

Published as: McCormack. A. & Griffiths, M.D. (2012). Motivating and inhibiting factors in online gambling behaviour: A grounded theory study. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 10, 39-53.

**Motivating and inhibiting factors in online gambling behaviour:  
A grounded theory study**

**Abby McCormack and Mark D. Griffiths  
International Gaming Research Unit  
Psychology Division  
Nottingham Trent University  
NG1 4BU  
United Kingdom**

**[abby.mccormack@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:abby.mccormack@ntu.ac.uk)**

**[mark.griffiths@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:mark.griffiths@ntu.ac.uk)**

## **Abstract**

To date, there has been very little empirical research examining why people gamble online or – just as importantly – why they do not gamble online. A grounded theory study examining the motivating and inhibiting factors in online gambling was carried out. The sample comprised 15 online gamblers, 14 offline gamblers, and 11 non-gamblers, and resulted in the identification of one major theme as to why participants were motivated to gamble online (i.e., greater opportunity to gamble) and four sub-themes (i.e., convenience, value for money, the greater variety of games, and anonymity). The main reason that inhibited online gambling was that the authenticity of gambling was reduced when gambling online. Four further sub-themes were identified as inhibitors of online gambling (i.e., the reduced realism, the asocial nature of the internet, the use of electronic money, and concerns about the safety of online gambling websites). Results also indicated that the participants' perception was that online gambling was more addictive than offline gambling and that online gambling would exacerbate gambling problems in society.

## Introduction

Technology has always played a role in the development of gambling practices (Griffiths 1999) and the internet may provide many people with their first exposure to gambling (Griffiths 2006a) which may be more enticing than previous non-technological forms (Griffiths 1999). Despite the rapid rate in which internet gambling has expanded, little empirical research has been carried out on why people are choosing to gamble on the internet, but just as importantly, why some gamblers choose not to gamble on the internet.

In the UK, the latest prevalence rate of internet gambling was found to be around 10.7% in 2010 for participation in remote gambling in the past month (Gambling Commission, 2010). Prevalence rates for internet gambling appear to increase when research samples comprise gamblers, ranging from 6.7% to 36.5% (GamCare, 2006; Ialomiteanu & Adlaf, 2001; Woodruff & Gregory, 2003). This suggests that gambling online may be more likely to be initiated by those who have already tried offline gambling. Recent research suggests that problem gambling rates among those who have gambled on the internet are much higher than those who do not gamble on the internet, suggesting that the medium of the internet may facilitate problem gambling among gamblers who are more vulnerable or susceptible (Griffiths, Wardle, Orford, et al., 2009). Concerns about internet gambling have also been expressed in the past and relate to issues such as accessibility, availability, convenience, escape, immersion/dissociation, anonymity, disinhibition, asociability and event frequency (Griffiths 2003).

Using data from 9,003 nationally representative participants, the British Gambling Prevalence Survey (Griffiths et al, 2009) found that internet gamblers (n=476) were significantly more likely to be male (74% males vs. 26% females), young adults, single, well educated, and in professional/managerial employment. Other studies have also found that internet gamblers are significantly more likely to be male (e.g., Wood & Williams, 2009), however, there may be a shift towards more females gambling online. Griffiths (2001) found that women reported they would prefer to gamble

online at online gambling sites than in traditional gambling venues as they were viewed as safer, less intimidating, anonymous, more fun, and more tempting.

In another online survey of internet gambling behaviour (n=563; 23% problem gamblers), McBride and Derevensky (2009) found that compared to social gamblers, problem gamblers were significantly more likely to spend more time gambling per session, gamble alone, gamble from school, gamble with a cell phone, gamble with more money, gamble online while consuming alcohol or illicit drugs, and lose more money gambling online. Using data from an internet-based survey of 1,920 internet gamblers, Wood, Williams and Lawton (2007) found that the primary reasons people gave for preferring internet gambling were: the relative convenience, comfort and ease of internet gambling; an aversion to the atmosphere, and clientele of land-based venues; a preference for the pace and nature of online game-play; and the potential for higher wins and lower overall expenditures when gambling online.

In a study of student gamblers (n=473), Griffiths and Barnes (2008) also reported the motivations for gambling on the internet. The main reasons among the internet gamblers (n = 105) were ease of access (84%), flexibility of use (75%), 24-h availability (66%), because friends do (67%), large gambling choice (57%), advertising (40%), anonymity (25%), demo games (21%) and because family members do (14%). Most Internet gamblers preferred to gamble with online operators who also had offline gambling facilities (e.g., high street bookmakers) (90%).

