

## Final Paper – Solutions to Social Isolation of Video Game Players

Composer: Gordon (Cunbo Li)

Email: [gordon.lee@nyu.edu](mailto:gordon.lee@nyu.edu) or [cl3846@nyu.edu](mailto:cl3846@nyu.edu)

Because of the advanced network, we can play any video game with anybody around the world, no matter on a phone, a computer or a game console. Advanced network technology gathers players into the world of video games. You can meet other players with diversity backgrounds from all over the world in video games, but did our life become happier? Or did we feel even more isolated from the real people, our friends, and families? I prefer the latter result. Because making people become lonely is the common phenomenon of video games. In my point of view, I believe video game isolating the players instead of making them have closer interpersonal relationships is a question that waiting to make a solution.

The video game was coming from equipment in the laboratory at the most beginning. With commercialization and industrialization of video games, *Spacewar!* brought video game out of the laboratories and entered into public places, so that arcade video games went into people's lives. Arcade video games reached the peak and came to the golden age in the 1970s, people gathered together in video game halls and enjoyed the happiness of playing video games. In the 1980s, with the crash of arcade video game and rising of console video game, people were able to play, cooperate or compete with their friends or families at home. Time to 1990s, the Internet was developing and gradually coming to people's lives. People realized that multiplayer game could base on the Internet so that online game was designed and developed, and became a genre of video games. From the 2000s to most recently, the Internet is advanced and fast enough and the high-speed network is an essential part of video games. People can enjoy video games with any other around the world in their bedrooms. In 2008, which is a memorable year for the smartphone, iPhone led the development of smartphone and also brought video games into people's pockets. People are focusing on a small flashing screen on subways, on the buses, on streets and playing video games on their phone anywhere and anytime. I realized a funny phenomenon that the number of people that players are playing with for video game are lesser and lesser when we go through the history of video game. People playing with others in arcade video game halls, then playing video games with other at home, and then playing alone at home, and then focusing on a small screen and even ignore others around them. Did people have lesser communication with friends, families and the real world because of the development of video games? I believe that this is a true phenomenon of video game players.

For example, when playing *Counter-Strike Global Operation* with other players on Steam, I'm always feeling that I'm still playing with CPUs instead of a real player, even though these "CPUs" are with thinking like the human. These "CPU" players can type text messages and speak voice messages, but you can totally ignore them and playing myself. Recalling the time of *Counter-Strike* just came out, I was playing it with other people via a local network in a big room. People were face to face, cooperating, competing, speaking and laughing with each other. I really enjoy the feeling of playing the video game like that. But now, the number of multiplayer games for local network are decreased significantly than before. Most of video games need to connect the Internet for multiplayer mode. Players avoid appointing with other players because there are always a lot

of other players in the world waiting for you on the servers. This is convenient for playing multiplayer games, but it also loses the enjoyment of playing video games with others in a room.

There is another example, my cousin is only living home during winter and summer break. One time that I visit my cousin's family, I found he only playing video games and nearly few talk to his parents. My cousin's father hopes my cousin can talk more about school life or more communication with families when he is home during the break. But my cousin only playing video games and ignore other people. There is not too much talking between my cousin and his parents although they are live together. His parents quite worry about this issue of the relationship among in family members. My cousin's parents always complain that the reason of cousin becoming isolated to families is video games. In my opinion, the reason for video game players become isolated from the real world is that video games established closer communities for video game players through the Internet and the player are easier to build a relationship with other people in the game than in the real world. And the contents of video game bring unique experiences that the players cannot enjoy in the real world is another reason. In order to solve the video game players are addicted to the video games should from two aspects. The first one is game designers should design video games that only if the players are playing physically together for better experiences. The second, making the video game more related to the real world instead of overloaded contents of violence and fictions.

Young kids are especially more easily affected by video games. These affections are usually negative. I visited my friend's family some days ago. I brought my *PlayStation Vita* with me and planned to talk about PSV games. Occasionally I noticed that his 2-year-old young kid was attracted by the game and concentrated all his attention to the gorgeous game scene. He stopped reading the book in his hand and came to watching me playing the game. The kid found that the interactivity of the video game can lead *Rayman* following his control, which is an experience that a kid cannot acquire from cartoons. The kids who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are even worse in being addicted to video games. ASD kids are living in their own world and have psychological obstacle to communicate with other people. Video games make ASD kids build their own world even more quickly. They spend extremely more time on playing video games than normal kids who have no ASD. "We found that children with ASD spent much more time playing video games than typically developing children, and they are much more likely to develop problematic or addictive patterns of video game play," says University of Missouri psychologist Micah Mazurek, Ph.D., *Kids and Teens with Autism Vulnerable to Video Game Addiction*.

Commercial game companies seemingly realized this question and trying to make video games allow family members to engage. They also found family games have a potential game market around the world. But I don't think the current family game well solved the problem of family member engagement and video game player isolation on playing video games. Most family games have avatars to represent each family member, but they look very different from the real people. For instance of *Wii Sports* which allows family members playing a sport game on a single screen with Nintendo Wireless Remote. The characters (Wii Mii) in *Wii Sports* are very different from the real family members, even though players can customize their Miis to make them similar to the real people, but Miis are not real people. If playing *Wii Sports* online, I can only feel like

playing a video game with CPUs who have the thinking similar to a human.

