

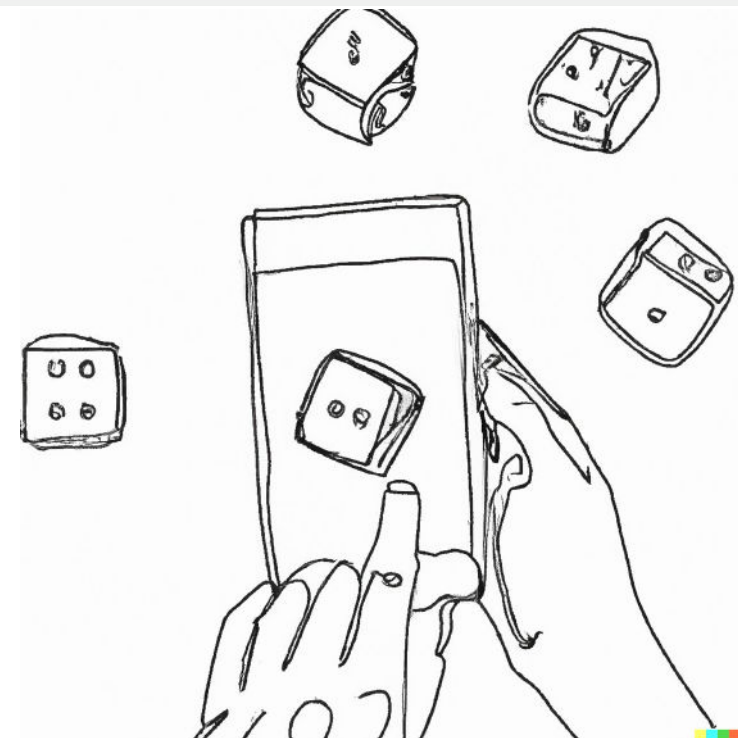


**“The money is just a number;
It’s more about the hygge”:**
Socially motivated youth gambling
in Danish upper-secondary school

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Research questions

1. What are the actual gambling **practices** of young people?
2. What **motivates** young people to gamble?
3. What roles do concepts such as **community** and **identity** play in gambling practices?
4. What does this knowledge mean for **practitioners**?

Gambling motivations (1/2)

- **Skill** and **excitement**, something to lose (Huizinga, 1955; Whyte, 1967)
 - "Desire for voluptuous panic" (Caillois, 2001)
- Stewart & Zack's three factor model (2008)
 - **Enhancement** of positive emotion
 - **Coping** with negative emotion
 - **Social**, external positive reinforcement, increased social affiliation

Gambling motivations (2/2)

- Binde's five motivational components (2012)
 - The **chance** of winning
 - The **dream** of hitting the jackpot
 - **Social** rewards
 - Intellectual **challenge**
 - **Mood** change

Social motivation (1/2)

- **Honour**, being above others, **hierarchy** (Zola, 1967)
- Binde's three sub-categories of social motivation (2012)
 - **Communion** – gathering, being around others
 - Gamblers **choose** to be parts of communities and socialise even when they don't have to e.g. around slot machines and horse races (Hildebrandt-Eriksen, 2010; Binde, 2011)
 - **Competition** – beating others
 - **Ostentation** – social status through boldness

Social motivation (2/2)

- Correlation between having active gamblers in **social network** and pathological gambling (Meisel et al., 2013)
- **Several** motivation types simultaneously

"a more complete understanding of gambling would nonetheless require that we look at problem gambling as a social dilemma where people are considered to be social actors and where social variables are taken into account" (Savard et al., 2015, p. 40)

Communities as people with shared, learnt ...

→ **Social identities**

→ **Norms**

→ **Practices/behaviours**

→ **Skills**

See communities of practice, affinity spaces (Gee, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Neely & Marone, 2016)

Gambling and community

Identity: "In neither [games of chance and skill] is money the primary motive for gambling, rather it is **the aspiration to be a 'dice thrower'**" (Reith, 1999)

- Socially learnt identity: Behaviour and identity, learnt by/with family/friends (Kristiansen et al., 2014; Trabjerg et al., 2014; Kim et al, 2017)
- Socialised at casinos, racetracks and state lotteries (Caillois, 2001) -> Spaces have moved (digital affordances)

Data and approach

- **Ethnographic fieldwork** at a **Danish upper-secondary school**, spring 2023
 - Initial interest in digital youth culture and practices
 - School statistically average (socioeconomically), relatively large
- 56 informants from two classes (1st year (1.STX) and last year (2.HF)), ages 16-23, 57% female and 43% male
- Online and offline observations. Over 22 hours of video and audio recordings, 101 pictures, 104 pages of fieldnotes, interviews with 22 students

