Gambling in Social Networks: Gaming Experiences of Finnish Online Gamblers

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ABSTRACT

Online gambling is often regarded as asocial activity. Previously players could not interact with each other in online environments. The situation has changed as internet, in general, has evolved towards a more social environment. First Finnish online gambling games, eBingo and online poker, which enabled in-game social interaction were opened in the year 2010. This article reports findings from the study which focused on the social interaction connected with these games. Based on the questionnaire data of 409 players 16 players were selected for the thematic interviews. The analysis of the interviews indicates that even if social interaction is not necessary in order to play, it is meaningful in players' experience of the game. The different levels of sociality before, during and/or after the game have an influence on the construction of gaming experiences and connect gambling as meaningful part of players' social networks.

Keywords

Online gambling, social networks, bingo, poker

INTRODUCTION

Playing games, whether they are gambling games or other games, is often social activity (Stenros et al. 2011). Even if playing itself would not involve social interaction, there are different levels of sociality connected with it which have an effect on the gaming experiences (Kinnunen 2011). In this paper, we first take a look at how online gambling has evolved from asocial to social activity and how the line between gambling games and other games has become blurred in internet. Then we focus on eBingo by Veikkaus (Finnish Lottery) and online poker by RAY (Finnish Slot-machine Accosiation); two rather new Finnish online gambling games, which enable in-game social interaction. Based on the interview data gathered from the average players of these games we shed light on different levels of sociality connected with gaming. Finally, by utilizing Goffman's (1974) frame analysis and theories of social networks, we discuss how these different levels of sociality are connected to each other and to the construction of gaming experiences.

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ONLINE GAMBLING

Online gambling has become more and more popular since its introduction in the middle of the 1990s. The majority of worldwide gambling games are still offline, but the significance of online gambling keeps getting more important all the time. It has been estimated, that the gross revenue of online gambling was 25 billion dollars in 2010, which is five times higher than in 2001 (Raventos & Zolezzi 2011, 300). Offline gambling operators have moved some of their gaming also to internet and, at the same time, there has been an emergence of offshore gambling operators, which operate mainly in online environment (Cooper 2011, 76-78). There were about 3000 different online gambling sites in the world in 2009 (Griffiths 2009, 659). Now the amount of sites is probably even higher.

At first, the online gambling games were electronic versions of offline games of pure chance. Players could for example fill their lottery tickets online or they could play virtual slot-machines. Online environment did not require any changes to games' mechanics. What was different compared to traditional forms of gambling was the lack of interaction between players. Playing was solitary and anonym activity against the game operator. Players could not communicate with each other in virtual gambling sites. They did not even know if there were other players online at the same time. On the other hand, no one knew when and how much you were playing unless there was someone next to you looking at what was happening on your personal computer's screen. The lack of interaction increased the risk for problem gambling (Griffiths 2003, 560-561).

Online gambling games and services have developed in connection with more general internet trends. As internet, in general, has evolved towards a more social environment (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008), also online gambling games and sites have accommodated new forms of social interaction. There are still online games which are played against the operator, but in addition, players can also play against each other, which requires social interaction between them.

When players play against each other, any game can become a gambling game if players decide so. This blurs the boundary between gambling games and other games. There are plenty of so called skill gaming sites in internet where players can play casual games, such as Tetris or solitaire, against each other on monetary bets. Also "real" gambling sites have adapted these kinds of casual games as a part of their game selection.

Different versions of traditional gambling games can be played without real money for example in children's video games or in social networking sites (King et al. 2010, 177-178). Playing poker is one way of maintaining social relations for millions of Facebook users. Even if players can not use real money on playing, they can purchase game-related virtual goods from the marketplace connected to the game. This, again, is one example of blurring the line between gambling games and other games.

It is still possible to play online gambling games without any social interaction, if players wish to do so. Nevertheless, it is clear, that online gambling is not merely asocial activity anymore. Gambling games are connected to large networks of players and other games. Players can interact with each other in many platforms and forums which can be situated also outside the actual games and gaming sites (Parke & Griffiths 2011; see also Taylor 2006, 52-57).

