Criticizing Caillois: Examining How Players Perceive Rules in Play and Games.

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ABSTRACT

Roger Caillois famously argued that games should be analyzed based upon how limited they are by rules on a continuum from Paidia to Ludus. Several other scholars have since viewed rules and rule-boundedness as key to understanding both games and play. No previous work has sufficiently addressed whether this continuum is representative of how player's experience rules in games and play. By examining 429 academic works that analyze playfulness, and an interview data set of 125 playful experiences for how rules, limitations, and boundaries are discussed, this work expands upon the framework of Caillois and adds two new categories that typify player-rule interactions. Līlā is a player creating and changing rules as an act of play, and Muhō is a player violating rules as an act of play. Introducing these new categories adds critical nuance for future discussions on the relationship of rules, games, and play.

Keywords

Rules, Playfulness, Caillois,

INTRODUCTION

The nature and implications of boundaries, rules, and restrictions in playful experiences is a fundamental question in academic discourses related to games. Roger Caillois, in 1958, famously argued in *Man, Play, and Games* that games should be analyzed based upon how limited they are by rules on a continuum from *paidia* to *ludus*. Caillois implies in this work that being unbounded by rules creates a more playful environment, while a more rule-bounded environment is fundamentally less playful, as it also becomes more recognizably like a game, or a sport (see reprint 2001, p. 13). Several other scholars that study play, playfulness, or games, similarly argue that a lack of rule-boundedness creates a more playful environment (Deterding et al. 2013). In contrast, several game scholars, such as Bernard Suits, argue that the rules, boundaries, and restrictions in games are fundamental to why they are appealing at all (2018). This continuum has also been presented more as a continuum of qualitative experiences where games are presented as creating one type of engaging experience through rules, and a lack of rules creates a different type of engaging experience (Alvarez & Djaouti 2011; Deterding et al. 2013). Implied in Caillois' work and subsequent works is an assumption that rules are fundamentally followed by players, they are restrictive, and the presence of more rules will always have a singular experiential result. By analyzing how rules, boundaries, and limitations are described in 429 academic sources related to playfulness, and an interview data set of 125 playful experiences this paper will argue that it is the right time for scholars to move beyond Caillois' theory and critically examine how rules

affect player experiences in playful experiences. This work aims to remap the theoretical claims of Caillois to include more ways that players may experience rules, and also bring in less western-centric theories of play and playfulness to categorize them.

Whether rules fundamentally inspire engagement by players, tediously restrict desire or have other effects on play is an important question for game studies to address critically. Several game design theorists view the designer's role as fundamentally tied to creating a game's rules (Fullerton, 2014; Salen & Zimmerman 2003; Schell 2008). Past literature however has not fully considered the question of how rules are perceived by players themselves and whether this continuum is a complete understanding, or a sufficient qualitative description of how rules, play, and games relate. This paper will take a new qualitative tactic to address this theoretical question and asks: How are rules, boundaries, and restrictions critically related to playful experiences?

This paper will address the presence and qualitative nature of rules in playful experiences by presenting a four-part theoretical framework. The data for this paper comes from two sources: 1.) a literature review the definitions of playfulness (Masek & Stenros 2021) and 2.) a semi-structured interview by participants across culture on highly playful experiences. By looking at how restrictions, rules, and boundaries are described in these two data sets, this paper triangulates theoretical descriptions that 1) are used in theoretical work 2) are commonly present in individuals' playful experiences, and 3) have a distinct qualitative relationship to playfulness. While the original source material focuses on playfulness, these theories will also apply more broadly to other instances of both play and games. This work is predominantly a theoretical contribution where the data sets illustrate the argument and its applicability in different contexts.

Upon analyzing the two data sets, four qualitative roles for rules, boundaries, and restrictions were commonly discussed. The names for these types of rules are drawn from the academic literature that describes them. 1) *Paidia*: boundaries where specific normal rules stop applying. 2) *Līlā*: rules that are created, negotiated and/or destroyed as a form of play 3) *Ludus*: rules that are followed in order to create a specific type of play. 4) *Muhō*: rules, boundaries, and norms that are violated in order to create a specific type of play.

