

Youth, Poker and Facebook: Another Case of Candy Cigarettes?

by

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Dalla Lana School of Public Health
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Abstract

A surge of unregulated gambling opportunities, referred to as social network gambling has emerged on social media platforms such as *Facebook*. This dissertation is a critical examination of social network gambling, more specifically, a virtual ethnographic case study, focusing on Zynga Poker (ZP). Through a two-phase qualitative research study, the aim was to: 1) examine the intentions of the game application and the influences of the ZP game design that youth are exposed to while playing; 2) explore the various perspectives of key stakeholders; and 3) investigate youths' (aged 18–24 years) lived experiences of poker play on Facebook, to understand what motivates them to play, and how they perceive their participation.

My study is rooted in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Goffman's frame analysis (1986), and the social networking theory of homophily (McPherson, Smith & Cook, 2001). Data were collected through personally participating in ZP, and interviews conducted with 15 key industry stakeholders and 15 youth (aged 18-24).

Results found that social game developers are designing and framing social network gambling games as a harmless form of entertainment, shielded from regulation that accompanies a legal distinction of gambling. Further, results indicate three motivation themes as to why youth play ZP: 1) a way to relax and escape boredom; 2) to connect socially; and 3) to satisfy their

desire for competitive gameplay. Youth perceive that under certain circumstances, ZP is a form of lower-stakes gambling and a potential training ground to develop the skills and confidence to migrate over to real money gambling on professional sites.

Based on the analysis, this dissertation presents a Public Health Framework and Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling that emphasize dissolution of the dualism that currently exists between gambling and gaming. The Spectrum Model focuses on six dimensions: money, competitiveness, training environment, temporality, chasing losses, and rituals. The model illustrates the transitory and fluid nature of social gambling gameplay at the individual level, ranging from healthy to problematic.

This study provides new understandings and warnings as we move forward to comprehend the possible benefits and unintended consequences of these gambling opportunities. The findings have particular implications for the protection and prevention of gambling-related harms to vulnerable populations, such as youth.

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ف تغیرت ف تعلمت، تالمت،
I suffered, I learned, I changed

Undertaking and completing a dissertation not only challenged me in a multitude of ways, but ultimately changed who I am. However, this experience would not have been possible without the help, support, and encouragement from many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank the key stakeholders and youth that agreed to be interviewed. Their willingness to share their wisdom and personal experiences helped shape a rich understanding of social network gambling games.

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Glossary of Terms

The terms found in this dissertation are defined as follows:

Big Data: A cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon that rests on the interplay of: 1) Technology: maximizing computation power and algorithmic accuracy to gather, analyze, link and compare large data sets; 2) Analysis: drawing on large data sets to identify patterns in order to make economic, social, technical, and legal claims; and 3) Mythology: the widespread belief that large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with an aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy (Boyd & Crawford, 2012, p.3).

Conversion Rate (%): The proportion of active players who convert into paying customers (Fields, 2014).

Daily Active Users (DAU): Is a measure of the number of unique users of the game application per day, typically calculated over a floating seven-day period (Fields, 2014, p.57).

Discourse: The outcome of the interplay of language found in textual and visual images (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2005; Kress, 1989) which contributes to the framing of whatever topic, object, or process is talked about (Kress, 1989).

Facebook: A social networking site which allows users to create and maintain relationships with others, in addition to allowing users to post photos, chat online, play games via applications, and post personal updates on their timeline for their friends to see.

Flow: The state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sake of doing it (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Free-to-Play/Freemium (F2P): Business model where the product (game) is free to access but premium features such as upgrades, bonuses, in-game currency or speeding up actions can be purchased with real money (Morgan Stanley Research, 2012).

Gambling-Related Harm: Gambling that disrupts or damages personal, family, or recreational pursuits. Associated with a range of health and social problems, which include: mental ill-health (e.g., anxiety, depression, compulsive behaviour patterns); impact on family cohesion, including domestic violence; employment instability; debt problems; homelessness; and criminality (theft or fraud to fund gambling activity; Lesieur & Rosenthal, 1991 as cited in Roaf, 2015).

Gamification: The use of game design elements in non-game contexts (Deterding, Sicart, Nacke, O'Hara, & Dixon, 2011).

Leaderboard: A common game component that provides a visual representation of where players rank within the gamified play system, according to different categories.

Lifetime Value (LTV): Is the total amount of money a game developer can expect to be able to extract through the course of the relationship with the player (Fields, 2014).

Monthly Active Users (MAU): Is a measure of the number of active users of a game application in a given calendar month, typically calculated from the first to the last day of that month (Fields, 2014, p.58).

MMOGs: Massively Multi-player Online Games

Mobile Gambling: Gambling via a mobile device (e.g., smart phone, phone, tablet).

MUPs: Monthly Unique Players

Online Games: A broad category that includes various online games (played either individually or collectively with a large number of individuals, played online via the LAN, Internet, or even Tele-communications). Online games include Internet gaming, social network gaming, online gambling, local LAN gaming, and mobile gaming, but not networked video and personal gaming (Chen, Chen, Song, & Korba, 2004).

Professional Online Gambling/Poker Sites: Internet gambling on professional industry-based websites (PartyPoker.com, BoDog.ca, etc.).

Social Context: The local mix of conditions and events, social agents, objects and interactions which characterize open systems ... whose unique confluence in time and space selectively

activates, triggers, blocks or modifies casual powers and mechanisms in a chain of reactions that may result in very different outcomes depending on the dynamic interplay of conditions and mechanisms over time and space (Poland, Frohlich, & Cargo, 2009, p.309).

Social Network Games (SNGs): Free-to-play/freemium games with social features, played via a remote medium (online or mobile; Morgan Stanley, 2012).

Social Network Gambling Games: All forms of casino-style games found on social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook.

Social Networking Sites (SNSs): A category of websites with profiles, semi-persistent public commentary on the profiles, and a traversable, publicly articulated social network displayed in relation to the profile (boyd, 2006).

Stickiness: Refers to the game mechanics/properties that encourage a player to play longer in the game (Pierce, 2010).

Youth: Individuals between 13 and 24 years of age.

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Prologue: Candy Cigarettes

I developed a pack-a-week candy cigarette habit during my childhood years spent driving to-and-from my family's cottage in Muskoka, Ontario during the late 1970's and early 80's. Every Friday evening my parents would hustle my sister and I into the back of the truck and we wouldn't return to the city until late Sunday night. It was a long drive, but what made the weekend ventures bearable was our ritualized stop at a nearby family-run gas station that also sold confectionary products. We were allowed to pick a treat of our choice, and it was here that I would purchase my pack of Popeye Candy Sticks for the weekend.

I can remember the thin, hard white candy sticks with a visibly demarcated light red tip, which in my young eyes clearly resembled a lit cigarette. What was even more impressive, was the fine dusting of confectioner's sugar that, with a puff, you were able to send the fine white powder into the air to resemble an empowering exhale of imaginary 'smoke'.

The gestures of smoking my candy cigarettes became an act of defiance, an exuding of an older version of myself. While the gestures were slight and quite simple (holding the cigarette stick between your index and middle fingers and small puff) they were powerful in meaning; experientially mimicking similar actions of those older, more sophisticated and cooler individuals I looked up to.

Throughout the course of my study, I was reminded of the case of candy cigarettes and how it resembles social network gambling. As history informs us, public health advocates once "considered candy cigarettes (cigarette sweets) an example of ways in which international trademark or copyright laws were violated to promote tobacco products to children" (Klein & St. Clair, 2000, p. 362). Klein et al. (2007) examined whether childhood candy cigarette use was associated with adult tobacco smoking. Findings demonstrated that a history of candy cigarette use was related to higher levels of current smoking among adults. These results, at the time contradicted the various reports put forward by the manufacturers that candy cigarettes were simply candy (Klein & St. Clair, 2000; Morabia & Costanza, 2007).

Around the time of the Surgeon General's Report in 1964 on smoking and health, the National Automatic Merchandising Association Special Committee on Cigarette Vending,

penned a report voicing concerns that the packs of candy cigarettes were “so real looking it’s startling” (as cited in Klein & St. Clair, 2000, p.363). These packages further prompted concerns that tobacco companies were “trying to lure youngsters into the smoking habit” (ibid). Following the committee’s report, the tobacco industry started to distance itself from candy cigarettes. Eventually, the sale of candy cigarettes was restricted within countries including Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia as a result of a 2003 resolution of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which included a recommendation to prohibit the production and sale of candy and toy tobacco products that appeal to minors (World Health Organization, 2003; as cited in Klein et al., 2007). This history is particularly interesting because it illustrates the significant adverse reaction that the use of candy cigarettes experienced, particularly from the public health community, similar to the current academic concerns about social network gambling.

This thesis is a qualitative exploration of social network gambling, more specifically, a virtual ethnographic case study, focusing on Zynga Poker (ZP). The primary purpose was two-fold: 1) actively engage with ZP to examine how the design frames or shapes a players’ experience; and 2) illustrate how this framing influences youths’ motivations to play poker on Facebook and their perception of their gameplay.

1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The explosion of gambling opportunities over the past few decades has given rise to one of the fastest growing global industries, generating enormous revenues that play an increasingly important role for corporations, investors, and governments—growth fuelled partly by gambling’s widespread appeal and social acceptability (Derevensky, 2012).

In a similar fashion, it is difficult not to be aware of the dramatic escalation in popularity of poker over the past decade. What was once considered a low-key game played in basements and around kitchen tables has now become a genuinely global phenomenon (Wilson, 2007). There is little doubt that poker’s popularity, particularly for many young people, has grown exponentially as a result of expanded coverage of poker on sports television and of the increase and social

acceptability of online poker sites such as PokerStars, Party Poker, or Full Tilt (Derevensky, 2012; Griffiths, Parke, Wood, & Rigbye, 2010).

Games, and more specifically gambling games, have been a part of the human experience for centuries. However, new technologies offer huge potential for expansion. As we have witnessed over the past decade, people are increasingly living their lives on interactive, social media, or social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Google+, Twitter, and YouTube, where play, work, and other areas of social life are irrevocably tangled together (Mayra, 2011). Social media is any networked electronic resource that derives its value from user participation. Unlike traditional websites that might deliver content in a static manner, social media tools are ones that can be manipulated, reworked, and linked together, and where the majority of content is generated by those that use the service, tool, or platform. Interactivity is inherent in social media and a key feature of any gaming system (Norman, 2012). More specifically, SNSs are “a category of websites with profiles, semi-persistent public commentary on the profile, and a traversable publicly articulated social network displayed in relation to the profile” (boyd, 2006, para. 2). “Interconnections between people on SNSs enhance the process of information dissemination, and amplify the influence of that information” (Luarn, Yang, & Chiu, 2014, p. 1).

With almost 1.5 billion active users (Statista, 2015), 50% of whom log on daily, sometimes several times a day (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Clavert, 2009), the popularity of Facebook cannot be disputed. Sixty-four percent of Facebook users visit the site daily, up from 51% in 2010, spending an average of 20 minutes per visit. Younger users tend to have significantly larger friend networks than their older counterparts. Specifically, it is reported that users between 18 and 29 years of age have, on average, more than 500 friends in their networks (Cohen, 2013; Facebook, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2014). Initially, Facebook was created as a portal for university students to create and maintain social ties within university communities. Over the past eight years, Facebook has expanded to the larger public sphere allowing individuals to create personalized profiles, post links, and share photos, along with becoming a platform for organizations and commercial businesses for information dissemination, marketing/advertising opportunities, and gaming.

The Oxford Dictionary defines social gaming as “the activity or practice of playing an online game on a social media platform” (as cited in Clifton, 2013, p. 26). While the exact

description of social network games (SNGs) is up for debate (Chen, 2010; Nettleton & Chong, 2013), there are some consistent characteristics, most notably that they are embedded within SNSs. These games are based on social design mechanics that cater to large, diverse audiences to make games accessible and playable with friends, while also generating revenue off of a free-to-play¹ (F2P) business model which allow players to make in-game purchases of virtual goods and currency (Nettleton & Chong, 2013; Paavilainen, Hamari, Stenros, & Kinnunen, 2013). However, the term SNG is not meant to include Internet gambling on professional industry-based websites (PartyPoker.com, BoDog.ca, etc.).

