (Gibson, 1979, p. 130). In essence, this is the concept of the adage of lemons and lemonade. People are able to manipulate their surroundings to have them better fit their needs. Gibson also makes classifications of affordances into mediums, substances, surfaces, objects, animals and persons. Within the realms of video games, animals and persons will not be covered as the affordances do not relate to a digital world.

Affordances lead us to define objects by their use, rather than their qualities, for example: "a rigid object with a sharp dihedral angle, an edge, affords cutting and scraping; it is a *knife*. It may be designed for both striking and cutting, and then it is an *axe*" (Gibson, 1979, p.133) (emphasis in original). Games with structure don't often have objects that are used for unintended or unobvious affordances, but sometimes they come to light. For instance, some of the Gorilla Kings have learned to use sniper rifles to counter plane or helicopter warfare.

Affordances associated with the medium are the spaces that are navigated about to do something, Gibson uses the air as an example. Air affords us respiration, it affords us sight on clear days, the ability to move about freely between solid objects and obstacles. For the video game world, the medium would be the game being played. Substances are things with a little more physicality and utilization to them. The example in Gibson's piece is of the human to water relationship.

Water is more substantial than air and always has a surface with air. It does not afford respiration for us. It affords drinking ... Being a solvent, it affords washing and bathing.

Its surface does not afford support for large animals ... (p. 131)

Substances in the gaming realm would be items that the player can interact with. Water in games can be both a medium and substance depending on how integrated the player is to this environment. Clay is also an example as it is a solid existing within the world and a malleable substance to fit one's needs (Gibson, 1979). Identifying substances involves perceiving "what can be done with it, what it is good for, its utility; and the hands are involved" (p.131). For a digital medium, we must take some liberties with the definition of hands in this case, but the essence of alteration and creation are the same. Surface affordances are those that provide or limit mobility through the landscape. Where a cliff face is difficult to scale, humans have made stairs within them to afford us the ability to maneuver through them with ease. With the base descriptions down, we may move to the integration of imagination.

Imagining a World

For this adaptation of affordances, we turn to Nagy and Neff (2015), "Imagined affordances emerge between users' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations; between the materiality and functionality of technologies; and between the intentions and perceptions of designers" (p. 5). In this definition and acknowledgement, we can find aspects of mediated

experiences that are invisible to users. Users can create their own worlds within the pre-constructed environment of a game. To call back to Gibson,

this is not a *new* environment – an artificial environment distinct from the natural environment – but the same old environment modified by man. It is a mistake to separate the natural from the artificial as if there were two environments; artifacts have to be manufactured from natural substances. It is also a mistake to separate the cultural environment from the natural environment, as if there were a world of mental products distinct from material products (p. 130).

These players are not creating a new game through their affordance alteration, they are reimagining the world around them to further suit their gaming desires and goals. Based on their decisions of alteration and restriction of affordances, they recreate these relationships with the affordances provided to them and redefine what they even are. Since we define objects for what they do for us, a beater “Rat” bike becomes a necessity for and symbol of entry level membership to the Gorilla Kings.

Imagined affordances, as defined by Nagy and Neff (2015), include processes of analysis and resolve the contradiction of social to technological affordances. We can alter the affordances of the term to suit our use without the essence of constructivism. “Imagined affordance takes it as the communicative ground through which the meanings of technology are negotiated and renegotiated by users through perception, mediation, and materiality” (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 7). Thanks to this rework, we are allowed to make distinctions between intention and practice with these caveats and navigate the nature of human and technology interaction more thoroughly.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT) describes how people create senses of self in accordance with the groups they are members of (Tajfel, 1979). With SIT and senses of group belonging come the more common phrases of in-group and out-group (McLeod, 2019). This theory is useful for its explanatory power of the group members' behavior. While its predictive power has been in question (Hogg, 2000), it is of no mind as this study seeks to explain rather than predict. SIT also shows us that social psychology doesn't need to be a science solely focused on the individual (Turner, 1986). The theory outlines three stages of mental processes that group members go through when creating these in and out groups in their minds: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel, 1979).

Categorization

Categorization explains the concept that humans are cognitive misers; we will take the path of least resistance to categorize the world around us. We create boxes in our mind to be able to sort others into when we try to comprehend their existence easily, also known as schemata (DiMaggio, 1997). These can be any identifiers that we know they belong to. Utilizing this concept helps explain how members of a group may see the world around them, in terms of how the other differs from the in-group. Categorization can be akin to stereotyping (Smith, 199) and can lead to warped views of groups other than your own. This can be problematic online and off, but at least online any violent interactions are simulated.

Identification

The identification stage is when the individual starts to adopt the norms of the group that they have taken membership of. This can cause some cognitive dissonance, should the group have different beliefs than what the individual is used to (Tajfel, 1979). In this instance, it is

when the players in question start to define themselves as members of the Gorilla Kings and bikers as opposed to just GTA players. The dissonance may come from the alteration of gameplay and the content and affordances they are no longer allowed to use under normal gameplay circumstances. The requirement of consistent symbolic garb of members may help with this process in identifying both oneself as “in” and others as “out.”

Comparison

Finally, when the person has fully considered themselves as a part of the group, comes the comparison stage (Tajfel, 1979). This stage is when the individual starts to compare their group to that of others. This concept is key to understanding how out-group prejudice appears and operates, as if they are in consistent rivalry. If the self-esteem of one’s group is to be maintained, their group must be able to compare favorably with other groups (McLeod, 2019). While this concept has played out many a time throughout history and day-to-day life, we can apply it to current times in reference to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Kingsley & Sommerlad, 2022). Within one locale, there are people of two nationalities with invested interests in the area. Because of their national and political distinctions, they see each side as completely different from one another, locked in combat until one side’s resources are depleted. During a speech, Russian President Vladimir Putin even said that being considered part of Ukraine was “embarrassing” for the people of Crimea (Putin, 2022). A perfect example of the “us versus them” mentality that comes from the identification and comparison of a group of people.

Media System Dependency Theory

When seeking motivations for media use, media systems dependency theory (MSD) can be integral for explanatory power. This theory was first introduced by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur

in 1976 to attempt to analyze how and why people utilize their chosen mediums. They posited that users engage in their chosen media based on how fulfilling these users find said platforms to be, in accordance with the user's desires. The more needs that a platform satisfies for the user, the further they will rely on said media to satisfy them, thus creating a dependency of sorts. It should be noted that a dependency of this nature is not synonymous with addiction, per se. It is more akin to a preference of outlet for these needs. Rather than utilizing other means for socialization and play, they use their chosen media to ensure these needs are fulfilled within the third space of a game that they already know and enjoy. It should also be mentioned that this theory has other degrees of explanation and also seeks to provide media effects, but this will not be integrated within this study as it is not pertinent to the scope.

This theory uses sociological perspectives to analyze the social world surrounding said mediums and take them into account regarding the media's usage. As seen within other games research (Marston, Kowert, 2020; Yee, 2014), social aspects can be very important to those that play games online. There are three motivational goals set forth by MSD to explain how individuals develop dependency to their media, the attainment of such being named the user's goal scope (Ball-Rokeach, 1976). The first motivational goal is understanding, which incorporates a user's desire to understand the world around them in an informational sense as well as how they fit into it. The second is orientation, detailing the user's need to be able to properly position themselves within their surroundings in accordance with others within their social structure. Finally, is play, which is a user's need for entertainment and enjoyment from the medium (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Within the scope of this theory, it would be rational to argue that players utilize games as a medium to satisfy needs of socialization as well as entertainment, potentially through cathartic means.

Within the context of GKMC, these are especially interesting premises. GTA already satisfies all these criteria; the game itself gives the player context to understanding their physical world and affordances through the organization of said available affordances within the game world and tutorials of such. It also provides narrative orientation to the player through in-game cutscenes and dialogic information to help them understand their role within the social world around them. GTA, being a game, is also inherently a form of play, enjoyment, and immersion. For the group of GKMC there also exists an added layer, a layer that the group offers on top of these preexisting developer-afforded structures. The players and members within GKMC are effectively doubling down on their dependency through their overlay of affordance alteration and social structure.

Understanding and GKMC

Understanding is affected by their manipulation of affordances to create the biker gang experience. They are able to utilize the rules and social connotations created by this group to further situate themselves within the story world presented to them by Rockstar. This conceptually situates itself nicely within SIT as the players make divisive lines between the in and outgroup through these processes.

Orientation and GKMC

Orientation is informed by the overlay of the hierarchical social structure within this group. They not only are able to situate themselves within the outside world, they cultivate a sense of belonging within the group itself and create meaning and purpose through gameplay, whether that be to help their fellow members with deliveries, with fights in the game, or to further social bonds through the game.

Play and GKMC

Play is affected by their social constraints. The biker gang motif is overlaid atop the already immersive gameplay of GTA. By restricting the affordances already provided to them, the players are provided a more in-depth realm of play through somewhat of a roleplaying aspect. It provides a narrower path of play and thus seemingly gives more thorough reasoning to continue said play.

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) is a semi-recent addition to the technological researcher's toolkit introduced by André Brock in 2018. It is a methodological approach to analyze how mezzocultures operate and perpetuate their ideals within provided technological artifacts. While this method was created in analysis of the phenomena of "Black Twitter" and is typically found in a racialized context, it can be utilized within any space where the culture being examined is not representative of the majority (Brock, 2018). Since the group studied within this project are but a slim percentage of players, an estimated .001% (SteamCharts, 2022), it is within its means to utilize CTDA as a method. CTDA combines an analysis of the technological material and its design with analysis of cultural production and potential to contribute to a value laden digital community as well as the discourse of said community and impact on beliefs. CTDA offers its users spaces "to think about all three in parallel, using a conceptual framework interrogating power relations, in order to tease out the connections between them. This approach provides a holistic analysis of the interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice" (Brock, 2018, p. 1013). CTDA has explanatory power in the front and back end of research, providing "plug and play" frameworks to create research questions (*fig. 1, p. 31*), as well as an outline to describe the relationships

between the technological artifacts, belief systems held by the group in question, and how these interact with one another in practice.

Studies that utilize CTDA are centered in searching how communities online utilize the spaces, artifacts, and affordances given to them by the platform developers. One article by Pemberton and Takhar (2020) analyzes how Muslim fashion bloggers in France combat the negative stereotypes set in motion by Islamophobia as well as utilize their platforms to create discourse about religion, sexuality, and race (Pemberton & Takhar, 2020). This study also finds that these influencers are positioning themselves as “‘cyberarbiters’ of social transformation and shifting attitudes about the intersections of Islam, the body, and female sexuality.” CTDA has also been used to analyze the rhetoric of Taylor Swift and her creation of a movement in allyship of the LGBTQ+ movement in “#YouNeedToCalmDown” (Avdeeff, 2021). This particular study goes multimodal and tracks the movement across TikTok and Twitter, as well as analyzes the platform-specific cultural attempts and impacts of the movement (Avdeeff, 2021). It provides discussion surrounding the topics of online communities and affiliations, performative allyship, as well as cancel culture.

