

# Gambling as a Playground for Adults? Or the Interconnection Between Games and Gambling.

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

“So long as they (the Proles) continued to work and breed, their other activities were without importance. Left to themselves, like cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina, they had reverted to a style of life that appeared to be natural to them, a sort of ancestral pattern ... Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbors, films, football, beer and above all, gambling filled up the horizon of their minds. To keep them in control was not difficult.”  
(George Orwell 1984)

This paper explores the question of whether gambling spaces can be regarded as metaphorical playgrounds for adults. To address this, I aim to initiate a discussion on the general similarities between analog and digital games, as well as games of chance ("gambling"). Certain researchers propose that the origins of gaming can be traced back to pre-religious practices, specifically the use of knuckle bones for fortune-telling (Parlett 2018). Over the course of time, this engagement evolved into more structured religious rituals, diverse forms of gameplay (Huizinga 1949, Callois 1961), and a wide array of gambling activities or “adult play” (Giddens 1964), including dice games, card games, horse race betting, lotteries, and the establishment of casinos.

A crucial inquiry arises: why and when did these three activities—the religious ritual, gaming, and gambling—become distinct, and which groups advocated for this division and what motivated them (Hargrave 2001, Schwartz 2013, Wardle 2021)? It is also intriguing to examine society's diverse attitudes toward gaming and gambling (e.g., "games support learning," "gambling leads to addiction"), the varied motives of players or gamblers (Schüll 2014), and how the two industries are differently structured and regulated. Identifying the areas where connections (still) exist is also pertinent to this examination.

Furthermore, the paper delves into the types of gambling elements e.g., randomizers, loot boxes (Close, Lloyd 2020), free-to-play reward systems, and betting mechanics currently utilized in the digital gaming industry and analyzes how players and society respond to these elements. The study's findings will culminate in a set of recommendations for game designers and gambling specialists regarding when and how to incorporate gambling-like elements.

Proceedings of DiGRA 2024

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Methods: The study employs historical discourse analyses and adopts a comparative ethnographic approach. It relies on narrative interviews conducted with experts primarily from Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands within the gaming and gambling industries, as well as regulatory institutions. Noteworthy examples of these experts include individuals associated with entities such as Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle (USK), Westlotto, and the Gauselmann Group.

## Keywords

games, gambling, religion, history, regulation, cultural discourses, loot boxes

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