Facebook's game enterprise has been continually growing year by year (Krejci, 2013; SuperData Research, 2012), generating \$3.65 billion² in 2010, with estimated revenues of \$8.64 billion by the end of 2014 (SuperData Research, 2012). "As these games migrate to social networks, mainstream consumer gameplay habits are finally visible" (SuperData Research, 2012, p. 1) revealing a new era of player demographics. In 2012, the estimated audience was 77.9 million players with the average age of the female SNG player being 40 years and the male, 37 years. (SuperData Research, 2012). However, it should be noted that social gaming encapsulates a number of diverse game genres including casino-style games, role-playing games, adventure games, and innovative and creative games (e.g., Farmville; Derevensky, Gainsbury, Gupta, & Ellery, 2013) and the player demographics represent all social game players across the multitude of game genres.

Most games are inherently social, in that they are played with others. However, having powerful social networks, built to foster interconnections, as their unique platform sets these games apart. "This is particularly relevant given that other gaming networks such as Xbox Live and Steam are not linked to already existing networks of friends and family, and are also strongly associated with gaming activities" (Boudreau & Consalvo, 2014, p. 1120).

The embedding of gambling games within existing networks designed for social interaction adds a new layer of risk and concern for public health. Currently, the minimum age requirement

¹ Free-to-play (F2P) games have also been referred to as freemium games. The F2P business model will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

² All dollar amounts refer to US\$, unless otherwise indicated.

to create a profile on Facebook and engage in social gaming, of any kind, is thirteen years. This low barrier to entry, alongside the lack of regulatory oversight, puts forth a particular concern for vulnerable populations, such as youth.

1.2 Gambling as a Public Health Issue

1.2.1 Public Health Gambling Conceptual Framework

The way you define a problem will determine what you do about it.

– Dr. Jonathan Mann

First Director, Global AIDS Program, WHO

To date, there are multiple conceptual paradigms used to frame gambling activities (i.e., responsible gambling model, pathways model, problem gambling, pathological gambling model, and the public health framework; Korn & Reynolds, 2009).³ Over the years, as gambling opportunities continue to expand, innovate, and become a normalized cultural venture, so does the importance of adopting a public health perspective as a way to conceptualize gambling (Korn, Gibbons, & Azmier, 2003; Korn & Shaffer, 1999; Marshall, 2009).

I have positioned the exploration and understanding of youths' poker play on Facebook within a comprehensive public health gambling framework. The framework, as established in the monograph by Korn and Shaffer (1999), builds on the World Health Organization Ottawa Charter (First International Conference on Health Promotion, 1986) and the Adelaide Statement and Recommendations on Healthy Public Policy (Second International Conference on Health Promotion, 1988). Essentially, the key difference between the public health framework and the other various approaches hinges on the role of the individual. The public health approach offers a broad viewpoint on society, moving beyond the individual behaviour to explore its context, epidemiology, and social and economic characteristics (Korn & Shaffer, 1999). More specifically the public health framework seeks to (a) look at gambling along a continuum (healthy/unhealthy

³ See Korn and Reynolds (2009) for expanded explanations of various conceptual paradigms used to currently examine gambling.

gambling); (b) centre itself around the principle of shared responsibility; (c) address all levels of prevention, as well as treatment and rehabilitation issues; (d) encapsulate a population health approach (vulnerable groups, not solely the individual); (e) recognize the important role of social determinants with respect to decisions to gamble; and (f) generate healthy public policy (Korn & Shaffer, 1999). The public health perspective is interdisciplinary, allowing for the application of different “lenses” for understanding gambling behaviour, or in this case social network gambling games. Its emphasis is on special, at-risk, vulnerable population groups, including youth, with health as its organizing principle, rather than responsibility. Additionally, the public health model focuses on analyzing both the benefits and costs associated with gambling, taking into consideration all aspects of the community, including health, social, and economic issues, as well as identifying strategies for action (Korn & Reynolds, 2009; Skinner, 1999). In sum, offering an “integrated dynamic approach that emphasizes a systems view rather than a primary focus solely on individuals” (Korn & Shaffer, 1999, p. 306) and their clinical needs.

Gambling is often framed as a form of entertainment for its consumers; however, research informs us “gambling for the purpose of revenue generation has consequences for citizens and communities” (Cosgrave & Klassen, 2009, p. 3). Within a public health framework, the term *gambling-related harm* is preferred to current terms that shape the analysis of gambling, such as compulsive, addictive, pathological, and disordered gambling that place the emphasis on the individual and their needs, while also implying a psychopathology and maladaptive behaviour (Korn & Shaffer, 1999; Roaf, 2015). The term I will be using throughout my research is gambling-related harm, with the exception of where I refer to the literature. Due to the lack of consistent nomenclature and different interpretations of the same problem as a result of different knowledge within each discipline (Ferrari, 2012), deciding how to define the problem poses an interesting source of insight for analysis. Different interpretations of the same problem, speaks directly to the heart of framing and the power struggles that can result over the naming/framing of a phenomenon. To respect the various disciplines and knowledge of the various authors, I will use the respective authors chosen terminology when describing the current literature.

1.2.2 Youth Gambling as a Public Health Concern

It is argued that understanding of the “local circumstances of individuals and communities are critical to whether gambling activity is problematic” (Marshall, 2009, p. 66). Since the inception of Korn and Shaffer’s (1999) seminal monograph establishing gambling as a public health issue, public health scholars have argued that “society’s representation of gambling can have a profound impact on youth” (Skinner, Biscope, Murray, & Korn, 2004, p. 264). The majority of today’s youth have already gambled by the time they are in their last year of high school (Shaffer, 2004), participating in a myriad of gambling activities, from dares and betting with friends to lotteries, casino style games, and poker.

Worldwide prevalence studies have consistently revealed that adolescents and youth (18–24 years) are participating in all forms of gambling, both government sanctioned and unregulated (Derevensky, 2012; Volberg, Gupta, Griffiths, Olason, & Delfabbro, 2010; Welte, Barnes, Tidwell, & Hoffman, 2008, 2011; Wiebe, Mun, & Kauffman, 2006). Meta-analyses examining the problem prevalence rates of gambling associated with young people, provide ample evidence that 2–8% of both adolescents and youth are experiencing gambling-related harms, with another 10–15% being at risk for the development of gambling problems (Derevensky, 2012; Derevensky & Gupta, 2000; Dickson, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2008; Forrest & McHale, 2012; Olason, Kristjansdottir, Einarsdottir, Haraldsson, Bjarnason, & Derevensky, 2011; Productivity Commission, 2010; Shaffer & Hall, 2001; Volberg et al., 2010; Welte et al., 2008, 2011; Wiebe et al., 2006), even when taking into account methodological issues around measurement and instrumentation (Volberg et al., 2010). Of particular concern for this current study, is the consensus that problem prevalence rates of young adults (ages 18–25) are 2–4 times higher than those of the adult population (Derevensky, 2012; Shaffer & Hall, 2001; Volberg et al., 2010; Welte et al., 2008, 2011; Wiebe et al., 2006).

Documented consequences of gambling-related harms associated with youth have been shown to include high rates of suicide ideation (Nower, Gupta, Blaszczyński, & Derevensky, 2004), increased criminal behaviour, disrupted familial and peer relationships, and poor academic and work performance (Hardoon & Derevensky, 2002), as well as a number of mental health and behavioural tribulations (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004). Further, a growing body of research indicates that gambling behaviours tend to be more excessive on the Internet, when compared to offline gambling, specifically with respect to frequency of play, spending, and time spent

gambling (Gainsbury, Wood, Russell, Hing, & Blaszczynski, 2012; Kairouz, Paradis, & Nadeau, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2009; Woodruff & Gregory, 2005). A more comprehensive discussion on what the current research reports about youth gambling and the risk factors associated with youths' gambling-related harms will be discussed in Chapter Two. Of particular importance to establishing youth gambling as a public health concern and to this study, is research that indicates that among young people, movement from social gambling to experiencing gambling-related harms occurs rapidly (Gupta & Derevensky, 2008; Volberg et al., 2010); many adults experiencing gambling-related harms report that they started gambling at an early age (Forrest & McHale, 2012) and similarly, many adolescents experiencing gambling-related harms report initiating gambling in their early years (Gupta & Derevensky, 2008; Productivity Commission, 2010; Vitaro, Wanner, Ladouceur, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2004; Volberg et al., 2010).

In sum, a public health approach to youth gambling offers a population health perspective that is not restricted to a narrow focus on the more specific area of gambling-related harms, promoting the examination of societal risks and protective factors to encourage or discourage the transition from recreational to problem-related gambling (Shaffer, LaBrie, & LaPlante, 2004).

1.3 The Research Problem

What has become perfectly clear: social casino gaming is the newest and strongest prospect for growth in both the de-regulated and regulated markets.

- Tom Sapsted (2013)

A popular genre of SNG is casino-style games played with virtual currency, meant to replicate real-money gambling games. Since the industries inception in 2007, social network gambling games have experienced a high level of popularity and financial success. At the present time, social network gambling is an ambiguous term, and has been used to describe many qualitatively different forms of social gambling (Parke, Wardle, Rigbye & Parke, 2012). Essentially, social network gambling is the convergence between online (real-money) gambling and social (virtual-currency) gaming, which is predominantly found on social networking sites.

The number of opportunities for young people to gamble via social media sites is

overwhelming. My colleagues and I (Korn, Norman, & Reynolds, 2010) sought to capture the number of poker, and other gambling opportunities, with an environmental scan on popular SNSs such as Facebook, MySpace, Orkut, and Hi5. Results uncovered significant gambling opportunities. Using the search term *poker*, 458 direct gambling applications and over 3,810 indirect gambling opportunities via pages/groups were revealed. As the results of this environmental scan indicate, there is a proliferation of gambling opportunities for young people via popular SNSs, as the barriers to entry are remarkably low, specifically for members under the age of 18. Despite this study being conducted in a particular context, contingent in time and space utilizing the popular tools of the day, the findings warrant concern that social networks and the tools that facilitate peer-to-peer collaboration and activity provide one of the most fundamental challenges to traditional gambling industries.

Can participating in poker on SNSs be deemed gambling? That is currently up for debate and it depends on how gambling is defined. For example, if you use the definition developed by Korn and Shaffer (1999), where gambling is defined as risking money or something of value on the outcome of an event involving an element of chance when the probability of winning is less than certain, the answer is: yes. To date, casino-style games on SNSs are referred to by a myriad of terms: social games/gambling, social media games/gambling, soft gambling, social casino games, non-monetary gambling, free-to-play gambling, practice gambling, or pseudo-gambling (Downs, 2010; Gainsbury, Hing, Delfabbro, & King, 2014; King, Delfabbro & Griffiths, 2010; Derevensky, 2013; Morgan Stanley, 2012; Ozuem & Prasad, 2014; Parke et al., 2012; Schneider, 2012), and more recently *digsinos* (i.e., Digital+social+casino; Miller & Howell, 2014). It is not difficult to understand how the lack of consistency in nomenclature may have significant implications for how researchers, regulators, policymakers, gambling prevention services, and, ultimately, players make sense of these games. However, despite the fluctuating terminology, a consistent set of characteristics underpins these games—the games simulate traditional casino-style games, and are based on a free-to-play (F2P) business model predominantly found on SNSs.

Social network gambling is estimated to be a \$1.7 billion industry within a larger \$35 billion online gambling industry. Poker's popularity amongst players holds strong, capturing 47% of the market, in comparison to bingo, slots, and other casino-style games. Social network gambling is dominating SNSs such as Facebook, and is considered to be potentially creating a new generation of customers who enjoy gambling (Derevensky et al., 2013; Downs, 2008; Gupta,

Derevensky, & Wohl, 2013; King et al., 2010; Morgan Stanley, 2012; Parke et al., 2012; Ozuem & Prasad, 2014; Wohl, Derevensky, Gupta, & Salmon, 2014), as they are a suitable market for online gambling operators, given the apparent crossover between the markets (Gainsbury, 2012), and are currently unregulated.

These regulatory challenges particularly exacerbate the problem with respect to young players. From the perspective of the gambling operators, the enormity of the current social gambling player base offers them an opportunity to advertise their products directly with existing and potential customers (Derevensky et al., 2013), a large majority of whom may currently be too young to legally gamble in land-based or online gambling environments. It has been estimated that gambling operators would experience a 30% growth if they could get only 10% of the existing social network gambling player base to migrate their play over to real-money gambling (Morgan Stanley, 2012). Given the magnitude of the current social network gambling player base, one strategy that could help facilitate this migration would be for professional online gambling operators to extend their reach into this emerging market by partnering up with social gambling operators, which is already occurring. For example, Bwin.party (a leading online gambling operator) recently announced its agreement with Zynga, while Caesar's Entertainment secured access into the social gambling market with its acquisition of Playtika, the makers of Slotomania who report 6.7 million monthly visitors (Derevensky et al., 2013).