The utility of CTDA is in its descriptive abilities. It provides a framework for investigating how people use mediated platforms for cultural creation and alteration. It does so by analyzing the technology and interface and what it affords, how the technology is utilized by the group to perpetuate its ideals, and how these actions and practices influence the ideology of the members of the group.

There are a few caveats for being able to use CTDA in its intended sense; it is rooted in critical race theory and examines how socially disparaged cultures signify in spaces of their own. The approach requires the researcher to draw directly from the perspective of the group under

examination, decenter the dominant culture and investigate the group in question as value-laden creators of enterprise, as well as not utilize any rationalist theoretical approaches (Brock, 2018).

Affordance Alteration in the Wild

Many video game players alter their gameplay by restricting their available affordances to fit their liking. How these alterations manifest can vary wildly depending on the game they engage in and can be to simply increase difficulty, intensify immersion, or to shake up gameplay to experience something different within the same virtual world. Some alterations lend themselves more towards cooperative participatory social structures (Gorilla Kings, RuneScape Group Ironmen), others to a more observational community (Mittensquad, Settled), and some are more geared to solo experiences (RuneScape Ironmen/UIM, Metro 2033, Undertale).

Solo Play Alterations

Starting in the solo-play sector, some games allow the player to enable settings that limit gameplay which, when toggled, reduce the amount of information given to the player. This reduction of in-game information can increase immersion as well as difficulty. An example of this comes within a game called Metro: 2033 in a game mode the developers have dubbed “Ranger Hardcore” This game mode is one that removes the player’s Heads-Up-Display (HUD) that tells them about the game environment around them. This includes their inventory of healing items and weapons, equipped armor, and even the reticle in the middle of the screen to know where the player is aiming. Enemies and the player also do increased damage to one another, and ammunition is a scarcity to be saved for special occasions. When playing in this game mode, the player is at the mercy of their wits and reflexes as the player relies on their knife and tactical planning to maneuver themselves through to the end, increasing the immersive fear of the post-apocalyptic setting.

For those who wish to alter affordances to experience a game in a new way, Undertale is a prime example. This is a game that has already sparked a good amount of scholarly research for its writing and character development, player interaction with NPCs, and implementation of music (Ruberg, 2018; Seraphine, 2018; Perez, 2017, respectively). This is a story-driven 2d 8-bit game where the player fell into, and subsequently explores, an underground area below earth while encountering monsters and mayhem alike along the way. This game is a wonderful example of the player altering their gameplay while being encouraged by the developers to do so, as it rewards the player with witnessing a new “ending” for completing the game in different ways. Though there are three main ways to play through the game, “neutral”, “genocide”, and “passivist”, there are ninety-three total recorded endings for Undertale. For ease of access, here are a few overarching ending possibilities as defined by a Reddit account named Anti-DolphinLobby:

Genocide run: You kill every monster. You specifically seek out every monster in an area until you get the confirmation that there are none left.

No mercy run: You kill every monster that crosses your path (including bosses). You do not seek them out on purpose.

Civilian-genocide run: You kill all the normal monsters (completely clearing out the area, as in genocide run) but spare all the bosses.

Civilian-kill run: You kill all the normal monsters you encounter (as in no-mercy run) but spare all the bosses.

Neutral/Other run: You kill some bosses/monsters and spare other monsters/bosses. You don't fit in any of the other categories.

Boss-kill run: You spare all the normal monsters but kill all the bosses.

Pacifist run: You don't kill anyone in the game from start to finish.

Technical Pacifist/Pulling Punches run: You don't kill anyone in the game. You spare them...but you get them down to "spare" by fighting instead of acting, every time.

Part of the beauty of affordance alteration is there's no one way to do it; there is no gate to be kept. Change your interactions with the pre-existing artifact to suit your playstyle and desires.

While solo players will not be extensively researched within this project, their existence is part of the whole. It's simpler to alter your own affordances, there is no commitment. The playthrough can last as long as the player's attention span. When affordance alterations are implemented into a cultural setting, though, is where the proverbial fun begins.

Community Affordance Alterations

In the game Old School RuneScape (OSRS), players have several options to limit themselves when creating their character. The overarching category is called "Ironman". This title means that these players are unable to trade with any other player and thus need to collect all their materials, armor, and weapons themselves. In doing so, they potentially add thousands of hours more work to tasks that could be done in minutes with gold pieces by any regular account. There is an additional Hardcore Ironman status that means that these players cannot die, or they lose this status. Ultimate Ironman status adds that they also cannot use a bank (with the bank, pay to play accounts have eight hundred plus inventory spaces, free to play accounts have four hundred, and Ultimate Ironmen have 28 no matter what). These Ironmen statuses are worn as a badge of honor, symbolizing in-group membership of people who play the game "right." Players take up this challenge with pride and have even formed specific communities for themselves both within the game through clan chats and outside of the game in spaces such as Reddit. This

is also an example of developer sanctioned restriction as the developers instituted these game modes after feedback from the community requesting such an experience within the game.

To make this experience more social, a new Ironman status was released in October 2021 called Group Ironman, which is essentially the same as Ironman status, but you can trade within a selective group of people of your choosing with a maximum of five. Should you choose a Hardcore Group Ironman status, your lives are split between members in your group (five members means you will have five lives between you all until you lose your Hardcore status) (Jagex, 2021). This game mode affords players to create a sense of community within their restricted experience. In doing so, they are still able to experience the game in the more thorough Ironman way while also easing the amount of time spent doing menial tasks as you're able to disperse the work throughout your group and celebrate your victories with one another. There are several guides on how to break up the group's skill leveling processes to make it the most efficient, but at the end of the day each player plays how they'd like for their enjoyment.

There are also many content creators who have created communities surrounding the concept of affordance alteration, Mitten Squad and Settled for example. Mitten Squad became famous through the creation of a series called "Can You Beat" where he plays through video games without using core mechanics such as using (or not using) certain weapons, not allowing himself to take damage, or impacting himself in the real world. For instance, he has played altering object-based affordances (Gibson, 1979) within the story/combat-based "guns highly suggested" shooter *Far Cry 5* with only a shovel, the combat-based *Skyrim* with naut but a fork. He has also experimented with medium-based affordances (Gibson, 1979) with the combat oriented open world *Fallout New Vegas* with a Guitar Hero controller as well as attempting to beat every Wii Sports game (bowling, baseball, boxing, golf, and tennis) simultaneously with

controllers strapped to every appendage with zip ties (Paul, 2019A, 2019B, 2020A, 2020B).

Something that doesn't directly come to mind when one thinks of self-limitation in video games is the potential for social structure that may come along with this concept. Where the followers of the Mitten Squad gather to witness the struggle, some may band together to participate in it, so long as the game has multiplayer features that allow them to do so.

Settled is an Old School RuneScape streamer and YouTuber who has recently finished a series based on surface-based affordance alterations (Gibson, 1979) that took him nearly three years to complete (Settled, 2021). In this series, he started an Ultimate Ironman account that could not leave one specific region of the game (Morytania). Within this region lies one of the most difficult player-versus-monster "raids" in the game, he sought to go from the lowest level possible to finishing that raid without leaving this zone. The thirty-three-episode long series is full of tedious tasks that he had to complete to compensate for not being able to leave the area; his struggle helped map the zone more fully as well as discover new item drops from monsters that have otherwise been considered "dead content" and had not been fully explored or documented until his series began (Settled, 2019). This series sparked a passion in the OSRS community for mainstays, returners, and observers as well.

Gorilla Kings MC

The exemplary focus of this project exists in Grand Theft Auto Online. A group of players denoted the "Gorilla Kings" has created a cohesive family feel within a structured organization that is based upon the implementation of rules to alter affordances within a relatively lawless world. In a world where outer space is essentially the limit, they have set their own limits and carved out their own group experience from the Los Santos terrain. They have a hierarchy that effectively streamlines in-game missions and jobs for optimal monetary gain all the while

limiting the available weaponry and vehicles its members can use for the purposes of fun and immersion. Their bylaws read:

The GKMC uses all standard weapons. Handguns, ARs, Pump Shotguns, Tear Gas, and Molotov Cocktails. If you can legitimately buy it on the streets, you can usually use it.

The Gorilla Kings is an OMC, an Outlaw Motorcycle Club. Members must own and ride a bike that has the word Western or LCC in the name, no sports bikes. New approved vehicle lists, subject to change, you're approved IN MODERATION to use anything at or below the following ranks. When representing the crew all members ride classic western style motorcycles or custom choppers unless other vehicles are needed for missions, jobs, or war. Other club approved vehicles (for the sake of role-playing) include muscle cars, vans, off-road vehicles, and other mission-specific vehicles. Super-bikes and super-cars are acceptable for racing and getaways. All vehicles are acceptable to be driven in groups of 2 or less. Gorillas are Outlaw bikers, not clowns and hipsters. Dress like a badass (or dirt-bag); This upholds the spirit of the outlaw biker subculture, enriches gameplay, and it looks fucking cool (Gorilla Kings MC, n.d.).

These rules are meant to embody the immersive biker gang experience that this group attempts to recreate in this online space. Despite the vast amount of weaponry and vehicles available within the affordances provided by Rockstar within GTA5 Online, they limit the use of such useful affordances to their members. They are only able to utilize weapons that one could feasibly acquire on the streets with the connections a member of a biker gang would have. This increases the difficulty of gameplay, making combat a more group experience that requires tactics rather than reaching into the player's pocket and using a laser powered minigun to lay waste to oncoming players or NPCs. Through interviews it is hoped to learn if their alteration of

affordances has increased a sense of bonding between them and the impact of these on gameplay and time. They utilize the spaces given to them by Rockstar to make their gaming experience their own by overlaying restrictions above the explicit game affordances provided to them within the medium of affordance.

Third Spaces

The conceptualization and implementation of third spaces (Oldenburg, 1999) are generally used within the fields of education and psychiatry but have relevancy here in online spaces as well. Though, before dialogue of their relation begins, the distinction between a space and a place should be made. Borrowing from interior design and psychology (Nairn, 2016), a space is an area where people may gather and, like its galactic homonym, takes up a tangible location (being regarded as physical in nature). This may be a coffee shop, a classroom, an office, etc. A place is a space that has some sort of relationship or attachment for those within it or the space around it, whether that be someone's favorite rock on a beach, a biker bar within GTA, a popup hotdog stand, or an MMO (Nairn, 2016). Due to this distinction, calling online environments spaceless places would not be far off, as the members have an attachment and conceptualization to the locale, but it lacks any physicality. A sense of space for the players could be argued through a synthesis of transportation theory (Green, 2002) and excitation-transfer theory (Bryant, 2003). Transportation theory is a narrative theory that states that when people become enthralled into a story, their thoughts and actions begin to reflect those of the story they're engaging with. Excitation-transfer theory states that one's emotions can be linked with the associated stimuli experienced through a narrative experience. Both explain how people can get lost within games as their mentalities become wrapped up within the story. Anything short of an integration of

tactile VR, though, and there is no physical presence present. For further use and reference, they will be referred to as third places.