Data and approach: The gambling subset

‘Gambling classes’ at the school:

“(laughing) Is it [class]? [Name]. It must be [name]”

Focus: A ‘gambling class’ – 2.HF (last semester of upper-secondary school)

11 male students, 9 gamble, 5 core members

Online slot machines, sports betting, crypto

At times, money at stake, at time simulated slot machines

Data and approach: Key informants

1. Used to gamble a lot, but promised his girlfriend he would stop. YouTube channel and streamer. Now only **watches** others gamble
 - A. The **girlfriend** of informant 1, does not gamble, hangs out with the guys
2. The most **avid** gambler, lost his childhood savings
3. Only gambles in ways he can "make money", **lender**, 20% interests
4. Professional Fortnite **player**, streamer, gambles regularly
5. Has **less sway** in the group, gambles regularly
 - B. Currently **non-gambler**, perception of classroom culture, previous experience

Extended anonymity: Vague in data, avoiding linkage to specific informants

"All the time"

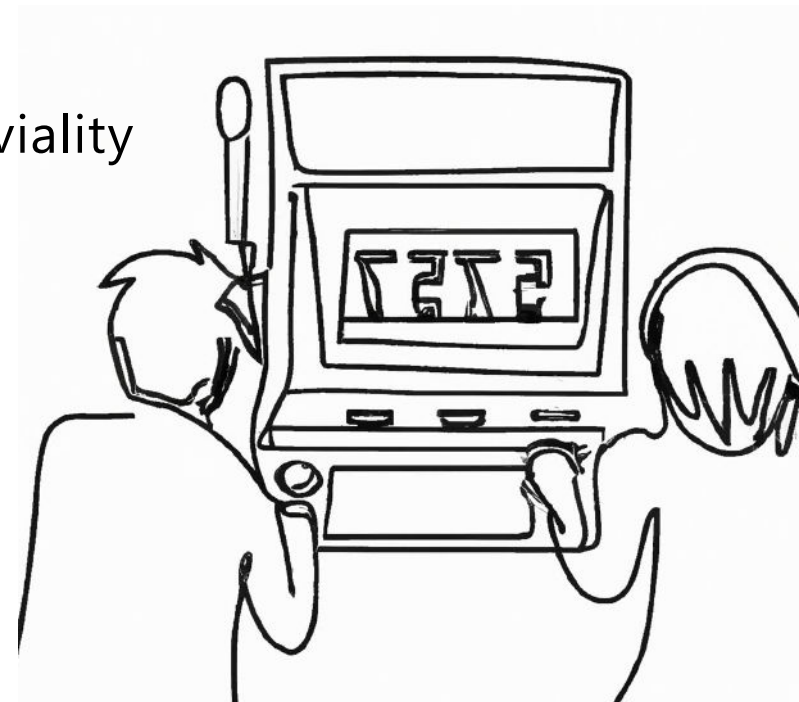
A. (girlfriend of 1.)

"They gamble all the time [...] Even at pre-game, they just need to play before we go into town"

The 8th of the month: "[One of the guys] has already spent his entire salary this month"

"It's really stupid, but they're [having a good time] with it"

[hygger sig]: "a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being"



"All the time"

B. (non-gambler)

I: How do you experience the culture in the classroom around the boys?

"It's strange to me [...] I feel like they all have a problem in some way, because then they sign up to ROFUS, and they come out and they're like 'ej I'm not gonna play' but then they play again because they just got paid [...] They should get some help because it ruins their entire education"

[...]

"it interrupts all the others in the class when they sit, and they talk loudly about it, and it's stuff like 'argh someone is winning a little' something 'aw what' and then they lose, and they yell because they're angry"

In the classroom

"I'll buy for 200 dkk on mine now"

"Do it. Do it"

Audio: English teacher speaking

Two guys are leaning towards a screen with a slot machine

While the teacher speaks, we hear quiet reactions

The teacher harpoons one of the guys, and they both instantly lean back and away from the computer

"yes yes"

"oiiii"

"there's no (?), man"

"(?) also needs to go up and get (?)"

Findings

Four themes: Turning points,
everyday life, normalisation and
community

Theme 1: Gambling turning points

Skinbetting (12-13 yo)

Sports betting with dad (15-16 yo)

Summer house and upper-secondary school:

"It started with us playing poker" [...]

"And the day after, our buddy came with his computer and said 'aah I have this Unibet [account] here' [...] 'let's just try this' [...] and then I just think it developed, and we kept going in school" [...]