To date, research is just beginning to examine social network gambling. Canadian researchers are currently conducting the first longitudinal study to examine not only whether social network gambling influences the migration of play over to monetary gambling, but also potential predictors of this migration. As a preliminary qualitative study to a large-scale quantitative examination of the social network gambling experience, Gupta et al. (2013) examined factors influencing social network gambling participation amongst youth aged 18–24 years. Youth focus groups revealed that many participants were playing on social network gambling applications as a means of building or reinforcing their skills before migrating their play over to real-money gambling sites. Specifically, youth commented that casino-style games on Facebook offered them an opportunity to learn how to gamble, leading the authors to conclude that these games serve as a “poker training ground” (Gupta et al., 2013, as cited in Derevensky et al., 2013, p. 12). An original survey was then conducted with 409 social network gamblers, aged 18+ years, who had never previously gambled online. A six-month follow up study, consisting of

99 participants revealed that approximately 26% of the social network gamblers reported having migrated over to monetary gambling. Analysis revealed that social network gamblers who made in-game microtransactions were eight times more likely to transition to real-money gambling, than those social network gamblers who played for free. The authors warned that the social network gambler that purchases virtual credits is “primed to spend money on gambling-related games online. Thus, micro-transactions may act as a ‘foot in the door’ for online gambling” (Kim, Wohl, Salmon, Gupta & Derevensky, 2014, p. 9). Future follow-ups are scheduled at 12 and 24 months.

As mentioned, the social network gambling industry is currently unregulated, which gives operators an opportunity to target any customer in any jurisdiction (Morgan Stanley, 2012), while also providing misleading and/or inflated payout rates (Kim et al., 2014) in the absence of independent oversight. The lack of accountability has led to concerns that social network gambling sites are “teaching young people to gamble” (Morgan Stanley, 2012, p. 6). Of particular concern are vulnerable populations like youth, who may not have engaged in such an activity until much later on, which could lead to the migration of their play over to real-money gambling sites when they come of legal age to gamble, as a result of distorted understandings about odds and chances of winning (Kim et al., 2014). Participating in risky health behaviours (e.g., smoking cigarettes, sexual exploration, and alcohol use) has long been associated with young people (Jessor, 1998). However, by embedding gambling into SNSs, there is a chance of lowering the age of onset for participation—which has been shown to be a risk factor for developing gambling-related harms.

Finally, within social and mobile game development the ability to gather large amounts of player engagement metrics (i.e. big data⁴), and being able to react quickly to changes in the

⁴ Big data as defined by boyd & Crawford (2012) to mean: A cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon that rests of the interplay of: 1) Technology: maximizing computation power and algorithmic accuracy to gather, analyze, link and compare large data sets; 2) Analysis: drawing on large data sets to identify patterns in order to make economic, social, technical, and legal claims; and 3) Mythology: the widespread belief that large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with an aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy (p.3).

player base (Fields, 2014), adds an additional level of risk and ethical concern when it comes to youth players of social network gambling games. “The era of Big Data is underway” (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p.2) and SNG developers have the ability to gather large amounts of player data through technology. For example, the company Bees & Pollen, developed *The HoneyLizer* – a real-time, social data optimization platform to leverage social network data to make social games more resourceful (Avidan, 2013; Bees & Pollen, 2011). Using players’ data pulled in from Facebook’s open graph; predictive algorithms can be generated to personalize (and actively alter) players’ gameplay to help optimize player engagement and monetization, a process referred to as predictive personalization. Essentially, predictive personalization, through *The HoneyLizer*, allows operators the ability to customize the social game experience by tapping into over 60 player attributes, both social and behavioural (i.e., players’ Facebook pages, likes, number of friends, location etc.). According to Alan Avidan (2013), the Executive Director of Bees & Pollen, examples of personalization would be using players’ real names in communications, as opposed to standard messages. Or even going further and more nuanced, shifting the price ranges players will see when they go to purchase additional credits. For instance, depending on certain player attributes, one player who decides to purchase additional credits may see payment ranges from 10cents to \$100, while a different player, accessing the same payment page would see payment ranges from \$5-\$200. There may even be variations in colours on the page, or whether the payments increase in range from lowest to highest, or vice versa, decrease from highest payment option down to the lowest (Avidan, 2013) – all in the attempt to personalize the social game experience, and I would argue influence players’ gameplay habits. It should be noted that ZP may or may not use *The HoneyLizer* technology specifically. However, at a Large Databases Conference at Stanford University, Zynga’s Daniel McCaffrey (2012), General Manager, Platform and Analytics Engineering, gave a talk reporting that their use of big data metrics allows for access to real-time and daily aggregated user and game data, to be primarily used for “personalization, targeting, profiling, and matchmaking” (p. 17).

Given the high rates of youth experiencing gambling-related harms, alongside recent research that highlights social network gambling games being used as a training platform to migrate gameplay over to real-money wagering, clearly there is reason to be concerned when it comes to young people. Gambling has entered a digital age, connecting individuals via their smart phones, computers and gaming consoles 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, from the

convenience of wherever they are (Downs, 2010; King et al., 2010). Although research is beginning to examine social network gambling games, there is little insight into how youth comprehend and make meaning of their gameplay and their motivation to participate is often surrounded by confusion, warranting further investigation (O’Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communications and Media, 2011). A qualitative examination of what motivates youth to play poker within popular SNSs, within the context of understanding the influences of the game mechanics, will contribute to the development of targeted Internet gambling prevention initiatives. Both primary and secondary prevention strategies could significantly influence policy development within social networking sites as they seek to embark on social gambling partnerships as a form of revenue generation.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate youths’ (aged 18–24 years) lived experiences of poker play on Facebook, how they make sense of their experience, and to understand what motivates them to play and how they frame their participation. This approach allowed me to explore and understand both youth’s experience, the context in which this experience take place, as well as the interaction between the two (lived experience and context). Qualitative methodologies recognize that behaviour unfolds, not in a vacuum, but rather within complex social and environmental interactions, or context, which shapes how the phenomena are exhibited, as well as how they may be taken up, resisted, or modified (Poland et al., 2009). For the purposes of this dissertation, I define context as:

The local mix of conditions and events, social agents, objects and interactions which characterize open systems ... whose unique confluence in time and space selectively activates, triggers, blocks or modifies casual powers and mechanisms in a chain of reactions that may result in very different outcomes depending on the dynamic interplay of conditions and mechanisms over time and space (Poland et al., 2009, p.309).

The visual images that youth are confronted with while playing poker on Facebook play an integral role in constructing their perception of social network gambling “by framing images

of reality ... in a predictable and patterned way” (McQuail, 1994, p.331). Frames refer to the lens through which individuals see the world and have the capacity to influence how individuals conceptualize an issue and shape the public discourse (Chong & Druckman, 2007), by positioning themselves within established cultural meanings or generating new ones. Therefore, to truly understand how youth perceive their poker gameplay, it is important to also examine the influences of the game designs and the intentions of the poker applications that youth are exposed to while playing on Facebook.

To achieve these objectives, I conducted a two-phase research program using an adaptive virtual ethnography methodology (Hine, 2000) with a case study approach (Stake, 2005), focusing on Zynga Poker (ZP). In the first phase, my study examines the types of discourses active on ZP and the design elements of the game in order to understand how these frames promote, maintain, or decrease youths’ engagement with the site. During the second phase, I interviewed both key industry stakeholders and youth, to delineate what meaning each of them attributes to poker on Facebook, what motivates youth to play poker on Facebook, and how engaging in poker on Facebook promotes, or not, migration of youths’ play onto real-money Internet poker sites. This approach to understanding this emerging phenomenon allows examination from multiple individual perspectives, while also exploring the interplay between the individual and the social-environmental context.

1.5 Preface: Moving Forward

I want to bring attention to two points. First, given the confusion that currently surrounds social network gambling games, more specifically the various names currently used to describe these entities, I put forward an important point of clarity. For the remainder of this dissertation, I will use the term social network gambling games to refer to all casino-style games found on SNSs like Facebook. My intention is not to polarize the various key stakeholder positions and conceptualizations as illustrated by the multitude of terms that are currently being used, but rather the opposite. My desire is to highlight the complexity and importance that language has by drawing attention to the potential implication that speaking different languages has on how youth frame their social network gambling experiences and, ultimately, on research and prevention messages and education strategies moving forward.

Second, I want to define how I am using the word discourse. Discourse is the outcome of the interplay of language found in textual and visual images (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2005; Kress, 1989), which contributes to the framing of whichever topic, object, or process is talked about (Kress, 1989). As articulated by Gee (2005), a discourse is “a dance that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times and places and in the here-and-now as a performance that is recognizable as just such a coordination” (p. 28). Understanding discourses and the impact they have on framing is a two-way process; specifically, they both contribute to a way of seeing, but also what is seen has been framed for the individual. For example, within this study, I felt it was important to understand not only the discourses active on the ZP application, as created by Zynga for the individual, but also how those discourses, contribute to how youth make meaning of (i.e., frame) their poker gameplay.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

This section provides a preview to the organization of my study.

In Chapters Two and Three, I present a review of the current state of literature relevant to this study. First, Chapter Two provides an understanding of the literature specifically examining both gaming and gambling, concentrating on what the current literature indicates about how these terms are defined, and the epidemiology. Chapter Three continues by examining the literature with respect to the environmental context that underscores this dissertation. I begin by describing what the literature tells us about Facebook and, more specifically, what we know to date about SNGs and social network gambling. Both chapters conclude with a summary of the gaps in the literature, which this dissertation attempts to address.

In Chapter Four, I describe the theories that frame my research: self-determination theory, Goffman’s frame analysis, and the social networking theory of homophily. I describe the roles that each theory has independently played in the course of this study and, in some cases, in the representation of the study findings.

In Chapter Five, I outline the overall research design and methods that I used in both phases of my research. I begin by describing Zynga—the developers of Zynga Poker (ZP)—and the business model that underpins many SNGs on Facebook. This is followed by a presentation of

the ZP gaming application and the images that were used during Phase One of my study. Additionally I discuss my methodology of inquiry, data generation strategies, management, and analysis, and conclude with describing the ethical considerations and a discussion about my strategies to establish trustworthiness during the research process.

In Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, the results of Phases One and Two are presented. First, in Chapter Six, the results are given from Phase One's discourse analysis and ethnographic journey playing ZP. Chapter Seven presents the results from Phase Two's analytic findings from my interviews with key industry stakeholders. Chapter Eight illustrates the lived experiences of youth who play ZP.

In Chapter Nine, I introduce both the Public Health Framework and the Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling, which was developed based on all of my findings. The chapter begins by building on the youth findings presented in Chapter Eight, by discussing how youth participants currently frame their ZP gameplay, giving voice to their feelings of how Facebook influences their perception, and impacts their participation. I then put forward my Framework and Spectrum Model, followed by reflections of the creation process.

Finally, Chapter Ten closes this dissertation by expanding on Chapter nine to provide an overall discussion of the findings of my study, in the context of previous research to extend our current knowledge and understanding of social network gambling. Additionally, I address the implications for research, prevention, and policy, and the limitations.

1.7 My Position and Assumptions Within this Study

This study is located within a constructivist paradigm which, at a general level, is concerned with understanding the meaning and experiences of individuals and can include a) inductivity; b) the prior use of theory at various times; c) a relatively unstructured/semi-structured format; and d) the involvement of the researcher as an instrument of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000a). As articulated by Bryman (2001), a constructivist ontological position refers to

the study of the nature of reality. A reality that is constructed rather than set in stone or objectively measurable, and furthermore, that individuals construct their reality by associating “meaning” with certain events and actions. (p. 246)

The constructivist paradigm position allowed me to focus on the interrelatedness of people’s lived experience, recognizing the importance of psychological, social, historical, and cultural factors (Ponterotto, 2005) that shape youths’ understandings of their ZP gameplay. I recognize that my approach to this study was greatly influenced by the paradigm; in particular, with respect to the literature reviewed, chosen theories drawn upon, and the methodology used to gather, analyze, and interpret the data. Rhetorically speaking, I have chosen to write from the perspective of the first person, and include the “voice” of the participants through the selection of representative quotations consistent with the philosophy of science on which the research is based (Gilgun, 2005). Further, writing from the first person, allowed a level of self-reflection and empathetic analysis and writing during my research journey, acknowledging that as a researcher I am never fully objective (Lincoln & Guba, 2000b), and actively participate in the construction of ideas and experiences.