A few studies have examined attitudes towards gambling in the past and have found that more positive attitudes towards gambling are held by those who gamble and that more negative attitudes are held by non-gamblers (Kassinove, Tsytsarev & Davidson, 1998; Wood & Griffiths, 2004). However, only one study seems to have specifically examined public attitudes towards gambling. Orford, Griffiths, Wardle, et al (2009), using data from the British Gambling Prevalence Survey, found that public attitudes towards gambling are, overall, more negative than positive. While the majority felt that people have a right to gamble whenever they want and were against a total prohibition on gambling, most believed that gambling was more harmful than beneficial for individuals and society. More positive attitudes were reported among those with greater engagement in gambling.

As land-based (i.e., offline) gambling venues have become more widespread and easily accessible (Wood et al, 2007), there has been little research on why people choose or prefer to gamble online. The purpose of this study was to examine the motivating factors for engaging in online gambling, as well as inhibiting factors that prevent the use of online gambling behaviour. More specifically, the study examined what it is that differentiates online and offline gamblers, and why non-gamblers choose not to gamble at all in either online or offline venues. Additional objectives included examining people's attitudes and opinions towards online gambling and to discover any underlying differences between non-gamblers, offline gamblers, and online gamblers.

### **Methodology**

*Design:* A structured Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilised to enable an emergent theoretical framework to conceptualise the motivating and inhibiting factors for participating in gambling and online gambling.

*Participants:* A total of 29 gamblers (15 online gamblers and 14 offline gamblers) and 11 non-gamblers, ranging in age from 19 years to 58 years with an average age of 36 years were interviewed (SD = 11.9 years). Of these, 25 were male and the remaining 14 were female. All participants were interviewed face-to-face apart from three participants who were interviewed by telephone. A demographic breakdown of all participant information can be found in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

*Problem gambling diagnostic measures:* Participants defined themselves as problem gamblers on the basis that their gambling behaviour had caused them significant problems either in the past and/or present. The participants were also administered two problem gambling diagnostic measures comprising the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) and the Problem Gambling Severity Index (Ferris & Wynne, 2001). In total, 15 participants were identified as current or past problem gamblers (6 online gamblers and 9 offline gamblers).

*Procedure:* A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on a schedule of key questions and themes, as identified in the psychological literature. Additional issues were incorporated in later interviews in response to emerging themes. Data were collected over a 13-month period. All participants gave their consent to record the interviews. These were transcribed verbatim. The interviews lasted between 35 and 75 minutes. The main focus of each interview was the participant's account of their gambling behaviour and how and why they first started gambling. They were asked about what it was that they liked about gambling, why they chose to gamble online and/or offline, and their opinions relating to online and offline gambling. The non-gamblers were asked about whether they had ever gambled in their lives and if so why, and why they presently did not gamble. The questioning process also developed organically as theory emerged from the data.

## **Results and Preliminary Discussion**

### **Motivating factors in gambling online**

The results identified one major theme (i.e., greater opportunity to gamble) and four sub-themes (i.e., convenience, value for money, the greater variety of games, and anonymity) as to why participants gambled online. These are now examined in turn.

*Greater opportunity to gamble:* Online gambling has features that clearly differentiate it from offline gambling resulting in different motivations and reasons for gambling in this medium. During the analysis of the data, the core concept clearly emerged – the greater opportunity to gamble – and appeared to account for a large proportion of why people were using the internet to gamble. Through constant comparison, the data provided no indication that any aspect of online gambling promoted less opportunity to gamble. Two offline gamblers stated that they did not use the internet to gamble simply because they did not have access to the internet, but this did not reduce their opportunity to gamble, rather it failed to increase their opportunity. This they felt this was a 'blessing in disguise' because they believed that the internet would make their gambling behaviour even more problematic:

*“I haven’t got a computer at home, I haven’t got access to it. It’s a bit like saying what you haven’t got you don’t miss...I’m glad I’ve not got into that to be honest with you...I’ve heard some bad stories about that” (Barry, 41).*

Four sub-themes emerged as to why people choose to gamble on the internet and why it is providing more opportunity. These were: convenience; value for money; greater online variety; and, a safe world.

*Convenience:* An emergent pattern from the data was the convenience that the internet provided to gamble. Gambling via internet had many advantages as it saves time because the person does not have to travel anywhere, they are not restricted by opening hours, and they can gamble from the comfort of their own home. The removal of unnecessary time consumption (e.g., travelling to a gambling venue) through internet gambling is another barrier to gambling participation that has been removed. Working long hours no longer restricts people from gambling. Essentially, gambling has now become a leisure activity replacing activities such as watching television or socialising outside of the home.

*“It’s something to do at night. If you’re not going out for the night...have a quick half an hour, hour of poker” (Joseph, 28).*

The ability to gamble at home may be less disruptive to a person’s lifestyle and wellbeing than a range of other leisure activities such as drinking alcohol. This therefore enables the gambler to justify elevated gambling involvement. Gambling is perceived as a more suitable leisure activity because it can be performed with greater efficiency and time management because of technological developments. Internet gambling provides far more opportunities to gamble as it is much more easily accessible and is providing (theoretical) ‘24-hour gambling’ where anyone can gamble at an hour of day that suits them.