In addition to expanding and modifying Caillois' original *paidia* to *ludus* scale, these new theoretical depictions of rules are informed by different cultural ways of describing playful behavior and/or games. In providing these new theoretical concepts, future game studies discourses may be able to describe player behavior more accurately, and further theoretical discussion on the nature of rules.

METHODS

Two data sources were analyzed in order to illustrate and refine the presented framework. The first source is a theoretical literature review and the second is a semi-structured interview data set. By combining these two different forms of data, the goal is to triangulate concepts that apply both theoretically in an academic context and pragmatically in how people describe their own playful experiences. Triangulation is a valuable method to expand the breadth and depth of a theoretical analysis (Thurmond 2001). The data that is extracted from these two data sets uses a similar qualitative five phase thematic data-analytic technique (Yin 2015). These two data sources are used to compose the argument of the following sections. Neither data set was gathered with the rules-based questions originally in mind, however both found "rules" to be a prescient concept and a valuable lens for further interpretation.

The first data set is a literature review analyzing academic research texts with playfulness in their title, published from 2014-2019, and then any subsequent cited definitions of playfulness (Masek & Stenros, 2021). Primary data was selected from 429 sources that defined playfulness. From 186 isolated definitions, the author analyzed if the concept of rules, restrictions, or boundaries were critically present inside of them. In this way, this data set is a useful source to describe how a particular way of discussing rules is present in a diversity of academic sources on playfulness.

The second data set is a semi-structured interview (N=83) process that was carried out at LOCATION from spring 2019 through winter 2021 where international students from a diversity of backgrounds were asked to reflect on a self-determined "highly playful experience" from any point in their life that they remembered in detail. Playfulness was defined for them as "An experience often associated with play, where since it is an internal experience, you may be doing any type of activity". This definition was used to provide the widest interpretive space for interviewees, so that their personal definitions and views on play and/or playfulness could be elicited, a technique derived from content-empty definitions in micro phenomenology (Petitmengin 2006, p. 248). Interviewees were selected for a diverse national background as a theoretical sampling method (Teppo 2015), as well as recommendations from past interviewees. The final data analyzes playful experiences that occurred in over 43 countries around the world, across primarily young adults with the average age of interviewee being 26. In this way, this data set can be seen as a useful source to verify how a theoretical concept, such as boundaries, occurs in actual lived "playful experiences".

The semi-structured interview collection utilized a triangulation of methodologies (Thurmond 2001) between Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 2017 for a reprint), Micro Phenomenology (Petitmengin 2006) and Qualitative Thematic Analysis (Yin 2015). First, grounded theory techniques (Strauss & Corbin 1997) were utilized primarily as a method of bottom-up elicitation of participant's interpretive views and ongoing theoretical development categorizing those views across a theoretically chosen participant pool. In specific, the following elements of grounded theory methods were utilized: constant comparative analysis, open and intermediate coding, theoretical sampling and saturation, theoretical integration of codes and categories, and concurrent and continuous data generation and analysis, and theoretical sampling (See Teppo 2015). Second, micro-phenomenology was used primarily for enabling interviewees to recall complicated elements of specific memories and more accurately deconstruct important sequential aspects of those memories. In specific, the following interview stabilization considerations were applied: Stabilization of Attention, Focusing upon a singular experience, Refocusing from What to How, Focusing on different dimensions of experience, Retrospective Analysis (re-enactment) and Scale of Precision (Petitmengin 2006). Finally, a broader qualitative thematic analysis technique was used to analyze how specific types of words, such as rules, boundaries, limitations etc. were critically present in individuals' experiences, using a five phase thematic analytic process (Yin 2015).

The interview process gathered a total of 125 highly playful experiences from 84 interviewees, from a diversity of national backgrounds (N=43), both in-person or online, taking on average 64 minutes per interview. The data analysis is ongoing and currently includes almost 2,000 distinct codes interpreting the data and numerous axial codes and resulting categories. Due to the degree of diversity in personal interpretations by participants, their quotations will be reported with an experience

number, with no gender or age information, unless the participant themselves thought this was critical to understand the experience itself.

