

***Flanki*: Drinking Games and Traditions of Students at AGH University of Kraków**

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper explores both pleasures and risks associated with *Flanki* (also known internationally as Flunkyball) – a competitive drinking game that challenges players' throwing, running, and fast alcohol consumption abilities – that has evolved into a distinct tradition among students at the AGH University of Kraków. The game consists of two teams standing opposite each other, that take turns trying to knock down an empty beer can which stands between them. If one team succeeds, the members have to drink their beverage (usually beer) until the other team sets the empty can upright. The first team to finish all their drinks wins the game.

The research aims to explore the motivations, consequences, and cultural significance of this specific drinking game in the context of local community and will culminate in a survey and interviews aiming to reveal tendencies in drinking behavior of AGH students and other regular visitors of AGH University Student Campus recreation area, which is the main location of *Flanki* games in Kraków. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the proposed paper will be its local scope, considering limitations of current drinking games theory, as Zamboanga (et al. 2014) notes that most research on drinking games has been conducted in the United States, and studies carried out in other countries may yield different results. Furthermore, some scholars have recently pointed out that there is an astounding lack of studies on drinking games that analyses them as a subject of game studies (Sotamaa and Stenros 2019, Masek and Stenros 2024), and because of that, this research will be conducted in such manner in order to fill that gap.

Previous literature on the topic of drinking games shows that participation is driven by various motives. Borsari (2004) reviews that students play mainly for socialization,

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competition, and intoxication, while other scholars also include categories such as simply having fun, coping, conforming to group, and experiencing something novel (George et al. 2023; Schumacher 2012; Zamboanga et al. 2014; 2018; 2024). Many of those motivations correspond closely to Huizinga's conception in *Homo Ludens*, where play is described as one of the main bases of civilization, pursued voluntarily not for material gain but for its autotelic character accompanied by tension, joy, and the pleasurable pursuit of a goal (Huizinga 1980). The game produces a competitive aspect that Huizinga describes as *agon*. Building on this typology, Caillois (2001) identifies *agon* as the domain of regulated competition and *ilinx* as the pursuit of dizziness or controlled disorientation – both of which characterize *Flanki*, given its combination of rivalry and alcohol-induced vertigo. *Flanki* thus functions as a contest of physical skills (accuracy, speed, and drinking ability), where the reward is not material gain but the satisfaction, symbolic recognition afforded by victory, and pleasure of intoxication.

The last aspect appears particularly problematic, as drinking alcohol is by design embedded in the rules of drinking games (Sotamaa and Stenros 2019), and so they tend to promote rapid alcohol intake. The documented risks of drinking games include blackouts, loss of consciousness, and continued elevated alcohol ingestion even after the game has ended (Zamboanga et al. 2014). Outcomes such as sexual assault also appear in the context of drinking games, with women being particularly vulnerable (Borsari 2004). Due to biological differences, they typically reach higher blood alcohol levels than men while drinking the same amount (Borsari 2004). Moreover, most women report drinking more alcohol while playing drinking games than they normally would, whereas men generally report drinking similar amounts in game settings as in other contexts (Johnson et al. 1998). Additionally, a significant percentage of participants identified “controlling others or getting someone else drunk” as a motive for engaging in drinking games (Borsari et al. 2003), and further research indicates that motivations involving sexual contact or manipulation also occur, with such motives reported more frequently by men than by women (Johnson 2002). Lastly, drinking games such as *Flanki*, through their cheerful atmosphere, may reinforce unhealthy relationships with alcohol (already prevalent among students), masking them as innocent play and sportsmanship. In Poland, alcohol use among university students is particularly concerning: a study by Wilczyński (et al. 2013) indicated that 95.5% of Polish students consume alcohol, predominantly beer and vodka, and locally in Kraków, the percentage of drinking students is similarly high (84.8%), with beer remaining the most popular beverage (Kowalewski 2006) – a detail especially relevant in the context of *Flanki*, which relies on beer.

Reports from AGH's local student media (Górski and Dobczyński 2023; Radio 1.7 2021) discuss the presence of *Flanki* at AGH, noting that most games occur on Thursdays, when large social gatherings take place in the campus recreation zone. Some matches are held simultaneously along the less crowded sidewalks, but the main arena is a concrete court that attracts large crowds and hosts multiple games at once. Those spaces might be categorized as “magic circles” – spatial and temporal boundaries of play, that are set apart from ordinary life (Huizinga 1980). Despite the large crowds in the main play area – many of whom are not interested in *Flanki* – the games are rarely disrupted by so-called “spoil-sports” (Huizinga 1980).

However, preliminary observations revealed that *Flanki* regularly gives way to other student traditions. At 21:37 – marking the hour of Pope John Paul II's death – all games pause as students begin singing the Polish pope's favorite song, *Barka*. This is typically

followed by a series of vulgar chants directed at other Kraków universities and their students, after which the games of *Flanki* resume (Górski and Dobczyński 2023). Despite those vulgar chants, the AGH campus recreation zone remains a space where students from various institutions can freely socialize, and many join in the chants without taking them too seriously.

We conducted a survey on a sample of 263 AGH students, that included a detailed breakdown by gender, faculties and year of study in pursuit of finding differences between subcultures within the university. Results show that half of the students that drink alcohol also participate in drinking games, and over 85% of them play *Flanki*. Respondents identified having fun (93,97%), socializing (75%), and competing (45,69%) as the main reasons for playing drinking games. Playing for competition was selected twice as often by men (59,68%) than by women (30,19%).

Further research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of *Flanki* within the local context of AGH. We are in the process of interviewing regular *Flanki* players and spectators to provide deeper insight into their motivations for participating in this activity, as well as to better understand how *Flanki* functions as a factor of social bonding and a folklore tradition among AGH students.

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