Finnish eBingo and Online Poker

First Finnish online gambling games which enabled in-game social interaction were opened in the year 2010. Veikkaus introduced a new game called eBingo and RAY opened a national online casino and a national online poker site. National online gambling has been possible in Finland since 1997, but previously playing did not involve any social interaction in online environment.

eBingo is a digital version of a classic game of bingo. Players purchase one or maximum of 21 virtual bingo tickets which each include 75 prefilled numbers. After they have paid their tickets follows the virtual draw. In reality, all the numbers have been drawn beforehand, so it could be possible to reveal the result of the game immediately after the payment. However, players must wait for the disclosure until the end of the virtual draw. Players can follow the draw step by step, but it is not necessary, because the drawn numbers are automatically marked in the players' tickets. There are different prize levels, for example two horizontal lines in the ticket or the full ticket. The draw is paused and the nickname(s) of the winner(s) is announced when some of the players get one of the smaller prizes. When the first player gets his/her ticket full, the draw is finished and the nickname of the winner is announced.

Players can see all the time how many numbers they are missing from the next prize. They can also compare their own position to the positions of three top players and they can chat with other players. These are the new features compared to the previous Finnish online gambling games.

The new online casino of RAY includes solitary games, such as slot-machines, and digital versions of traditional casino games, such as Black Jack and Roulette, which are played in the presence of other players. Most elaborated game in regard of social interaction is, however, the online poker. RAY's online poker is quite similar to other gambling sites' online pokers. Players are gathered around the virtual gaming table. Players can see each other's nicknames, stacks (the amount of chips) and positions in the table. They can follow whose turn it is to bet, call, check, raise or fold. These actions are communicated to other players by different visual signs. Playing is interactive, because the actions of every player influence other players' actions and the outcome of the game. Players do not need to talk with each other, because their actions are visually communicated to other players. However, there is also a chat connected to the game.

AIM AND METHODS

Playing eBingo, online casino games or online poker is possible without ever using chats connected to these games. However, there are also other levels of sociality connected with these games which can influence the experiences of playing them. Our aim is to identify those different levels of sociality and to analyze how meaningful they are for the average players of these games. Because the social interaction connected with games is not always situated inside the games or even inside the gaming sites, we are studying also how gambling is connected with the more general social interaction of these players.

Average Players

We are interested in the average players for several reasons. By focusing on the average players we can exclude those players who have only tried out these games once or twice. On the other hand, we also want to exclude those players who play these games excessively or might even have a gambling problem. We assume that the average players

have played these games at least a few times so they have a clear picture of the game and they are able to discuss about its features from different points of view.

It is possible to define the averageness of players in many ways depending on the available data. The companies (Veikkaus and RAY) have customer registers which include data about players' backgrounds and playing habits. We did not have access to that data so we could not directly identify the average players of the new Finnish online gambling games. We asked the companies to conduct the sampling of the average players for us. We have no way to confirm that the selected players are actually the average players of these games. We can only trust that the companies made the sampling correctly.

The 2517 selected players of eBingo were average based on the amount of games played and the amount of money used in playing in one month. There were three groups from RAY. The first group consisted of players who had played only RAY's online poker. The second group consisted of players who had played only RAY's online casino games. The third group consisted of players who had played both RAY's online poker and online casino games. There were 500 average players selected in each group based on the amount of money used in playing.

Questionnaires

The selected players were average primarily based on the amount of money used in playing these particular games. They all used approximately the same amount of money in playing as other players in their sample. Players in the eBingo-sample also played approximately same amount of games in one month. This doesn't mean that all these players are alike. On the contrary, our questionnaire data reveals that there are different types of players among the average players of these games.

To get a better view of who these average players are, an online questionnaire was created. The questionnaire included background questions of the player's age, gender, education, working situation, living conditions and favorite gambling game. The second part of the questionnaire focused on the frequency of gambling. It had questions how often and in which gambling venues players play domestic and non-domestic offline and online gambling games. The final part of the questionnaire measured how much time players consume in all their gambling activity. At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents could voluntarily leave their contact information if they wanted to participate in the following interviews. The questionnaire functioned primarily as an instrument to recruit interviewees. We did not expect to get statistically significant data.

There were four different, but identical, questionnaires for four different player groups. Links to online questionnaires were sent by e-mail to players by the companies through their customer services. Even though the questionnaires were conducted in cooperation with the companies, the data collected was managed only by the researchers. The companies did not interfere with the design of the research or the content of the questionnaires. They did not have any kind of access to the answers or personal details of the respondents. On the other hand, the researchers did not have an access to the customer registers of the companies. We can not identify in detail those players who received an invitation to our questionnaires. We know only the number of genders and the size of different age-groups of selected players.