*“I go on there because I want to go on there. But I also go on there because it’s there to go on. I mean nowhere else could I go and get a bet at midnight, and carry on gambling through to 6[am] in the morning” (Clive, 47).*

One of the reasons playing poker has become very popular online, is because it is much more available online than offline. For example, traditional poker games in casinos have structural and situational limitations; players must be at the venue to play and there must be an unoccupied seat at the table. However, online poker rooms allow players to have unlimited access to poker games and they can play against people from all over the world. In general, the gambling literature demonstrates that an increase in availability of gambling opportunities tends to lead to an increase in gambling participation (Jacques, Ladouceur, & Ferland, 2000). In countries where gambling has become widely available, public attitudes have generally become more accepting of gambling, and gambling participation has become commonplace throughout the general adult population (Abbott, Williams & Volberg 2004). Such data indicate that gambling involvement appears to be significantly affected by situational determinants and therefore cannot be solely attributed to individual differences.

*Value for money:* For operators, the cost of setting up an online gambling business is significantly lower than the cost to open an offline gambling venue. As a consequence, the online gambling industry has become highly competitive and gamblers can receive more competitive prices and promotional offers that they would be unlikely to receive offline. Therefore, online gamblers feel they are getting better value for money online and this perceived increase in value for money may lead to an increased likelihood to gamble. In particular, the free offers tempted people who had never gambled before:

*“Well an email came in from one of these casinos and for some reason I read it and it said whatever you deposited they would double (the amount of money)” (Fran, 57).*

Over half of the internet gamblers (n=8) said they were attracted by online gambling websites offering free bets. These common online promotional offers appear to attract new customers as such offers are not typically on offer in venues such as high street betting shops or casinos. Bonuses range from matching customer deposit amounts, offering a free stake to gamble with, and awarding customer loyalty points to be

redeemed for prizes. This sense of a greater ‘value for money’ attracts gamblers away from gambling at offline venues to gambling on the internet.

*“I heard that if you open an account you get free bets. I thought you don’t get that in the betting shops so it started like that” (Nick, 26).*

People are therefore choosing to bet on the internet to get what they perceive as ‘free money’. Gamblers will also check out many websites for the free bets on offer:

*“I would hunt about and I would say, oh yes there’s another one, ‘Daily Record Bingo’, we’ll go on that, and so on you know, so it’s...that would influence me greatly” (Fran, 57).*

The introduction of ‘betting exchanges’ has facilitated sports betting for many gamblers. Betting exchanges are where gamblers can bet against one another and the operator running the betting exchange matches the bets placed by the gamblers. Betting exchanges have the potential to give gamblers a fairer and better deal, thus offering greater value for money (as the customers receive better odds for their wager with the removal of the marked up betting odds of an offline bookmaker). Additionally, gamblers can practice for free online (for points instead of money) until they feel confident enough to play with their own money and/or enter live tournaments. Online gambling also has the capacity to remove or lower the potential for embarrassment caused by inexperienced play. However, these ‘free play’ games often have much better odds for the gambler than real games and so the player may find the game more attractive through increased familiarity and may develop unrealistic ideas about how much they could win if they played for money (Sevigny, Cloutier, Pelletier & Ladouceur 2005). Furthermore, gambling in practice modes may build self-efficacy and potentially increase perceptions of control in determining gambling outcomes motivating participation in their ‘real cash’ counterparts within the site (Griffiths, Parke, Wood & Parke, 2006).

Additionally, because of the reduced economies of scale and physical limitations in customer base, it is not cost-effective to provide poker gambling opportunities at low stakes in offline gambling environments. In online situations, novice poker players

have the opportunity to practice for free, or with very small stakes to gain experience.

*“On the internet you can gamble on tables that are one [cent] or two [cents] and the average pot prize is a dollar... but you couldn't gamble like that in the casino, you can't gamble with pennies” (Joseph, 28).*

Offline, inexperienced gamblers may be reluctant to risk significant amounts of money in a skill-based activity but the internet has removed financial and social barriers to gamble on skill-based activities such as poker, thus increasing the attraction to gamble for inexperienced players.