These two data sets were analyzed in the same five phase thematic data-analytic technique (Yin 2015) focusing on the idea of rules, limitations, and constraints. This brings together two different types of voices, academic and self-reflective, on the topic of how rules are interacted with by players. After conducting both data analyzes the resulting theoretical model was constructed.

RESULTS

Given the diverse sources of data, it is firstly valuable to note that idea of boundaries, rules, and restrictions do overlap between the two data sets, providing a firmer footing for the subsequent analysis. The idea of restrictions is both present in many academic discourses that study playfulness, and is a salient concept that individuals used to describe key components of their playful experiences. In order to provide the clearest contribution possible, each theoretical conception of rules will be described with quotations from both academic sources that utilize that form of boundaries, as well as quotations from individual's experiences that held those types of rules as critical to the playfulness of their memory.

These themes are not exclusive categories. One theoretical work or experience may present different rules in different ways. There are four themes that will be deconstructed for how rules are described:

Paidia: Boundaries where specific normal rules stop applying.
Līlā: Rules that are created, negotiated and/or destroyed as a form of play.
Ludus: Rules that are followed in order to create a specific type of play.
Muhō: Rules, boundaries and norms that are violated in order to create a specific type of play.

Each of these words have culturally significant definitions in their own context, which will be discussed later. The use of these terms are meant to further interest by game studies to explore less western-centric concepts that can inform understandings of play. These remappings will fundamentally be reductive, however. The goal of the paper is to expand thinking much like how the appropriation of the greek term *paidia* (which translates to children in greek), and the latin term *ludus* (which translates to play, game, prank, or elementary school in addition to several other connotations), done by Caillois did result in a fruitful expansion on the discussion of rules in games. It is with eyes open that these words are chosen so that later writers can criticize their application and in doing so bring up more interesting insights for games scholars in general.

It is also important to put into context Caillois' problematically western-oriented thinking in origins of his terms. In explaining the term *paidia* for example he writes "I have chosen the term *paidia* because its root is the word for child, and also because of a desire not to needlessly disconcert the reader by resorting to a term borrowed from an antipodal language" (2001, p. 27). This paper thus also seeks to re-approach languages into game studies discourses that are hopefully no longer disconcerting to readers. Once again, While the full cultural context of these terms will not be possible to communicate in this paper, an argument will be made as to how core components of these concepts are highly useful sources for understanding a specific relationship between rules, play, and games.

Paidia
Freedom, Exploration, Imagination

Paidia is a bounded zone where normal rules that would prevent play are removed. The opposite of *paidia* is obligation: a non-playful restriction. As an example, we could imagine a school aged child going on a vacation. Unlike the perception of their normal school-environment as full of external rules, during vacation time they feel freer to do whatever they want. This absence of normal rules is commonly described as creating an internal sensation of freedom, liminality, or removal from normal life. The freedom that *paidia* enables can extend beyond artificial rules and even become described as a freedom the rules of reality itself often utilizing imagination. Examples of *paidia boundaries* include Vacations/Festivals, free play spaces, parties and stories/imagination.

The term paidia is originally sourced from the work of Caillois who argues that play can be placed

> On a continuum from two opposite poles. At one extreme an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety is dominant. It manifests a kind of uncontrolled fantasy that can be designated by the term paidia. (Caillois 2001, p. 13)

Caillois's description of paidia as care-free, and uncontrolled emphasizes a reduction in an implied normal level of care and control. His conception of paidia has also been widely influential on other works on playfulness in fields such as Human-Computer Interaction (Bischof et al. 2016) and Gamification (Deterding et al. 2011). Deterding et al. (2011) for example defined *Playfulness*, based on *paidia*, as fundamentally unbounded by rules as opposed to the rule bounded ludic *Gamefulness*.

Other theoretical authors have similarly argued that playfulness is typified by a lack of limitation, and the active reduction of normal limitations. Dewey, in the field of psychotherapy describes this as

> The playful attitude is one of freedom. The person is not bound to the physical traits of things, nor does he care whether a thing really means (as we say) what he takes it to represent. When the child plays horse with a broom and cars with chairs, the fact that the broom does not really represent a horse, or a chair a locomotive, is of no account. (p. 162, 1997).

