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Shooting Straight and Chatting Freely:

How Shooting Ranges and Discord Define Modern Third Spaces

In today's rapidly evolving world the spaces where people gather are shifting in surprising ways. Technology such as surveillance cameras redefine what we may consider a private place. Whether it's a traditional shooting range, where a shared interest in marksmanship brings people closer, or on digital platforms like Discord, where communities are built around shared hobbies like gaming, the definition of third places is expanding; as is the nature of their privacy. Ray Oldenburg's concept of third places—public spaces outside home and work that encourage relaxed, informal socializing—has historically been applied to physical locations like libraries and parks. Yet, as technology and culture advances, it raises new questions: Can digital spaces like Discord fulfill the same role as physical third places? Do they truly foster community, inclusivity, and casual interaction as Oldenburg defined?

Shooting ranges are Privately owned public third places, also known by the acronym POPS (Loperena); allowing each member the freedom to train individually or in a group. In my case, the range provides a neutral environment, where individuals from different backgrounds come together to enjoy a shared activity in an informal, leisurely setting as Oldenburg suggested.

The article, "[The Meaning of Guns to Gun Owners in the U.S: The Lawful Use of Gun Survey](#)"



indicates that a significant majority of gun owners view guns as an important part of their identity (Siegel).

Although only a small percentage of gun owners such as myself regularly go to the range, those who do may find community; share similar values, interests and camaraderie at shooting ranges. I certainly agree as I

have made friends with like minded people such as law-enforcement, prior military and the average family-man that values discipline, self reliance and a respect for traditional values.

Although the primary purpose of a range is highly specialized it does not dismiss newcomers; in fact the opposite, often I see those with more experience helping newcomers. It may differ from the traditional third spaces, where social interaction is the primary activity. With all this in mind, I interviewed a friend at my local range; Clay and asked, "Would you consider the range a third place?". Clay stated, "Yes, often I'm here to do my independent drills, usually focusing on competitions, but even when I'm practicing simulated real world scenarios, I have plenty of freedom to experiment beyond my law enforcement training to share and learn from other perspectives and experiences". Some shooting ranges are exclusive, requiring specific skills, or memberships; making them less accessible to the general public. The specialized nature of a shooting range can limit its inclusivity, however this is done keeping the safety of its members in mind. If a citizen cannot prove they can properly handle a firearm, would you want them shooting on the lane next to you? Similarly the cameras in any business monitor the facility and its occupants for security and liability. Although this surveillance may feel like infringement

server, but the secret to keeping people active in your community lies in frequent events paired with active and fair management”(Vance 10). Discord servers have a dynamic community structure; with regulars upholding the server's culture while welcoming new members who resonate with it. Members engage casually, share experiences, and collaborate; nurturing creativity and social bonds.

Privacy is always a concern, especially when online and discussing personal matters. As a liminal digital space, discord allows members the freedom to limit certain text or voice channels, i.e in my server ‘KoC’, I have private channels for fellow ‘Knights’. “While Discord remains a digital space, and is therefore limited in the kinds of interactions it can support, we have nonetheless been pleasantly surprised by the variety and depth of our Discord community”(Harris). The governance I chose to implement mirrors ‘King Arthur & The Knights of the Round Table’, for a member to be promoted or considered a Knight they must have the blessing of all pre-existing ‘Knights’ and they gain full autonomy and control to the server.

In conclusion, both shooting ranges and Discord illustrate how the concept of third spaces is evolving in the modern world. Each space, though vastly different in form and function, provides individuals with a neutral ground for connection, community-building, and shared experiences. Shooting ranges foster camaraderie and informal socialization around shared values such as discipline, self-reliance, and tradition. While they may have limitations in terms of inclusivity and accessibility, the strong sense of community found among regulars reflects the spirit of Oldenburg’s third places. Discord, on the other hand, extends this sense of community into the digital realm, where spontaneous interactions and diverse communities thrive. Its accessibility connects people from all walks of life make it a valuable modern third space, even if it lacks the face-to-face interaction of its physical counterparts. As technology continues to

reshape the spaces where we gather, the idea of what constitutes a third place will likely continue to expand, accommodating both the physical and digital worlds in ways we are only beginning to see.

Work Cited

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