*Greater online variety:* In addition to increased convenience and value for money, is the fact that the internet offers a greater variety of games. The popularity of online poker can be facilitated as the result of participants perceiving that it has become a more profitable activity because of the improvements that developing IT has made to the situational and structural features of poker playing. As mentioned previously, traditional poker venues have structural and situational limitations. For instance, players must be in the location of the poker room and must find an unoccupied seat. Online poker provides players with unlimited access to poker games. Players also have the potential to participate in multiple games of poker simultaneously when playing online. Gamblers may perceive that because poker is largely skill-based, they will become more profitable per gambling session because they are no longer restricted to playing in only one game at any given time. For some, playing multiple games reduces the risk of losing too much money:

*“If your playing seven tables at the same time you lower the risk [of losing too much money] because on one hand you can get beaten but if you run one hand a hundred times and your top 10% favourite every time, on one table you might lose but you play seven or eight tables at the same time or whatever” (Martin, 26).*

Some gamblers (n=4) perceive that because poker is largely based on skill, they will become more profitable per gambling session because they can now play more than one game at a time. It is worth noting that all four of these gamblers played poker for

a living. At a basic level, the internet is providing more simultaneous opportunities to win money for good players and as a result a few poker players appear to be now making a living playing online poker.

*A safe world:* The structural and situational characteristics of internet gambling can reduce social barriers (e.g., anonymity, level of skill required, stake size, jackpot size) that exist for offline gambling venues. For example, a beginner poker player may feel intimidated playing poker in a casino, but online the anonymity the internet provides allows an individual to play against opponents without ‘losing face’ if they consistently lose or do not know the rules. The impact of engaging in a potentially stigmatised activity is significantly reduced online because the gambling can be performed in isolation, anonymously, and in secret. Internet gambling may therefore appeal because the anonymity it provides can remove some of the negative stigma attached to gambling. This may be especially attractive for female gamblers as traditional gambling venues are typically seen as very masculine places.

*“It will appeal to more people and allow more people to gamble because some people don’t like the social stigma perhaps of going to a casino so they think alright go online...and online bingo sites are attracting a lot more women, and I can understand that casinos are quite masculine environments as well so women might find it more attractive” (Kristian,26).*

Anonymity is also seen as a key advantage of online gambling compared to offline gambling for problem gamblers. For instance:

*“The other thing is, if you’re gambling in a bookies, people are going to notice, oh there’s her off back in there, whereas internet gambling is hidden away, there’s only you and your computer” (Fran, 57).*

### **Inhibiting factors in online gambling**

The results identified one major theme (i.e., the authenticity of gambling was reduced when gambling online) and four sub-themes (i.e., the reduced realism, the asocial nature of the internet, the use of electronic money, and concerns about the safety of

online gambling websites) as factors that inhibited players' online gambling behaviour. These are examined in turn.

*Reduced authenticity of gambling online:* The overriding theme as to why gamblers chose not to gamble on the internet appeared to be that the authenticity of gambling is reduced online. Issues surrounding the trustworthiness of websites, the reduced realism online, the asocial characteristics of internet gambling, and the reduced psychological value of electronic money all created a reduced authenticity of gambling.

*Reduced realism:* Poker is largely a game of social and psychological information to be played against other human opponents. However, online poker rooms do not allow for the subtle non-verbal communication (NVC) between players that is integral to the psychological aspect of the game, making the games potentially less authentic and less enjoyable than they could be for those who like the NVC aspects (Golder & Donath, 2004). This appeared to be a major reason as to why offline gamblers did not want to play games like poker online. For instance:

*“It’s against a machine...There’s no people. There would be no joy in winning money. It’s just not the same” (Richard, 57).*

Over a third of the offline gamblers (n=5) felt that gambling on the internet would seem less real because they were not actually physically handling the money, whereas if they were to win in the bookmakers they would receive the winnings in cash, and therefore the enjoyment would be greater:

*“It [winning in bookmakers] does feel more real. You still lose the same amount of money you know what I mean, but it feels more real... especially when you win because you get the cash straight back, it’s just a number on the computer do you know what I mean” (John, 37).*

In a small pilot study based on four case studies, Griffiths and Parke (2007) also found that one of the barriers to internet gambling was the lack of the ‘physical’ transaction of collecting winnings as this was highly rewarding to the participants.

Some participants in this study also reported greater enjoyment by actually being present at the event because of the atmosphere:

*“You need to hear a buzz, whether you’re at the race track or dog track or casino, you need to have a buzz in the room, you need to hear people swearing and cursing and damning their luck and cheering” (Richard, 57).*

*Internet is antisocial:* One consequence of internet gambling has been the capacity to reduce the fundamentally social nature of gambling to an activity that is essentially asocial. Research has shown that those who experience problems are more likely to be those playing on their own (e.g., those playing to escape; Griffiths, 1995). Griffiths, et al (2006) suggest that gambling in a social setting could potentially provide some kind of ‘safety net’ for over-spenders, that is a form of gambling where the primary orientation of gambling is for social reasons with the possibility of some fun and chance to win some money. All problem gamblers in this study (both online and offline) reported gambling alone. Internet gamblers preferred gambling on the internet because of the anonymity it provided.

