

# Reliving and Reinventing Childhood Video Games: A First Look into Collocated Social Speedrunning

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## WHAT IS GDQ?

Games Done Quick (GDQ) is a series of video game charity events held every year, one in the early January, Awesome Games Done Quick (AGDQ), and one in late June, Summer Games Done Quick (SGDQ). In its 11 year history, GDQ has raised over 16.5 million dollars and is currently the largest fundraising event for Doctors Without Borders and the Prevent Cancer Foundation in the world. Attendance at these events averages around 2000 people, taking roles as attendees, staff, volunteers and runners [4].

## SPEEDRUNNING

Speedrunning is the recurring act of completing a game with the sole intent of finishing either the complete game, or specific portions as quickly as possible [13]. This is achieved by exploiting glitches and unintended strategies in the game. Speedrunning can be done individually, collectively, or raced between multiple runners as a social event.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Speedrunning has been studied in computer science and engineering for novel ways to apply image processing [12], algorithmic complexity analysis [7], and hardware serial interface manipulation [8]. Speedrunning has also been used as a case study to examine expansive [2] and transformative [5] gameplay. Studies have also examined how social communities redefine “cheating” [1] and how speedrunning acts as a “museum of accidents” showcasing the gaming community’s discoveries of glitches [11].

Video gaming has been studied comparing interpersonal dynamics between solo and collocated console gameplay [15] and how video gaming acts as a digital hearth, a gathering place, for individuals of varying ages, expertise, and backgrounds [16]. Social, instrumental, and financial support from viewers of online video game live streams has been studied to better understand the dynamics of social support between viewer and streamer [17].



## METHODS

This study interviewed 18 individuals using semi-structured interviews [9] who were involved with Summer Games Done Quick 2018. Participants were runners, attendees, hosts, online viewers, or a combination of these. Interviews were transcribed and coded using a grounded theory approach [3] to find emergent themes.

Field observations [10] were also taken through watching Summer Games Done Quick 2018’s video archives on YouTube. Observation notes were also coded using the same grounded theory approach.

| Participant | Number of Events Attended | Year introduced to Speedrunning | Roles                                 | Games Involved With   |
|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| P7          | 10                        | 2013                            | Runner, Attendee                      | Pepsiman, Teslagrad   |
| P12         | 1                         | 2008                            | Runner                                | Banjo-Tooie for N64   |
| P8          | 0                         | 2015                            | Online Viewer                         | Zelda: Majora’s Mask  |
| P2          | 10                        | 2014                            | Attendee, Host                        | N/A   |
| P13         | 3                         | 2012                            | Attendee, Host                        | Zelda Link to the Past, Super Mario 64, Diddy Kong Racing, Banjo- Kazooie |
| P14         | 0                         | 2008                            | Viewer                                | N/A   |
| P3          | 5                         | N/A                             | Runner, Attendee                      | Zelda Oracle of Seasons, Link’s Awakening                                 |
| P11         | 1                         | 2011                            | Attendee                              | Mega Man  |
| P5          | 5                         | 2013                            | Attendee                              | Wave Race, Variety  |
| P17         | 10                        | 2010                            | Runner, Attendee, Host                | Aladdin, Super Mario World  |
| P10         | 0                         | 2015                            | Online Viewer                         | N/A   |
| P16         | 8                         | 2012                            | Runner, Attendee, Host, Online Viewer | Oregon Trail, Super Mario Bros 3  |
| P4          | 0                         | N/A                             | Online Viewer                         | Zelda Majora’s Mask, Zelda Link to the Past                               |
| P15         | 4                         | 2006                            | Runner                                | Mega Man(franchise) Mega Man X, Mega man 3, mega man X2                   |
| P1          | 3                         | 2014                            | Runner, Attendee                      | Zelda Majora’s Mask, Pokemon Black / White 2                              |
| P9          | 3                         | 2013                            | Runner                                | Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, Zelda: Ocarina of Time                     |
| P6          | 0                         | 2016                            | Online Viewer, Runner                 | Paper Mario, Majora’s Mask  |

## FINDINGS

Coding all the interviews resulted in 1330 codes total. We found two code groups pertaining to the social aspect of GDQ (181), and GDQ acting as a meeting place for speedrunners (30). In the interviews we found the informants spoke extensively about how the social aspect of GDQ significantly motivates them to attend GDQ. We identified four aspects of social importance behind these motivations: forming friendships, GDQ as a meeting place, community, and international appeal.

## FORMING FRIENDSHIPS

Speedrunning has become a method for players to make friends of similar interest and build bonds with people who also attend GDQ events. GDQ acts as an event that players look forward to where they can share experiences with friends. These bonds players and runners both make at GDQ events are an important part of their life. Even when they can’t go, participants informed us they will ensure they watch their friends on stream.



