

# Socialization processes of online gambling: experiences of Finnish online Gamblers

Apags, Macao, 6.11.2012

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# Background: Gambling in Finland

- In Finland gambling games are operated by three licensed companies (state monopoly):
  - Finnish Lottery “Veikkaus” (lotteries, sports-betting)
  - Finland’s Slot Machine Association “Ray” (slot-machines, casino games)
  - “Fintoto” (toto, horse-betting)
  - (Autonomous island of Åland and “Paf”)
- Finnish Lottery “Veikkaus” has provided internet gambling since 1997
- “Fintoto” has provided internet gambling since 2002
- Åland’s “Paf” has provided internet gambling since 1999
- Slot Machine Association “Ray” opened its online casino and online poker site at the end of the year 2010
- There are plenty of foreign internet gambling sites, which serve also Finnish customers in Finnish language
- It’s not prohibited to play internet gambling games



# Online gambling



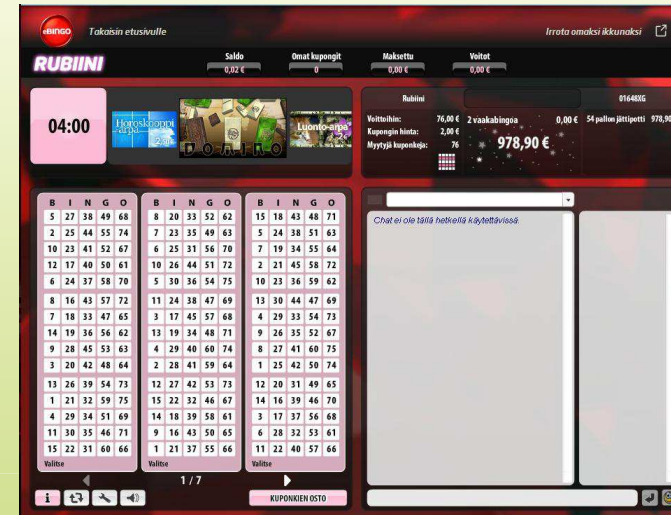
- Online gambling and gaming have become popular in recent years
- First online gambling games were electronic versions of traditional games of pure chance
- Playing these games were for long anonymous activity without any social interaction
  - Solitary games against the game operator
  - Impossible to communicate with other players
  - Lack of information of other players: is there other players online at the same time and who are those people?
  - Impossible to watch other players play
- At the same time internet in general has evolved towards more social environment social interaction and online gambling have been integrated in many ways
- Games based on skill, which are played against other players, have increased their proportional popularity
- There are completely new forms of gambling games in internet these days
- Large part of online gambling requires interaction between players
- It is still possible to play online gambling games alone, but it's clear that online gambling in general is not asocial activity



- First Finnish online gambling games which have the possibility for in-game social interaction were opened in the year 2010

- eBingo by Veikkaus
- Online poker and online casino by Ray

- What kinds of levels of sociality are connected with these games?
- How average players of these games have learned to gamble?
- How average players of these games have started to play online games?



# Questionnaires

- Online questionnaires were created to reach the players
- Questionnaires were conducted in cooperation with Veikkaus and Ray
- Links to online questionnaires were sent to players by the companies through their customer service
- Aimed at the average players. Sampling of the average players were made by the companies
- eBingo:
  - 2517 average players based on the amount of games and the amount of money in one month
- Ray:
  - 1500 average players based on the amount of money used in
    - Internet poker only (500 players)
    - Internet casino only (500 players)
    - Both internet poker and internet casino (500 players)



# Questionnaire 1.

- **The questionnaire was used mainly as an instrument to recruit interviewees**
- Background information
  - Age, gender, education, work situation, living conditions (alone or with somebody) and favorite gambling game
- How often plays
  - Domestic gambling games
  - Domestic online gambling games
  - Non-domestic online gambling games
  - In different domestic or international places
- How much time consumes in gambling or gaming



# Response rate (N=409)

Group	Sample	Respondents	Response rate (%)
eBingo	2517	264	10,5
Internet poker	500	40	8
Internet casino	500	44	8,8
Poker & casino	500	61	12,2
All	4017	409	10,2