However, the internet still offers the capacity for social facilitation as individuals in games like online poker and online bingo can communicate online via computer-mediated communication (CMC) within the game itself and even post-gambling through involvement in online gambling web-communities. Around half the internet gamblers (n=7) reported using this facility (some more frequently than others) to chat to other players about the game and to learn more. Participants also liked to congratulate other players on a good hand or ‘wind people up’ (i.e., aggravate them) to perhaps put them off their game (two participants reported doing this). In spite of this, nearly a third of the offline gamblers (n=4) felt that internet gambling was not as real because it was more antisocial. A few of the non-problem offline gamblers (n=4) enjoyed the social aspect of making a night of gambling, by going to the casino for a night out, or going to the dog track for the day and being around other people. However, by gambling online a player loses this social element:

*“I think because you can’t see the other person...because you’re sort of sitting there in a room by yourself you lose, for me, the other elements of gambling*

*that appeal, so the face-to-face contact, having a drink with friends, being in a room full of people” (Kristian, 26).*

It could be that problem gamblers may be drawn to use the internet to gamble because it provides them with anonymity and allows them to be alone when they gamble. Non-problem gamblers may be more likely to gamble in offline venues as they allow for a preferable kind of social interaction.

*Easier to spend more money online:* The type of payment may also have a bigger impact online. For many gamblers, electronic cash (i.e., a virtual representation of money) has been argued to lower the psychological monetary value, and gambling with e-cash may lead to a ‘suspension of judgment’ (Griffiths *et al.*, 2006; Griffiths, 2006b), temporarily disrupting the gambler’s financial value system and potentially stimulating further gambling. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that people gamble more using e-cash than they would with real cash (Griffiths, 1999) and some recent experimental evidence suggesting players gamble more with real money than with chips (Lapuz & Griffiths, 2010). The majority of the offline and online gamblers (n=18) indicated that electronic money does not seem as real and therefore could encourage people to spend more.

*“When I was gambling in the bookies in those days I would not even consider putting £100 on a horse, but now... I’ve put a £1000 on a spin of a roulette wheel and it didn’t matter... it’s not money when it’s online, it’s just numbers” (Nathan, 34).*

Chips and tokens appear to ‘disguise’ the money’s true value but it would seem that the psychological value of electronic money may be reduced even more and can lead to people spending more money than they would if they were gambling offline. Furthermore, two offline gamblers reported that they were cautious about trying internet gambling because they thought it might lead them to spending more money:

*“I would probably spend more on the internet... when you’ve got the actual cash [in your hands] you are more aware of what you’re spending” (Rose, 21).*

*Security of the websites:* Given the nature of online gambling as a largely unregulated industry, fair play practices are difficult to monitor as there is less evidence of the authenticity and fairness of gambling outcomes (Monaghan, 2008). A number of the offline gamblers and non-gamblers (n=9) were very unsure about the safety of internet gambling.

*“I didn’t trust it because you don’t know who’s manipulating it” (Rick, 26).*

Even a few of the online gamblers (n=3) had doubts about the safety of internet gambling, usually in regards to an online activity that they didn’t participate in. For example, one online sport’s better said he wouldn’t trust online gambling in terms of playing poker online. High levels of mistrust and cynicism amongst players regarding online gambling have been reported by online gamblers, with security concerns and legitimacy cited as the main reasons for not playing online in a survey of U.S. poker players (Ipsos Reid, 2005). The online gamblers (n=8) were more likely than the offline gamblers and non-gamblers (n=1) to believe that the gambling websites are secure. However there was the perception that some websites were more trustworthy than others, and the players generally played on well known sites, e.g., companies that were well established offline such as the British gambling companies *Ladbrokes*, *William Hill* and *BetFred*.

### **Perceptions and attitudes about online gambling**

What clearly emerged from the interviews with online gamblers, offline gamblers and non-gamblers, is the perception that internet gambling is more addictive and potentially dangerous for vulnerable people, and will ultimately exacerbate gambling problems in society. Participants likened gambling problems as an epidemic waiting to happen:

*‘The situation with Internet gambling where it’s all hidden is like a time bomb and it’s an epidemic and it’s going to...affect so many people. I think that every year that goes by there’s going to be hundreds more affected’ (Fran, 57)*

The problem online gamblers had particularly strong negative opinions about internet gambling:

*'I think it's [internet gambling] the devil to be honest, it should be stopped'*  
(Nathan, 34).

All but one participant strongly believed that internet gambling is more risky and more addictive than offline gambling:

*'I think it [internet gambling] could be more addictive. Purely just through the fact that it's 24/7, you know, there's no doubt I could wake up at 4.30am and gamble on something somewhere around the world...so yes, I think it is more of a problem and potentially more addictive, because it's kind of there talking to you isn't it, oh switch me on type thing...it's there, whereas you don't necessarily have that opportunity [offline]'* (Damian, 43).

