

# Well Played! Facilitating Social Connectedness Through Videogames and Matchmaking

**Daniel Johnson, Michelle Grant-Iramu, Ella Horton**

Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

Brisbane, Australia

dm.johnson@; m.grantiramu@qut.edu.au

**Jo Mitchell**

The Mind Room

Melbourne, Australia

jo@themindroom.com.au

Satisfaction levels with relationships and social connections has been shown to have direct links to people's experiences of good mental health and wellbeing [1, 7]. Men are significantly impacted by poor mental health and this is highlighted by the high rates of suicide among men [1, 7]. In 2015, the Movember Foundation called for social innovation in this space. Through the foundation's *Social Innovation Challenge* they provided funding for the first phase of this program of research, which explored the possibility of videogames as a way for people to connect. While the problem motivating this research is more prevalent among men our proposed solution is intended for use by everyone. In the first instance, our response aims to build people's social networks, redefining the parameters by which people play video games so that the potential to develop new and renewed social connections is given precedence.

Over the last five to ten years, increasing attention has been given to the possibility of games improving health and wellbeing [5]. Social isolation is a common cause of poor mental health outcomes for a range of demographics [9]. Conversely, strong social connections and healthy relationships can move individuals from merely surviving life to resilience and thriving [4, 5]. Research has demonstrated the potential for videogames to facilitate social connections that can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing [6].

Videogames are a digital space that men already inhabit. This has significance for the development of tools that aim to maximize the social capital and connected benefits associated with videogame play. High proportions of men are already spending time playing videogames, with research [3] indicating that 99% of young men in Australia interact online. Between 2008 and 2012 there were steady increases in the number of men accessing the internet, at more diverse locations and for longer periods [3]. While our initial focus is to engage men in an environment that enhances their ability to socially connect, this research has relevance that extends past gender specific causation, providing a solution that responds to broader experiences of social isolation. This is underlined by high levels of videogame play, regardless of gender. In Australia, over 80% of 15-34 year olds, 76% of 35-44 year olds and 60%

of 45-54 year olds are playing videogames and average 100 minutes playing time per day [2].

Familiarity with digital technology and its prolific use provides an opportunity to go into a space that people already inhabit, leveraging the flexibility and inherent interactive elements of online multiplayer videogames to facilitate social connections. The first phase of this research initially focused on investigating the functionalities and parameters of a videogame matchmaking platform as a means to facilitate these connections. Through our initial research we uncovered a deeper capacity for connection in multiplayer settings, one that provides opportunities to form and consolidate new relationships, enhance existing relationships and to build a sense of community through shared experiences.

The next stage of this research project is to develop a series of online and offline video game events. These events will enable us to observe how people connect during video game play and to prototype a platform that focusses on social connections.

## REFERENCES

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