In Dewey's context, while in normal environments, individuals are bounded in some way to the reality they are living in. Playfulness enables people to remove those limitations and engage in acts of imagination. This type of freedom is not just a freedom from game-imposed rules, but rather all types of rules or realities that could limit playfulness. This concept has been used in several definitions of playfulness such as Bundy's test of playfulness from occupation therapy which defines one of the core components as "not bound by objective reality" (Bundy et al. 2001 p. 277). Restrictions that playfulness has been associated with removing include limiting social identities (Sullivan & Wilson 2015), attitudes of prejudice (Van der Meij et al. 2017), trauma-based feelings of vulnerability and hypervigilance (Monahan, 2015) and more generally constraining situational factors (Shen, Chick, & Zinn 2014).

Importantly, many theories also describe playfulness as using a clear boundary that enables normal rules to be reduced. Huizinga's conception of play and the magic circle describes how it is a "free activity standing quite consciously outside

"ordinary" life as being 'not serious'..." (Huizinga, 2014). Huizinga is also a useful example of how paideic rule-reducing boundaries can co-occur with other types of rules. Huizinga also argues that play "proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.". In this context, I would argue Huizinga is discussing two different qualitative types of boundaries, a paideic boundary enabling a "free activity" from "ordinary life" and then another form of boundary that institutes additional artificial "fixed rules". Other authors do not frame playfulness as instituting its own rules, for example O'Connor (2014) discusses the playful contexts and concludes that for "a pre-school child, playfulness is based on space, freedom and choice to explore and experiment" (p. 135). In this work, freedom of choice is framed by an absence or violation of normative rules such as play occurring under a table vs. at a table.

In this way, we can see how a certain form of boundary is commonly discussed in theories of playfulness: paideic boundaries that remove normal limitations. In playful experiences around the globe, adults similarly have a clear conception of playfulness as enabling the reduction of normative rules.

In the qualitative dataset of 125 playful experiences around the globe, several participants held a similar view that playfulness was associated with a reduction in normative rules and felt tied to a sensation freedom. Unlike theorists of playfulness, individuals focused considerably more on a social environment being the definitive type of boundary that enabled the reduction in normative limitation. For example, as one participant described their highly playful experience in a party environment

> It was very happy and enjoyable, and it was like this night should never be ended and I would say it was like the atmosphere about the friends and the atmosphere that you can behave like you want there's nobody judging you about what you do if you sing very very badly or if you behave like nonsense (Experience 13).

This concept of an environment where normative social judgment is reduced is a common feature in several playful experiences with *paideic boundaries*. Other types of normative restrictions that participants described include the normal rules implied by "breaking free from rational thought" (Experience 3), "overall liberty to change roles" (Experience 47) or a story direction such as "you are free to tell and run the story where you want." (Experience 99). In this final example it is important to note that the story-telling game being described was in part free from the boundaries of reality itself. In this way, a special boundary enabled a story-telling game to enter into a fictitious topic for the story-telling style.

In this way we can see how a boundary that removes normative rules and restrictions, whether social rules of judgment, rules of reality, or the rules of normalcy, is a prescient concept to understand both theories of playfulness and playful experience in a diversity of social contexts. This removal of rules can occur within an individual, such as a change of mind, or outside of an individual, such as a parent reducing the normative rules to enable a child's free play. In conclusion we can see the following definition:

Paidia: Boundaries where specific normal rules stop applying.

लीला Līlā

Creativity, Rule negotiation, Re-framing

Līla describes boundaries that are actively manipulated, built, and destroyed as a primary activity in playful experiences. The opposite of a *līla boundary* is obedience: an unquestionable rule. If we imagine an adult in a tabletop role-playing game not only playing the game, but sometimes debating what the rules of the game are, in order to enable a different form of play, this negotiation is a *līla* interaction with rules. We could also imagine a creative artist figuring out what kind of painting they are trying to draw. This form of rule-creation and destruction is frequently described as creating an internal sensation of creativity, struggle, and competence/power. These rules are not followed, and they cannot be violated, because they are currently created, remade, and destroyed as an activity. When the activity of changing the rules stops then the act of *līla* has ended. These boundaries can occur briefly, such as a short rule-change, or can become an entire activity where the negotiated rules are never followed. Examples of *līla boundaries* include Creative spaces, arguments, and meta-rule/design conversations.