The concept of third places is used to describe places that are used to gather and operate in accordance with eight characteristics, according to Oldenburg (1999). The first characteristic of these third places is their ability to serve as neutral ground, meaning that the places are open for those to drop in and leave as they wish. They are public places to those that are members of the community as opposed to private and requiring an invitation. When speaking of third places within games, however, there may be invitation-only places within them, but the game world itself is there for anyone to drop in as they wish. Game-related third spaces are also not burdened, en masse, by time constraints or serious compulsion to participate. The second characteristic of these places is that they are considered social levelers (Oldenburg, 1999). This is to say that they remove any physical or offline social identifications from their members, all that is shown about the player is the avatar that they've created. Avatars can be as close or as far from the player's identity as they wish during creation. People are able to determine how they wish to be visually perceived by the community so long as it is in accordance with the character creation affordances provided by the developers. The importance of this characteristic cannot be understated as it provides an even ground for players of all socioeconomic statuses, ages, races, disabilities, and even heights to vie for the same community positions, power, social capital, etc.

Thirdly, these places carry a connotation for some that conversation is the main activity, an activity in which wit and playfulness are valued above all else (Oldenburg, 1999) These spaces are not meant to be rife with toxicity or entirely silent as the norm. Should they fall into either of those denotations, they will no longer hold the welcoming aesthetic necessary. For instance, in OSRS, players will often engage in what is called "bankstanding." Bankstanding is

exactly as it sounds, a player logs in simply to stand in a bank and either ‘people watch’ or participate in conversation (also known as “lurking” on other sites, i.e., Twitch). Most of these players will also be actively training their skills whilst talking, so long as said still doesn’t require mobility to train, which makes conversation the focus whilst the game is being played in the background. The fourth trait is that these places must be accessible and accommodating. This trait begins the distinction between third places and spaces. Third places, as used in this project, require access to technology and an internet connection; most require either an original purpose or a continued subscription. This means only those with monetary means can access them. A third space, being physical by nature, insinuates that it can be accessed by anyone so long as they know of its existence. In this sense, there is an argument to be had that third spaces could be more accommodating.

The fifth trait is the place’s regular players as a feature of the environment. These regular players (rather, the kind ones) may act as tour guides and escorts for the newcomers to facilitate their learning of the environment and foster a welcoming place that these new players would like to return to. An example of this can be found within the community of the MMO *Fallout 76*, created by Bethesda Game Studios. This game experienced heavy criticism upon release which hindered growth of the player base since. As a result, some players have become incredibly inclusive to compensate. Welcoming others to the world, dropping free gear, food, and water for new players, and even escorting them through quests (Bailey, 2018). For the sixth, there returns the distinction between third places and spaces. This is that these places have a low profile and are characteristically “homely and without presentation” (Oldenberg, 1999). In the classroom, this is often the case as teachers are careful to decorate enough to be interesting but not to the point of distraction. Online games, on the other hand, are known for their vibrant and interactive

atmospheres. This doesn't mean that they cannot be utilized as third places, it just means that there are more aspects to their existence that are meant to engage the player aside from community creation.

The seventh is that these places often feature a playful mood marked with frivolity, verbal word play, and wit (Oldenberg, 1999). This is especially true in online spaces as conversation often happens between several people with no known similarities to speak of, so communication is often about the happenings of the game or rife with community memes or trolling. This can manifest in saying things specifically to get a rise out of one another or find a conversational partner to engage in battles of wit to pass the time. Finally, the eighth is that these places can serve as a "home away from home" to its entrenched members. This means that they follow Seamon's five defining traits of "rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual regeneration, feelings of being at ease, and warmth" (Steinkuehler, 2006, p. 890). In a form of escapism, these places can provide reprieve for their members as they log in and let their daily stressors slip away amongst the robust online world. Upon satisfying these qualities, a space is considered welcoming within the theoretical definition of Oldenburg. The publics that have access to these places should feel comfortable enough there as if it were their own, despite having no owners.

Grand Theft Auto (as well as other games), despite being inherently hostile by nature, serves as a welcoming third place for the Gorilla Kings and others like them with attachments and social structures within the game. With its emphasis on a carefree, law-free, experience it also lends itself well to a place of banter and enjoyment. While there are loading screens which can be quite long, it is relatively easy to access for those that are able to. Who would have thought a place known for murder and mayhem could be so welcoming?

Goal and Research Questions

This project seeks to explore and explain players' relationships with affordance alterations in games, specifically in tandem with their group dynamic.

RQ 1: Why do players willingly alter their affordances?

RQ 2: How does a group dynamic impact the alternative gaming experience?

RQ 3: How do perceptions of alteration differ between players, even within the same group?

RQ 4: How do players see affordance alteration as signifying in-group membership?

RQ 5: What about affordance restriction is enticing enough to make it a main form of play?

METHODS

To analyze how some groups alter affordances within video game artifacts, this study ventured to where one of these groups (The Gorilla Kings) is located, the streets of Los Santos in Grand Theft Auto Online. This was a two-part study, in hopes that the first part of textual analysis would further inform the interview questions. These interview questions would be implemented in an interview setting to the second part, which is assumed to bear the most information on their experiences.

Textual analysis gives context to the ‘word of the law’, the way they present the rules in-text is important in their idealistic relationships with these rules. Textual analysis is defined as a researcher reading critically and making educated guesses in interpreting texts as they may be interpreted by members (McKee, 2016). We do so to attempt to gain insight into how they have made sense of the game world around them in accordance with these rules set forth, categorized as MSD’s theory of understanding (McKee, 2016). Interpretations were from the frame of the researcher and having a double check on rule implementation was useful for understanding.

Most of the content for textual analysis was within their bylaws page, coding for mentions of any affordance restricting rules and how they are to be implemented and enforced. Other useful pages for this analysis were their rules for advancement within the crew, the page outlining each role and its associated tasks and abilities, and the page outlining their table and riding formations to see how social hierarchy was implemented within the group, analyzed through MSD’s concept of orientation. There were slightly over 3,000 words analyzed for this stage.

Interviews were utilized to help understand the ‘spirit of the law’ and if there are any changes in the application of the rules compared to how they are defined, either due to ease of use or certain situational contexts. This series of interviews was conducted (in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the IRB) with members of various ranks within the group. This consisted of contacting players within GKMC via email and arranging to meet with them in a PlayStation Network voice call. There is a contact email on their website, which was the start of the snowball sampling. Each member was then informed about the project and encouraged to reach out should they be interested. These interviews were recorded, and the interviewees were made aware of this through the initial contact as well as before the record button was pressed. These were semi-structured, narrative interviews with a collective stance, focusing on the stories as told by the interviewees to tailor together a broader story of their experiences (Tracy, 2013).

These conversations were the most integral part to truly understand how the players feel about the rules they subject themselves to. The concept of the ‘spirit of the law’ is important and determines any discrepancies between how the rules were written compared to how they are implemented. These interviews should provide insight into participant ideals through strategic use of question phrasing (Spradley, 1979). Interviews can encourage the members to engage and reflect upon their own experiences based upon the questions rather than limiting them to a textual form response and attempts to limit respondent bias (Tracy, 2013; Ball, 2013). A rough list of questions and the theories that have inspired them can be found in Appendix A. They will be further informed and curated by the textual analysis portion of this project and explored by the interview question types as defined in Tracy (2013, p. 146).

It is hoped that this research will further how we understand the player-to-game and player-to-player relationships as well as the roles of creativity and challenge within the realm of

enjoyment. This insight could be important to scholars and game developers alike, to provide new lenses to look at motivation and interaction in accordance with their aptitude for affordance manipulation. It could help players delve into why they like the games they do, play in the ways they play, and could potentially help developers better mold their games to better suit their audiences.

Positionality Statement

The primary researcher in this project has preexisting knowledge of GTA. Since the release of the online section of the game ten years ago, I have amassed 800+ hours of gameplay. Most of this time has not been current, ending consistent gameplay around 2020. This familiarity with the game involves knowing the availability of affordances and offerings through gameplay. Despite owning a motorcycle club, it went mostly unused aside from the affordance to summon a bike at whim. Most of the hours played were in missions, doing CEO business, or driving around aimlessly with occasional rampages. Through these hours, I have never been engaged in a formal group to play the game and have never had any interaction with the members of GKMC in-game. I was introduced to this group out of the game by an acquaintance that was involved in their MC. From conversations with this person, I reached out to some of the higher-ranking individuals to see if they would be willing to be a part of this study. There was little to no other conversation not involving this study.

Theoretical Framework of the Method

While group behavior can be analyzed in a myriad of ways, this project operated with the belief that a qualitative approach would provide more investigative power into the practice of affordance alterations. Personal statements and interaction about the GKMC utilization of the artifact of GTA is key to our understanding of motivation.

Interviews and textual analysis have been useful in societal research. Online approaches and analyses, though, are a rather new contribution to the field. This is due to both the recency of the internet as well as the even more recent consideration of research practiced on it being viable (Kozinets, 2015). Textual analysis is incredibly helpful within the online sector of humanities as the internet is saturated with examples of human-centric texts. These could be social media sites, blogs, corporation communiques, wiki sites, etc. McKee (2016) gives an excellent preview on how to complete these and describes them as an interpretation of meaning and a process of making sense of the document. This piece accentuates how murky that texts can be as they allow the reader so much room for interpretation, but thankfully the bylaws of the GKMC are detailed to the point where there is less room for interpretation. Interviews have been done online more often as of late with the advent of COVID-19 and have been outlined by Tracy (2013). This participant sample is an “extreme instance sample” as described by Tracy, as the players in this project are not an “average” consumer (p. 137). Rubin and Rubin (2005) provide a metaphor of interviews being akin to having “night vision goggles” (p. vii) as they allow the interviewer to know the place of which they reside, but the randomness to follow is akin to wandering amongst the darkness trying to stumble upon what they seek amongst the other, potentially equally useful, clutter.

These methods are being used in conjunction to capture the full frame of the experience of the GKMC; the more methods used to analyze the group, the further we are able to progress our understanding of how they operate within their own realm of restricted affordances. With content analysis and interviews we can place our thumbs on the word of the law, the spirit of the law, as well as the opinions of these laws.

