

# A Mixed Method Approach to Studying Collaborative Video Game Play

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Activity Theory supports the idea that human activity is hierarchically organized. Our research follows a qualitative case study that highlights the use of affordances, or potentials for action, during video game player interaction among peers and the game interface. Activity Theory's meditational triangle will shed light on motivated activity itself, the tools available to complete the activity, and peer relationships (such as role specialization and rules of interaction) to evaluate game designs and their ability to fulfill serious purposes with meaningful outcomes. This presentation will focus on Activity Theory and how the meditational triangle can be used to evaluate peer relationships within game play.

A blended approach incorporating features of Ethnomethodology and grounded theory will be used to construct an open-ended, bottom-up approach to studying collaborative game play. A true Ethnomethodological approach would reject the top-down, theory-driven approach required by Activity Theory, Activity Theory can highlight particular relationships during game player interactions to provide a frame for game player activity. Activity theory, when applied in conjunction with an emergent approach, can both broaden our concept of affordances and remind us to look for action potentials on the various levels of activity, and does not necessarily have to constrain findings by introducing preconceptions. While bound to the specific situation being studied and not seeking of patterns in observations, Ethnomethodology can be a very useful starting point for the analysis of game player activity in order to reveal underlying, and commonly overlooked, social assumptions.

Activity theory can be incorporated following an initially open-ended, emergent Ethnomethodological approach to highlight relationships and game player motivations that might have been initially overlooked. While this process becomes partially theory-driven in the end, it also allows us to obtain some of the benefits of initially using an open-ended ethnomethodologically inspired approach. This approach can help construct a context-dependent, bottom-up, indexical and descriptive representation of game player activity, which is crucial to understanding interactions within Serious Games and their associated meaningful outcomes.

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