The term līlā derives from the appropriation of the Sanskrit concept of divine play and subsequent application especially in the work of Richard Schechner in performance studies. Schechner defines līlā as a relationship that gods have to creating and destroying the concrete world of maya when he writes "In Indian terms, the gods in their lila made a world of maya: when the gods play, the world comes into existence; but this world, however substantial it appears, is not fixed or reliable. It is ultimately governed by desire and chance." (Schechner & Lucie 2020 p. 112). Other english speaking scholars including William Sax describes līlā in a similar way writing "God created the world in a spirit of līlā, like a child who builds a sandcastle and then unattached to his or her creation, knocks it down and builds it up again" (Sax 1995, p.3). While the full implications of maya-līla have yet to be translated well into English (Sax 1995), a highly valuable component of *līlā* in its original context depicts the essence of a certain interaction with rules. In this divine play, Gods are not bounded by their rules or by reality, they create and destroy them as a form of their play. Several playfulness theories present a similar type of creative/destructive playful relationship to rules.

In academic theories of playfulness, the creation, destruction, and recreation of boundaries in play is a fundamental focus of psychology and Occupational Therapy. Barnett (2007) had a highly influential new conception of playfulness for young adults as "predisposition to frame (or reframe) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humor, and/or entertainment" (p. 955). Subsequent psychologists have taken this language of re-framing such as Proyer (2017) who defines "Playfulness is an individual differences variable that allows people to frame or reframe everyday situations in a way such that they experience them as entertaining, and/or intellectually stimulating, and/or personally interesting." (p. 8). The language of framing and re-framing seems to focus on playfulness as an active alteration of the manner and limitations an interaction is guided by. The specifics of these theories further seem to clarify an active rules-affecting relationship between playfulness and its environment. For example, Proyer's (2017) OLIW measure of playfulness is measured by items such as "I enjoy a game only if the rules allow for something curious, unpredictable, unusual, or surprising to happen (or if I am allowed to change the rules in such a way that they can!)" (Appendix). The Test of Playfulness, often used in Occupational Therapy, also observes active rule change as a critical aspect of playfulness termed "framing" and measured by observing a child for making "facial, Verbal, and body cues appropriate to the situation and says "This is how you should act towards me" (Bundy et al. 2001, Appendix). These conceptions all view an active creative/destructive changing of rules as fundamentally playful.

Individual playful experiences also include a subset of līlā, where players are actively creating, destroying, and recreating limitations as a form of play. This style of rules-relationship was commonly expressed in experiences associated with imaginary activities. One participant described such a creative-destructive relationship to rules in their imaginary play as a child as

> We would always argue over who got to be who and what the rules were. What superpowers you could have if you were going to be a superhero, and like, what was fair and what wasn't. And for some reason, that would take up all of the time, we wouldn't actually get to role play these characters. We would spend the entire time building our characters and setting…But it was still really fun (Experience 16).

This experience is highly illustrative of the līlā style interaction with the rules. In this case, the participants were so engaged by creating rules about superhero powers, arguing about which rules to allow, and recreating new rules, that there was no time to follow these rules. The fact that the participant described how fun these arguments were speaking to how this rule-argumentation was a desired primary activity.

Several other experiences included an active constructive/destructive relationship to rules associated with imagination and role playing. Other līlā experiences also included various forms of imaginary role playing such as pretending to be a pirate (Experience 11) pretending to be a medieval knight as an adult (Experience 17), pretending to run away from zombies (Experience 26), and adult workplace activities that felt like role playing (Experience 5). The act of imagination seemed to frequently be associated with a player's ability to quickly change rules, thus enabling līlā. Other activities that were perceived in this way included creative photography (Experience 42), and with highly autonomous game play experiences with *Minecraft* which one participant described as "everybody is just fully engaged in just messing around in this world, and trying to come up with creative ideas, like spontaneously, but that's the core of it." (Experience 83).

Common to these experiences was a sense that the very nature of the experience was in negotiation. Similar to the gods in the divine play of līlā, the participant was constantly creating, destroying, and recreating the boundaries of what they were doing as an activity itself. In conclusion we can see the following definition:

Līlā: Rules that are created, negotiated, and/or destroyed as a form of play.