"It wasn't until when we started in upper-secondary school and after that summer house trip that all of this with casino and slots and such have become a thing"

At first, only together, but after a while it also became something they did **alone** e.g. while doing homework, when bored and passing time

CONCLUSIONS THEME 1

Gambling is learned in social context, and it changes over time

In this context, upper-secondary school represents a central turning point

Theme 2: Gambling as part of everyday life

- A conversation about getting paid soon. A natural connection to gambling: "Gambling – it's gambling, boys. We like that"
- **Football:** "I'm rooting for Leeds tonight" – "Did you bet on Leeds?"
- **Taxes:** "Yes", "Nooo this is shit"

Gamblification (Macey & Hamari, 2024)

Theme 2: Gambling as part of everyday life

- Gaming: Professional Fortnite player

“There’s **potentially money** in everything we play”

“**The valuta that it says in there is not so much a krone**, it’s more just like a number-ish and then it’s like more the adrenaline of it and such that makes it fun”

“Of course you want to make money, but it’s more that it gives a good **excitement** in the body-ish”

“It’s kinda ***hyggeligt***”

CONCLUSIONS THEME 2

The guys gamble alongside other activities – in the classroom and as parts of other hobbies

Gambling is part of many everyday activities

Activities are gamblified to add a layer of excitement and *hygge*

Theme 3: Normalisation

2: Yes. A lot of people do it.

3: Well, I will say, **ever since we started upper secondary school here, then just everything you see and hear around**, a lot have started playing

1: The advertisements have also begun to come up more on TV

3: Yes

1: And like radio **it feels like they're constantly playing**

3: It could also be because we-

1: It's also just become because **you've started to notice** it

3: -we ourselves notice it. But it is certainly-

1: (?) everywhere

3: I've heard **a lot of buddies and buddies of buddies** who play and øh yeah in the same way as us have found an interest in it

Theme 3: Normalisation

A. (girlfriend)

"But it's not just here that it's normal. Also **in other upper-secondary schools**"

English teacher

"It's not just a [city] problem" – it is **normal at all Danish upper-secondary schools**

Theme 3: Normalisation

Layers of normalisation

1. Within the group
2. At the school (will be expanded)
3. Across the country, a larger culture
4. General surroundings (via advertisements)

CONCLUSIONS THEME 3

Gambling is viewed as normal by the guys in the group and by other students and teachers at the school

The guys experience meeting gambling everywhere – among other young people, in advertisements and on the internet

Theme 4: Identity and community

Internally marked identity

- "Then I can put on my sunglasses. Then you can't see my eyes. Then I'm a real gambler"
- "*smilingly* You are a major gambling addict" (*ludoman*)
- "I just lost 8.000 kroner" - *laughter*

Theme 4: Identity and community

Shared memories (1/2)

1: I would like to listen to it

?: *laughter*

2: I fucking would like to. I've been in and examined it, but you can't find old stream back (but) I would like to try and [find the very old the one where j- where I sat] at home there

3: [å the one where we sat and (drank)]

3: *laughter*

Recreation starts

2: åå you're a fucking [whore, man. Leeds,] you can't (come) and say anything about Leeds, man

?: *laughter*

3: You can't say anything about Calvin Phillips, man

1: You can't say anything about Leeds

Recreation stops

2: Eej fuck I would like to do that

Theme 4: Identity and community

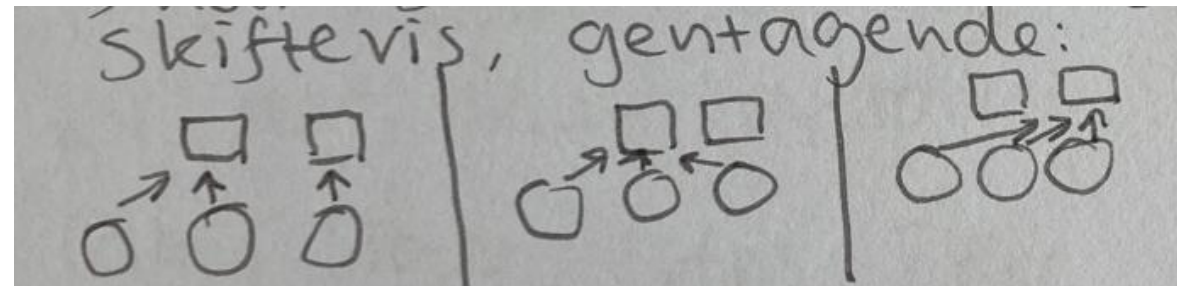
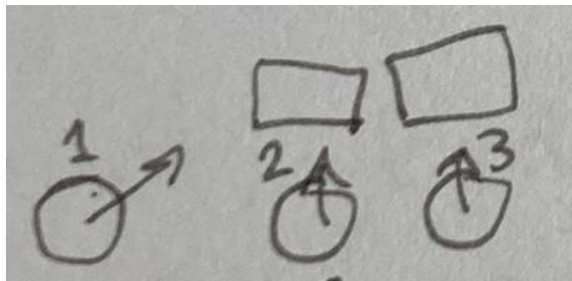
Shared memories (2/2)