The internet has increased the opportunities to gamble and this, coupled with the advertisements and gambling companies enticing players (sometimes involving unscrupulous practices), has led to an increase in gambling participation, particularly internet gambling which is now the fastest growing form of gambling. Advertising, celebrity endorsement, and the (so called) celebrity status afforded to poker stars, has almost normalised gambling behaviour causing people who otherwise would not have gambled to start participating in this leisure activity. These factors which were apparent in the accounts of the participants are beyond the scope of this paper, but have led to the development of the proposed grounded theory model (see Figure 1).

### **Emergent grounded theory**

From the data, four theoretical propositions emerged in relation to the motivating and inhibiting factors of engaging in online gambling behaviour and how these may impact on problem gambling behaviour (see Figure 1). These need to be tested empirically.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

- Theory 1: The medium of online gambling provides gamblers with better value for money, greater variety of games and overall convenience and thus increases gambling opportunity and motivation to gamble online.

- Theory 2: The medium of online gambling can also lead to a reduced authenticity of gambling and thus inhibiting some individuals from gambling online (particularly those people who enjoy the social element of gambling such as those playing poker, being around other people).
- Theory 3: No previous involvement with offline gambling prior to engaging in online gambling may increase an individual's risk of developing a gambling problem.
- Theory 4: If an online gambler is currently a problem offline gambler then they have an increased risk of developing an online gambling problem

### **Discussion**

There is a paucity of empirical research that has examined why people are choosing to gamble online, but also, just as importantly, why some gamblers choose not to gamble online. The main objective of this study was to examine the motivating and inhibiting factors of engaging in online gambling behaviour based on participant interviews. The wide range of reasons (e.g., accessibility, availability, convenience, better value for money, greater variety of games, multiple gambling opportunities etc.) given for online gambling demonstrates the diversity of online gamblers. These factors have been highlighted as potentially attractive features of online gambling (Griffiths, 2003).

The motivating factors for engaging in online gambling can lead to increased gambling opportunities for the player. If a player has previous involvement with offline gambling but is not a current problem offline gambler then they appear to have reduced risk of developing an online gambling problem compared to someone who has no previous involvement with offline gambling. A player who has previous involvement with offline gambling and is a current problem gambler may be more likely to be affected by online gambling and have increased risk of developing an online gambling problem compared to a non-problem gambler.

Two online gamblers interviewed in this study had never gambled offline prior to starting online gambling and consequently developed a gambling problem. However, all of the other online gamblers had already participated in offline gambling and the

other problem online gamblers had already developed a problem through gambling offline before they started gambling on the internet. Therefore, it could be that those new to gambling, who choose to gamble online may be less aware of the dangers/risks of using the internet for gambling, while current gamblers may have more of an idea of how problematic online gambling could be. Current problem gamblers may be using the internet as a convenient medium to engage in their addictive behaviour. The fact that online gambling may be more problematic and/or addictive could possibly be due to the structural and situational characteristics of online gambling that increases the tendency to gamble in a disordered, problematic manner (Griffiths, et al, 2006).

The inhibiting factors of engaging in online gambling lead to the belief that the authenticity of gambling is reduced online and therefore it would not be as enjoyable. If a player is a problem offline gambler they might be more motivated to also gamble online because it provides greater anonymity and increased gambling opportunity. However for a social gambler, they may be less inclined to gamble on the internet if their enjoyment of gambling comes from the social element of being around other people. The reduced authenticity of online gambling appears to reduce the motivation to gamble online among some players. It is hypothesised that those players who enjoy the social element of gambling, such as the atmosphere at casinos, or playing a social game of cards, will be less likely to gamble online. Online gambling may be more appealing for solitary gambling activities such as placing sports bets simply because of the convenience and the better odds available online. Online gambling is also likely to be a supplementary form of gambling for semi-professional and professional gamblers due to the ability to play multiple games but may also attract novices due to the ability to practice for free and/or play for lower stakes online. However, these hypotheses are speculation at this stage and further research is required.

It would appear that online gambling may be potentially more dangerous for those who are current problem offline gamblers and to those who have never experienced offline gambling. It has been found that problem gambling rates are higher among online gamblers than rates found in gamblers who do not gamble online (Griffiths et al, 2009). The increased number of on-site gambling opportunities provided by the internet could potentially exacerbate gambling problems in wider society as more

people who have never engaged in offline gambling may be attracted to gamble online.

In this study, the antisocial nature of online gambling was identified as one of the inhibiting factors of online gambling (as it reduces the opportunity for social interaction and reduces the authenticity of gambling), but also identified as one of the motivating factors for problem gamblers due to the ability to disguise a gambling problem more easily. The antisocial element may therefore have different impacts for different activities and types of players. For social games such as poker, many recreational players may be put off from playing poker online because there is no social interaction, but they may still choose to gamble on the internet for other activities such as sports betting. However, some offline sports bettors have said they gamble with friends – they enjoy the social element of going to the betting shop with friends and placing bets then watching the game in the afternoon, they would not enjoy betting online on their own.