Ludus
Games

Ludus describes rules that are meant to be followed in order to create a specific form of play. The opposite of ludus is chaos: a disorganized environment that is unpredictable and where individuals do not share the conception of the primary activity. Whereas certain conceptions of ludus, both theoretically and in interviews, present it as fundamentally unplayful, other scholars and individuals view the binding rules of ludus as a direct source of playful engagement. For example, we can imagine a group of children who are bored and do not know what to do, one of them offers a game for all of them to play, which they then enjoy. Those ludic rules can be seen as fundamentally increasing engagement for each individual, and unifying engagement across individuals. Certain individuals also bring up how these game rules can sometimes become restrictive, and not enabling a desire to play which can cause

conflict. Ludic rules are often associated with experiences such as gaming, winning, and restriction.

Caillois' is the original definition of ludus inspiring this work, which is defined directly after the definition of paidia above as

> At the opposite extreme, this frolicsome and impulsive exuberance is almost entirely absorbed or disciplined by a complementary, and in some respects inverse, tendency to its anarchic and capricious nature: there is a growing tendency to bind it with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions, to oppose it still more by ceaselessly practicing the most embarrassing chicanery upon it, in order to make it more uncertain or attaining its desired effect. This latter principle is completely impractical, even though it requires an ever greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity. I call this second component ludus. (Caillois 2001, p. 13).

The description of ludus explicitly presents it in a sense as an opposite to playfulness. The use of purposefully tedious conventions seems to imply that Caillois fundamentally views these rules as the opposite of what players want to be doing. Other later scholars have softened this perspective that ludic rules are not engaging. For example, Deterding et al. (2011) uses Caillois' theory to describe more of qualitative difference between *gamefulness* which is "for rule-bound, goal-oriented play (i.e., ludus), with little space for open, exploratory, free-form play (i.e., paidia)" (Deterding et al. 2011, p. 11). Which is contrasted with the free-from paidia *playfulness*. Other scholars view following rules as a fundamental aspect of how games create a desired experience. For example, Bernard Suits in *The Grasshopper: games, life, and utopia,* argues that for a player to play a game they need to have a "lusory attitude" which he defines as "*lusory attitude:* the acceptance of constitutive rules just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur." (Suits, 2018, p. 40). This quote seems to frame rules as a requirement that players accept to pursue a desired activity in game play. Hazar et al. (2014) in young adult sport studies similarly frames rule-following as synonymous with playfulness by measuring playfulness with statements such as "I follow the rules of a game" (p. 37). In these theories we perceive not only a tension about whether rules are desired by players or not, but also an agreement that rules also generally guide experiences across players towards a more singular shared experience of a game. The presence of rules has even been observed as a common criterion across definitions of games (Stenros 2017).

Individuals interviewed about playful experiences also had several presentations of ludic rules. Similar to Suits conception, several participants described rules in games as a fundamental requirement of play with statements such as "part of playfulness is knowing the rules and accepting them." (Experience 5). This general perspective was also sometimes a participant's entire definition of playfulness such as "you're trying to create a game situation, in which you have a set of rules, you have some outcomes, and then you have rewards for that" (Experience 92). It was common for participants to associate ludic rules with victory conditions, for example when answering if rules heightened the playfulness of their experience, one participant responded with "Yeah. Because you have to stick to the rules to win" (Experience 87). However, other participants shared a more Caillois perspective that too many rules reduce playfulness such as one participant who described how "So probably too many rules ruin this kind of playfulness in my mind." (Experience 51). Several participants had a hard time even perceiving game rules because they were associated with the very reality of the playful experience. One participant demonstrated this confusion when describing a live action treasure hunt's rules as "maybe not clear rules but I mean, the rules were

more like the objective of the game, going toward the treasure and so following the steps" (Experience 6). In this interview it became clear that the rules that created the engaging experience of the game were trying to be separated out from non-playful rules that would normally bind them. This speaks to how paidia and ludus can overlap with each other, removing normative rules and replacing them with potentially more engaging game rules.