Instruments and Variables

As mentioned, CTDA provides us with an exoskeletal framework for creating research questions to investigate the theories and platforms that we are conducting this research with. First, insert the theories in use. In this case, they are affordance theory (Gibson, 1979), media system dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979).

Theoretical Perspectives	Interface & Discourse Analysis	Methodological Approach
<p>Affordance Theory: The world is organized by spatial relationships and possibilities for action <u>Actor</u> <u>Object</u></p> <p>Media System Dependency Theory: The media people select for use is dependant on how the engagement situates them in the chosen world and the enjoyment through the process <u>Understanding</u> <u>Orientation</u> <u>Play</u></p> <p>Social Identity Theory: Self-conceptualization is based on their membership of specific social groups. <u>Categorization</u> <u>Identification</u> <u>Comparison</u></p>	<p>Technology: motorcycle club creation, weapon selection, vehicle selection, clothing selection, illicit good production and sale, heists and robberies</p> <p>Technology Practices: grouping, weapon, vehicle, and clothing choice restriction, obligatory protection of sales, restriction of money making methods and activities.</p> <p>Cultural Ideologies: group dynamics, reputation, skill/efficiency, transportation and immersion, social categorization/ identification/ comparison, and orientation/ understanding</p>	<p>RQ 1: Why do players willingly alter their affordances?</p> <p>RQ 2: How does a group dynamic impact the alternative gaming experience?</p> <p>RQ 3: How do perceptions of alteration differ between players, even within the same group?</p> <p>RQ 4: How do players see affordance alteration as signifying in-group membership?</p> <p>RQ 5: What about affordance restriction is enticing enough to make it a main form of play?</p>

Figure 1: *CTDA's Integration With Theories*

We then analyze the technological affordances in play and how they allow the player to create and craft their way through the game (before alteration, in this case). These technological uses in practice are next, how the users communicate and convey their ideologies and membership of the group through interaction with the affordances provided (introduction of alteration). Finally, the cultural ideologies are analyzed, within the context of the group, what is condoned and conveyed

through the discourses of the group (impacts and perpetuation of alterations). Finally, we can interpret this information and craft research questions.

FINDINGS

After interviewing the participants, several themes came to the surface. While not all of them emerged as hypothesized, they followed the general pattern of expectation. The main themes that developed within this process that will be discussed are as follows, “Motivations”, which was a theme as to why the players engage in the group and game in the ways that they do, which serves as somewhat of a synthesis of the other three. “Group as Identity,” where we find that the sense of belonging within the group greatly supersedes the context of Grand Theft Auto. “GTA as ‘Safe’,” which provides insight into the group feeling completely safe and welcome both socially as well as within the game world, which is infamously turbulent. Finally, “Rules as Interaction” is a theme in which we discover the largest diversion from the expectation, finding that the group does not necessarily interact with or pay mind to their affordance alteration choices in the ways that were previously outlined.

Motivations

As an open world game, GTA provides its players agency to essentially do whatever they want within the limitations of the game. There is a large spread of available activities for players, including but not limited to: aimlessly taking a drive in their favorite vehicles, playing side games like darts or golf or tennis, watching the in-game tv networks, committing mass murder upon the digital population of the town ending in a standoff against the police, or raiding a drug lord’s private island. Clearly, players have multiple motivations for logging onto the game, from the most mundane passing of time to high-octane combat missions.

Members of GKMC are no different than other players in this way. While there are similar ties of social motivation between them all, they all have their own reasons for enjoying

the game they all play. A game with a wide range such as this appeals to many audiences and is in turn able to attract people of every motivation defined by Quantic Foundry. The following sections will be in ascending order of frequency of appearance and seeming importance.

Immersion-Creativity

The immersive nature of the club into the biker world is important to the group's dynamic, as mentioned within "Rules as Performative Interactions". The portrayal of themselves as bikers is an immersive experience for them, looking the part and utilizing the tools. One member is particularly aesthetically driven when it comes to gameplay;

I grind off the crew when I get low out of money ... if nobody has [sales to do] yeah like well I think I have some ready, we can run mine you know just to help everyone else get money and stuff yeah um but mostly I just change clothes change my hair and change my vehicles, that's typically what I do nowadays (Participant 3, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023)

The customization abilities in GTA are incredibly vast and allow a certain level of creativity within its affordances, as we've seen in the creative way that this group has spun the platform to fit their needs. Within GTA, any player is allowed to customize their avatar down to the color of their eyes at any time, customize the colors and specs of their cars and bikes, and even color and modify their weapons. To engage in such customizations, though, one needs money.

Mastery-Achievement (Power)

The next most common mention is within the Achievement category. Members talk often of the power (as a subset of achievement) of the group, in combat as well as through monetary gain. Achievement is closely related to power, and one way to have a powerful character is to amass money to purchase the best gear and bikes. Mastery and power are also related within a

context of bettering their technical gameplay. Money is the largest connection point for their motivations, they even have a position in the club to pay attention to the most current money makers in the game for the club.

[the Treasurer is] the money man, essentially, we make the money for the club, we help new people make money. If anyone wants to know the fastest way to make money you basically do that, so I went from around one million for the first like five years of my gameplay to now ... well I'm currently standing at nearly 78 million and I've literally bought everything in the game, so I don't even need to buy anything anymore to be honest with you. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022)

Money makes the GTA world go around, to a certain point. Should hangarounds take notice of how much money you can make working with the group (and should they want to make money), it is a factor for recruitment. As mentioned above, they are more than willing to assist new members make money efficiently.

The social nature of the group is important for money making as well, considering that playing GTA solo can be dangerous and unfruitful;

You can't sell a full business alone, there's usually either three or four vehicles and you don't have enough time to deliver all of them ... the crew is your bread and butter, without the crew aspect, it would be a lot harder to enjoy the game ... [Even] some of the missions might be like from two to four players, you can't even start them alone ... can you be efficient as a solo player? Yes and no, you can always find a quiet lobby ... but there [will always be] bad days. Being in a motorcycle club will ensure that you do not have a fucking bad day ever (Participant 4, Personal Communication, December 28, 2022)

The above quote details both the crew's ability to provide players with social power and in-game power. Social power comes as members willing to fight with and for each other and the in-game power being the power through capital they acquire through this process to better their character's power through weaponry. Though, the weaponry one possesses does little for them if not utilized properly.

The group also will help one another train in combat situations and learn how to protect themselves. "Our fight leaders, they tell us when to leave, when not to leave, to fight, who not to fight, or who to focus on" (Participant 10, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022). Optimization of their combat situations is an example of their pursuit of mastery. They also push each other to better their game interactions socially.

Action-Social

The club attracts members that are interested in social aspects, intriguing game interactions through alterations, and players interested in making money. Most members had their largest interest in the social aspect of the group, as should be evidenced by a majority of the quotes in this chapter. One member in particular was interested in the synthesis of power and social, finding likeminded grinders;

They played the way I did, they weren't Grieferers (players who find joy in screwing with other players' progress) they didn't like beating on people, and like I said they seem to want the money. They wanted the money so they could get the stuff even though they kind of had rules about using it, flashing it, they all wanted it. Which is what I wanted, I mean I only played this game like I said I would sit AFK in my bunker and every day I could go on and do a bunker sale and make a million dollars, that was really the only reason I was playing. (Participant 2, Personal Communication, January 2, 2023)

The social aspect of the group also has an impact on the players' drive to better themselves at the action aspects within the game;

[The group gives me] more respect for NPCs or, I don't know this virtual life. Other times I just wouldn't care if I died 10 million times but in GKMC, just having a group of like 10 people calling you out like 'yo why did you die there' like 'oh I'm sorry it was a cop or a random NPC ran me over' you're like 'okay you're kind of silly for dying for NPCs like you gotta up your game yeah dude that's bullshit'. (Participant 8, Personal Communication, December 22, 2022)

Most players also cited playing other action-oriented games such as Call of Duty (5) and Fortnite (3) except for one who would rather play something more relaxing, like Animal Crossing. They all would rather play GTA with their crew, navigating the tumultuous environment of Los Santos with their fellow MC members. Humans' desire to acquire social satisfaction does not end when they pick up a controller (Armstrong & Hagel, 2000). Video games can provide their players senses of vicarious social belonging. This could be through affordances provided in games such as The Sims and Animal Crossing that encourage the player to build and maintain social relationships with non-player characters (NPC's), or by utilizing the game as a shared experience medium to engage with other people within chats and voice calls.

Group as an Identity

Members of GKMC seem to consider the group as a whole before considering individualistic notions when engaging in space together. Participants see their membership status as one of the most important points of general gameplay, one citing gameplay motivation due to "the jobs and applications that I have in the crew" (Participant 4, Personal Communication, December 28, 2022). This being said, it is not understood as a tyranny upon the time of its

members. To this point, it was mentioned that “life comes first ... if you've got shit to do, you've got shit to do” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). The social norm seems to be less that you put the group before everything in life and more along the lines of if you’ve got time to game, spend it with the crew. While some people noted issues with serial inactivity, there was a level of understanding with the expectation of communication of the situation and no real social pressure. Most feel this social drive on their own due to the general hospitable nature of the group and the closeness they feel with one another.

Intimate Closeness

“Anything I can do for this club I'm willing to do, because not only have I had to earn my place in this club, the club has earned its place in my life” (Participant 1, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022). The members of GKMC would never identify the group as just people who play a game as a collective. For them, the interaction is much deeper and more fulfilling than that.

For the people outside of GKMC, the first thing, of course, they are going to see us as is a gaming crew. But that is the surface. What the outside world sees at first but um we are a lot more than a gaming crew like we are an actual community, and in here we can call ourselves friends and family. (Participant 4, Personal Communication, December 28, 2022)

The level of closeness that members feel is as intense as one could find within an online community,

I've literally listened while someone's kid took their first step, you know, and heard ‘oh my god you're walking! You took a step!’ I mean it's like you get this even though you're not in-person. You're getting this intimate closeness of what's

going on in someone's life. Like we hear people arguing with their loved ones, things that people don't post on social media all the time, like both good and bad stuff. It feels like I feel closer to a lot of the people in the crew than I do some of my best friends in real life. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023)

The relationships of this group do not exclusively exist behind pseudonyms and PlayStation ID's. The more established members "know each other's real names, we know our home address, we know each other's phone number, we know the names of family members, like wife and kids" (Participant 4, Personal Communication, December 28, 2022). Their interactions often take root in other mediated experiences, as well. They communicate multimodally, through audio channels, video chats, text-based communication, as well as the engaging communicative space of GTA; "A lot of us have each other on Facebook ... [we] FaceTime each other and talk and you know so it's kind of awesome" (Participant 10, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022). Despite this being the case, that does not necessarily mean that pseudonyms are forgone for identification, considering the personal ties to each member's avatars.