*Differences between problem online gamblers and problem offline gamblers:* To date there has been very little research examining the differences between traditional offline gamblers and online gamblers, and whether problem online gamblers differ from problem offline gamblers. One study of in-depth interviews with four gamblers examined the individual differences and cognitive processes that discriminate between traditional (non-internet) gamblers and internet gamblers (Griffiths & Parke, 2007). They found a few subtle differences between the two types of gamblers, but more research is needed on a larger scale to make firm conclusions on the differences between offline and online gamblers, and whether problem offline and problem online gamblers differ. In this study, very few differences were found between problem online gamblers and problem offline gamblers. No firm conclusions can be made as the data only contained interviews from nine offline problem gamblers and six online problem gamblers.

There are, of course, some limitations of the present study, largely the fact that the results cannot be generalised to the motivations of all online and offline gamblers as this was an exploratory qualitative study. The sample was relatively small as only 15 online gamblers, 14 offline gamblers and 11 non-gamblers were interviewed.

However, in terms of a grounded theory study this is deemed to be a considerable sample size. The majority of the gamblers were male so no real gender differences could be examined. Whether the results can be applied to a female population need further examination in future research. Further research is also required on the characteristics of internet gamblers to come to a better understanding as to the causes and reasons for internet gambling, and how this compares to individuals who engage in offline gambling. It is possible that internet gambling sites offer players a range of distinct features that are unavailable in land-based venues and internet gambling may be used by a different population than land-based gambling (Wood, Williams & Lawton, 2007). Further research would help clarify whether internet and land-based gambling sites are in direct competition with one another, or whether the type of gambling medium caters for different groups of gamblers..

### References

Abbott, M.W., Williams, M.M., & Volberg, R.A. (2004). A prospective study of problem and regular non problem gamblers living in the community. *Substance Use and Misuse*, 39, 855 – 884.

American Psychiatric Association (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Bergler, E. (1957). *The Psychology of Gambling*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. London: Sage.

Ferris, J., & Wynne, H. (2001). *The Canadian problem gambling index: Final report*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

Gambling Commission, (2010). Survey data on gambling participation – April 2010.

Located at:

[http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/research\\_consultations/research/survey\\_dat](http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/research_consultations/research/survey_dat)

[a\\_on\\_remote\\_gam/survey\\_data\\_on\\_remote\\_gambling.aspx](#). (Last accessed June 19 2010).

GamCare. (2006). *Care Services 2006 Report*. Located at: <http://www.gamcare.org.uk/data/files/pdfs/CareServices2006.pdf>. (Last accessed June 19 2010).

Golder, S. A., & Donath, J. (2004). Hiding and revealing in online poker games. *Proceedings of the ACM conference on computer-supported cooperative work*. ACM Press, New York, 370-373.

Griffiths, M. D. (1995). *Adolescent Gambling*. London: Routledge.

Griffiths, M. D. (1999). Gambling technologies: Prospects for problem gamblers. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 15, 265-283.

Griffiths, M. D. (2001). Internet gambling: Preliminary results of the first UK prevalence survey. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 5, Located at: [http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue5/research/griffiths\\_article.html](http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue5/research/griffiths_article.html). (Last accessed June 19 2010).

Griffiths, M., (2003). Internet gambling: Issues, concerns and recommendations. *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 6, 557-568.

Griffiths, M.D. (2006a). Addiction trends: Internet v casino gambling. *Casino and Gaming International*, 2(1), 85-91.

Griffiths, M., (2006b). Internet trends, projections & effects: What can looking at the past tell us about the future. *Casino and Gaming International*, 4, 37-43.

Griffiths, M.D. & Barnes, A. (2008). Internet gambling: An online empirical study among student gamblers. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 6, 194-204.

Griffiths, M., & Parke, J. (2007). Betting on the couch: A thematic analysis of internet gambling using case studies. *Social Psychological Review*, 9(2), 29-35.

Griffiths, M., Parke, A., Wood, R., & Parke, J. (2006). Internet gambling: An overview of psychosocial impacts. *Gaming Research and Review Journal*, 27(1), 27-39.

Griffiths, M., Wardle, H., Orford, J., Sproston, K., & Erens, B. (2009). Sociodemographic correlates of internet gambling: Findings from the 2007 British Gambling Prevalence Survey. *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, 12, 199-202.

Ialomiteanu, A., & Adlaf, E. M. (2002). Internet gambling among Ontario adults. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 5, Located at: [http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue5/research/ialomiteanur\\_adlaf\\_article.html](http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue5/research/ialomiteanur_adlaf_article.html). (Last accessed June 19 2010).

Ipsos Reid, (2005). *Online Poker in North America: A syndicated study*. Located at: [http://www.ipsos.ca/pdf/Ipsos\\_OnlinePoker.pdf](http://www.ipsos.ca/pdf/Ipsos_OnlinePoker.pdf). (Last accessed June 19 2010).