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

Table 1: The response rate of different player groups (N=409)

The response rate in all groups was about ten percent. Online poker players were least eager to participate and those players who play both online casino games and online poker were most active respondents. The youngest of the respondents was 18 years old and the oldest was 80 years old. The average and median age of all the respondents was 41. Almost 70 % of the respondents were male.

Young players were underrepresented among the respondents, except young female eBingo players. Female percentage was rather small in all the RAY's groups and especially in the online poker group. The national Lotto by Veikkaus was the most common game among all the respondents, which is not surprising, because it's the most popular gambling game in Finland (Raento 2011, 71). Otherwise it was surprisingly clear that the players of eBingo group played mainly games of Veikkaus and the players of RAY's groups played mainly games of RAY. In offline environments the games of both companies are often available in the same space, e.g. in kiosks or grocery stores, but the online sites are separated.

Even if there were a clear distinction between players of Veikkaus and RAY, there were also a lot of players who played games of both companies, both online and offline. It was possible to profile different kinds of players, who then could be invited to be interviewed. 266 (65 %) of all the respondents left their contact information and expressed their willingness to participate in the interviews.

Interviews

The questionnaires worked primarily as instruments to recruit interviewees. They gave us a possibility to select different kinds of players for interviews. We wanted to interview players who had preferably played both eBingo and RAY's online poker, so they could compare these different kinds of games and their social dimensions. We also selected players who had experience of playing also other gambling games than those available by Veikkaus and RAY. We did not want to interview just one gender, but selected both male and female players. By analyzing the questionnaire data 16 players were selected to interviews.

Even if the respondents had expressed in the questionnaires their willingness to participate in the interviews, not all the players we selected wanted to participate after we contacted them. If someone refused to participate, we selected the next candidate who had as similar qualities as possible. Because of the refusals, we had to select two players who had not played eBingo and four players who had not played RAY's online poker. Ten interviewees had played both eBingo and RAY's online poker.

					Time in a
ld	Group	Age	Gender	Favorite game	week
1	eBingo	46	М	Sports-betting	2-10 h
2	eBingo	22	F	Scratch-cards	1-2 h
3	eBingo	60	М	Lotto	30 min
4	eBingo	26	М	Sports-betting	1-2 h
5	eBingo	21	F	Scratch-cards	30 min
6	eBingo	38	М	Sports-betting	30 min
7	eBingo	58	F	Slot-machines	2-10 h
8	eBingo	33	F	Horse-betting	2-10 h
9	Online poker	35	М	Horse-betting	2-10 h
10	Online poker	34	М	Poker	10-20 h
11	Online poker	38	М	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	М	Poker	2-10 h
16	Poker & casino	33	F	Slot-machines	30 min

Table 2: The interviewees

Eight from the interviewees came from eBingo group and eight from RAY's groups. There were eight females and eight males. Based on the answers of the favorite game, there were eight players who preferred pure games of chance, and eight players who preferred games of skill. The youngest of the interviewees was 21 years old and the oldest was 60 years old. The average age of the interviewees was 36, which is a little bit less than the average age among all the respondents in the questionnaires (41 years).

The interviewees differ from each other quite clearly based on the amount of time they use on gambling in a week. Five of the interviewees use only 30 minutes in a week on gambling while three players use as much as 10-20 hours on gambling in a week. Most of the interviewees are clearly gambling hobbyists based on the time used on gambling. Some games demand more time from the players than other games. One round of slot-machine playing is often over in seconds, while poker tournament can last hours or even days.

The questionnaires revealed what games the respondents play, where they play, what is their favorite gambling game and how much time they use on gambling. However, they did not tell what kind of social interaction is connected with these games and gaming venues or how important social aspects are for players. Interviews were needed to collect data on these matters.

Before the interviews a link to another online-questionnaire were sent to selected interviewees. The second questionnaire focused on the social elements of gambling and gaming. It included questions on how often players play with friends on money, how often they bet on something with friends and how much money they spend on gambling in a month. The questionnaire did not focus just on gambling games but it also asked how often players play all kinds of games, e.g. Facebook games, MMORPGs, console, PC,

mobile and board games and team sports, which have different levels of social interaction connected with them. The respondents had also a possibility to specify their agreement or disagreement on a symmetric five-step rating scale with 16 statements about social elements of gambling.