As individuals, we all view things in our unique ways according to personal histories, experiences, and points of view. Entering into a study as a researcher requires exploration of worldviews and assumptions—in a way becoming a reflective practitioner. The ongoing practice of becoming aware of the self as a researcher and an instrument of knowledge generation within the research process is referred to as “reflexivity” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000b). Reflexivity is an ongoing practice that tries to capture the dialogue between “what I know” and “how I know it” (Hertz, 1997).

I am a heterosexual female, born and raised in Canada. Coming from a privileged position, I have studied and practiced several different professions, such as fashion design, couple and family therapy, divorce mediation, youth gambling research and prevention, and I am currently a doctoral student. Throughout my research, I have been mindful of how my “brought self” (Hertz, 1997) entered into the study. For example, I recognize how my race, class, sexual orientation, and academic history may have influenced my ability to connect to some of my participants and, in turn, shaped my analysis. Specifically, as most of my youth participants were studying at local

universities and colleges, my gender, class, and academic status may have helped me better relate to some of the youth. However, these same elements of myself may have placed me in a subordinate position in relation to senior, well-established professionals who participated in my study as part of my key stakeholder interviews. I would also add that previous to my study, I would never have self-identified as a “gamer”⁵ although I always loved playing a variety of card games. This perception of myself, allowed me to approach this study with a new and different perspective, particularly playing ZP during my ethnographic journey. Upon reflection, I began to appreciate the draw and enjoyment that “gaming” can have and allowed me to relate better with those youth participants who did self-identify as a “gamer” during the interviews.

Finally, I recognize that my “research-based self” (Hertz, 1997) guided how I created this enquiry. For the past 10 years, I have worked as a researcher and project manager at the Public Health Gambling Project, in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, at the University of Toronto alongside my colleague, Dr. David Korn. The mandate of the project was to educate youth about gambling-related harms via the Internet using public health strategies of health promotion, harm reduction, and primary prevention. We were successful in receiving various research grants that helped further our understanding of youth gambling. One such grant was for an environmental scan examining the gambling-related opportunities available to young people on popular social networking sites. Results of this exploratory scan revealed there is a proliferation gambling opportunities for young people via social networking sites. My position at the Public Health Gambling Project significantly influenced my doctoral study, not only in terms of the subject of enquiry, but also the literature reviewed, my chosen methodology, and the analysis and interpretation of the data.

During my years working in the area of youth gambling awareness and prevention, we developed YouthBet.net—an interactive, multimedia website developed to prevent gambling problems among youth. YouthBet.net was developed by youth for youth. This experience solidified the importance of engaging youth in the development of health promotion initiatives. It was this experience, which influenced my decision to focus on the lived experiences of social

⁵ I specifically use the word *gamer* here to refer to the word in an urban sense of someone who plays videogames for a hobby or when they are bored (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=gamer>) .

network poker players, as a way to understand what motivates them to play, and how they perceive their participation.

2 Chapter 2: Gaming Versus Gambling

My study is located at the unique juncture between several fields of study—gaming, gambling, and new media. In this chapter, I synthesize and review various streams of empirically based published research relevant to the larger fields of gaming and gambling. First, I examine the literature addressing gaming, looking to answer the question: What is it that we are speaking about when we use the terms games and gaming? In a similar fashion, I review the literature on gambling, in particular synthesizing how various key stakeholders in the larger gambling field define gambling, our current understanding of youth gambling, Internet gambling, and poker. The chapter will end with a summary and discussion about the current gaps in the literature. The literature on new media, and more specifically Facebook and social network gaming and gambling, will be addressed in the next chapter.

2.1 What is Gaming?

2.1.1 Definitions

A game is a game is a game. (Schell, 2008, p. xxvi)

Games have been a part of the human experience for centuries and seem to be defined differently from author to author, with terms like *experience*, *play*, and *game* used interchangeably (Schell, 2008). Formally, a review of the literature unveils numerous definitions for games:

A problem-solving activity, approached with a playful attitude. (Schell, 2008, p. 37)

A system in which players engage in artificial conflict, defined by the rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome. (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 80)

An activity, which is essentially: Free (voluntary), separate [in time and space], uncertain,

unproductive, governed by rules, make believe. (Caillois, 1961, p. 10–11)

A free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious,” but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (Huizinga, 1955, p. 13)

A game is a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable. (Juul, 2003, p. 5)

A voluntary activity, obviously separate from real life, creating an imaginary world that may or may not have any relation to real life and that absorbs the player’s full attention. Games are played out within a specific time and place, are played according to established rules and create social groups out of their players. (Michael & Chen, 2006, p. 19)

A game is a series of interesting choices. (Meirer, as cited in Rollings & Adams, 2003, p. 300)

As the relevant scholarship reveals, there are several prominent definitions of games, which exhibit more similarities than differences. For instance, most definitions highlight a voluntary activity, governed by a rule-based formal system, with quantifiable outcomes (Juul, 2010). The Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) famously argued that there are difficulties in defining the concept of a game, specifically using the word *game* as an example of how it’s impossible to ever pin down one thing entirely; instead there are family resemblances between different games. As Kilgore (2007) states, “There is a reason for this difficulty in definitions. No single entity embodies the perceptive concepts of gameplay. One cannot independently examine an element of gameplay without examining them all” (p. 2). Given the definitional debates over the thousands of years scholars have been thinking and talking about games, it is unlikely that they will be rigidly defined any time soon (Schell, 2008).

Historically, scholarship in the area of game studies relied on the assumption that games are fun and that the player finds themselves in a special or magical sphere separate from ordinary life (Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008). The concept of a *magic circle* originates from Johan Huizinga's classic text *Homo Ludens* (1955), but is most notably applied within contemporary video game studies by game study theorists Salen and Zimmerman (2004) and Juul (2005) to articulate the spatial, temporal, and psychological boundaries between games and the real world (Calleja, 2007). Both Salen and Zimmerman (2004) and Juul (2005) define the boundary of a game (both with respect to time and space) as the magic circle. The important feature of the magic circle is that it is closed; creating a space that is separate from the real world and is separate from any marker of time. "It simultaneously represents a path with a beginning and end, but one without beginning and end ... a space that is both limited and limitless. In short, a finite space with infinite possibility" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 95).

Until recently, the magic circle theory has been taken as the simple and ultimate descriptive truth about gaming (Nieborg & Hermes, 2008). However, a growing body of criticism highlighting the limitations of the magic circle has begun to receive attention in recent years (Calleja, 2010; Copier, 2007; Deterding, 2009; Nieborg & Hermes, 2008; Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008). "The idea of a magic circle is alluring, as is the idea of a clear limit between play and non-play. Reality is messier" (Pargman & Jakobsson, 2008, p. 227), and today's networked societies in which many games are played, particularly the latest free-to-play (F2P) games on SNSs, suggest the need to understand the complexity of collaborative play and shift from thinking in boundaries (Copier, 2007). As Copier (2007) argues, the magic circle metaphor "creates a false image of an isolated, magical, and thus difficult to understand game space" (p. 32). Today's emerging new form of gameplay "constitutes pushback against the boundaries of a system established by rules" (Chaplin, 2013, para. 6).

Furthermore, Huizinga (1955) originally argued that within the magic circle, "any form of ludic activity, and by extension, culture more generally, must be both voluntary and free of economic interest. As soon as money or any form of interest is involved, he asserted, play ceases to be play and culture becomes commodity" (as cited in Goggin, 2012, p. 441). In sum, the emergence of digital technology has given games a new visibility, altering the very nature of cultural consumption (Zimmerman, 2013) and, in turn, the nature of games themselves. Games and play are steadily entering new realms, in particular a socially connected terrain and the realm

of finance, giving rise to a new “financial entertainment industry” (Goggin, 2012), of which the latest F2P social network games would be considered part. Many early definitions of games, are constructed within a given time and space. In other words, definitions are “shaped by ways in which material objects (artifacts), social relations (socio-facts) and ideas (mentifacts) come together in ways that are contingent in time and space” (Gesler & Kearns, 2002, as cited in Poland et al., 2009, p. 311). The F2P games challenge the early scholarship and traditional view of play and games.

2.1.2 Epidemiology: Youth Gaming

The past decade has witnessed an unprecedented explosion in the popularity of online games. Globally, online gaming is estimated to be a \$68 billion industry, with increasing amounts of time and money being spent on games across a variety of platforms (e.g., mobile phones, tablets, computers, hand-held game systems, and game consoles; McGonigal, 2011). The latest reports from the Entertainment Software Association (ESA; 2012, 2014) and the ESA of Canada (2014) illustrate that 90% of Canadian youth are gamers, 48% of which are female, 52% male. Forty-seven percent of gamers report playing social network games,⁶ and 15% of frequent players state that they pay for online games. The average online game player spends approximately 50–70 minutes per day playing (Boyle, Connolly, Hailey, & Boyle, 2012; Quandt, Breuer, Festl, & Scharkow, 2013, as cited in Kneer, Rieger, Ivory, & Ferguson, 2014).

To date, systematic reviews of the literature have been conducted to advance our understanding of online games (Boyle et al., 2012; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). For example, Boyle et al. (2012) examined 55 papers to assess engagement in online games. Papers were categorized across different aspects of the engagement process—subjective experience, physiological responses, motives for play, game usage, games market and loyalty, and impact of gaming on life satisfaction. Results indicate that the majority of scholarly papers focus on the players’ motives for playing, followed by literature examining players’ subjective experiences. More specifically,

⁶ Social network games are a specific genre of online games (Chen, Chen, Song, & Korba, 2004; Entertainment Software Association, 2014), most often found on social networking sites and based on the free-to-play (F2P) business model.

the literature reveals that the need for challenge, socialization, and achievement was the most important motive for player involvement.

For most individuals, playing online games is a pleasurable entertainment activity; however, recent research identifies that excessive engagement may lead to players experiencing harms. Kuss and Griffiths (2012) deduce from a review of 30 empirical studies meeting the established inclusion criteria, that online gaming has become an integral element in the lives of young people. Studies revealed a large variability in problem prevalence rates, ranging from 8–18% of players experiencing harms associated with excessive play, academic, health, financial, and relationship problems, in addition to 50% of gamers self-identifying as addicted. Personality states such as introversion, neuroticism, and impulsivity, were found to be significantly related to Internet addiction (Kneer et al., 2014; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012); however, the same personality states are not unique to the disorder, therefore, it is hard to adequately assess the etiological significance of the findings (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). The researchers claim that gameplay was often used as a form of self-medication, with tolerance playing an important role leading to continued increases in time spent playing. Specifically, individuals gaming excessively were shown to spend increasing amounts of time preparing for, organizing, and actually playing, resulting in the experience of *flow*⁷ and in-game immersion associated with addiction. Kuss and Griffiths (2012) conclude that the available evidence suggests that problematic online gaming can be conceptualized as a behavioural addiction rather than a disorder of impulse control as described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association defined “Internet Gaming Disorder” in the controversial fifth edition of the *DSM* (as cited in Wakefield, 2013), as a condition warranting further examination (Kneer et al., 2014).

To compliment the significant number of quantitative studies examining online game players’ motives and risk factors, Kneer et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study to provide insight into the perceptions of risk factors by (non-addicted) players, and by counsellors. For the players, social interaction and immersion were named as the most important influence in the

⁷ Flow, as famously conceptualized by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), is “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sake of doing it” (p. 4).

development of problematic play behaviour. For example, players perceived that social isolation and lack of family support could be seen as significant risk factors for developing harm. Interviews also highlighted the dangers of immersive play, specifically players getting “lost” in the game, experiencing timelessness while playing. However, it should be noted that the authors claim that the participants were non-addicted but purposely strayed away from asking participants about the possibility of their own problematic playing behaviour. Counsellors pointed to individual traits such as anxiety, introversion, and other psychological problems such as depression and social phobia as significant risk factors.