In this way we can see an important conception of boundaries and rules in playful experiences:

Ludus: Rules that are followed in order to create a specific type of play.

無法 Muhō
Dark play, Humor

Muhō describes open transgression and violation of rules. The opposite of muhō is oppression: when rule violations are completely stopped. This rule violation is generally not meant to change the rule at hand, but rather, through breaking the rule create its own form of play. For example, we can imagine a group of friends openly making offensive comments to each other. The jokes are purposefully not following rules about polite conversation and this offensiveness is their primary play activity. These friends do not actually wish to remove the rules of politeness in other contexts, but rather simply engage in this rule-breaking manner in this conversation. Those rules and norms of politeness they are violating can be seen as muhō. Experiences with muhō are frequently described as inspiring the experience of laughter, danger, and risk.

Muhō roughly translates to "lawless" and is connected to understanding definitions of playfulness through Galit Aviman's understanding of playful freedom in the life of zen artists Hakuin Ekaku and Sengai Gibon. Aviman translates one inscription on a painting as revealing of a deeper philosophy arguing

> Sengai reveals in the last inscription that in fact 'Sengai's paintings are lawless' therefore we come to understand that there was probably no intention or attempt from the beginning to follow (or not to follow) any rules - as Buddha says: Laws are principally lawless (Aviman P.74-75).

This quotation depicts a very particular type of rule relationship between Sengai as a buddhist monk and artist and his environment. The above quote is the source of the concept "lawless", translated by the author as muhō.

The conception of lawless in Aviman's work is a deep sense of freedom from restrictions that are still binding to the individual's society and greater context. To be explicit, despite breaking various rules and generating humorous experiences during, Sengai's work is not viewed as an attempt to change any of the rules that are being transgressed. For example, a common character in Sengai's work is Kensu the clam priest who "used to wander along lakes and river-banks eating shrimps and clams, despite the buddhist requirement of adherence to a vegetarian diet" (p. 77). The openly transgressive nature of a vegetarian monk, who maintains they are a vegetarian, while eating shrimp and clams is a metaphor of what is meant as muhō.

Aviman also connects this to a general Zen buddhist as support for "the free action of a rule breaker, an awakened and enlightened person whose mind ignores distinctions and who can 'laugh uproariously in the face of normal constraint'" (p.79). Laughing

uproariously is interesting for two reasons, one it connects muhō to comedy, which will be an ongoing theme, and also emphasizes how awareness of rule-breaking is a source of engagement. This playful action of a rule-breaker who can laugh uproariously while violating rules and norms, is the essence of what I define as muhō.

Other scholars have interests in similar conceptions of playfulness as openly seeking the violation of rules as a form of play. Schechner in the field of Performance Studies describes Dark Play similarly as "Dark play subverts order, dissolves frames, and breaks its own rules – so much so that the playing itself is in danger of being destroyed, as in spying, double-agentry, con games, and stings." (Schechner & Lucie 2020, p. 119). This subversion of order includes forms intentional danger, law breaking, joking around death and social rejection. This form of dark play seems to similarly be constructed by specific rules that players openly violate, the essence of Muhō. Other conceptions of open norm/rule violation in playfulness include theoretical treatments of bullying (Gonçales et al. 2014), violent humor in the Bible (Kim 2015), transgressive game play (Mortensen & Jørgensen 2020), and explicit rule-violation of Nazi ideologies by prisoners in death camps (Salura 2017). Different scholars associate the rules that are broken more or less with a comedic experience, which is also common in playful experiences in an individual's lives.

In playful experiences around the world, rules that are openly violated as a primary activity is also an important and prescient concept. Humor and joking is often associated with this flagrant breaking of rules. As one participant described their friends joking as a "circus of inappropriateness. It's like, people who are trying to outdo each other, be even more inappropriate than the others." (Experience 39). Various types of intentional rule-breaking were tied to humor, including playfully mocking friends (Experience 48), playfully throwing rocks at friends (Experience 30), and playfully insulting others at a workplace (Experience 110). Outside of humor, rules that heightened engagement by being broken include several purposefully physically risky activities including taking potentially dangerous travel plans during a covid lockdown (Experience 61) and standing near the edge of cliff "[s]o I feel a fear of my death." (Experience 95). Very importantly in these experiences, the exact nature of the rule violation was important. As one person described "you throw a pebble at someone, and they act like overly shocked. Totally wounded them both emotionally and physically. And it's like it's fun" (Experience 30). In this way, we can see that the shocking nature of the rule violation was required for the playful experience to exist.