Interviews focused on the questions relevant to each individual interviewee. Because we already knew a lot about the interviewees' playing habits and preferences, it was possible to go right to the point at the beginning of each interview and keep the duration of interviews rather compact. The interviews were made by phone and they lasted from 30 minutes to 55 minutes. The phone calls were recorded and the audio records were transcribed by a professional company.

The interviews did not focus only on online gambling but also on social elements of gambling and gaming in general. Even if we did not have a fixed set on questions, we used the same outline of themes in all the interviews. The themes were 1) beginning of gambling, 2) everyday playing habits and practices, 3) money and social relations, and 4) qualities of games and game services. These themes work as potential angles to study the different levels of sociality connected with gambling.

Based on the questionnaire data we were able to select different types of players to interviews. The analysis on interview data, however, did not primarily aim to find differences between different player types. In other words, we are not trying to compare female players with male players, young with old or skill gamers with players of games of pure chance, if the data does not clearly indicate differences between different player types. Instead of that, we are trying to identify those levels of sociality which have an effect on the construction of gaming experiences of all the interviewees. Diverse combinations of these levels have an influence on why one and the same player acts differently in various situations. Next we are going to introduce these different levels of sociality. After that we show how they are related to each other and how gambling is connected with the more general social interaction of players.

THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SOCIALITY

In-game Social Interaction

eBingo does not require social interaction between players. It is possible to play eBingo completely alone. Nevertheless, there are different features attached to the game which can increase sense of affinity between players and enable social interaction between them. The possibility to compare one's own position to the positions of three top players signals clearly that there are also other players present. The large chat-box next to the game confirms that impression and makes it possible for players to communicate with each other.

"I've followed [the chat] a few times, because it takes a few minutes before the game starts, if I haven't had any other pages open at the same time. But I haven't participated in the discussions." (Id 5. Female, 21 years old, favorite game scratch-cards)

Even if players would not pay attention to the chat, no one of the interviewees thought that the chat is bad or annoying feature. Attitudes were similar towards the visible position ranking between three top players and oneself. Most of the interviewees do follow other player's comments and discussions in the chat, but they seldom participate in the discussions themselves. The chat is perceived as a valuable feature especially when

the game itself is not in progress (see Taylor 2006, 39-40). Players follow the chat and participate in it especially before the draw is started and after the outcome of the game is settled. In those situations, players can focus also on other things than just the game, e.g. on chat or on other web-pages open on the computer screen.

"If you play in multiple tables, it requires lots of concentration, you have to focus on the most important thing [playing]... sometimes I can say a couple of words to some familiar players [in chat], but the main thing is playing." (Id 10. M, 34, poker)

Playing eBingo does not require as much concentration as playing online poker. It is possible to write comments in the chat even if the game is running, because the game automatically fills players' virtual bingo-tickets and informs if someone has won something. It is easy to return to the game, even if players focus temporarily on other things. Online poker is a different kind of game. It requires more uninterrupted concentration from players than eBingo. Players have to react to the actions of other players and they try to influence their opponents' actions by using different game strategies. It is possible to use the chat for example to provoke one's opponents to play worse (Wood & Griffiths 2008), but most of the players do not chat that much. It is common that players play in more than one virtual poker table at the same time, which increasingly limits the possibilities to use the chat. Longer discussions have to be situated in other forums (Parke & Griffiths 2011), but there might be short moments during playing which enable quick greetings to familiar players in the chat (see Wright et al. 2002). These moments are more probable if players play only in one table.

Both the qualities of a game and the qualities of channels for interaction attached to it have an influence on the forms of in-game social interaction. Skill games require active orientation from players, which makes it difficult to participate in additional activities, like chat, during playing. Pure games of chance, on the other hand, allow players to focus also on other things, because their actions do not have any kind of effect on the outcome of the game. Interaction channels can actually make the experience of playing more pleasant. Players can compare one's own position to other players' positions and share their experiences through the chat. The sense of togetherness with other players makes the threshold of social interaction lower.

Social Interaction in Gaming Environments

The in-game interaction channels are not the only channels players utilize. Social interaction between players can also take place in different gaming environments whose qualities have an effect on the course of their actions (Friedl 2003, 99-135). There are differences between online and offline environments, but some basic principles are applicable to social interaction in all kinds of gaming environments.