2.1.3 Online Game Design

In contrast to focusing on the individual, as highlighted in the previous section, game designers have long created absorbing games, in essence, purposively placing players in a state of flow to “create an engaging experience for the player, resulting in player investment (both time and money)” (Groves, Skues, & Wise, 2014, p. 681). As Kneer et al. (2014) stated above, oftentimes players report getting lost in the game, unaware of how long they have been playing.

“The principles that make the classic games fun are the same principles that make the most modern games fun” (Schell, 2008, p. xxvi). While the explosion of computer technology has led to innovative game creation, the underlying principles of human psychology have remained the same and play an integral part in how the game industry develops games that make players happy (McGonigal, 2011; Schell, 2008). Sicart (2008) sought to analytically summarize the major work in the field of game mechanics as a way to develop a formalized definition of game mechanics in addition to providing a tool to discover, describe, and interrelate game mechanics in any given game. “Within the general research tradition on game mechanics, the concept is used to analyze elements of the game system” (p. 4)—for example, how players interact with the game, player strategies, and actions. Several distinct definitions can be found throughout the literature; however, Sicart (2008) argues that the literature does not provide a single, dominant approach that encompasses all of these aspects. Born out of academic necessity, Sicart (2008) defined game mechanics as methods invoked by agents for interacting with the game world. “This definition allows the study of the systemic structure of games in terms of actions afforded to agents to overcome challenges, but also the analysis of how actions are mapped onto input

devices and how mechanics can be used to create specific emotional experiences in players” (p. 13).

The structural mechanics incorporated into online games have been investigated (Karlsen, 2011; King et al., 2010; Wood, Griffiths, Chappell, & Davies, 2004; Wang & Sun, 2011) and found to be similar to those mechanics found in electronic gambling machines to specifically encourage an absorbing form of play (King et al., 2010; Schull, 2012). King et al. (2010) developed a taxonomy of the structural characteristics of video games such as social features, manipulation and cultural features, narrative and identity features, reward and punishment features, and presentation features. Wang and Sun (2011) found that game reward systems provide positive experiences for players, through motivation, enhanced status within the gaming community, and the use of rewards as social tools. Research conducted by Karlsen (2011) found that excessive playing of online games is closely linked to socially based motivation factors.

2.2 What is Gambling?

2.2.1 Definitions

The Ontario gambling industry has a long history dating back to 1892 when gambling became regulated under the Criminal Code of Canada. The Criminal Code of Canada starts from the premise that gambling is something to be prohibited to protect public interest and individuals in society (Bourgeois, 1999). Since 1969, several key amendments have been introduced such that the provinces have exclusive jurisdiction over gambling activities within their borders (Bourgeois, 1999; Campbell, Hartnagel, & Smith, 2005; Elson, 2013). These amendments have resulted in the current criminal gambling legislation being described as a “patchwork of fossilized law” (Glickman, 1979, as cited in Campbell et al., 2005, p. 13), prompting Campbell et al. (2005) to claim that “gambling can be legal or illegal depending on the context, circumstance and the operators of the game” (p. 9).

From a Canadian legal and regulatory perspective, the term gambling is elusive, referring to:

a risk-taking activity that contains three essential elements: a) chance - in which the outcome of a particular event is uncertain; b) consideration - in which something of value is staked on the outcome of the uncertain event; and c) prize - in which something of value may be won contingent upon the successful outcome of the uncertain event. (Campbell et al., 2005, p. 8)

More specifically, a bet, which would constitute consideration, is defined as money or something of value that is risked on the outcome of a game of chance (Dukelow, 2011). This definition is similar to the legal definitions found in the US (Owens, 2011), and in the UK (Gambling Act, 2005). Under these definitions, what constitutes something of value or money's worth and/or a prize is difficult to discern.

The subtle definitional variance found when examining the legality of gambling is similarly evident when dealing with the definition of gambling that underpins research and organizational frameworks. A review of the literature reveals a number of comparable definitions of gambling:

Includes any practice that requires in irreversible investment (money or a material good that is of value) in the hope of gain based on chance on an uncertain outcome (which is the case of games that require an element of skill). (Abbott, Binde, Hodgins, Korn, Pereira, Volberg, & Williams, 2013, p. 5)

An entertainment based on staking money on uncertain events driven by chance, with the potential to win more than staked, but with the ultimate certainty that gamblers as a group will lose over time. (Productivity Commission, 2010, sect. 1.4)

The betting or wagering of valuables on events of an uncertain outcome. (Devereux, 1979, as cited in Smith & Wynne, 2002, p. 17)

Characterized by the following criteria: (1) players wager money or an object of value, (2) the bet is irreversible once placed, and (3) the game's outcome relies on chance.

(Ladouceur, 2004, p. 501)

Risking money or something of value on the outcome of an event involving chance when the probability of winning is less than certain. (Korn & Shaffer, 1999, p. 292)

The act of staking money or some other item of value on the outcome of an event determined by chance. (Blaszczynski, Walker, Sagris, & Dickerson, 1999, p. 4)

Wagering money on activities (e.g., lottery, cards, sports events, bingo, casino-type games, etc.) with a chance of winning or losing. (McBride & Derevensky, 2012, p. 52)

Across studies, “implicit in most of the definitions are the following assumptions: 1) an element of risk involved; 2) someone wins and loses—money, property or other items of value change hands; 3) at least two parties⁸ must be involved in the activity—a person cannot gamble against him/herself; and 4) gambling is a conscious, deliberate, and voluntary activity” (Smith & Wynne, 2002, p. 17). While there are more commonalities than differences, the distinctions, once again, lie in the wager—whether or not an individual is wagering money or something of value. With respect to young people, and more particularly my research study, this variance in definitions is important, as youth are gambling with more than money (Korn, Murray, Morrison, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2006; Skinner et al., 2004; Wiebe & Falkowski-Ham, 2003). However, when it comes to previous youth gambling research, there seems to be a discrepancy between definitions used in applied research, which only denote wagering with money (Cook, Turner, Paglia-Boak, Adlaf, & Mann, 2010; McBride & Derevensky, 2012; Shead, Derevensky, Fong, & Gupta, 2012), and a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of youth gambling found in many organizations and reports (Abbott et al., 2013; Blaszczynski et al., 1999; Korn & Shaffer, 1999; Ladouceur, 2004).

⁸ The “house” is considered to be a party.

2.2.2 Epidemiology: Youth Gambling

Youth view gambling as a positive activity to promote social relationships and eliminate boredom, while at the same time routinely underestimating the possible harms associated with it (Derevensky, 2012; Hume & Mort, 2011; Skinner et al., 2004).

To examine the current knowledge around youth gambling and problem gambling, Derevensky et al. (2013), conducted a review of the literature, concluding that, “there is clear evidence that adolescents and young adults continue to be engaged in multiple forms of gambling, often beginning at a fairly early age, in spite of legislative prohibitions” (p. 5). The authors found that international reviews of youth gambling prevalence studies, along with the recent Ipsos MORI (2011) survey, indicate that in spite of different methodologies and instruments, all reviewed studies report higher prevalence rates of gambling and problem gambling amongst adolescents. In particular, the evidence suggests consistently high prevalence rates of gambling and problem gambling among young adults (ages 18–25) (Derevensky, 2012; Volberg et al., 2010; Welte, Barnes, Tidwell, & Hoffman, 2008, 2011).

Over the past decade, researchers have devoted substantial attention to adolescent gambling (Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2013), resulting from concerns about the early age of onset of the players. The literature informs us that while the prospect of wagering to make money is important, it does not appear to be the primary motivation for adolescents to gamble. After examining the available literature, Derevensky (2012) reveals a number of key reasons adolescents report for gambling: enjoyment, followed by the desire to make money, excitement, social involvement, relaxation, to escape from daily problems, to feel older, to alleviate depression, and finally to deal with loneliness. Environmental variables such as family and peer influence (Felsher, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2010; Lussier, Derevensky, Gupta, & Vitaro, 2014; Vachon, Vitaro, Wanner, & Tremblay, 2004) in addition to media and advertising (Derevensky, Sklar, Gupta & Messerlian, 2010; Korn, Reynolds & Hurson, 2009) and low social bonding (Lussier et al., 2014) were also found to shape adolescent gambling behaviours. Given the considerable number of studies examining adolescent gambling behaviour, there is a dearth of available literature on college students and youth, ages 18–24 years, many of whom have the resources, proximity, and time to legally participate in gambling (Blinn-Pike, Worthy, & Jonkman, 2007). Derevensky (2012) cautions that an individual may have multiple motivations to gamble; however, Derevensky points out that the reasons mentioned above, do not significantly differ from those cited by adults.

Gambling-related harms have been shown to impact people of all ages, occurring when an individual's gambling disrupts or damages personal, family, or recreational pursuits. It is associated with a range of health and social problems, which include, but are not limited to mental ill-health (e.g., anxiety, depression, compulsive behaviour patterns); impact on family cohesion, including domestic violence; employment stability; educational pursuits; debt problems; homelessness; and criminality (Dalton, Stover, Vanderlinden, & Turner, 2012; Lesieur & Rosenthal, 1991, as cited in Roaf, 2015). Research indicates that 10–15% of adolescents are at risk of becoming problem gamblers, while 4–6% already meet the diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004). With respect to youth aged 18–24 years, Blinn-Pike et al. (2007), conducted a meta-analysis of disordered gambling amongst college students and found that the estimated proportion of disordered gambling was 7.89%. Documented consequences of gambling-related harms among youth include high rates of suicidal ideation (Nower, Gupta, Blaszczynski, & Derevensky, 2004), increased criminal behaviour, disrupted familial and peer relationships, and poor academic and work performance (Hardoon & Derevensky, 2002), as well as a number of mental health and behavioural tribulations (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004). Furthermore, research specific to the area of neurobiology and problem gambling suggests that a higher prevalence of problem gambling amongst young people may in part relate to stages of neurodevelopment, which predisposes them to developing problematic behaviours due to biological vulnerability (Chambers & Potenza, 2003), leading to low impulse control and decision-making abilities.

Recently, Williams, West, and Simpson (2012) prepared a comprehensive document reviewing the available literature and drawing from established models of addictive behaviour in an effort to propose an etiological framework for understanding how problem gambling develops within adults, and in-turn, identify current best practices for the prevention of gambling-related harms. Drawing from longitudinal studies, cross-sectional research, twin studies, and retrospective reports of problem gamblers, the authors posit that there are a large number of biological, psychological, experiential, and social factors, which interact in complex ways, in and around individuals, who experience gambling problems. For example, their systematic review of the literature indicates that environmental factors that may put some individuals at risk include parental and peer group gambling, the normalization, and social acceptance of gambling, gambling accessibility, lower income and educational levels, high stress and low support, and

unsafe provision of gambling. When environmental factors are considered together with biological risk factors (e.g., impulsivity, risk seeking, and vulnerability to addiction and mental health problems), and direct risk factors (e.g., erroneous cognitions, rewarding early gambling experiences and subsequent conditioning, and gambling serving a psychological need), a clearer understanding of the causes of problem gambling, based on the best available evidence, can be discerned. It is argued that given the available empirical evidence, several best practices are necessary for the prevention of problem gambling. For example, the researchers assert that the goal moving forward in many jurisdictions for governments and corporations, would be to focus on social responsibility when it comes to policy directions, placing harm minimization as a priority over revenue generation, suggesting a decrease in general availability of gambling, and focusing on shifting the harms away from vulnerable populations, such as young people (Williams et al., 2012).

While the evidence suggests that prevalence rates of gambling-related harms amongst young people have remained stable over the past decade (Derevensky, 2012; Volberg et al., 2010), cross-sectional prevalence surveys can be misleading as they fail to capture the nature and history of harms in the community. Researchers Slutske, Jackson, and Sher (2003), in a 11-year, four-wave longitudinal study, examined past-year prevalences, life-time prevalences, and incidences of problem gambling from adolescence through young adulthood and found that despite the stability of prevalence rates at the individual level, problem gambling appears to be more transitory and episodic than enduring and chronic. The authors conclude, “A downward spiral is not the inevitable outcome of gambling-related problems and that many cases, perhaps the majority, of sub-clinical gambling-related problems resolve naturally” (Slutske et al., 2003, p. 271). These findings are similar to those found by Reith and Dobbie (2013), in their longitudinal, qualitative study carried out amongst 50 adults who lived in Glasgow, Scotland. Guided by participants’ “own articulations of what they found difficult or undesirable in terms of their gambling” (p. 29), narratives of change (high degree of variability) and non-linearity became apparent in participants behaviour over time. Suggesting that gambling behaviour may be “extremely dynamic; continually moving away from, as well as towards, problems with gambling in ways that are multidimensional and fluid” (p. 40).

