

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

Health concerns including depression and reduced social involvement

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 social capital



SOCIAL CAPITAL

Bridging

Outside information

Does not provide as much social support

Bonding

Close personal relationships

Tends to provide social support

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.



SITE DETAILS



User run and
operated



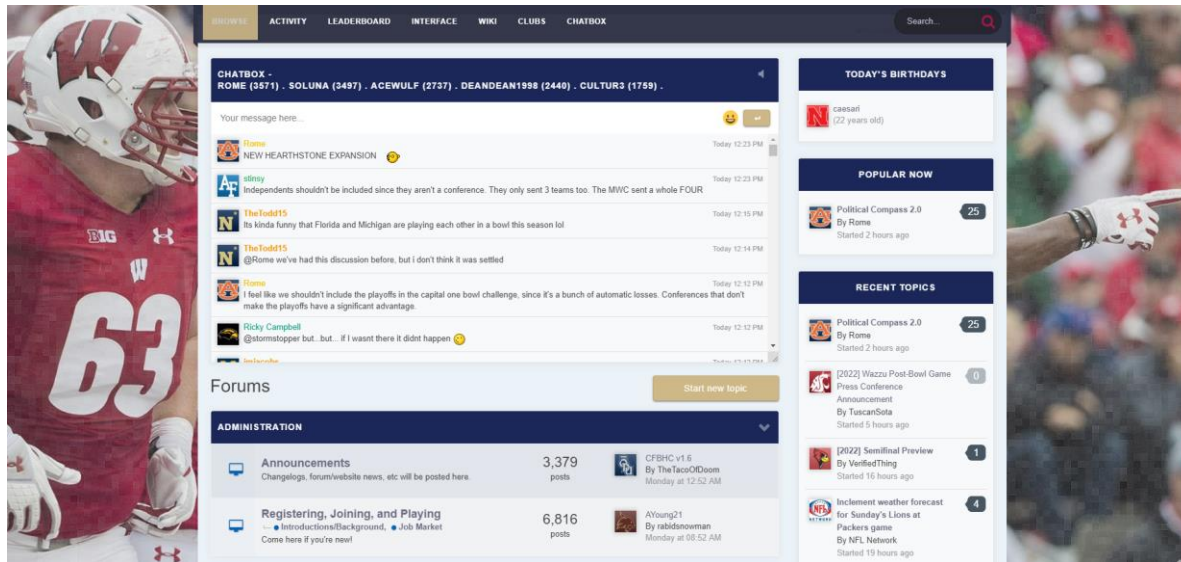
Text based
simulation of
college
football



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

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

All respondents were male.

80% identified as White

70% were employed and 30% identified as students.

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.