"In grocery stores, if I have a few coins left after paying, I play [slot-machines]" (Id 5. F, 21, scratch-cards)

The way games are situated in relation to other games and to other activities in an environment influences the behavior of players. In Finland, slot-machines are commonly located also in grocery stores. They are often positioned in close proximity to cashiers, so it is easy to move to them right after paying the groceries. The change can be used in playing and the amount of change measures the duration of gaming session. The actual gaming venues, like casinos, are designed in a similar manner. When a person enters a casino there is nothing random he or she is going to come across. The arrangements of

games and additional services in different parts of the environment are carefully calculated (Kingma 2011, 83). This defines partly how players are situated in relation to each other and to other people in that environment (Marksbury 2010, 96).

"Täyspotti [casino] is better place than grocery stores, because you can play in privacy. It's actually forbidden to "stalk" behind other players' back." (Id 7. F, 58, slot-machines)

In grocery stores, there are usually other people than just players present in the same environment. Some of them can entertain themselves by watching other people's play. These bystanders can irritate some of the players, especially if they will not keep quiet but start to comment on playing. More peaceful gaming spaces can be found on dedicated gambling venues. The social code in these places demands more discreet behavior. It is forbidden to disturb other players, which makes it possible to concentrate purely on playing and leave all the social interaction behind. On the other hand, players are often within talking distance to each other in these places, which gives them a possibility to start a conversation (Kinnunen 2011, 86-87).

"I don't talk with other players, if they are strangers" (Id 5. F, 21, scratch-cards)

A possibility for communication doesn't guarantee social interaction. The official and unofficial rules and codes of an environment regulate how players engage in conversations (Siitonen 2007; Wright et al. 2002). Even if they are in a same situation and identify themselves as players, which can stir sense of togetherness, players can avoid social interaction, if they are strangers. This applies to both offline and online environments. If players recognize the same faces or nicknames repeatedly in the same environment they can eventually start to communicate with each other.

"We follow the race [trotting] quite intensively and after the race we discuss about it." (Id 8. F, 33, horse-betting)

When players are in a gaming environment with their friends the social interaction has an important role in the construction of gaming experiences. Playing itself is often the most important activity also in these situations. During the determination process of the game players concentrate only to that and stop momentarily other activities, such as conversation with friends. After the outcome of the game is revealed, players want to share their experiences and relive the game again by discussing about it with friends and others involved (Binde 2011, 112). In that regard playing in trotting-track has a lot in common with playing in virtual bingo hall. The channels these different environments offer for communication and other social interaction can vary, but the possibility for game-related social interaction is important to a certain group of players in every environment.

The Socio-cultural Context of Gambling

It is not merely the available interaction channels which have an influence on the formation of game-related social interaction. Rules of play, rules of different environments, state of play and other conditions in a particular situation define how those channels are utilized. Gaming doesn't take place in a vacuum, nor does the game-related social interaction. There is always a larger socio-cultural context which surrounds these activities. For example, general attitudes towards gambling influence what forms of gambling are seen acceptable, with who it is acceptable to play with and how players want to communicate about their gaming to other people.

"The first time [when played slot-machine] was with mom. I think I was about 8 years old" (Id 8. F, 33, horse-betting)

Attitudes towards gambling have been rather positive for a long time in Finland. Almost 90 % of the Finns have gambled at some point of their lives (Raento 2011, 60). 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. There are plenty of opportunities for gambling available in everyday Finnish environments which suit different playing habits. That is why it is interesting that no one of the interviewees had started to play alone. The beginning of gambling is profoundly a social event (Reith & Dobbie 2011). Most often the very beginning had taken place with parents or grandparents and some times with friends. New games are often introduced to players by their friends.

"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. F, 58, slot-machines)

For the interviewees gambling is often everyday activity which is defined by customary practices and routines. They routinely play slot-machines after shopping and betting follows the same patterns which have taken place for years. Routines make players feel safe, because they keep the gambling inside non-problematic boundaries. The amount of money used in gaming is every time approximately the same which players know they can afford to lose without too serious consequences. However, gaming can also take place outside of everyday practices, e.g. during holiday trips. In those cases also gambling is a special occasion. Players can allow themselves to spend more money and play more games than usually. To keep the gambling in control in those situations as well, players can beforehand allocate a certain amount of money which can be used on gaming. This earmarked money works also as a symbol of shift away from everyday life and its constraints.