P7: And it is, while there are people whom, it is a charity right, but more than that for a lot of people, including myself it is a vacation. Getting to see all of my friends in an environment that I love. So it is super exciting the weeks coming up, I cannot wait, every single time, about a month before I start getting giddy.

P13: But it’s mostly the friend aspect. I made a lot of really close friends in the games community and I couldn’t imagine my life any different than it is now really.

P17: I personally feel like I’ve made my closest friends that I have to this day through GDQ. I actually, two of my roommates that I live with I met at GDQs.

P15: For me it is really mostly like the friends I have in the community. Even if I don’t go, I usually have at least a few people I know who are running some game so I like to watch them.

## GAMING COMMUNITY

GDQ allows different speedrunning game communities to gather together and represent their community and showcase their speedrun, even when these communities are grassroots communities and are small and niche in nature. GDQ not only provide an opportunity for speedrunners to represent their community, but it also allows different communities to form at GDQ, such for volunteers and hosts

P16: [What GDQ] does really well is unify the community...

P13: I think what it does really well is that it really hones in on that sense of community and it really showcases that sense of community no matter what game gets in, they really focus on how this all started in someone’s basement. Like this all started in a small place but look where it’s gone to with such a great community and I think GDQ does that really well and never really strays from the fact that they know where they started.

P13: I do remember that the other hosts were always really supportive of one another and for the most part a lot of the more seasoned hosts were very welcoming... That really helped I know especially for my first time hosting, just having someone to sit there and tell me that I was doing ok. That was really nice and I think really shows the community that GDQ has and especially that it’s not just about the speed runners it’s about everyone involved in GDQ and it’s kind of like this giant community and we all want each other to succeed...

## GDQ AS A MEETING PLACE

GDQ acts as a consistent communal meeting place twice a year for those that are a part of the speedrunning community.

P16: It’s like a family reunion now twice a year... It gives us a place to go twice a year.

P7: It’s a place where a number of friends can gather all at once on a regular basis. As an adult, especially one who has moved away from their home state and friends from college and high school. Seeing those friends, not that common. I basically had to go back and travel back to them in order to see them. Maybe once a year. But GDQs I get to see friends twice a year most of the time.

## INTERNATIONAL REACH

GDQ attracts people internationally to meet in one setting to speedrun together in the same physical space. Speedrunners are motivated to go to GDQ to meet with friends they’ve made all over the world through speedrunning communities.

P7: Actually, all over the place. Australia, Germany, Sweden, Massachusetts, Ohio, et cetera, et cetera. The list goes on and on. [...] And it’s so rare to get that opportunity and it’s a great time. With all of the friends. Friends bring me back every single time.

P12: The thing that brings me back to GDQ is definitely seeing the friends that I go to GDQ with. Seeing the people that I chat with everyday, because I have friends that go to GDQ from California, and from Texas, and from the New England states, and New Jersey, and I mean they’re dotted all around Canada and the United States and even in Europe.

P16: You know, you’re seeing all these people from all over the country and all over the world that you haven’t seen in a year and, for better or for worse we’re family.



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For the attendees of GDQ, GDQ is more of a social event than it is a charity event. Our informants, who are attendees of GDQ, shared sentiments of how they are motivated to attend GDQ to meet up with friends and how GDQ acts as a meeting place for the speedrunning community.

The occurrence of people physically gathering around a digital medium is not new. Amy Volda discusses the idea of the gaming console acting as a digital hearth, how the game console acts as a shared central social space [15]. Borrowing this concept, we argue that GDQ acts as a digital hearth for the community of speedrunners to gather and share social experiences together. Speedrunners gather around GDQ to relive the gameplay experience, nostalgic games by participating in speedrunning, the reinvention of gameplay. This has solidified GDQ’s identity as a digital hearth for nostalgic games and novel gameplay. By viewing GDQ as a digital hearth, we can better understand the success of GDQ in raising money for charity by considering the charity success as a byproduct of speedrunning communities gathering around a digital hearth.

We can further expand on Volda’s idea of a digital hearth by proposing GDQ also acts as a virtual hearth by streaming its event online on Twitch. Through live streaming, it extends the gathering participants beyond runners to viewers and fans of speedrunning. More research looking directly at online viewers needs to be conducted in order to better define and iterate on the idea of a virtual hearth.

Our work takes a first look at Games Done Quick events as a social phenomenon and focuses on the experience of its participants through semi-structured interviews. Due to what our participants informed us on their experiences, GDQ is viewed more as a social event than a charity event by attendees. Furthermore, by considering GDQ as a digital hearth, and conceptualizing GDQ as a virtual hearth, we suggest that the success of GDQ as a charity event is a byproduct of GDQ acting as a central social event for the speedrunning community.

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