2.2.3 Internet Gambling

In addition to legal, land-based gambling establishments, there are a growing number of gambling opportunities on the Internet, opportunities which are currently outpacing regulatory policies and academic research (Wood & Williams, 2011). According to Online Casino City⁹ (Casino City, 2014a, 2014b), Canadians can gamble on 222 Internet casino websites, 26 of which are specifically online poker rooms.

Research in the field has primarily focused on demographic characteristics, gambling attitudes, and problem gambling prevalence rates among those who gamble online. Studies consistently reveal that Internet gamblers are more likely to be male, young adults, single, well educated, and come from managerial and professional households (Dowling, Lorains, & Jackson, 2015; Gainsbury et al., 2012; Griffiths & Barnes, 2008; Griffiths, Wardle, Orford, Sproston, & Erens, 2009; Kairouz et al., 2012; McBride & Derevensky, 2009, 2012; Olason et al., 2011; Wood & Williams, 2011); in addition, female online gambling participation rates may be on the rise (McCormack & Griffiths, 2012). Players report key motivations for gambling online to be convenience; anonymity; comfort and ease of being able to gamble wherever, whenever; an aversion to the atmosphere and clientele of land-based venues; a preference for the pace and nature of online play; and the potential for higher wins and lower overall expenditures when gambling online (McBride & Derevensky, 2009; McCormack & Griffiths, 2012; Wood & Williams, 2011; Wood, Williams, & Lawton, 2007). These results are similar to the main reasons cited by youth online gamblers. Of particular concern for this study and, more importantly, a risk for young people, is the online environment that offers an ease of access for a population that spends a significant amount of their days online. More specifically, the same features that make online gambling attractive to youth players, also offer the potential to increase the social costs of gambling—flexibility of use, 24-hour availability, friends also playing, instant reinforcements, large gambling choice, advertising, anonymity, and free practice sites (Derevensky, 2012; Griffiths & Barnes, 2008; Woodruff & Gregory, 2005).

Internationally, community-based adult Internet gambling participation rates range from

⁹ Online Casino City is a widely used gambling portal provided by Casino City Press—a reputable publisher of casino directories (electronic and paper) <http://online.casinocity.com>

1% to 13% (Gainsbury et al., 2012; Kairouz et al., 2012; Olason et al., 2011; Petry, 2006; Wardle, Moody, Griffiths, Orford, & Volberg, 2011; Wood & Williams, 2011). However, when study samples are solely comprised of gamblers, there is an increase in prevalence rates, ranging from 6.7 to 36.5%, suggesting migration to online gambling from those who have initially participated in land-based gambling (Ialomiteanu & Adlaf, 2001; Woodruff & Gregory, 2005)—offering further support for the main reasons why individual gamblers are motivated to play online.

With respect to the prevalence rates of gambling-related harms, McBride and Derevensky (2009) used an online survey to examine Internet gambling behaviour ($N=563$; 382 male; ages 18 and over), finding 23% of respondents identifying as problem gamblers using the DSM-IV definition. Problem gamblers were significantly more likely than social gamblers to spend more time and money gambling, gamble alone, gamble from school, gamble with a smart phone, and gamble online while consuming alcohol or illicit drugs. Risk factors associated with problem online gambling in youth have been found to be 1) greater accessibility, 2) involvement in gambling at an earlier age, 3) gambling when depressed or socially isolated, 4) peer approval or peer pressure, and 5) social acceptability of gambling (Griffiths, 2003; Gupta & Derevensky, 2008; Hardoon & Derevensky, 2002). The risk factors, alongside the similarly reported motivations to gamble in an online environment have led to trepidation among gambling researchers about the unprecedented social trend and access to Internet gambling, particularly with respect to the youth demographic (Derevensky & Gupta, 2007; Griffiths, King, & Delfabbro, 2009; Griffiths & Wood, 2000, 2004; Wood, Griffiths, & Parke, 2007; Wood & Williams, 2009).

Finally, given growing concerns over the substantial increase in the number of gambling opportunities online, researchers in the United Kingdom sought to investigate what safeguards Internet gambling companies were putting in place. Results found that many sites were cause for concern when it came to engaging in socially responsible practices and safeguarding against minors accessing these sites and playing. For example, many sites did not carry any age warnings at all, or made it difficult to determine that underage gambling was prohibited. Additionally, almost all sites examined showed no evidence that gamblers could self-exclude if they felt that their play was becoming problematic (Smeaton & Griffiths, 2004).

2.2.4 Internet Poker

As mentioned previously, over the past decade poker has become a genuinely global phenomenon (Wilson, 2007) attracting individuals both young and old. In examining the differences between poker players and non-poker-playing gamblers, research has found that online poker players were more likely to be male, score higher on a problem gambling severity measure, report problems with interpersonal relationships and illicit drug use, as well as spend more time and more money on gambling per month than their in-person or non-poker-playing counterparts (Mihaylova, Kairouz, & Nadeau, 2012; Shead, Hodgins, & Scharf, 2008). Of particular importance to this study, the social aspects of poker were also highlighted by players as one of the key attractions to the game, with the majority of players indicating that it was through playing with friends that they were first introduced to the game (Shead et al., 2008).

While social interaction is not necessary for online poker players, it has been found to hold meaning in players' experiences of the game. More specifically, research conducted by Kinnunen, Rautio, Alha, & Paavilainen (2012), found that different levels of sociality (before, during, and/or after), influence players social construction of their gambling experiences, making gambling a meaningful part of players' social connections.

Poker is often referred to as a deep game, involving a complex weaving of strategy that can take a great deal of effort and time to master. While speculation and debate exist about the nature of poker and whether performance is a result of skill or chance (Bjerg, 2010; Caillois, 1961; Dedonno & Detterman, 2008; Griffiths et al., 2010; Levitt & Miles, 2011; Mackay, Bard, Bowling, & Hodgins, 2014; Stevens & Young, 2010; Turner, 2008), there is no doubt that poker does involve skill; however, it is not entirely a game of skill and that distinction is undoubtedly blurred and not as dichotomous as the limited research may suggest (Stevens & Young, 2010; Turner, 2008). As the debates about skill versus chance continue to unfold, does the fact that poker involves an element of skill indicate that it is not a form of gambling? As articulated by Turner (2008), gambling does not come down to skill versus chance, but rather is about risking money or something of value on an uncertain event. Even if that uncertainty is reduced somewhat by skill, the outcome is still uncertain.

Further, Siler (2010) sought to analyze roughly twenty-seven million hands of Texas Hold'em to determine the types of strategies used by players at each level of play (i.e., small,

medium, high stakes), in addition to the various payoffs associated with the different strategies at varying levels of play. As Siler (2010) articulated,

Beneath the card game of poker is a meta-level competition of rationalities and handling the burdens of different psychological stressors. As players move up stakes, competitive edges shrink, and uncertainty about the strategic play of opponents and chances for profit increases, commensurating uncertainty into precise, quantitative risk becomes much more difficult. (p. 417)

Results uncover that competitive edges diminish as players move up the levels of play, and tight-aggressive strategies become more prevalent. Specifically, smaller-stake players have more difficulty appropriately weighing incentive structures with frequent small gains and occasional large losses. Siler (2010) argues that while poker is primarily a game of people, “the biggest opponent for many players is themselves, given the challenges of optimizing ones mindset and strategies, both in the card game, and the meta-games of psychology, rationality, and socio-economic arbitrage which hover beneath it” (p. 418).

To determine whether poker players accurately assess their relative skill levels, researchers Mackay et al. (2014), undertook an interdisciplinary investigation in which 278 post-secondary gamblers completed an online questionnaire and played a simulated game of Texas Hold'em poker against a computer-controlled opponent. Findings revealed that online poker players perceive themselves to be more skilled and exhibit higher levels of gambling-related cognitive distortions than off-line poker players, despite showing no superiority in poker ability. The results of their study significantly impacts problem gambling treatment, as it is more difficult to address games like poker because the chance component's interpretive biases may pose difficulty when trying to prevent problems.

A number of psychological and personality factors have been shown to contribute to poker-related harms. Hopley and Nicki (2010) found that impulsivity, boredom, dissociation, and negative affective states such as depression, anxiety, and stress were predictive factors of problem gambling in poker players. Utilizing the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI;

Smith & Wynne, 2002), approximately 9% of poker players were classified as problem gamblers, and 38% as moderate-risk gamblers. Additionally, the amount of time players spent playing online poker was positively correlated with players CPGI score, implying that as time spent playing increased, so did their problem gambling severity index score.

However, there is strong evidence to suggest that poker is challenging our existing theoretical understanding of what a problem gambler looks like, given that many may not be experiencing a loss of money but rather a loss of time, and may not have an irrational perception of the elements of chance versus skill (Bjerg, 2010; Griffiths et al., 2010; Hopley & Nicki, 2010; Wood et al., 2007). In the UK, researchers conducted an online survey of 422 student poker players to shed some light on some of the predicting factors of online poker success and problem gambling. Using the DSM-IV criteria, results indicated that 18% of the students were classified as probable pathological gamblers (i.e., admitting to at least four of the ten categories), with an additional 30% of students claiming two or three of the DSM-IV categories, ranking them as exhibiting some signs of experiencing gambling-related harms. Findings highlighted several key factors of problem online poker players, specifically that they were significantly more likely to 1) swap genders when playing online; 2) be undisciplined and have a tendency to spend over their allocated budgets; and 3) play more frequently for longer periods of time (Griffiths et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2007). Researchers suggest that “there is a complex relationship between time spent playing, winning, and developing gambling problems” (Griffiths et al., 2010, p. 87). To further tease out the ways in which problem gambling may present itself differently in poker players, Bjerg (2010) conducted qualitative interviews with both professional and recreational poker players, half of whom were defined as problem gamblers. His analysis revealed two major claims: 1) that the structural composition of different gambling games significantly effects the ways in which related harms may develop in relation to these games; and 2) that there is a large degree of variability within poker, in which associated problems may arise. Bjerg suggests that while poker players may exhibit cognitive distortions and erroneous beliefs similar to other gamblers, the problem is more profound and the concepts and measurement tools currently being used within the majority of gambling research may not apply to poker players and may need to be re-examined.

Finally, the relationship between distorted cognitions, and motivation on problem gambling in social poker players was further examined by Mitrovic and Brown (2009). Results suggest that

problem gambling is significantly related to distorted cognitions, non-self-determined motivation, and difficulty identifying feelings. Specifically, problem-gambling poker players held significantly more distorted cognitions than non-problem players and, as motivation to gamble increased, so did the severity of problem gambling. However, similarly to Bjerg (2010) and Griffiths et al., (2010), researchers caution transferring current gambling theories to poker, as their results did not replicate past research sufficiently, further questioning what psychological factors truly underlie the development of problem gambling amongst poker players.

2.3 Summary and Gaps in the Gaming and Gambling Literature

Definitions are not simply labels that aid communication; they also influence the very perception of the issues and the way in which they can be measured and evaluated.

(Dickerson et al., 1997, as cited in
Neal, Delfabro & O'Neil, 2005, p. 1)

Whether the available scholarship is referring to gaming or gambling, the literature reveals the complexity and difficulty in drawing clear and universal definitions for what exactly we are talking about. While the definitions reveal more similarities than differences, it is in those small variances where significant debates and discussions are taking place, specifically with respect to youth gambling on social networks. From a constructivist position, the notion of demonstrating a universal definition is futile, given that different interpretations of the same problem arise out of different knowledge within each discipline (Ferrari, 2012), reflective of the multiple stakes in defining the problem. Essentially, we have to recognize the power operating between disciplinary ways of knowing, more specifically, who gets to name the problem and how. For example, defining gambling according to the legal coordinates of consideration, chance, and prize, where the interpretation of prize is limited to only money, demonstrates the power behind who gets to define the problem and, in turn, the harms. This is particularly true when it comes to social network gambling games and youth, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter. For now I will just say, significant implications exist if youth perceive their poker play as a form of gambling, despite whether the games adhere, or not, to the interpreted

traditional legal coordinates. For it is this age demographic (18–24 years), that research identifies as being at-risk both for gambling and for gaming-related harms.

