



We like Among Us
because it lets us lie
to our friends

Unity in Among Us and Quarantine

Welcome to the third episode of the series, titled “Unity in Among Us and Quarantine”. And in this episode, we’ll probe into a game that became widely popular within the last three months. But before we dive into the topic, I want to first introduce my team members, who have done a fantastic job and put this all together...Elaine Han and Andy Kim. For this specific episode, Jimmy Wang will be our wonderful producer and Elaine will be my dear co-producer.

And we're actually doing this on a rainy Sunday, which is exactly the title of our entire series, "The Longest Rainy Sunday".

So what do you think of when you hear the phrase "The Longest Rainy Sunday"?

I think of chips and salsa, yeah chips and salsa, that's right. A little bit of those, with some cheese and hot sauce, and you're good to go. But guess what, this is not the time of any of these, this is the time of Among Us.

This game almost came out of nowhere in the midst of the pandemic. And indeed, It was not recognized or heard for a long time. It was carefully waiting and waiting. And in September 2020, it received over 100 million downloads, and the player count rose to 3.8 million concurrent players at its peak. Get excited guys. I know Andy is. And he'll tell you about how this game is played.

Yes. Among Us is a low-graphic, indie, online multiplayer social deduction game. The participants for each game are categorized as either impostors or crewmates. The impostors' goal is to secretly kill off the crewmates while trying to keep their identity anonymous; they have the ability to 'sabotage' certain facets of the game like closing off doors and turning off the lights which disable crewmate vision and also the ability to 'vent' which enable them to move swiftly throughout the entire map. Each round ends with a 'discussion period' during which players can kill off a player by voting. The crewmates win if they vote off the impostors or complete their individualized sets of tasks scattered around the map; the impostors win if they outnumber or match the number of crewmates. Among Us received an influx of popularity mostly due to Twitch streamers and YouTubers playing the fun, party game.

Exactly right, Andy. The idea of having a remote party online sounds very intriguing, Elaine, would you share a little bit about your experience playing this game Among Us?

- Well first, I really agree with what Andy previously said; Among Us is indeed a social game that requires deduction skills. Furthermore, my strong impression about the game is the connection we have to make with our teammates to go through a series of cooperation, discussion, and decision. While the ultimate goal is to win the victory no matter which side of the game we are in, I enjoy the process of engaging with others more, especially during such a pandemic time.

Well said, thank you Elaine. Among Us received a 95% positive rating on steam and people like it for different reasons. For our process of critical playing, we find that there is one key characteristic of Among us that is representative of what people are looking for during the current pandemic. Among Us has become famous because it is a game that emphasizes mutual collaboration and strengthens bonds between people. And this emphasis on a group identity effectively appeals to players worldwide, who are stuck at home, lost, confused, eagerly trying to find a purpose on a long rainy Sunday afternoon.

In her book *Critical Play*, Mary Flanagan says, “By playing together, people form close communities and develop a group identity and a sense of belonging.” When you look at how people discover their own identities, there is usually the word “group” associated with it. That being said, we tend to know who we are from interacting with other people. And right now, in the big context of Covid, self identity is, to some degree, lost. Many lives are suffering. So many people lost their jobs. Some people feel hopeless. Others wonder how they can get things back to normal in life. And I believe the rise of Among Us shows that people want to play and re-define their identities. And they do so by making connections to friends and other players online. Therefore, Among Us serves as a tool that people can make connections with their friends (or find a sense of belonging in a larger group) and also understand the self.

Throughout the game, one would see that Among Us is full of the notion of togetherness. Simply put, players experience a strong connection with each other. For example, when players report a dead body on the spaceship, the game system will automatically set up an emergency meeting with every player in it. Then, players actively communicate with each other during the meeting in order to better determine who's the imposter. How this game drives players to reach the same goal is characterized by the word "unity".

Also, by design this game pushes people to communicate with each other. One may not notice that somehow the constraint of this game model is time. Even though there is not a physical clock ticking, you almost feel that you're always rushed. Therefore, the imposter has to kill crewmates quickly and frequently, driven by crewmates' efforts in completing all individual tasks and winning the entire game. And in the end, every extra kill reported means every extra collective meeting that needs to take place.

Would you feel excited if the resources that players use during the game are all created by each other? Yeah I know! Amazing, right? That is a theme of unity as well. In this game, our knowledge or intuitions are based solely on the information that other players leave us, whatever it's a dead body of a player that is killed by an imposter or a hidden lie behind someone's words, you name it. Thus, communication is a must in "Among Us" because we actually rely on each other to exchange new valuable information.

We found a way to describe this dependent way of playing in a more straightforward fashion: playing against each other, playing from each other. And now a good question for us to ask is: does this dependent way of playing manifest a good design of the medium of the game? How do we know if Among Us truly speaks to its audiences by forcing them to rely on each other?

This requires a firsthand in-depth look into the rhetorical situation of this game. What kind of video game players is the game designed for? Well, since Among Us functions as a team bonding/socializing party game, it is designed for players who want to spend time with friends together online. Due to the pandemic this year, more people are in need of hanging out virtually as in reality we're quarantined and disconnected from each other. The rising need of working together instead of alone, collectively instead of individually represents the key purposes that many people play games this year. Thus, Among Us has a perfect design of medium because it fits people's expectations on the right spot. People hope to collaborate and play as a team; and Among Us has them all united in the same server.

To elaborate on what Jimmy said, Among Us is a multiplayer party game in which you have to psycho-analyze your friends' behavior. You assess their "suspiciousness" as they maneuver around the map, doing or maybe even faking tasks. During each discussion period, you also assess speech patterns. Do they use filler words? Do they go head first and start hard accusing people that are only a little suspicious? Do they relentlessly defend themselves that they are crewmates although all the evidence proves otherwise? Players look for these kinds of behavior changes on a psychoanalytical level to ultimately uncover the truth. Thus, this game is learning more about your friends. As you play more and more of the game, you learn interesting facets of people's personality that you might have known before. This game is the perfect tool that strengthens existing friendships and also develops new ones, which is as important as ever during this pandemic. Interestingly enough, around the same time Among Us received a boom in popularity, there was another game that received a similar amount of "hype", Fall Guys, a multiplayer game that also gained popularity from Twitch streamers and YouTubers playing it. This highlights two things: just how influential content creators on these gaming platforms have

over the gaming world and how people have been longing to divert their isolation by getting back to socializing with their friends through these multiplayer party games. So, thank you Among Us for alleviating our loneliness!!

In a long rainy Sunday, we sit down at our desk, we look at the world right now. We feel upset. And we wanna do something about it. And we open a game called Among Us, where we find purposes, identities, and valuable time with our friends. Collaborating, bonding, these things all demonstrate one key message. That is unity, unity, and We are therefore able to imagine a better way forward with unity.

We hope you enjoyed listening to our podcast, The Longest Rainy Sunday, the episode produced by Jimmy Wang, Elaine Han, and Andy Kim this week, instructed by Professor Morgen at Emory University. Check out the resources listed below in our bibliography, and stay tuned for next week's episode. **BYE!!!**