# Interviews

- Based on the questionnaires **16 interviewees** were selected for the thematic interviews
- Selection criteria:
  - Preferably had at least tried both eBingo and internet poker
  - Had played games of both Veikkaus and Ray
  - Also players who had played other games
  - Not just one player-type but different kinds of players
  - Both males and females, various ages
- 8 from eBingo-group
- 8 from Ray's groups
  - 3 from internet poker
  - 5 from poker & casino
- 8 females and 8 males
- Average age 36 (41 in all the respondents)
- Favorite game
  - Pure game of chance: 8 players
  - Element of skill: 8 players
- Time in week for playing
  - 30 minutes: 5 players
  - 1-2 hours: 3 players
  - 2-10 hours: 5 players
  - 10-20 hours: 3 players





# Interviewees

Id	Group	Age	Gender	Favorite game	Time in week
1	eBingo	46	M	Sports-betting	2-10 h
2	eBingo	22	F	Scratch-cards	1-2 h
3	eBingo	60	M	Lotto	30 min
4	eBingo	26	M	Sports-betting	1-2 h
5	eBingo	21	F	Scratch-cards	30 min
6	eBingo	38	M	Sports-betting	30 min
7	eBingo	58	F	Slot-machines	2-10 h
8	eBingo	33	F	Horse-betting	2-10 h
9	Internet poker	35	M	Horse-betting	2-10 h
10	Internet poker	34	M	Poker	10-20 h
11	Internet poker	38	M	Poker	10-20 h
12	Poker & casino	27	F	Slot-machines	1-2 h
13	Poker & casino	38	F	Slot-machines	10-20 h
14	Poker & casino	40	F	Slot-machines	30 min
15	Poker & casino	26	M	Poker	2-10 h
16	Poker & casino	33	F	Slot-machines	30 min



# Questionnaire 2. and interviews

- Before the interviews everyone filled an extra questionnaire, which was focused on the social elements of gambling and gaming
  - How often plays with friends with monetary bets
  - How often plays games which have different levels of social interaction
    - Facebook-games, MMORPGs, console, PC, mobile, board etc., teamsports
  - Attitudes towards social elements of gambling
- Lots of information about the player before the actual interview
  - Interviews focused on the questions relevant to each interviewee
- Interviews didn't focus only for online gambling but gambling and playing in general and social interaction connected with gambling.
- Shared themes in all the interviews
  - **Beginning of gambling**
  - Everyday playing habits and practices
  - Money and social relations
  - Qualities of different games and game services



# Gambling first time

- With parents (9)
  - 16 years old, lottery, because father played (ID 6)
  - With parents, slot-machines (ID 5)
  - 8 years old, slot-machine in a grocery store with mother (ID 8)
  - As a small boy, played slot machines with his father (ID 4)
  - About 7 years old in horse race track with parents (ID 9)
  - As a child slot machine with father (ID 12)
  - Slot machine with a parent when was a child (ID 15)
  - Slot machines with mother (ID 13)
  - As a small child played Pajatso with father, as a teenager played more with friends (ID 1)
- With grandparents (2)
  - Pajatso with grandmother when was under aged (ID 14)
  - As a small child, Pajatso with grandfather (ID 16)
- With friends (4)
  - About 12 years old, played Pajatso with friends, also parents played slot-machines and Lotto (ID 11)
  - Slot machines before were 12 years old, with friends (ID 2)
  - 15 years old, Pajatso with friends (ID 3)
  - 13 years old, slot machines in a store, possibly with friends (ID 10)
- Alone (1)
  - Was in her twenties when first time played lottery, found it based on an advertisement. Lotto had just begun in Finland. **Parents** used to bet on sports before Lotto. She found she didn't understand anything about sports betting, but because Lotto is a pure game of chance, she felt she can start to play it. (ID 7)



# Beginning online gambling

- Friends influence (10)
  - Found online games because one friend introduces them to her. (ID 5)
  - Played poker with friends before online poker (ID 11)
  - Friend from work introduced (ID 2)
  - . Some of his friends had played online before him (ID 9)
  - A friend found out that there is a such thing as online poker, and they tried it out first with play money and then started real money games (ID 10)
  - Online poker first with friends account (ID 12)
  - Husband has introduced online games to her (ID 14)
  - Online games were introduced by a friend who had an account in Paf (ID 13)
  - Husbands friend recommended Paf's site for online gaming (ID 16)
  - Overseas online site was selected (with friends who also played poker) based on the online advertisement. (ID 4)
- Other (6)
  - Saw an advertisement about online games by Finnish Lottery in the middle of 90s. Was one of the first to try Finnish online gambling games. (ID 6)
  - Found them based on the advertisement and other media coverage (ID 1)
  - Started to play online (Lotto) because it's easier than offline playing (ID 7)
  - Found the online site based on media coverage and advertisement (ID 3)
  - Online games when turned 18 and was legally able to register to the site ((ID 15)
  - ID 8 unclear