"I pay the bills first and the entertainment [gambling] comes after that" (Id 14. F, 40, slot-machines)

Attitudes towards gambling money mirror the more general values of society. On holiday trips it is possible to spend more money than usually, but not any kind of money. Only the residual money after paying bills is seen appropriate to use on entertainments purposes, such as gaming. This kind of hierarchy of values concerns also different types of gambling. The same way as slot-machines are played with the change after paying groceries, new gambling games can be tried out with that money which remains after taking first care of duty-like gambling routines. For example, players can try out eBingo only after they have first paid their weekly lottery or sports-betting tickets. If there is not enough money left in the online gambling account after that, they are not going to transfer new money there in order to play other games.

"It doesn't matter if I play against strangers or friends. [...] Maybe it's better that they [opponents] are strangers. [...] I wouldn't play, at least actively, on money against my friends" (Id 5. F, 21, scratch-cards)

The conventions of players reveal that they treat money differently in different situations. According to Vivian Zelizer (1997) money is not uniform but it can transform to different kinds of currencies depending on the context. Gambling money, for example, is different

from housekeeping money and gambling money in one situation is different from gambling money in another situation. Social definitions of these currencies have an effect on the social interaction connected with gaming. 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. Especially poker players play often also against their friends. However, they try to keep the size of the bets at a socially acceptable level, which means that the winnings or losses in these games would not jeopardize the social relations between them. Those who do not want to use monetary bets at all in games between friends, feel that any amount of money would change playing to something too serious. Interestingly, they would not mind to lose money to their friends, but are afraid that their friends would not think the same way in the opposite situation. These fears of breaking social relationships because of gambling are not based on their own experiences, but rather on prevailing attitudes towards games, gambling and money in surrounding society and culture.

Player's Mindset

The motivations to gamble vary (Aasved 2003). There is seldom only one reason to play and the goals of gaming can change from one situation to another, even during the single gaming session.

"[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 it wouldn't always be just monotonous, boring online gambling." (Id 10. M, 34, poker)

Playing online and live poker can be motivated by different reasons. Online poker playing, for example, can be a way to earn money which makes it a work-like activity. Playing itself does not necessarily give any pleasure for the player and it can lack the social interaction quite completely (see Kultima 2009; Stenros 2010). Playing live poker can be a totally different experience for the same player. Winning money still motivates playing, but winnings are more like social rewards in the competition between friends (Kinnunen 2011, 87-88). Playing is mainly an instrument for friendly social interaction (see e.g. Zurcher 1970). Expectations of playing and player's mindset (Stenros et al. 2007) are not the same in these different occasions.

"I have a hell of a lot of people around me; I don't want them around when I'm playing" (Id 7. F, 58, slot-machines)

Even if players want to play alone, playing is in relation to social interaction. Playing can enable social isolation, if player's life is otherwise filled with social contacts. In that case, all the interaction channels available during playing can be meaningless or even irritating. It depends on the player's mindset. Like one of the interviewees puts it: "I don't talk, if I'm not in the mood." (*Id 16. F, 33, slot-machines*). The same player can sometimes want to play alone and sometimes the social interaction with other players is pleasurable. Player's mindset is not a stable construction. It is constantly shaped based on player's past and present experiences in different situations (Kultima & Stenros 2010).

GAMBLING AS PART OF PLAYERS' SOCIAL NETWORKS

In order to understand the significance of different levels of social interaction for players' gambling experiences, two concepts, frames and social networks, come in handy. The concept of frame originates from Erving Goffman's book *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (1974). According to Goffman, people use frames to

interpret what is going on in a particular situation. Frames can be seen as socially constructed cognitive structures which guide the perception of reality. For example, members of a particular society and culture usually act similarly in formal situations or at least they know what is expected from them and from other people in those situations. They can place the activity in the shared frame of interpretation and guide their individual behavior accordingly. The socio-cultural context is one example of Goffmanian frames of interpretation.

In addition to the larger socio-cultural frame of gambling, games and gaming environments can be seen as frames, which guide the interpretation of situations and actions of players. Each of these frames demands and affords certain kinds of behavior from players. This applies also to social interaction before, during and/or after the game. Depending on the game, the frame of the game can require social interaction between players, as in poker, or it can just make the social interaction possible, as in eBingo. The frame of the gambling environment regulates how players can interact with each other during the game and what is expected from them outside the actual playing. The larger socio-cultural frame defines what kind of social interaction in general is valued and expected from the people of a particular culture and society. It guides, for example, how players communicate about their gambling to other members of society and what kind of money is seen acceptable to use on gambling.