You're [PlayStation ID] you know, you're not [Real Name] ... I even picture, like a lot of times in my head, their character, not what they actually look like in real life. I like that [about GTA avatars]. I like that it's actual people [that] you get to be on there. It just feels more personable to me than if it was like some big dragon or something you know? Like that's cool don't get me wrong and we may play other games where you get to be you know different creatures or whatever um but I like that playing an online game where it's an actual person feels more I don't know, human. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023)

The group sees their close ties as so important as to occasionally help one another out in the offline world to ensure they would still be able to interact. It was mentioned in several interviews that members would occasionally collect and send monetary support to one another. Combining the ideas of family and support, one participant said that “it's literally a brotherhood, like we save money to help people out in the crew. A year ago we helped someone buy a new TV that their kid accidentally busted” (Participant 10, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022). There have been several instances of the crew helping one another, another participant said “We've helped fund a funeral for someone, we've bought appliances for people, I can't even count how many PlayStations that we have bought for people as their PlayStations have fucked up and they weren't able to play” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023). The bonds created by this group are much deeper than a game; these bonds suggest something more akin to close personal friends or even familial.

Game as Secondary

The familial motif carries through a majority of the interviews with “family” being mentioned, verbatim, by half of them. The synthesis of community and game interaction is also prevalent.

People are very welcoming in this club, they try to make your money, get to know you, ask you questions about yourself, where you're from, what you're about, what your interests are. Everybody in this club is really a family more than a GTA club, we're very close-knit. (Participant 1, Personal Communication, December 12, 2023)

The context of the game within the group is known, but is definitely regarded as less important than the community aspect of their interactions; “Even if you're not playing the same game, you have someone to [chat] with, you know?” (Participant 9, Personal Communication, December

13, 2022). One of the members provided a powerful example portraying this sentiment, “There's so much more than just gaming like if I never played another video game again for the rest of my life, I still wouldn't leave the crew, I can't, like, y'all can't kick me out because I need my family” (Participant 3, Personal Communication, December 28). Connection with other members in the group is often regarded as more important to them than the game that binds them. “There are days that I only get online to actually play GTA because of the crew, like I will have zero interest in playing the game ... I don't want to, but I do it [because of the crew]” (Participant 7, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022).

Ingroup Identification

Identification as a member of the group is held sacred and exemplified within the ranking system present, identified by a specific patch on one's clothing that must be displayed at all times. Receiving the ability to don a patch is ritualized and celebrated with a ceremony, called ‘patching in’, welcoming the newest members.

Once you finally get your patch and you've earned your place with us you know a trade for you know you've signed up for this you know that you can only use certain weapons, certain vehicles, you can't do certain things, you know what you're here for. (Participant 1, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022)

Some of the ranks have specific outfits, parts of outfits, or tattoos they are required to wear to further denote them as such. There are several different Charters within the club, each having their own table members and bikes and colors to identify them as such. There are many ranks nestled within the hierarchy, each holding its own honor and responsibilities.

While there are many contextual nuances and some overlaps to this system, in the simplest of terms and from least to most established, the ranks are: Hangaround, Prospect,

Member, Table Member (~8 positions), Table Vice-President, Table President, Nomad, Guerilla, National Table, Silverback, and National President (permanent position and founder).

“Silverback is the highest honor and title that you can achieve in GKMC, if you're Silverback you already know that you belong to the Inner Circle” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, December 28, 2022). Possessing a rank of Silverback gives members increased social capital as well as leniency with certain rules.

Ranks within the table and above are generally held in esteem but not all members possess the drive to climb the ladder for the sake of notoriety, and prefer to just be a part of the group for the sake of belonging; “I have one guy in my [table domain] who just likes playing every once in a while, like [he has] no interest in a table spot. He'd be good on the table, but he has no interest” (Participant 2, Personal Communication, January 2, 2023). In contrast, some are incredibly rank and goal motivated, “you want to move up? you got goals that you set, and those goals are obviously affected by the rules. If I didn't follow the rules and play the way I did I wouldn't have made Silverback” (Participant 9, Personal Communication, December 13, 2022). Like any biker gang would be expected to be, GKMC is relatively exclusionary. When responding to questions about people in other motorcycle clubs MC's or (without one), the responses weren't hostile but there was a clear distinction between ingroup and outgroup associations.

Outgroup Identification

Members see GKMC as the best, expectantly. They give little thought to those not in any sort of crew; often just keeping an eye on them for the sake of group defense in case the unknown player is looking for trouble. Occasionally, though, some members would step out of their way to help these ungrouped players. “We've seen some noobs getting killed by a griefer

and we'll just step in to help them out even if they're not in the club. We'll just help 'em out anyway, it's kind of fun" (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). Despite the strong sense of belonging and notes of 'othering' within the interviews, they don't see all other MC's as rivals, per se. They have a semi-working relationship with one of the other groups that also act as an immersive biker group, The Unborn.

They [The Unborn] would sell [in-game goods for in-game money], we would sell, and we would kind of run a Lobby. So that's kind of cool, we did that for a couple months um but there was a time where we were so active there would be 20 some of us in a Lobby selling you know so we didn't have to, we used to run lobbies. (Participant 9, Personal Communication, December 13, 2022)

While there is no particular hostility against other MC's, there are still clear distinctions made between members of GKMC and "others". Despite some of them playing the game in a similar fashion, since they do not possess the same members or passions, they are lesser. This has always been an interesting sentiment within the gaming community. It is reminiscent of the PlayStation vs Xbox animosities. Despite the groups having similar goals in mind, the other is seen as lesser to the group simply because they do it differently.

They play like us but they ain't like us type of thing, they grind like we do but when it comes to protecting our brothers ... some of them are like us, some of them aren't, they're all pretty chill. We can get along sometimes awesome as long as there's not a hell of a lot of animosity, depending on how we feel that day on who we want to kick ass and who we don't. (Participant 10, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022).

GKMC has a rigid process for joining their ranks, though it is considered relaxed in comparison to some other clubs according to the ingroup information. Other groups are noted to have stipulations such as:

KD (ratio for the player's kills to deaths) expectations or like time ... the hangarounds aren't allowed inside of certain buildings, they can't go into the club houses, they have to stand at certain places and with a gun at the ready and they can't talk. They have to hang around for something like six months and then they have to go into prospecting. I mean it's absolutely insane they treat it like it's an actual biker Club I mean it's absolutely beyond crazy what they do. (Participant 7, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022)

There are other motorcycle clubs that don't play as bikers, to which there can be a slight stigma when placed in comparison to GKMC specifically.

I think each their own um I think if that's what they want to do, then that's what they want to do but I don't think they kind of get it. I think if you play in an MC you've got to play as a biker, for starters, and if you're playing as a biker then you've got to have a club. I think they kind of go hand in hand and I think if they're in an MC and they're like a flying MC or whatever great good for them, well done. But I think it takes a lot more doing what we do because like I said the rules that we have in like the organization we've got and I think it's just it really shows kind of commitment and respect to be honest.

(Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022)

The distinctions being made within the gameplay loops of the groups in question is particularly interesting. Groups utilizing the same game and platform for different goals, like aviators, are seen as less committed and respectful because they have a different relationship with rules.

GTA as “Safe”

GTA is, in almost all forms of the word, an aggressive game. The characters in the storylines are murderers and thieves and your online character is expected to do the same if you wish to level up. Players who utilize communicative features in the game are more often than not spreading negative messages rife with hostile language and people dubbed “griefers” will do everything in their firepower to keep you as dead as long as possible. GKMC has taken this traditionally hostile communicative and gameplay space and made it a welcoming one for its members and their avatars.

Safe Game

The game incentivizes players to destroy each other’s goods when moving to sell them by providing a minimal amount of cash and experience points towards leveling up. The members of GKMC have essentially weaponized the concept of strength in numbers. They have developed this structure to protect and support each other through the tumultuous gameplay one would regularly experience during a regular session of GTA.

When a member encounters a particularly aggressive player, they simply send a message within one of their GKMC chats and await their backup. “You should see the shit, it's something to behold you just put the word out and then literally [the server] gets fucking flooded” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). Nonmembers typically don’t understand the weight of the situation they’re entering in when picking a fight with members, “[T]hey'll start messaging you like ‘yo what the fuck why is it 10 versus one, what the fuck just happened’ and then I just remind them like pay attention at the names like if they all say GKMC” (Participant 8, Personal Communication, December 22, 2022). The implication being that players should know not to mess with other players who have tags, maybe even GKMC specifically. The

concept of tags is an interesting one. Some groups don't require any sort of prerequisites to join and the meaning behind membership is radically different from the protective nature of GKMC.

The fact that we're such a close-knit group you know I could sit here all day and we can run sales, which is what we do as a grinder crew, but as we're doing that, we're having deeper conversations about you know the things going on in our lives and issues following that ... We touch a lot of different topics and we just pass through them.

(Participant 1, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022)

The sheer time spent in-game driving around with fellow members could be akin to driving around with someone in the outside world. If the parties are comfortable with sharing information, it can end up in incredibly productive in-depth conversations. To help facilitate interaction, new players may be encouraged to drive a beater van and give rides to higher members that ask; "I would drive my van and then I'll get like the top guys ... to be like yo let me ride with you. I'm like hell yeah dude you're one of the top dudes and you want to ride with me, like I love this" (Participant 8, Personal Communication, December 22, 2022). Even tasks as simple as driving with one another create a sort of reliance and closeness of the avatars and players.

Safe Space

In the benefit of fostering connection, GKMC members tend to feel very safe and welcome when interacting with one another. They see fellow members as links to a positive space where they can share their lives freely. This benefit seems to be obvious to the members, rather than a more taken for granted aspect of their social lives. "[T]here's people from all walks of life in here, so it's a really rich environment (Participant 4, Personal Communication, December 28, 2022). The same participant acknowledged the group's multicultural background

and how it benefits them; “GTA gives me a lot of social networking, [there’s] a lot of people to talk to. It also gives me an opportunity to learn other countries' customs, cultures, and habits” (Participant 4, Personal Communication, December 28, 2022). This is a shared sentiment, members appreciate the ability to log on to one of their favorite games and engage with cultures from around the world;

The community and having everybody there, it's quite awesome. Like just going home and knowing that I'm hopping on my PlayStation and able to talk to like 12 dudes that I know very well already and they're all over the world. It's a great community, talking to dudes from Australia to New Zealand to fucking Finland and just hearing all their different issues that they're having ... It's just a big support group and uh it's great. We're not allowed to talk about politics but then it's kind of hard not to talk about politics because our own lives revolve around these different communities and different countries. (Participant 8, Personal Communication, December 22, 2022)

While politics is typically a hot-button issue for people, there seems to be a general expectation that members can listen to and engage with one another without hostility as well as considering their different locations around the globe. Should hostility arise, it is expected that a higher member would end such lines of communication.