It should be noted that a large majority of the literature is derived from a quantitative approach, seeking to enumerate trends and behaviour isolated from their social relations/contexts and suspended in a particular moment of time (Reith & Dobbie, 2013). Further, I observed that the current literature on youth gambling tends to examine behaviour through a biopsychosocial perspective, and is primarily problem-prevalence focused. For example, most of the research to date, concentrates on gambling behaviours that fall along the right end of the gambling continuum—problematic and pathological in nature. It is important to understand, however, when examining gambling from a public health perspective,¹⁰ non-problematic gambling attitudes and behaviours should not be disregarded as they can positively influence health promotion strategies such as primary prevention initiatives, specifically when dealing with youth gambling participation and protection. “Identification of motives for gambling is necessary to better understand what differentiates problem from non-problem gamblers” (Neighbors, Lostutter, Cronce, & Larimer, 2002).

The literature indicates similar player motivations and potential risk factors for both gamers and gamblers. Specifically, research shows that players are seeking challenge, socialization, skill development, and personal achievement. While most gamblers and gamers can play without experiencing any problems, a small percentage of players will experience associated harms. Risk factors for both excessive gambling and gaming have been identified as boredom, low self-esteem, sensation-seeking, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, and differing levels of sociality.

Poker can be a deeply complex and analytical game, whose popularity cannot be denied, both for players who gamble on free sites and for those who gamble with real money. Social aspects of the game have been shown as one of the key reasons why players love the game. However, research indicates that online poker players consider themselves to be more skilled and exhibit higher levels of cognitive distortions, than their off-line counterparts.

¹⁰ The Public Health Gambling Framework as outlined by Korn and Shaffer (1999), described in detail in the Conceptual and Theoretical Framework section of this proposal.

My research spans across three important and related areas of study—gaming, gambling, and new media, in particular, the SNS Facebook. The existing knowledge from these three areas helps to shape what is known and functions to ground my current study. In the next chapter, I will turn my attention to the current literature available about social network gambling games, in addition to understanding where these games reside—Facebook.

3 Chapter 3: Facebook and Social Network Games/Gambling

In this chapter, I continue the literature review relevant to my study by synthesizing and examining the current scholarship addressing SNSs, particularly Facebook and social network games and gambling.

3.1 Social Networking Sites - Facebook

The undeniable proliferation of Facebook over the past 10 years has led academics to examine factors contributing to its popularity and growing presence in individuals' lives. The burgeoning literature in this area has sought to primarily examine 1) the general use of Facebook through both the demographic and personality characteristics of its users; 2) online privacy issues; and 3) the emotional and social consequences of using Facebook.

Just as an overview, researchers Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) conducted a systematic review of the existing literature on the psychological factors associated with Facebook use, concluding that usage is motivated by two primary needs: the need to belong and the need for self-presentation. In total, the researchers conducted a comprehensive literature search in PubMed, PsychInfo, and the Cochrane Library using the search term, Facebook. In total 279 records were identified and following removal of duplicates and choosing only evidence-based studies, the final systematic review was conducted on 42 records. The authors' conclusion was based on studies specifically focusing on the general demographic characteristics of users, research examining the association between Facebook and extraversion, introversion, and neuroticism, and the roles that narcissism, self-esteem, and self-worth play in Facebook participation. The authors' dual-factor model of Facebook usage outlines the need to belong as

referring to the intrinsic drive to affiliate with others and gain acceptance. The model proposes that as a social being, one's self-esteem, sense of belonging, emotional well-being, sense of life meaning, purpose, self-efficacy, and self-worth are dependent on the social support of others and can be negatively impacted when an individual is ostracized from a social group (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Specifically, Facebook use, to some degree, is motivated by cultural and other sociodemographic factors (e.g., females and ethnic minorities tend to use Facebook more than males and Caucasians; Joiner et al., 2014; Lee-Won, Shim, Joo, & Park, 2014; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012), and Facebook use improves self-esteem by increasing users' sense of belonging (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012).

On the other hand, the authors refer to the need for self-presentation as the continuous process of impression management (Goffman, 1959). Specifically, users may display an idealized, rather than accurate, sense of self through individuals' profiles and activities (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). This need to self-present, in turn, appears to guide individuals' specific behaviours, which appear to be socially desirable identities that individuals aspire to be offline but have not yet been able to embody for one reason or another (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008).

The link between Facebook use and depression and loneliness has been attracting scholarly attention (Song et al., 2014; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015). Recently, Song et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis exploring the relationship between loneliness and Facebook, specifically seeking to answer: Does Facebook make its users lonely, or do lonely people use Facebook? In total, a sample of 18 research effects was produced. Findings revealed a positive correlation between Facebook use and loneliness. Through the testing of a causal model, authors confirm, "lonely individuals who are shy and have low social support may turn to Facebook to compensate for their lack of social skills and/or social networks in face-to-face settings" (p. 450).

Finally, the dominant role that Facebook now plays in the lives of individuals has raised legitimate questions about the extent to which Facebook content relates to real-life health behaviours (van Hoof, Bekkers & van Vuuren, 2014), specifically with respect to adolescents and youth. Fogel and Nehmad (2009) examined risk-taking, trust, and privacy concerns with regard to social networking sites amongst 205 college students. Overall, results highlighted that youth with profiles on social networking sites have significantly greater risk-taking attitudes than those who

do not, more specifically though, that men have greater risk-taking attitudes than women. With respect to privacy concerns, the study found that in general women held more concerns about privacy on social networking sites than men, and that men were more likely than women to report displaying personal information such as phone numbers and home addresses on their profiles.

Youth have generally been known to engage in risky behaviours (e.g., alcohol, gambling, sexual experimentation). Researchers van Hoof et al. (2014) wanted to explore the extent to which information disclosed publicly on Facebook provides a reliable indication of real-life risk behaviours, specifically, alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use, and nutrition and participation in sports. Using an online questionnaire and a content analysis of each respondent's Facebook profile, findings testify to the ability to use Facebook content as an indication for real-life health behaviours. Specifically, an individual's smoking and sports behaviour can be predicted reliably, based on Facebook content, and profile elements relating to alcohol usage are indicators of real-life drinking. Illicit drug use and unhealthy eating habits were not found to be predictable by Facebook content. While gambling was not a behaviour studied, findings suggest that further exploration into this specific risk behaviour is warranted.

This review of the Facebook literature is not meant to be extensive, but rather to highlight the multitude of influences that Facebook has on individuals. Facebook use is now deeply woven into people's daily practices. The embedding of gambling games within existing social networks, promoting social interaction, adds a new layer of risk and concern for public health, which will be elaborated on in the following sections.

3.2 Free-to-Play (F2P) Social Network Games

Recently, Facebook announced its Games of the Year that, according to Facebook developer Morris (2014), "define our platform and captivate our players" (para.1). Games were chosen based on player ratings, strength of Facebook implementation, growth, and overall quality. As Morris further proclaims, 2014 witnessed interest from players in various genres and content of games; however, Facebook states they specifically experienced a "continued health of the social casino category" (Morris, 2014, para.1). For example, the Game of the Year title went to Cookie Jam, a colourful, level-based matching game that has players create matches with

specific ingredients in order to complete recipes. Appearing on the market in spring 2014, the game boasted well over 5 million players in only a matter of months. ZP was listed among 2014's Hall of Fame Games, designated as one of the oldest games on the Facebook platform, and still able to draw a crowd.

While the literature on SNGs is recent and still emerging, research has begun to examine players' experiences and motivations to play (Boudreau & Consalvo, 2014; Kowert, Domahidi, Festl, & Quandt, 2014; Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2012; Paavilainen et al., 2013; Shin & Shin, 2011; Wohn, 2012; Wohn & Lee, 2013) and the social and motivational factors associated with game mechanics and design (Groves et al., 2014; Lewis, Wardrip-Fruin, & Whitehead, 2012), all of which has sparked a dialogue about whether or not SNGs should be considered real games based on their true game qualities (Consalvo & Paul, 2013).

Given that social network games are embedded within SNSs, it is understandable that individuals' motivations to play have been found to heighten social interaction, competition, and pride amongst players (Lee et al., 2012; Paavilainen et al., 2013; Shin & Shin, 2011; Wohn, Lampe, Wash, Ellison, & Vitak, 2011). Additionally, social gamers' strong desires to participate have been attributed to an inclination to buy and swap virtual goods with friends, (Paavilainen et al., 2013; Wohn & Lee, 2013), as a way to pass time (Lee et al., 2012; Paavilainen et al., 2013; Wohn, 2012; Wohn et al., 2011; Wohn & Lee, 2013) or alleviate social problems (Wohn & Lee, 2013), and because the games are a playful and fun form of entertainment, resulting from a perceived in-game flow experience (Lee et al., 2012; Shin & Shin, 2011). A recent study by Wohn (2012) revealed that the strength of habitual play was a strong predictor of how long users spent playing. Another study conducted by Wohn and colleagues, found that SNG initiation was a result of being "friended" into the game as a way for fellow players to receive recruitment benefits within the game (i.e., extra currency). Once playing, users developed strong relationships with fellow players (Wohn et al., 2011).

Given the obvious popularity in SNGs, it is not surprising that concerns exist about the impact of game play on users' socialization. Kowert et al. (2014) set out to examine the relationship between social online gameplay and relationship outcomes. Findings indicate "increased social online game play corresponds with smaller social circles (i.e., less confidants) of a lower quality (i.e., less emotional support, lower total support) for adolescent players" (p.

388). However, the authors stress the need for further research into whether a causal relationship exists, as well as the potential impact this may have on young players.

As discussed previously, the purpose and goal for many game designers is to create engaging and memorable experiences for players, primarily achieved through various game mechanics diffused into the structure of the game. To date, the structural game mechanics of a variety of popular F2P games has just begun to receive attention (Groves et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2012). However, studies have not examined the specific genre of social network gambling games. Utilizing the taxonomy developed by King et al. (2010), Groves et al. (2014) sought to examine the structural characteristics of two Facebook F2P games—a tile matching game and a simulation role-playing game (RPG)—to investigate their potential to encourage problem levels of play amongst users. As in studies examining digital games (Karlsen, 2011; Wang & Sun, 2011), the authors found that both genres of games used various reward and social features to encourage game play, which, in turn, could potentially lead users to play at problematic levels. Finally, Lewis et al. (2012), sought to analyze motivational game design patterns in the popular “Ville-style” games¹¹ (Farmville, CityVille, CastleVille, etc.). Results illustrate how these popular SNGs employ social strategies in prominent ways. For example, players have an opportunity to fully engage in a game’s theme by collecting and decorating mechanisms. The authors argue that “the value of SNGs to players isn’t contained within the games themselves, but as part and parcel of the relationship building and maintenance” (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 178) within the game community.

3.2.1 Free-to-Play (F2P) Revenue Model

One of the salient characteristics of SNGs is their F2P revenue model. The majority of F2P games on Facebook, allow individuals to acquire and play the game free of charge, however players are encouraged to buy virtual currency and goods during game play (Alha, Koskinen,

¹¹ All Ville games examined fall under the larger rubrics of Zynga’s game portfolio and were chosen because, at the time of the study, Zynga was the most popular game developer on Facebook.

Paavilainen, Hamari, & Kinnunen, 2014). While real-money trade of virtual goods within games first emerged in 1999 in massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) such as EverQuest, trading already existed between players—essentially players listing their possessions on eBay and other similar sites for fellow gamers to bid on them. In the F2P games, operators generate significant revenues by allowing players to enter the game for free, with the expectation that some users will spend money on virtual good microtransactions (Hamari & Lehdonvirta, 2010). According to a recent industry study by SuperData Research (2012), most players spend only \$1–\$5 a month, and generate less than 15% of the games revenue. *Whales*, an industry term for players who are considered big spenders, represent less than 15% of a game’s paying users, spending more than \$25 per month; however, they generate more than 50% of a typical game’s revenue. It has been reported that Zynga’s popular Farmville game, sells approximately 38,000 virtual items per second. “Even if every sale was only a penny, that adds up to \$11 billion in one year, if that volume is kept up” (Rood, 2011, as cited in Owens, 2011, p. 703).