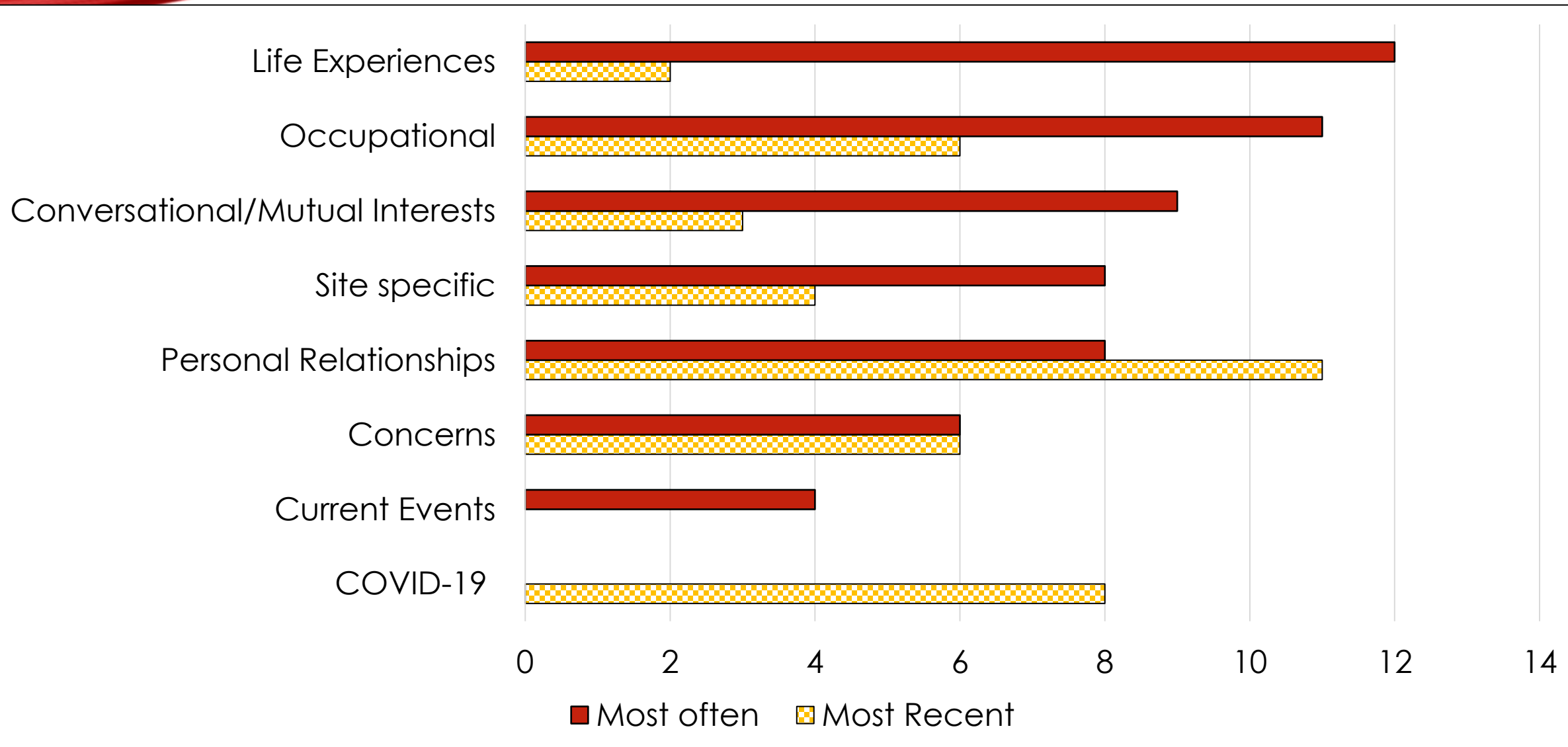
Only three members (7.5%) of the network reported a score greater than the cut point for identifying the possibility of severe clinical depression.

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

QAP REGRESSION

Depressive Symptoms (R ² =0.20)		
	β (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."

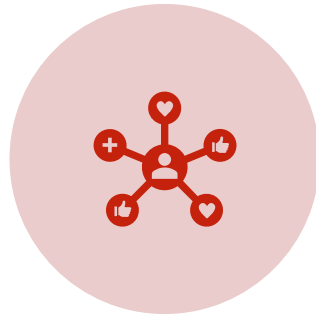
Availability (n=6)

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

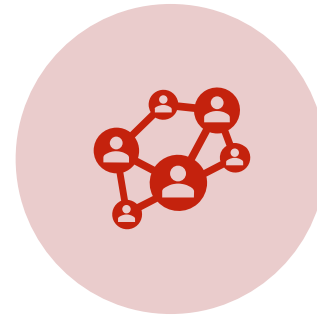
CONCLUSIONS



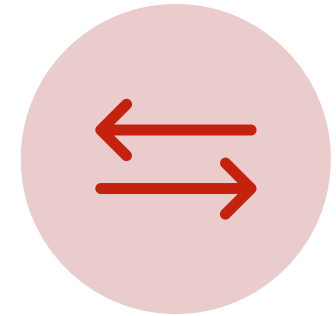
IRL social support had protective association with DS



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

COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

Maintain/Sustain IRL friendships through gaming



Forge new friendships when IRL opportunities are limited



Creating meaningful and sustained contact points to build bonding capital



NEXT STEPS

LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS



LARGER SAMPLE



MULTIPLE GAME GENRES



IMPLICATIONS FOR ONLINE LEARNING AND
TELEHEALTH

QUESTIONS



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