Members of GKMC find themselves in an equal space with people from many walks of life. It’s interesting to find an intimate online community that is so homogeneous in ideals but so radically different in where they’re coming from, both physically and mentally. From what has been surmised there are military personnel, graduate students, unemployed individuals, engineers, ex-law enforcement, plumbers, and it’s assumed many more. The concept that all these people that would usually never have interacted if it weren’t for the given third space is

what makes online groups so enticing. “It's nice to have a social [outlet], someone to chat with and talk about what you're going through in your life and shit like that and that's kind of why I got into GKMC” (Participant 9, Personal Communication, December 13, 2022). All the culminating backgrounds, cultures, and opinions serve as an interesting juxtaposition between the expected echo chamber of chosen communities and the possibility of variety of thought found within online communities that span the globe.

Rules as Interaction

Affordance alterations (the term used to describe the process of GKMC utilizing rules which impact their gameplay) and the group’s opinions of them do not entirely operate in the way that was anticipated. While many members noted appreciating what the alterations do to liven up their gameplay, it seems that a general consensus is that they play for the sake of the group and the community. The rules themselves are also more contextually bendable than previously thought, as some noted that at the end of the day it is just a game.

Rules as Game Interaction and Betterment

Socially altering the rules and available tools within GTA has led some players to foster a more intimate relationship with the combat mechanics and appreciate the gameplay more than the usual GTA ‘go-to’ of tanks, rocket launchers, and alien laser beams. As noted by a participant, “it's not about skill anymore it's about who whips out the RPG first” (Participant 7, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). In appreciation of the changes to gameplay one participant said, “I think it makes it a little bit more fun knowing that you have to do it a certain way. You ever notice how a game becomes if you use cheat codes? You get everything, there’s nothing to work for” (Participant 9, Personal Communication, December 13, 2022). Within the same lines of having something to work for, the group’s restrictions have a profound impact on

how GKMC views game interaction and combat within the context of their character's abilities. "It was [more fun] for me when there were more rules ... like having an organized system and jumping on to do things a certain way instead of just jumping on to jump on" (Participant 9, Personal Communication, December 13, 2022). Having to work more efficiently for their kills and defending themselves, they are encouraged by the process to optimize their movements.

[Affordance alteration makes the game] a lot more interesting to have to really consider different options when you're fighting people, using only [allowed weapons]. It limits ... how you do it, instead of sitting there with a sniper rifle shooting people down you gotta roll your way around and maneuver, jump over things and get close so you can use your [allowed weapons]. So it does put a nice little twist on it. It makes me think harder to be playing this game ... we also do a lot of in-depth training if you want to about using our [available] weapons against these people using [the rest]. To be honest, I was a horrible fighter before getting into GTA with this crew. I mean before I joined my KD(ratio for the player's kills to deaths) was like 0.32 now I'm at like a 0.64 only using one percent of weapons. (Participant 1, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022)

The social and hierarchical elements in place also require available lower ranking members to help higher ranking members with selling their goods. This is for either protection from outgroup players or to provide extra hands driving goods across the map. Interactions like this are not common in GTA. A GKMC member who had previously been in a different crew said that this past crew "didn't really help. [GKMC] helps you with money and they help you with RP (levels). [the other crew] just told me to do it myself. That's kind of the point of a crew isn't it, to help each other?" (Participant 6, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). In

insisting members help one another, it allows them to consistently make money and better their standing within the game.

Let's say I don't know per sale you get say 50,000 for example ... then you do that four times for one person, that's 200,000. You do that for everyone in the group, let's say 10 people in the group are higher than you, that's like four million. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022)

Through this rule of having players help each other with sales, the helpers end up being helped in a way. This structure allows them to gain money relatively quickly while also putting in their dues for the crew. Who helps who with sales is entirely based on the social standing of the members of the crew. If someone higher than you in the crew has sales to do, you must help. This leans into the concept of “Rules as Social Interaction”.

Rules as Social Interaction

This is where the word of the law starts to split from the spirit. Rules are held situationally, there is a certain level of discretion with the rules depending on the table the players report to and the player's status in the group. Unless someone is a repeat offender with clear malice, it doesn't seem to be an issue. The roles that people play within the group also influence how they see enforcement of the rules as well. Someone with the enforcer rank is in charge of keeping their table in line and adhering to the rules. In regards to enforcement, one participant said “We're not the police, we know it's a game at the end of the day, but fuck up and badly and we'll know about it” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). Some people have a more lenient view of the rules, considering them more as social constructions to guide behavior over gameplay:

I look at it like everyone's an adult, I don't really want to get on to adults, like you're not my children. Typically ... our biggest thing is, we have this whole list of rules, but the main thing is just don't be a dick. (Participant 3, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023)

The gameplay aspect is not forgotten by all but the social constructions behind the rules do often supersede the needs for gameplay restrictions, for instance:

Like you've got to kind of use common sense to some degree, you're not going to come down on everybody just because they did something wrong. Ultimately, we follow the rules as closely as we can. I mean if I come down on someone and say 'well why are you doing that' and they say 'well I was saving [President]', for example, well okay then I'm not gonna argue with you for saving your president. (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022)

The rules are meant to be somewhat of guidelines, depending on the contextual interaction someone is in.

There are two different ranks that are allowed what is essentially full leniency. The Nomads are members that comprise the muscle of the group and have to have proven themselves in combat time and time again as well as voted in by current Nomads. They are allowed to use any of the other weapons, provided that the enemy has used it first. This is a protection contingency for the group in case of particularly persistent and strong aggressors. Primarily, the rank of Silverback does not, officially, have to follow a majority of the rules. As previously mentioned, Silverbacks are a part of the "inner circle." As per the GKMC website, these members have been around for an extended period of time and are considered core members who have "demonstrate(d) the highest level of commitment ... [and] must be voted in unanimously by

all current Silverbacks” (Gorilla Kings MC, n.d.). Some of these players still adhere to the rules for the sake of camaraderie,

As a Silverback, I don't have hardly any limitations like I mean I still have to follow the rules but I mean I don't really have any limitations, no. My biggest limitation right now is just being accountable like if I want to hold my crew, my charter, accountable I need to be accountable. Like just being a good leader, so if I want my guys to be on bikes like I need to be on a bike. (Participant 9, Personal Communication, December 13, 2022)

Not all of the higher-ranking members follow such leadership tactics, and will occasionally opt out of helping others with sales for some reason or another.

I'll see like someone needs help with sales and then [high rank will not help], so like you're disobeying the bylaws you're supposed to be [rank] so no it does happen, not very often but yeah. [The rules] tend to bend have for a few people and we don't tend to say anything because who they are but if it was a hangaround and we saw them doing it then we do tell them just so they know what they're doing but once they get patched in and we see them do it I don't know maybe we won't call them out like maybe two or three times after the violation. (Participant X) (Name further anonymized for the sake of group dynamic)

As we can see, the expectation of rules and the nudges associated with the infraction are different depending on the social capital the member has within the group. From what could be gleaned from the interviews, there is no consistent tension to be found with this ruleset. While members may be occasionally annoyed that high ranking people don't follow the rules to a T, it is understood that this is a part of the rules of engagement.

Rules as Performative Interaction

GKMC prides themselves in embodying the biker lifestyle as much as they can in the online space. This outward portrayal is ingrained in their culture to the point that mentions to biker culture and bravado are in their bylaws, in regard to working as a team and always protecting one another, it “propagates our reputation as bad-asses.”(Gorilla Kings MC, n.d.). Dressing and looking the part in their avatars is also important and listed in the bylaws, “Dress like a badass (or dirt-bag); This upholds the spirit of the outlaw biker subculture, enriches gameplay, and it looks fucking cool.” (Gorilla Kings MC, n.d.). The curated culture and air of professionalism seems to attract members. “What really set GK [apart], I think, for me it was probably the organization like the actual being a part of something that actually looks like they legit know what they're doing” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). The members see their organization as somewhat professional and put together, but like all groups, they understand the performative nature of interaction to portray this.

The rules, as they exist socially, are managed differently than stated. This is the purest form of the distinction between the spirit and the word of the law. Rules in the world, especially ones that are socially conscripted, often have a certain level of wiggle room, provided that the offender can provide good reason. In response to a hypothetical situation regarding such;

Just don't do it again and don't let anyone catch you doing it ... I don't want to know basically you do what you got to do but I just don't want to know if I hear about it, then I hear about it and you're in shit, otherwise carry on basically (quote continued from previous section) (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022)

The rules are important to the group as displays of roles. There is a caveat, though. When no one is looking, where's the harm? Recently (in comparison to how long the game has been released),

players were allowed to sell their goods in private lobbies, away from prying eyes (and guns) of strangers. This has opened a whole new route of gameplay, because “the only time we break the rules is like when we're in the live we're in a um private lobby with each other” (Participant 6, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022).

This alteration of the rules is officially sanctioned. “When you're in a private lobby you can drive cars, you can drive whatever you want to drive you can use rockets and shit, if it's just us playing around having a good time” (Participant 7, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). This seems to have had an impact on how the members see and interact with the game world. It seems to allow players a deeper connection with the rules when engaged in public lobbies, encouraging them to remember what they stand for as opposed to becoming complacent in the act.

a lot of our time has been in private lobbies, so a lot of the rules are steadily broken now because we don't spend a lot of time in public lobbies anymore. We do try to do sales in public lobbies ... when we go to public lobbies, we're looking for interaction with other crews or other players instead of being forced into interaction with other players, if that makes sense. (Participant 7, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022)

GKMC cares for the immersion of the biker aspect of their gameplay for themselves as well as for a performative act to the rest of the players. Time away from the show of the gang is important for players to not burn out on the concept, in a way, to keep them motivated.

DISCUSSION

The Gorilla Kings Motorcycle Club provides a crosscut observation of why people engage in unconventional methods of play. Most players/groups will not engage with consistency in the same ways that GKMC does, but I believe that all of us have, at some point, had the impulse to ride our bikes without the handlebars. The insights provided by this study explain the players that pursue those impulses with purpose.

There are points where this group has flipped the script with the expectation of play. Most notably, the motivations for play. While it wasn't unexpected that the main driving point for connection within the medium would be social, it was expected that the alterations would have a more profound impact on motivations as opposed to being afterthoughts. The rules themselves, being social by nature, are enforced as expected; socially. The dynamics in play for these rules and the enforcement of such are not unlike how rules work in any workplace, club, or non-legally binding sphere of expectations. Direct parallels can be made between the members of Gorilla King's Motorcycle Club (GKMC) and those of offline social groups. Much like an offline society, those with higher status experience a different relationship with rules as stated. The social "haves" see rules as followed almost for the sport of it. Social norms and rules seem to become mere guidelines to the social elite; as when Elon Musk tells advertisers and namely the head of Disney Bob Iger to "go fuck yourself" (Madarang, 2023). These findings are also indicative of people's nature to impart their own desires upon platforms that allow such leniency, as simple as people recreating their favorite online and offline places in the sandbox game Minecraft (Hill, 2021).

