

# DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT THROUGH ONLINE GAMING: A MIXED METHODS ANALYSIS OF ONLINE GAMING NETWORK COMMUNICATION

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# BACKGROUND

65% of Americans report playing video games daily

Concerned for effects including depression and reduced social involvement

Features to extend real life relationships and/or make new online friendships

Online sites may be a comfortable “third place” for individuals to share and connect anonymously

Bridging social capital more often reported than bonding



## OBJECTIVE

Use social network analysis to investigate discussant networks established through an online gaming site and their possible association with depressive symptoms and social support.





# SOCIAL CAPITAL

## Bridging

Outside information

Does not provide as much social support

## Bonding

Close personal relationships

Tends to provide social support



# SITE DETAILS



User run and  
operated



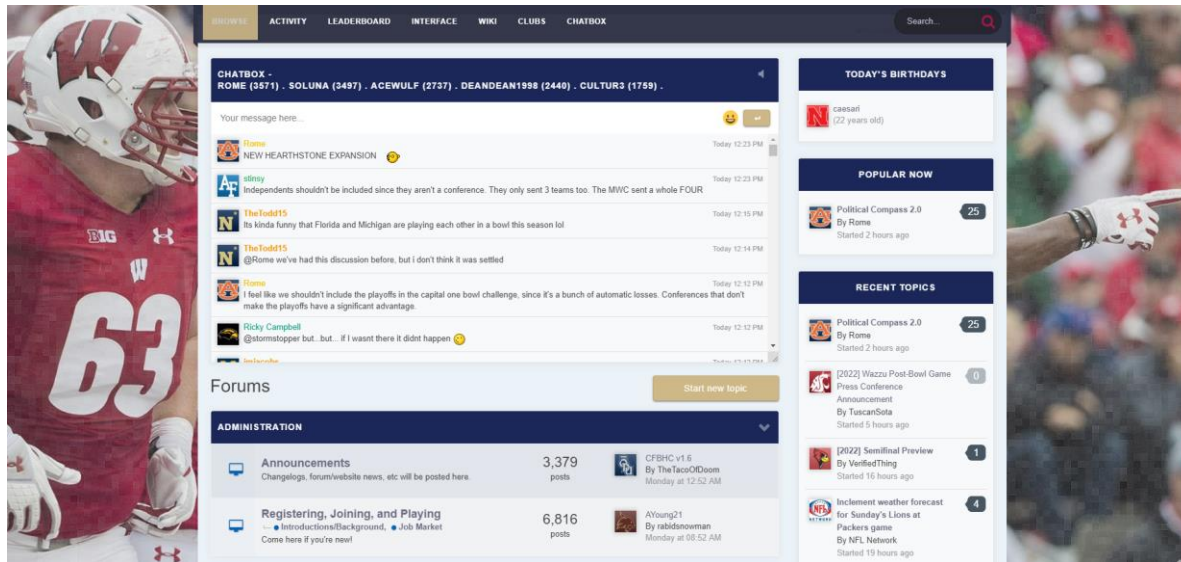
Text based  
simulation of  
college  
football



Forums and  
Chat  
Functions



Roughly 100  
members



# METHODS



## Setting

Online football simulation game

Participants (n=40)



## Measures

Depressive Symptoms – PHQ-9

Online and “in-real-life” (IRL) Social Support



## Social Network

Nominated other members on the site with whom they spoke to about important life matters



## Qualitative Inquiry

Topics of conversation “most often” and “most recent”

Why did they choose to speak to that member?



## Data Analysis

QAP-MR

Inductive Thematic Analysis

# QUALITATIVE CODING

## Topics

**Site specific**

**Occupational**

**Conversational/Mutual Interests**

**Life Experiences**

**Personal Relationships**

**Concerns**

**Current Events**

- COVID-19 (child code)

## Why

**Availability**

**Developed Relationship/Trust**

**Valued Input**

**Personal Support**



# RESULTS

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$n=40$ ; Mean age = 25.25 years old ( $SD=6.88$ )

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All respondents were male.

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80% identified as White

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70% were employed and 30% identified as students.

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Members spent, on average, 14.75 hours ( $SD=12.36$ ) on the site per week.



# RESULTS



Average PHQ score was 5.85 (SD=4.86) indicating members felt depressive symptoms “not at all” to “several days” over the past two weeks.