- Reconstructing memories as **construction of identity** (Mianowski et al., 2019)
- Sharing collective memories and emotion – the feeling of **belonging** to social **community** (Wood, 2020)

Theme 4: Identity and community

Attention

Gambling reactions leading to attention in the group



Attention as social currency (Dalmasso et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2019)

Theme 4: Identity and community

Gambler identity beyond the group, the larger community

English teacher, **plenum** brainstorm: "What are some examples of reasons for divorce?"

"Gambling"

Most guys in class: *laughter*

B: "They have all these groups where they sit and play. And it's both in the class and when you get into your elective **with people from other classes**, then there's also a huge group that sits and plays"

The narrative of normalisation **across schools in all of Denmark**

CONCLUSIONS THEME 4

Together, the guys perform a gambler identity and create a community around gambling

In the group, gambling gives the members attention, which can be viewed as a form of social currency

Gambling gives them access to community – in and beyond the classroom

//

Right now, we're young and dumb. When you become 25, you're probably more sensible. [...] In 10 years, we'll probably think it was very stupid, and that it was a lot of money we threw away. But also some fun experiences

Conclusions

1. Gambling is learned, social behaviour and changes over times with contexts
2. For this group, gambling is an integrated part of everyday life and merges with other activities
3. There are several processes of normalisation at stake
4. Social motives are central to these guys, and they gain access to community through gambling activities

What does this knowledge mean for practitioners?

- We cannot underestimate the **importance** of sociality
 - Correlation between having active gamblers in **social network** and pathological gambling (Meisel et al., 2013) (Previously mentioned)
 - **Normalisation** through social connections (Russell, Langham & Hing, 2018)
- Socially motivated gambling is **assumed to be less problematic** – but while social motives can be “a **protective factor** for problem gambling”, depending on other factors, social motives can be risk factors (Floyd et al., 2025)
 - Changes: First together then also alone
- It is problematic to ignore social factors in preventive gambling programmes (Monreal-Bartolomé et al., 2023)
 - ‘This does not apply to me’

Future research

2026

If funded, a project on gambling **streaming** and its role/function for young people

Feel free to reach out

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18: Gambling turning points

9 *F: Ja, kan I huske sådan, hvornår I første gang prøvede gambling? Kan I
10 sådan fortælle lidt om, hvordan det har udviklet sig over tid?

11 *D1: Det kan jeg godt hvis

12 *D2: Ja

13 *D1: Jeg kan huske os tre vi var ude i sommerhustur med en kammerat, som
14 også skulle have været her i dag, som ikke er kommet, [navn], og så
15 var det dagen efter, vi havde drukket eller sådan noget.

16 *D2: Ja, det startede faktisk med, at vi spillede poker.

17 *D1: Ja, vi spillede poker, det er rigtigt.

18 *F: Bare sådan med rigtige kort?

19 *D3: Jaja fysisk kort og fysisk

20 *D1: Og dagen efter så hehe kom han frem med computeren og sagde årh jeg
21 sådan en Unibet her, og min kammerat han har trukket sygt mange ud
22 og sådan noget, det skal vi lige prøve. Så var det ligesom sådan,
23 det startede, og så tror jeg bare det har udviklet sig, med at vi
24 blev lidt ved i skolen, og så smed sådan meget små beløber ind
25 alle sammen sammen, 16,5 kr. eller hvad fanden det var, vi sme indd.

26 *F: Og det er sådan, det var bold, eller sådan sportsbetting?

27 *D1: Nej det var casino.

28 *D2: Slots. Altså man kan ikke sige. Nu ved jeg ikke med de andre, men
29 personligt så har jeg fået lov til det af min far for det måske da
30 jeg var 15-16, få lov lige at låne hans bet og lige smide en 10'er
31 på en fodboldkamp.

32 *D1: Ja, det må jeg også.

33 *D2: Og det tror jeg også, der er mange, der gør. Men det er først her,
34 da vi startede på gym og efter den sommerhustur der, at det der med
35 casino og slots og sådan noget, det er blevet en ting.

36 @end

Outside categories

On the choice of online gambling: “party and colors” and “bonus functions” – play elements

On crack downs on streaming: Legal vs. illegal gambling, streamers having to turn to foreign, uncontrolled sites

“It’s gives you a kick, but it’s dangerous”