Thinking about the scene we are playing Poker with others, that we may get some inspiration to turn a video game to a real world multiplayer game and take players out of the virtual world. In order to combine video games with the real world and encourage people to communicate each other in the real world via a video game should include following ideas. First of all, video games should be offline and emphasize local network or single-screen multiplayer mode. Second, design a video game which only multiplayer mode and only playable with more than one player. For example, we can get some inspiration from *Pokémon Go* which utilizes AR technology. We use AR implement to a board game with other players around a table. Third, video games need a simplified customization system with facial recognition instead of pre-designed characters. The current character customization system is too complicated that includes so many sliders and data. Simplifying character customization system is providing players opportunities to quickly design their own characters. For example, generating a character by using facial recognition technology and simple data like age, height, and weight. This could make the game character with similar appearance, skin color and stature and give players feeling of playing video games with real people. And of course, players can also design their characters by using superstars' photos. For example making a Kobe Bryant game character and let him play a Tennis match. Customization system with facial recognition can also solve the problem of unbalance in races. An article of *Overwatch* mentions the problem of character's skin color. In order to satisfy players from different backgrounds around the world. *Overwatch* has out of 23 characters, nine are non-white. Reducing skin color and gender choices will make the game less diverse and less white will make the game over-stereotype. This is a problem need to solve so that I believe giving players freedom and priority to design their own character by using simplified customization system with facial recognition is not only a solution to quickly make a custom character but also a feasible solution to reduce unbalance in culture diversity. Making video game offline will rise another problem of if some players want to play with other player who is at a location far away. Offline mode multiplayer game is impossible to satisfy this need and the Internet is the only solution for long distance multiplayer games. In order to solve the problem like this, we can make the concept of *Sync Dinner* as a reference. This concept is trying to solve problem of enjoying romantic dinner for long-distance couple. Game design could also using this concept to make video game players playing a multiplayer video game feeling like in a "same room". In summary, these ideas to make video games be a real world multiplayer game are attributed to video games should not isolate to real world and real world communication (vocal language, body language and emotional language). Overloaded violence and fiction contents have negative influence to young kids. Game designer should make games without pre-designed contents and provide creative platform, for example Mario Maker, to let kids and parents have opportunities design games to each other, which is an ideal solution for video game "isolating" family members.

Video game offline may bring some other problems as well. For example, player online rate decline. But I don't think this is an excuse to keep video games isolating to the real world. That is to say, video games work for making fun to video game players, not making players be isolated from the real world. Online rate is important to game companies, but I don't think this is as serious as players getting lonely among in each other. The concept of *Sync Dinner* may leak players'

privacies to the Internet when players playing online multiplayer game. This concept may implement between players who are known each other. Players also have freedom to choose whether they want to share sync video with others. And the game companies have responsibilities to protect players' personal data as well.

In summary of above discussing, I believe that at the same time of video game making fun and unique experiences, video game players become isolated from people, friends, families and the real world. Video games using the Internet gather players together in the virtual world, but players getting far away from real people in the real world. Huizinga mentioned how does play happen between animal and animal, human being and animal, and human and human when he defined the play theory. But under the highly developed Internet and video games, game contravenes the original idea of play. Playing video game makes people become far away, isolated and even autistic from each other. This is not a new question or an issue to video games, but a question or an issue needs more and more new effective solutions

The video game is designed to bring fun and happy to people and not to give rise to social and psychological problems. We have already realized the negative influence of video game to kids, teens and young adults, so that I hope making video game offline, providing only multiplayer mode, customizing realistic avatar based on simplified customization system with facial recognition, using concept of Sync Dinner and creating a game in a game to your family members are ideal solutions to reduce negative influences of video games and reunion people to the real world.

#### References:

Huizinga, Johan. 1949. *Homo Ludens*. London: Routledge.

Sunden, Jenn. "Play as Transgression: An Ethnographic Approach to Queer Game Culture." Breaking New Ground, Brunei University, 2009

Jakobsson, Mikael. "Playing with the Rules: Social and Cultural Aspects of Game Rules in a Console Game Club." *Situated Play: Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA)*. Ed. Baba Akira. Tokyo, 2007. 386-392. 22 Jan 2008

Taylor, T. L. "Pushing the borders: Player participation and game culture." *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture*. Ed. Joe Karaganis. New York: Social Science Research Council, 2007.

Williams, D., Martins, N., Consalvo, M., & Ivory, J. D. (2009). *The virtual census: representations of gender, race and age in video games*. *New Media and Society*, 11 (5), 815-834.

*Autism Behavior Problems Linked To Video Game Play*

<https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2013/04/22/autism-video-game/17766/>

*Kids and Teens with Autism Vulnerable to Video Game Addiction*

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/science-news/kids-and-teens-autism-vulnerable-video-game-addiction>

*Screen Time Versus Sleep Time in Boys with Autism*

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/science-news/screen-time-versus-sleep-time-boys-autism>

*With a bet on diversity, Blizzard reveals Overwatch's queer character*

<https://techcrunch.com/2016/12/20/overwatch-is-tracer-gay-yesss/>

*SYNC DINNER*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p\\_i2D-5CA4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p_i2D-5CA4)