Even if these frames afford different levels of social interaction between players, individual players can themselves decide what possibilities they will utilize. For example, they can use the chat connected to the game or refrain from the communication if all the other players are strangers. Player's mood or mindset, which also can be seen as a frame, has an influence on that. The mood can change from one situation to another, as can the available options for social interaction. Playing online poker alone, for example, is considerably different activity from playing offline poker with friends, when it comes to players' mindsets and available communication channels. The combination and the order of different frames define what forms of social interaction will arise.

In Goffman's frame analysis frames can include other frames and frames can overlap with each other. There is always more than just one frame present which guides our interpretation of the situation. The amount of frames is not restricted. All the frames present have an effect on the construction of experiences. One of the frames is always the leading frame of interpretation, but other frames influence in the background. Frames are dynamic. They can move in relation to each other. When the situation changes, one of the background frames can become the leading one and the order between other frames can also change. These kinds of changes can be quick and effortless.

The frame of the game is not exactly the same frame in every situation. The frame of poker is different from the frame of eBingo and the frame of online poker is different from the frame of offline poker. It is better to think that there is the primary frame of games, which meets the general definition of games (see e.g. Caillois 1961, 9-10). Then there are multiple different frames of different games which have their own characteristics (Stenros 2010). Depending on the situation the primary frame of games can exist together with one of the more specific frames of the games. In a same way, there can be more than just one frame of gaming environments and the larger sociocultural frame includes plenty of other, more specific frames. All these frames can exist together in different combinations, but their order in relation to each other changes from

one situation to another. In order to understand this more clearly, it might be useful to look at the concept of social networks.

Gambling and gaming, as any other activity, are connected to players' networks. A single individual, a game or a gaming environment, among other things, can form a node in a network. Different nodes are connected to each other by strong or weak ties (Granovetter 1973; Wittel 2001). Active interaction between nodes makes the ties strong and lack of interaction weakens them. Ties between nodes can vanish altogether due to a long-term lack of interaction.

Goffman's frames can be seen as analytical tools which highlight or foreground certain parts of a larger network. For example, the frame of a gaming environment highlights those ties in a network of different games, players and other people which are essential in that particular environment. Framing a smaller part of a network is useful for analytical purposes. It is easier to concentrate only on one frame at a time and, if needed, cut that frame into smaller analytical frames. This is not, however, the fundamental goal of Goffman's frame analysis. Instead of concentrating to one frame at a time, the dynamics of frames should ultimately be in the center of the analysis. The actions of players who act in a network are always guided by more than just one frame and the dynamics of frames is the basis for their gaming experiences.

Different frames activate different ties of players' networks, and vice versa. When players start to play, the frame of the game becomes the leading frame of interpretation and actions. The interaction between the player and the game during playing strengthens the ties between them and keeps the frame of the game in the foreground. However, the player is not detached from all the other ties in his or her network. Those ties, or other frames, influence in the background more or less active. This is why social interaction is meaningful also to those players who do not necessarily utilize any of the in-game communication channels available. They are not - at least directly - members of the network of in-game chatters, but they have a possibility to join that network at any moment during playing. At the same time, they are connected to those social networks which extend beyond the boundaries of games and gaming environments (Taylor 2006, 84-87; Peirce and Artemesia 2009, 177). Social interaction with friends, colleagues, family, relatives or other members of their communities have an influence on how players interact with each other. If they can identify other players or if they can even identify themselves with them, in-game social interaction is more likely.

Already existing strong or active ties promote social interaction in different situations. The activeness and the strength of the ties is not exactly the same thing. The strength of the ties indicates how strongly one identifies oneself with different objects, whether they are games, gaming environments, other players, communities and subcultures connected with gaming or objects of surrounding society and culture (Porat 2010). The activeness of the ties indicates which frames are present at the situation and the intensity of the activeness indicates the order of those frames. Both the strength and the activeness of ties change based on the ongoing social interaction.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing the interview data gathered from the average players of Finnish eBingo and online poker, we have identified different levels of sociality connected with gaming. These levels can be seen as frames in a Goffmanian (1974) perspective. All these frames demand and afford certain kinds of interaction before, during and/or after playing, both

inside games and in different environments connected with games. Each of them foregrounds significant relations in players' social networks. The construction of gaming experiences is based on the dynamics of different frames. One of the frames is always the leading frame of interpretation, but other frames influence in the background. The order of the frames changes from one situation to another, which activate different relations in player's networks. Even if social interaction is not necessary in order to play, it is meaningful in players' experience of the game.

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