Jacques, C., Ladouceur, R., & Ferland, F. (2000). The impact of availability on gambling: A longitudinal study. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 45, 810-815.

Kassinove, J.I., Tsytarev, S.V., Davidson, I. (1998). Russian attitudes toward gambling. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 24, 41-46.

Ladd, G.T., & Petry, N.M., (2002). Disordered gambling among University-based medical and dental patients: A focus on internet gambling. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviours*, 16, 76-79.

LaPlane, D.A., Kleschinsky, J.H., LaBrie, R.A., Nelson, S.E., & Shaffer, H.J. (2009). Sitting at the virtual poker table: A prospective epidemiological study of actual internet poker gambling behaviour. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 25, 711-717.

Lapuz, J. & Griffiths, M.D. (2010). The role of chips in poker gambling: An empirical pilot study. *Gambling Research*, in press.

McBride, J., & Derevensky, J. (2009). Internet gambling behaviour in a sample of online gamblers. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 7, 149-167.

Monaghan, S. (2008). Internet and wireless gambling – A current profile. Report to the Australasian Gaming Council. University of Sydney, Sydney.

Sevigny, S., Cloutier, M., Pelletier, M., & Ladouceur, R. (2005). Internet gambling: Misleading payout rates during the "demo" period. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 21, 153-158.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Sage: London.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J., (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. London: Sage

Wardle, H., Sproston, K., Orford, J., Erens, R., Griffiths, M. D. Constantine, R., et al (2007). *British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2007*. London: The Stationery Office.

Wood, R.T.A., & Griffiths, M.D., (2004). Adolescent lottery and scratchcard players: do their attitudes influence their gambling behaviour? *Journal of Adolescence*, 27, 465-475.

Wood, R.T., & Williams, R.J. (2009). *Internet Gambling: Prevalence, Patterns, Problems and Policy Options*. Final Report prepared for the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre, Guelph, Ontario. January 5, 2009.

Wood, R.T., Williams, R.J., & Lawton, P.K. (2007). Why do internet gamblers prefer online versus land-based venues? Some preliminary findings and implications. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 20, 235-252.

Woodruff, C., & Gregory, S. (2003). Profile of Internet gamblers: betting on the future. *Gaming Research & Review Journal*, 9, 1-14.

**Table 1: Basic demographic details of study participants (n = 40)**

Identifier	Age	Gender	Type of gambling	Problem gambler status	Ever sought treatment
INTG01	32	M	Poker, horses	No	No
INTG02	47	M	Poker, roulette, horses, blackjack	Ex-problem	No
INTG03	44	M	Sports, horses	No	No
INTG04	43	M	Sports, horses, roulette	Yes	Yes
INTG05	28	M	Poker	No	No
INTG06	34	M	Poker, horses, sports, roulette	Yes	Yes
INTG07	25	M	Poker	No (professional)	No
INTG08	57	F	Bingo	Ex-problem	Yes
INTG09	53	M	Blackjack	Ex-problem	Yes
INTG10	26	M	Sports	No	No
INTG11	32	M	Sports, horses	Ex-problem	Yes
INTG12	26	M	Poker	No (professional)	No
INTG13	29	M	Poker	No (professional)	No
INTG14	23	F	Poker	No	No
INTG15	37	M	Poker	No	No
GAM01	41	M	Horses, sports betting	Yes	No
GAM02	42	M	Slot machines	Yes	Yes
GAM03	57	M	Poker	No	No
GAM04	51	F	Slot machines, bingo	Ex-problem	No
GAM05	52	M	Horses	Yes	No
GAM06	26	M	Roulette	Ex-problem	Yes
GAM07	34	M	Roulette, horses, sports	Yes	No
GAM08	19	M	Poker	No	No
GAM09	21	F	Lottery, scratch cards	No	No
GAM10	23	M	Roulette, blackjack	Ex-problem	No
GAM11	42	M	Horses, sports, virtual roulette	Yes	No
GAM12	26	M	Poker	No	No
GAM13	38	M	Horses, virtual roulette	Yes	Yes
GAM14	27	M	Sports, horses, casino	No	No
NONG01	26	F	Occasional lottery in past	No	No
NONG02	42	F	Nothing	NA	NA
NONG03	52	M	Lottery every week	No	No
NONG04	33	M	Nothing	NA	NA
NONG05	46	M	Nothing	NA	NA
NONG06	53	F	Nothing	NA	NA
NONG07	24	M	Occasional day out to the races	No	No
NONG08	20	F	Nothing	NA	NA
NONG09	25	M	Nothing	NA	NA
NONG10	46	F	Lottery every week	No	No
NONG11	58	F	Nothing	NA	NA

**Figure 1: Motivating and inhibiting factors for engaging in online gambling**