The findings are consistent with the expectations laid forth by media systems dependency theory (MSD) for usage of media for the satisfaction of the players' utilization of the space to satisfy needs of understanding, orientation, and play. They also converse with the concepts of third spaces in the ways they utilize this space and have made it feel welcoming to the group. The motivations for play, though, differ from our expected outcroppings of classifications as outlined by Quantic Foundry (Quantic Foundry, 2021). Quantic Foundry and Yee's explanations of player motivations have been covered earlier, but for the sake of clarity some of the deeper naming conventions were left out. These further archetypes that are denoted by their research are as follows: Acrobat, Gardener, Slayer, Skirmisher, Gladiator, Ninja, Bounty Hunter, Architect, and Bard (Quantic Foundry, 2021). The players of GKMC exist in an unexpected arena within these classifications. While the research does allow for combinations of any and all archetypes, having a primary and secondary type, their combination is an unexpected one; and two words that probably have rarely been said in the same breath: Gladiator/Bard.

Gladiators are much more likely to identify as hardcore gamers, and they want games to engage them using a broad spectrum of features. They are looking for an epic experience that provides team arenas, fast-paced explosive gameplay, power progression mechanics, challenging gameplay that requires strategic thinking, and a rich world setting with lots to explore and customize. (Quantic Foundry, 2021)

Motto: Dedicated, Hardcore Gaming (Quantic Foundry, 2021).

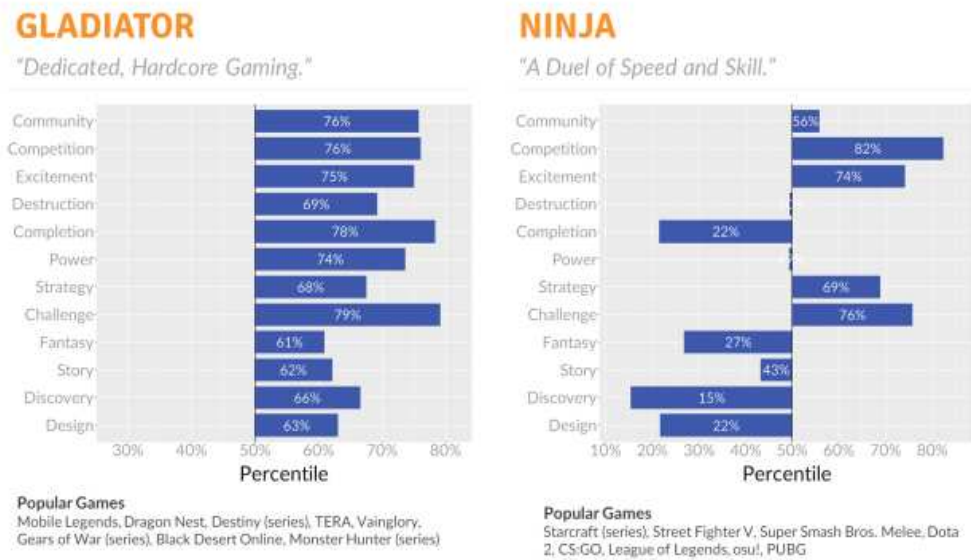


Figure 2: *Quantic Foundry's Explanation of Gladiator & Ninja*

While Gladiator's check all the boxes of this group, something missing is an emphasis on *their* community and the roleplay aspects of play. While Gladiators do appreciate community, what is missing from the explanation is that GKMC is not just playing the game set before them for the sake of power and completion. They are creating their own world within this platform to engage with their group. The biggest of weapons is of no concern to them, it is about using what they have to the best of their abilities and engaging with other players as a biker gang. Bringing in the Bard type.

Bards are social players who want to chat and interact with other players in game worlds that are rich with lore, stories, discovery, and customization. They want to be part of a grand story in a community of other players that together craft and shape the world and the stories that get told. For them, the game is a theatrical stage. They care little about power progression and task completion and want to just experience the game world organically. (Quantic Foundry, 2021)

Motto: “Playing a Part in a Grand Story” (Quantic Foundry, 2021).



Figure 3: *Quantic Foundry’s Explanation of Bard*

These members follow a general Bard type, enjoying the social aspects and engaging with the world around them in creative ways. As noted in the description, regarding not caring about power and task completion, we cannot forget GKMC’s reliance on the hierarchical nature of this group and the meticulous war room tactics which point toward a Gladiator archetype.

RQ 1: Why do players willingly alter their affordances?

When considering the motivations for GKMC membership, the players involved restrict themselves for the entertainment value and enjoyment (MSD’s category of play). What they appear to get from this experience is just that, the experience. The restrictions in place make the game world more difficult to engage with, involving finding new ways to complete the same processes. For instance, any “normal” GTA player would bring out the most powerful tool at

their disposal to get the job done; GKMC players must parse through this self-imposed added layer of problem solving to reach the satisfaction of completing an objective.

Players are attracted to the aesthetic and social elements inherent to group membership (Tajfel, 1979). The members that partook in this study were more interested in being members of the group and engaging with the nuance of what that entails as opposed to being biker members. The interests lie in the process and the goals, not simply the method. Looking at the Motivations set by Quantic Foundry (2021), there are social gamers who utilize the group as essences of play and understanding (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). A sense of belonging paired with a sense of fun. What this could allude to for the community is a desire for more malleable experiences within games, which studios seem to have been catching onto. Within the last decade, some studios have been leaning towards a more open-world and sandbox approach with classics such as Legend of Zelda, Pokémon, Assassin's Creed, and Final Fantasy getting open-world entries.

Outside of the context of GTA and GKMC, there is potential to utilize the information explored in this study to better understand player's interactions with gameplay loops. The information presented in their motives, being based on social desire and mastery of the game environment, is useful to integrate game modes and tools within the game to allow players to engage in this behavior. These players are interested in showing a mastery of their imagined affordances. There is consistent negotiation and renegotiation between the affordances at-play to denote meaning (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Integrating methods of play that engage with the imagined affordances and symbols created through these negotiations of meaning and status symbols would be advantageous to further allow players joys such as these. These engagements would exist inside of the pre-determined affordances of the game's sphere. Being integrated as such,

they are not separate entities, but rather cultural imprints upon the natural environment of the game (Gibson, 1979).

As an example of integrations of alternative motivators within games; in their shooter Counter Strike Global Offensive, Valve gives their players the ability to obtain certain skins for guns that track their kills. Should someone become attached to using one of the objectively 'lesser' guns in the game, they may utilize this skin type to show skill in their own satisfying way, thus encouraging their behavior to use said gun for their own enjoyment. The greater space of affordance being the game itself, considered the natural environment here (Gibson, 1979). We can see the alteration of an affordance provided to the players, creating an artificial environment in tandem. The artificial environment being crafted from artifacts present within the natural environment (Gibson, 1979).

On the other side of the coin, this could be useful for breaking these habits. Should someone wish to attempt to break these compulsion loops of game play to get themselves or others less attached to games, we can understand the satisfactions that are gained through games for these types of players and find other routes for this dopamine hit. Finding new avenues for community engagement and offline creative outlets to engage in altered affordances.

RQ 2: How does a group dynamic impact the alternative gaming experience?

With the integration of the group dynamic, there are positive impacts on feelings of belongingness and ties to game progression through social means. These outcomes become motivations towards playing, increasing a desire for time to be spent within the game world. Increased social ties which create meaning and purpose through gameplay as through MSD's orientation classification (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The cumulative sense of welcoming

in the space cultivated through the open-world nature of the game through third spaces (Oldenburg, 1999) and the community's overlay of usage through the platform as outlined by CTDA (Brock, 2016). The increase of play time, according to interviews, stems from their roles and desire to engage in group activities. If members had no obligations to the group, they would not have as much of a drive to log in and be present within the space, as stated within the orientation portion of MSD, they create meaning and purpose through these interactions (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). This would not have fostered if not for the already open door third space (Oldenburg, 1999) of the game. It has long been said that misery loves company, but through this study we've shown that a willing hardship creates said company. When it is proven that the path less traveled is more tedious but also more enjoyable, it becomes a path that some relish in traveling.

To engage these premises outside of the context, while it has been noted by many in the field that social ties are important to some who play video games (Juul, 2000; Banks, 1998; Kinder 1991), the depth of these relationships through interests has become even more prevalent. It is not just about *a* game or *the* game people are engaging in. Through our findings, it is about what they are doing together within the game. Game studios could learn from this by providing better social networking situations, not just within a match. For instance, should a match-based shooter such as Valorant have a lobby system where players that are in a group can go together to a place that is not inherently about combat while waiting for a match or even just for fun; I believe they would see a rise in playtime. Providing a third space for low-stress social interaction is important to players like this.

RQ 3: How do perceptions of alteration differ between players, even within the same group?

The perceptions of alterations between players differ depending on their relationship to said rules. If a member is high enough in rank to warrant a lesser following of the rules, they tend to see the rules as more expendable. Media system dependency's concept of orientation gives us the insight that these associations to rules are influenced by the overlaying of their social structure within meaning (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The social structure begins to supersede the rules structure as it is how they orient themselves with their environment. Should the same player have some relationship with the oversight of the rules upon the group, such as being an enforcer, they see the rules as less strict than those who just follow them. The social nature of these rules is acknowledged, and its meaning negotiated within the constraints of the environment (Nagy & Neff, 2015). This environment being one of enjoyment and following the motivation of play (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), it is taken less seriously. Should someone possess neither rank, they will see the rules as a more rigid structure, to be followed in the belief that it is to prove themselves. Their actions are conceptualized to reflect on the group, as opposed to a personal reflection. With social identity theory's premises of identification and comparison (Tajfel, 1979), requests for rule following are accepted through mostly self-monitoring.