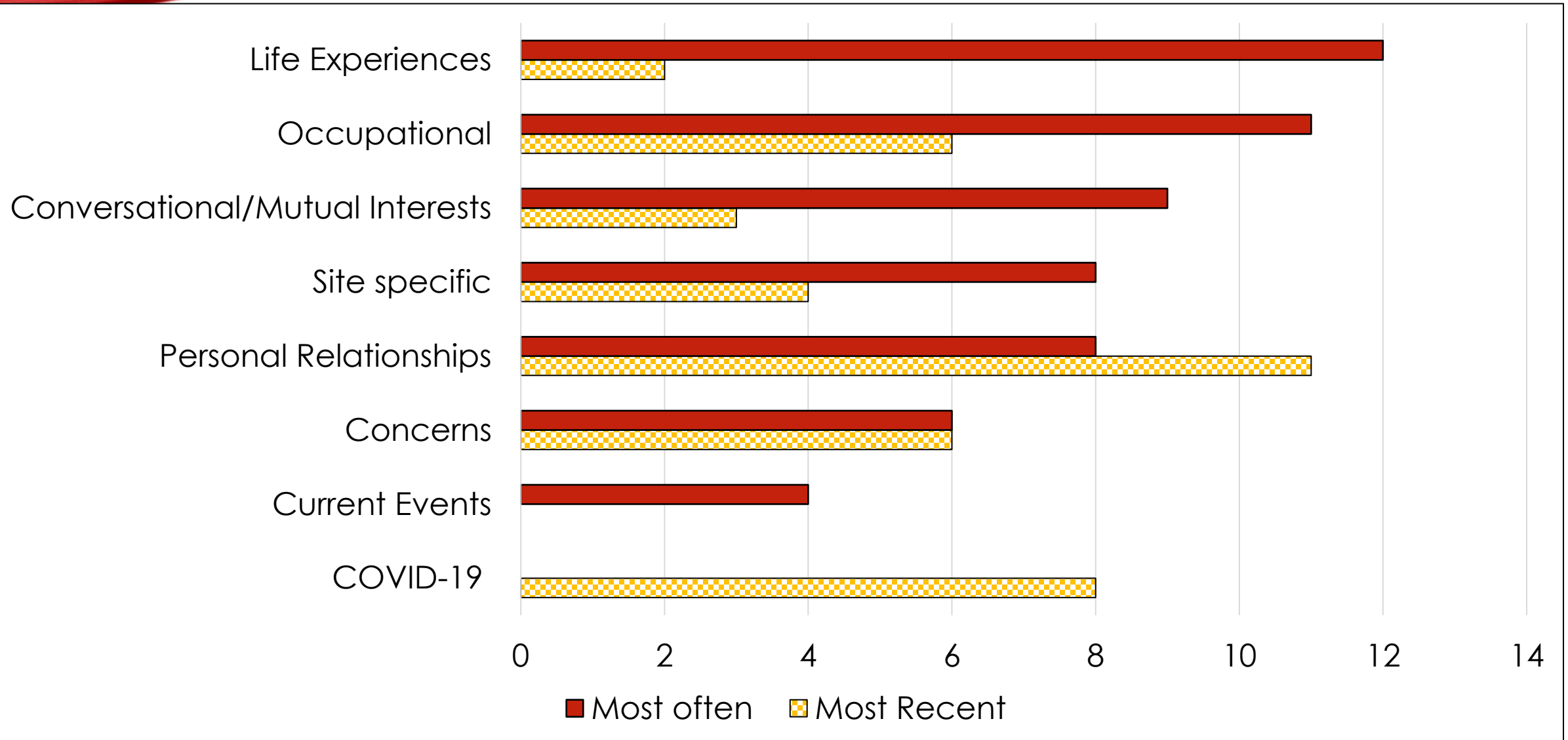
Only three members (7.5%) of the network reported a score greater than the cut point for identifying the possibility of severe clinical depression.

Respondents reported they spoke with 8.38 (SD=6.76) other members of the site regarding important life matters.

# QAP REGRESSION

Depressive Symptoms (R <sup>2</sup> =0.20)		
	$\beta$ (SE)	p
Covariates		
Depressive Symptoms	-	-
Online Social Support	0.39 (1.91)	.04*
IRL Social Support	-0.44 (1.78)	.01*
Age	0.08 (0.12)	.28
Hours Spent on Site	-0.27 (0.07)	.05
Structural Effects		
Out-Degree	0.03 (0.28)	.42
In-Degree	-0.03 (0.31)	.42
Reciprocity	0.01 (0.17)	.12
Transitivity	-0.04 (0.27)	.11

# TOPICS OF CONVERSATION



# REASONS FOR COMMUNICATION

## Seeking or providing personal support (n=14)

- "I wanted to ask them since I was stressing about things."
- "I wanted to know if they're doing alright and if they are in good health."
- "Despite me not meeting anyone from the site I feel like it is a welcoming community that would embrace me with open arms."

## Developed relationship or trust over time (n=8)

- "Because I felt like I had spent a long time getting to know them."
- "There's just a feeling of (years of built up) trust and understanding."
- "[Member] and I are good friends outside of site! We've met up several times, even went on a weeklong vacation up the west coast. I've stayed at his place, and he's stayed at my place"
- "Well one of my guys I met on the site I ended up living with, so I talked to him because he became a roommate and close friend."

## Valued members' input (n=6)

- "it's nice to get a different perspective from all walks of life - different area of the country/world, different social class, etc."
- "I value his unbiased input; I knew they would give me the best advice for my situation."

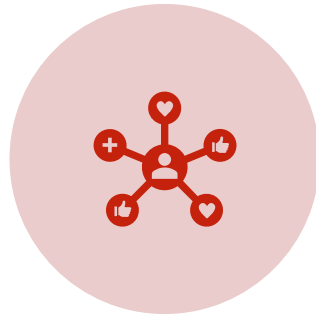
## Availability (n=6)

- "they happened to be online at the same time"
- "It's convenient on Discord"

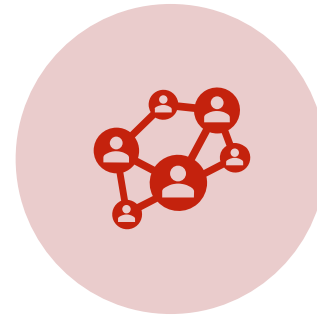
# CONCLUSIONS



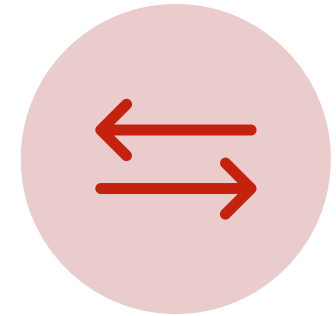
IRL social support had protective association with DS



Members were significantly more likely to speak to others online if they reported less IRL support; may be filling an IRL deficit with friends online



Bridging and bonding social capital was present



Transitioning bridging to bonding in these relationships is possible



# NEXT STEPS

LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS



LARGER SAMPLES



MULTIPLE GAME GENRES



IMPLICATIONS FOR ONLINE LEARNING AND  
TELEHEALTH

# QUESTIONS



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