Importantly for all of the above experiences, it was specific rules being broken that created engagement. Individuals did not speak about it as a generalized activity, rather certain rules were often maintained while others were broken. In especially comedic experiences, replacing one rule-breaking with another was not described as creating the same comedic experience. In the same way that following a different set of rules creates a different *ludic* experience, breaking a different set of rules creates a different *muhō* experience.

In this way we can see an important conception of boundaries and rules in playful experiences:

Muhō: Rules, boundaries, and norms that are violated in order to create a specific type of play.

DISCUSSION

By analyzing various theories associated with playfulness, play, and games, and 125 highly playful experiences from around the world, four different qualitative ways players relate rules were illustrated. The addition of two new categories of rules expands and resists Caillois' *paidia-ludus* scale and opens up more nuanced language for describing how players relate to different rules in playful experiences.

A key result of this framework is that rules may be critical aspects of playful experience without being binding. Viewing the other functions that rules can play, such as a playful to change, or playful to violate, creates a more complicated set of qualitative descriptions of discuss how different individual rules are perceived by players. One interesting difference between this conception and the *paidia-ludus* continuum, is that all four types of rules can be present in a single experience. As an example, Experience 105 illustrates how all four types of rules can overlap. In this experience an older child was in their summer vacation, removing normal school-based regulations on their daily life (paidia). To fill their days, they decided to involve a large group of friends to play a sport that is common in their area and that they enjoy playing (ludus). They decided that they would sneak onto a local playing field that was forbidden for them to play on, which added a sense of thrill (muhō). During the course of their game, they realized that the field was too big for their number of players and got into a negotiation over how to change the rules of the game to be more fun (līlā).

CONCLUSION

This article has brought together a diverse array of scientific works that describe different interests in how playfulness and rules inter-relate. In addition, these theoretical categories are further illustrated with how they are expressed in playful experiences around the world. In this way, the theoretical constructs of *paidia*, *līlā*, *ludus*, and *muhō* are offered as useful frames for describing different manners of interactions individuals have with limitations inside of playful experiences. Considering these playful experiences also frequently occur in the act of play, and during a game, it is the contention of the paper that all of them are critical concepts for understanding the complexities of behaviors players exhibit in game play in general. It is very possible that certain rules have implied affordances, they are perceived as creative, or perceived as meant to be followed, or perceived as meant to be broken. In this way, we can also use this framework for understanding more nuanced rule-design in games.

In particular, it is recommended for game designers to consider each of these types of rule interactions when designing their games. For example, *paidia* may be a useful consideration when game designers intentionally support or remove anonymous spaces in their games. It is possible that removal of the normal identity-based structure explicitly changes the play in a desired or undesired way (see Chen et al. 2009). Explicit consideration of *līlā* in video games may enable deeper creative spaces for players, for example deepening the discourse on elements of games such as the character generation activities in *The Sims 2* (Griebel 2006). *Ludus* is a robust consideration by many game designers but may be useful for scholars to understand that many players' play is supported by these constraining rules, rather than resisted. Finally, muhō may be an excellent design consideration for games that are in part seeking to create comedic experiences. Past literature on comedy in games (Kallio & Masoodian 2019) considers deviations from normality, but the idea of specific rules, norms, and limitations that players get to transgress in a game presents an interesting

technical opportunity for game designers to consider how to create deviations and resulting comedic experiences.

These categories do have some fundamental limitations. All four of the inspiring concepts used to label this paper's theoretical framework have numerous complicated nuances in their original cultural context. It would benefit future game studies to spend more time expanding on non-western conceptions of play and playfulness and learn from the rich nuance of these histories and etymologies. In addition, the use of qualitative quotations in this work is illustrative. It would be excellent for future work to expand more deeply on how present these different types of rule-interactions are represented in various playful contexts, including play, games, humor, and performance.

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