This interaction is not as blatantly useful outside of the gaming world, but it is a prime example of the ideology of how rules are functionally observed in society. Should these rules not have large consequences or impact others in a negative way, they begin to lose meaning. The members of GKMC see the rules as a signifying marker for membership (Tajfel, 1979). The perceived external views of rule enforcement are more important and the rationale for breaking them comes into play more than expected, which is a positive marker toward understanding (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Context has begun to be forgotten in today's day and age. A computer does not care if you are a hacker or simply forgot your password. But the ability to

prove the latter should remain as important as the enforcement against the prior. Members do not live in fear of being kicked out for simple mistakes, so long as someone consistently follows rules and understands what they mean to the group they should have little to no issues playing the game and engaging with the group. There is a certain fluidity to these rules, though. As noted by an interview, a member would not be particularly chastised for bending the rules if their hypothetical motive were saving their chapter president from a particularly nasty fight (Participant 5, Personal Communication, December 23, 2022). These negotiations of meaning suggest that the group treats the rule structure as intended to be the words of the law but interpreted with the spirit of the law. The group's identity remains intact primarily, for the sake of the reputation of the group, again alluding to social identity theory's comparison concept (Tajfel, 1979). Meaning is derived not from being a member of GKMC, but from the ideology that GKMC itself carries to its members.

RQ 4: How do players see affordance alteration as signifying in-group membership?

I believe the best quote to signify this is “they play like us but they ain't us” (Participant 10, Personal Communication, December 12, 2022). Not only is in-group recognized as a following of rulesets, it is also membership in and of itself. Other groups that follow similar structures are either “too lenient” or “too strict”. This is exactly as expected within the expectations of SIT, as the members categorize the groups available, identify themselves within the social structure of their group, and compare themselves to other groups, favorably to bias (Tajfel, 1979). Membership is an important identity marker for members (Tajfel, 1979). Not only do they identify themselves as GKMC members above all else, but they physically label themselves as a member daily within the game through patches, usage of particular bikes, and

group colors. It has been said that one (or more) member(s) have physical tattoos commemorating the group or its motto.

Ideal identification through physical identifiers and symbols is not a novel concept to the world, almost any given established group has a symbol, a flag, or a motto. The interesting part of these findings is that contrary to brand identification in the offline world, these identifiers do not hold any deeper recognizable meaning to the general public. In the real world, should one see the logo of their town clubs or opinion leaders the association would immediately be made. In this case, the meaning of symbolic and avowed/ascribed membership is important to only those who are familiar with the group but held to a high regard of importance to all that bear the marks and are privy to the social structure's orientation and understanding as placed in the environment (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

Social identity theory is expected to go both ways; iPhone vs Android, Coke vs Pepsi, Chipotle vs Qdoba. Members of either faction see the others as lesser due to their choice in the debate. Seeing themselves as representatives of their own faction and members to be compared (Tajfel, 1979) against is less frequent. Some 50% of smartphone users in the United States have iPhones (Mickle, 2023); as an iPhone owner, I do not see myself as a representative for the meaning of my choice. For GKMC, as identified in the interviews, does not have a direct and frequent rival. There are occasional squabbles with other motorcycle clubs, but the core concepts to their identification (Tajfel, 1979) are of their own creation. They must all put their best foot forward, so they can continue to identify out-group as lesser by comparison (Tajfel, 1979). The better they work together and follow their alterations, the better it reflects *on* the group *to* the group.

RQ 5: What about affordance restriction is enticing enough to make it a main form of play?

That's just it. It is play, a user's need for entertainment and enjoyment through the medium (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The players that engage in this are attracted by the novelty of the situation and the ability to belong to such a phenomenon (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Affordance alteration to this level gives these players something new to engage with in the same medium they already enjoy (GTA). Paired with the intense social landscape, any player that enjoys a challenge and someone to talk to is bound to be even slightly interested in a group such as GKMC. We find this in the Quantic Foundry Bard and Gladiator types (Quantic Foundry, 2021). Affordance alteration allows the player to impart their own desires and needs into a platform of their choosing. GKMC utilizes this space as a transportation (Green, 2002) into a world of their own creation. The alteration of affordances makes a game that has become comically unrealistic with its laser miniguns and consumer grade tanks into a more satisfying and realistic experience for the members. Through excitation-transfer (Bryant, 2003), GKMC can shelf their 9-to-5's and become immersed as a member of one of the most ruthless and coordinated biker gangs in Los Santos, if only for a little. What is a nature documentary if not an at-home on-demand and interactive biology lecture? What is the last book that you read or show that you watched? Was there ever a moment that you wish you could have interacted with the narrative and made it suit your needs? A favorite character gets written off; a scene goes awry in the most obvious of ways because someone walked into the clearly haunted basement. GKMC takes control of their narrative experiences to the best of their abilities to suit their entertainment motivations (Ball-Rokeach, 1976).

CONCLUSION

In the interest of being as cliché and transparent as possible; why do you care? You care because the nature of this group is novel, the altering of something meant to be an open-ended adventure with little to no connection to rules into a concrete set of rules, regulations, and expectations. GKMC embodies of the concept of “death of the author” (Barthes, 1977). The intentions of the game’s creators are slid aside for the sake of their own interpretations of the narrative. Additionally, the findings within this study are not only applicable to GKMC, but worldwide. The gamification of challenge can be seen in all realms and should be used in consideration as a metric of what makes a good game. How can people take this platform and make it their own? Is the game meant to be malleable? Nature finds a way, and it is human nature to manipulate our affordances. We can find this in the tools we use (knives being a combination of a safe and dangerous materials altered to increase utility), how we spend our free time through hobbies (given rubber, leather, metal, and glass, we synthesized the game of basketball), and even the food we eat (a deconstructed burger should be a federal offense).

This study has delved through a niche community within a 10-year-old game and discovered an active trove of meaning making and belonging. GKMC members have utilized rigid social structure to advance senses of social space in a placeless space. Members of the group have come to see one another as close friends, even “chosen family” through bonding experiences created by this structure. They have become more intimately familiar with the game to the point of mastery through this purposeful restriction of affordances and intensification of combat encounters.

Non-Academic Applications

The offline world can learn from studies like this too, as mentioned through references to affordance alteration. Should someone want to increase their skill in a certain activity, they should start to remove parts of that activity they find too easy. For instance, should someone want to build a stronger backhand while playing tennis, they could start to play games using only their backhand. While the start would be rough, with time, they would eventually be more familiar with the intricacies of using their backhand and integrating it back to normal play. Limiting yourself, taking away things that can be used as leans, increases skill on the things you leave available.

In addition, this research could be useful outside of academia through applications within the business/game development sector, utilizing this information to increase personal interaction with games, and through breaking these motivation structures to lessen the desire to play games.

First, within game development, this research can be integrated into games that are intended to appeal to a similar audience, or a mass audience. Should a game possess elements of a sandbox nature or incentives for creative use, considering some of the qualities used by GKMC would be advantageous for a properly interactive game. Considering how the structures provided could be “run with” by the player, and how to encourage such self-starter behavior. More is apparently sometimes better.

On a personal interaction note, players could take note of the approaches of GKMC and alter their own gameplay to increase their interaction with the game and possibly, in turn, their enjoyment of such. Let’s say you’ve been playing the newest shooter game and it’s gotten way too easy for you. Why not try using *only* the worst gun in the game for a while? Maybe limiting

the abilities you can utilize within a level, like no jumping or climbing in Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom. This would create a more intimate understanding of the paths that your character could walk, the roadside attractions along the way, and a sense of satisfaction in taking no shortcuts.

The findings through motivations could be used to assist in the breaking of video game reliance for these needs. Socially, we find that social structure can be useful to create senses of place. While a group of friends playing a game is nothing to scoff at, creating roles for people (so long as they are willing and able to fulfill or learn to fulfill those roles) leads to a feeling of ownership and participation within the group. Finding another group to belong to could be advantageous if someone would like to break this for social purposes. Should the motivations be more of the gamification nature, taking up hobbies that are open platforms for play such as golf, frisbee golf, rock climbing, etc. Focusing on activities that have open rules, multiple ways to approach, and are possible to play with a group.

Research Limitations & Further Research

The sandbox nature of the game and group studied provided unforeseen limitations regarding the relationships of motivations at play. Members were predisposed to associating their gameplay interactions as social to the point of seeming to disregard the rules. The hierarchical positions of these members also played a large role in their opinions of the rules, as some were not expected to follow them rigorously. It was attempted to reach newer members, but either they were less willing to be interviewed on the subject or the messages never reached them. Should a future study be conducted in the realm of alterations of play, it could be particularly advantageous to conduct several in-depth interviews with solo players. Despite the increased difficulty of sampling, doing so would effectively remove the social motivation to dig to the root

of the motivation of alteration. Studying groups that have further ties with the rules could also be a point to focus upon. While it was not obvious upon entry, it was made apparent that the aesthetic limitations provided to the group are a draw for new members but become seemingly taken for granted as time continues. I would have liked to know the membership rates in COVID, if they saw an uptick in applicants or member playtime.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Questions

- 1) What is your (age) (preferred gender) (race) (general location). - Demographic
- 2) When did you start playing GTA?
 - a) When did you join GKMC? – Demographic
- 3) Do you feel you “get” anything from playing GTA? If so, what? - Motivations (Yee)
- 4) When you have time to play video games, do you consider playing something other than GTA often? (MDT)
- 5) How did you find GKMC? Were you looking for a clan? (MDT)
 - a) What made you want to join GKMC? – Motivations (Yee), Demographic, & affordance alteration, CTDA (Brock), SIT (Tajfel)
- 6) How did/do you feel about the prospect process? – Affordance alteration, third spaces (Oldenburg)
- 7) What are some of your favorite parts about how GKMC plays GTA? – Affordance alteration opinion & CTDA (Brock)
- 8) Do you know of any other MC’s in GTA5 that play like GKMC, to any degree?
 - a) What do you think of them? -SIT (Tajfel)
- 9) Do you make distinctions between GKMC members and other MCs with similar rules 1%er weapons? (SIT)
 - a) What about those that play without any alterations? (SIT)
 - b) What about no group/no MC? – SIT (Tajfel)
- 10) What makes the limitations fun/interesting for you? – Affordance alteration & motivations (Yee)
- 11) Have you ever participated in any other clans, inside or outside of GTA?
 - a) GTA Role Play servers? - Motivations (Yee) & third spaces (Oldenburg)
- 12) Do you think that GTA is a good platform for groups such as GKMC to exist?
 - a) Accessibility, welcoming, safe to identify as you are – Affordances (Gibson) third spaces (Oldenburg)
- 13) How familiar are you with the bylaws as written on the website? (Affordance alteration & MDT)
 - a) How often would you say you bend these rules, if ever? – Affordance alteration attention and social norm conformity
- 14) Do you think that the way GKMC plays GTA is a way that Rockstar intended? – Affordances (Gibson), CTDA (Brock)
- 15) Do members ever check to see if other members are following the rules? (checking their vehicle permissions, watching them play, loyalty/respect checks to underlings?)
- 16) How does probation work? Is rule breaking a problem often?
- 17) Do you have any other thoughts about how being in the group affects your gameplay?
- 18) Do you think you stick around for the restrictions, or in spite of them?

Appendix B – Motorcycle Club Headquarters Images







Appendix C – Quantic Foundry Genre Map