# Finding new games

- Friends influence
  - Friends play the same games (ID 6)
  - Heard interesting sounds when her colleague was playing online games, s/he explained what s/he was doing → had to try herself (ID 2)
- Environment and situation influence
  - Lotto is a routine, spare changes left after Lotto playing can be used to play other games in the site (ID 5)
- Advertisements influence
  - Finds new games based on the in-site advertisements. Starting to play new games requires guidance from somebody. Doesn't try new games by herself. (ID 7)



# Gambling careers

- Tryout
- → If the game is good
- → Playing continues (Identification)
- → Playing becomes a “tradition, routine, standard”
- → Playing becomes part of everyday life



# Tryout

- About 90 % of the Finns have gambled at some point of their lives
- Everybody has family members, relatives and/or friends who gamble
- General attitudes towards gambling have been rather liberal in Finland
- Games can be found everywhere
  - Grocery stores
  - Gas stations
  - Kiosks
  - Bars and restaurants
  - Online
  - Gambling venues
- It's easy to start to gamble in Finland
- Possibilities to tryout gambling are plentiful
- The general age limit of 18 years for gambling was passed in the year 2011. Few years ago there were no age limits for example for lotteries. The slot-machines had the age limits of 15, but also younger children were allowed to play them if they were accompanied by their parents.
- Beginning gambling is fundamentally social process (Reith & Dobbie 2011)



# Identification

- “[My parents don’t play] online games. Internet is not that familiar to their generation. They play mainly slots” (ID 5)
- ID 8 used to be “a horse-girl” → likes especially horse race betting in race tracks
- ID 10 used to play football so it was easy for him to become interested in sports betting
- Foreign vs. domestic online sites
  - Domestic sites are seen more responsible, reliable and safe
  - Long history in Finland
    - Parents and even grandparents have been and are customers to those companies
- Players continue to play those games (and in those venues/sites) to which they have an emotional connection
- If the game somehow represents their identity, it is likely, they will continue to play





# “tradition, routine, standard”

- “Lotto is kind of a routine [...] bingo has become almost kind of a tradition [...] usually I have always the standard [amount of money for games]” (ID 5)
- Gambling has become a routine for most of the interviewees
  - The time and the place of gambling is almost always the same
    - E.g. weekly lotteries, weekly sports betting, slot machines after grocery shopping, poker playing after work week
  - The size of the bets is usually the same
    - Standardized weekly bets, spare change after shopping, spare change after weekly online lottery
- Routines are also safety factors
  - Will not consume more time or money one can afford to
  - Routines are known by family members and friends → social control



# Everyday vs. occasions

“Online poker takes so much time from other activities so I have kind of stopped playing it” (ID 4)

- Routines make gambling as part of everyday life
- Gambling happens during and in between other everyday routines e.g.
  - Shopping
  - Online surfing
- Doesn't require reflexivity
- Gambling is talked about only if something extraordinary happens (=winnings)

“Those boat-trips, I earmark a certain sum of money to play on those trips... I play more on those trips than usually” (ID 7)

- If there are special occasions (e.g. gambling during holiday trips, trip to casino) different precautionary measures are necessary
    - Special earmarked money for gambling
- Gaming with friends → social control



# Money and social interaction

“I pay the bills first and the entertainment [gambling] comes after that” (Id 14)

“[Live poker with friends] is a different game. Of course you try to win money, but social interaction is much more important than in online poker. That’s why we organize them, so that it wouldn’t always be just monotonous, boring online gambling.” (ID 10)

- Attitudes towards gambling money mirror the more general values of society
- Gambling money has different qualities in different situations
  - Different currencies
  - Hierarchy between different currencies (weekly bets, spare change etc.)
- Some players do not want to play against friends on monetary bets in any circumstances while for some other players this is an everyday activity
  - Size of the bets at a socially acceptable level → would not jeopardize the social relations
- ID 9: When wins money from strangers, feels the money is not taken away from anybody
- Gambling money (bets, losses, winnings) is always socially defined



# Conclusions

- (Online)Gambling is fundamentally social activity which is learned and experienced in specific socio-cultural frames
- (Online)Gambling is integrally connected with players' social networks
- Strong social ties demand certain kind of action while weak ties allow more freedom for players
- Strength of the ties indicate how strongly players identify themselves with the
  - Game
  - Gaming environment
  - Other players
  - Communities and subcultures related to gambling
  - Surrounding society and culture
- Ties are constructed, maintained and terminated based on the social interaction