Virtual items, purchased by players as part of gameplay or for aesthetic and social purposes, tend to function in the same kind of socially-constructed roles that material goods play in the real world (Castronova, Williams, Shen, Ratan, Xiong, Huang, & Keegan, 2009; Goode, Shailer, Wilson, & Jankowshi, 2014; Hamari, & Lehdonvirta, 2010; Lehdonvirta, 2009, 2010; Lehdonvirta, Wilska, & Johnson, 2009). For example, virtual goods help build and express a player’s personal identity and social status, are used as tokens and gifts sent and received between players, and help solve in-game problems (Lehdonvirta, 2010; Lehdonvirta et al., 2009). Lehdonvirta et al. (2009) argue that virtual goods have a social life beyond their physical qualities. “When we label them ‘virtual’, we do not mean to imply that they are less ‘real’—only that they are computer-mediated. If there is an unreal air to how intangible objects can be worth lots of money, it is an observation regarding the nature of our consumer culture in general, of which virtual consumerism is only a naked example. In this sense, all consumption is virtual” (p. 1074).

Researchers Hamari and Lehdonvirta (2010) set out to examine what leads consumers to purchase virtual goods in online games. Deviating from individual motivations, researchers focused on the rules and mechanics that designers build into the games to promote virtual good purchases. The authors state, “when designing a virtual world, its rules and internal economy can be regarded as marketing activities concerned with creating the underlying need and conditions

for customers to be incentivized to buying virtual goods” (p. 17). Findings provide an alternative perspective, illustrating patterns and game mechanics in two categories. The first category consists of game mechanics that create segmentation of users and enable differentiation of virtual goods, for example, avatar types to generate player differences, stratified content to provoke incentives for repeated purchases, status-restricted items to promote desire for particular goods and enforce segmentation, more challenging content, and multi-dimensional gameplay. The second category includes mechanics to foster desire for virtual goods and encourage repeated purchases such as planned obsolescence of items, artificial scarcity to promote exclusiveness, alterations to existing content, special-occasion goods, and inconvenient gameplay elements to create additional need to purchase virtual goods and services (Hamari & Lehdonvirta, 2010).

Despite incredible financial success for game developers, the F2P revenue model has garnered some criticism for exploiting existing social connections in one form or another (Bogost, 2010, 2014; Shin & Shin, 2011). In early 2014, the European Commission published a press release announcing that, as a result of significant consumer complaints, it would initiate an investigation into the marketing practices of the F2P revenue model, stating that “children are particularly vulnerable to marketing from ‘free-to-download’ games, which are not ‘free-to-play’” (para.1). Consumer complaints about the marketing model have been raised about 1) misleading consumers as to the true costs; 2) the vulnerability of players (both children and adults) to be persuaded to purchase in-game items; 3) the default app settings that don’t require explicit consumer consent; and 4) the lack of clear contact information for consumers to submit queries and complaints (European Commission, 2014).

Finally, Finnish researchers Alha et al. (2014) explored the F2P revenue model from the perspectives of game professionals. Interview results indicate that game stakeholders hold conflicting attitudes towards F2P games. On the one hand, game professionals felt that F2P games allowed a wide variety of players to experience the game without having to pay upfront and to decide if they want to eventually pay for or not, leading to a much better and more fair game environment. Conversely, concerns from game professionals arose around issues such as aggressive monetization, poor game design, and the ability of users to pay-to-win, meaning “players with the most money to use get unfair advantage over players who do not use money” (Alha et al., 2014, p. 4). Game professionals didn’t specifically articulate that the F2P games were unethical; however, they described some issues as morally questionable, particularly the

practice of marketing to children when the concepts of money might not yet be clear to them, and the potential for addictive gameplay in some players. The creation of responsible gaming policies, similar to responsible gambling policies, such as setting monetary and time limits, and flagging players with unusual spending patterns were suggested as possible solutions to protect vulnerable players.

3.3 Free-to-Play (F2P) Social Network Gambling

Classification and taxonomies of social games have been presented to help bring clarity and act as a framework within which to explore social gambling games (Gainsbury et al., 2014; Parke et al., 2012). Parke et al. (2012) put forward a classification continuum presenting nine categories, ranging from what we traditionally understand as online real-money gambling, through to SNS gaming. Each category varies according to the game platform, the nature of social interaction, and the possibility of real-money rewards. Building on Parke and colleagues' (2012) classification of social gambling, researchers Gainsbury et al. (2014a) developed a hierarchical taxonomy of social casino games to systematize gambling-themed activities based on structural characteristics such as the requirement for a monetary payment, the roles of chance and skill, the game platform, and the centrality of a gambling-theme to the game. Their taxonomy suggests that the criteria for what differentiates online gambling from social network gambling games include "the requirement for payment, the role of skill, the type of platform, and the centrality of the gambling theme" (p. 1). The authors present this taxonomy as a living classification system, expected to evolve in response to technological and regulatory advancements, in addition to user behaviour and preferences.

While both classification systems are conceptually accurate, their creations were based on limited published papers and industry reports, while also being framed "against a traditional legal coordinate - consideration, chance, and prize" (Owens, 2010, p. 670), which ultimately frames these social network gambling games as not gambling. Social network gambling, which exposes people of all ages to gambling-like experiences, currently challenges various moral, ethical, legal, and regulatory issues (Griffiths, 2013). For example, from a legal perspective, the definition of gambling is strictly related to players making a monetary wager in relation to in-game outcomes (Gainsbury et al., 2014a). This underlying legal principle has elicited commentary suggesting that

the social interaction, rather than the prizes, is clearly the players' main reward for participating (Owens, 2010). Further, these frameworks have not been developed through rigorous academic research that has examined the lived experiences of players, particularly young people, and their motivations to play.

To date, the most comprehensive analysis of the social network gambling industry heralds from a blue paper put forward by Morgan Stanley (2012). The analysis offers three prominent takeaway messages: 1) social network gambling overshadows real-money online gambling operators; 2) regulation would change the face of the industry; and 3) consolidation within the markets looks set to continue. The report estimates that approximately 12% of the world's population plays at least one or more SNGs a month. More specifically, 20% of these players participate in some form of casino-style activity. "This suggests that 173 million people (2.6% of the population) are involved in soft social gambling of some sort. This dwarfs the estimated 50 million people taking part in real money online gambling" (Morgan Stanley, 2012, p. 5).

The Morgan Stanley (2012) report refers to SNGs as a soft form of gambling. However, the majority of key industry stakeholders do not perceive these games to be considered gambling, currently positioning the industry in an unregulated grey zone. The lack of regulations means that social network gambling operators can target customers in any jurisdiction or demographic, especially youth, which legal online gamblers are unable to do. The authors predict the industry will see regulation in the upcoming years as a result of several factors, specifically, the "potential to 'teach young people to gamble', the potential to spend significant sums on social gambling, and to turn virtual chips into real money (even if indirectly)" (Morgan Stanley, 2012, p. 6).

Social network gambling is still in its infancy, when compared to the traditional gambling industry, and is thriving where online gambling is currently restricted (Morgan Stanley, 2012). It is not surprising then, that the expansion of social network gambling has outpaced academic research. To facilitate a clearer understanding of what we currently know about the social gambling industry and to speculate on the level of potential implications for risk, harm, and responsible play, academic research is beginning to surface (Derevensky et al., 2013; Parke et al., 2012; Wohl et al., 2014).

The research indicates mixed evidence concerning our understanding of the profile of the typical social media gambler. For example, there are studies that suggest that anywhere from 33–

55% of young people surveyed in Canada and the US report playing some form of free-to-play gambling games online (Derevensky, 2012; Derevensky & Gupta, 2006; Meerkamper, 2010). Within the UK, the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute (Ipsos MORI, 2011, 2012, 2013) commissioned by the National Lottery Commission, conducts a yearly survey with secondary students, aged 11–15, to explore young people’s gambling behaviours and to study trends over time. Their 2013 (Ipsos MORI, 2013) survey revealed that 13% of adolescents had played free or practice gambling games in the previous week, most often on the Facebook platform—which is consistent with the previous two-year waves (2011–2012). However, data revealed in a recently commissioned report by the International Social Games Association (ISGA) revealed that “approximately 0.74% of the total Digsino player numbers were under the age of 18 years, and only 0.56% of these players paid to play Digsino games” (Miller & Howell, 2014, p. 19). Real-player data from over 12 million players, drawn from five different Digsino game operators across four markets—US, UK, EU, and Australia—was provided to Miller and Howell and stratified according to two classifications: age (13–18 years and over 18) and expenditure (free and paid playing time). As noted, this report was commissioned by ISGA (International Social Games Association, 2014) whose mandate is to “act as a unified and consistent voice to represent the legal, regulatory, and commercial interest of social games companies world wide” (para. 1), and whose executive members include key SNG developers such as Zynga, Plumbee, Playtika, Bally Technologies, MGM, and IGT.

Given the discrepancy in participation rates, industry data should be interpreted with some degree of caution, as the figures are not available for scrutiny (Derevensky et al., 2014). For example, I question the data provided to Miller and Howell (2014), specifically with respect to players’ ages, as Facebook does not have a true age verification system. Facebook’s current policy prohibits anyone under the age of 13 from operating an account; however, the literature informs us that plenty of kids under the age of 13 have Facebook accounts, requiring only a name and an email account (Gilbert, 2008; Livingstone, Haddon, Gorzig, & Olafsson, 2011), both of which are easily obtained providing false information. Additionally, many social network gambling players create different profiles to skirt privacy issues. Therefore, many accounts may not reflect players’ real demographic data.

Recent research out of Australia (Gainsbury et al., 2014b), highlights that social network gamblers more closely resemble Internet gamblers than do patrons of land-based casinos—

tending to be younger, less likely to be married or widowed, but more likely to be either living with a partner or single. Social network gambling was related to high gambling involvement and gambling problems, prompting authors to suggest that consumer protection measures should be strengthened so that social network gambling players aren't encouraged to migrate to real-money Internet gambling sites. Their study reported that the average age of a social network gambler was 43 years old, suggesting that social network gamblers are not limited to young adults. However, it should be noted that the study used a random-digit-dialing telephone survey of adults aged 18–100 years. In total 2,010 gamblers were surveyed, only 36 of which were social network gamblers between the ages of 18 and 24 years. Such low participation rates for this age demographic would definitely influence the reported demographic characteristics of players and is likely a result of many young adults having abandoned landlines. It is estimated that at least 19% of the Australian population are mobile-only users, with “18–24 year olds the largest group to take up this trend” (Tapsell, 2013).

Whether it is on a free practice site or a regular site, online poker has proven to be a popular social activity for many young people. When you take the potential for winning money out of the equation, what motivates individuals to play? Researchers Bradley and Schroeder (2009) conducted a covert ethnographic study of players in free-to-play poker tournaments. The authors found that there are three main motivations among poker players: 1) to sharpen skills for later migration onto the pay sites, 2) for sociability, and 3) to achieve the status of a regular player. While their methodology did not focus on Facebook poker, and prevented them from definitively identifying the exact motivation for each player, their fieldwork was able to shed some light on the motivations for playing free poker by identifying three general domains of information. Other studies revealed that the primary motivating force behind player participation was to relieve boredom, followed by the desire to have fun, socialize, and develop a skilled level of play (Meerkamper, 2010; Wohl et al., 2014).

3.4 Convergence Between Social Network Games and Gambling

The courtship between gambling and gaming has created boundaries between the two entities that are both contested and fluid (Cassidy, 2013). It has been argued that digital gaming and gambling share similar psychological, structural, and situational risk factors (Griffiths &

Wood, 2000; King et al., 2010; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). This budding area of scholarly inquiry contributes to the notion of a convergence between gambling-related activities and online gaming activities, essentially meaning that it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate the two activities (Delfabbro, King, Lambos, & Puglies, 2009; King, Delfabbro, Kaptsis, & Zwaans, 2014). As articulated by Delfabbro et al. (2009), “it is possible, that playing videogames provides exposure to a style of entertainment (watching graphics, pressing buttons, obtaining outcomes) that is readily transferred to gaming machines of various forms” (p. 393).

Of particular concern, is the potential transition of players from casino-style games found on SNSs, over to actual real-money gambling (Derevensky et al., 2013; Gainsbury et al., 2014a; Gupta, Derevensky, & Wohl, 2013; Kim et al., 2014; King et al., 2014; Morgan Stanley, 2012; Ozuem & Prasad, 2014; Parke et al., 2012; Wohl et al., 2014), especially among today’s young people. One of the first studies to examine the co-occurrence of social network gambling and real-money gambling comes from the UK (Ipsos MORI, 2011). Research found that children ages 11–15 years who play free-to-play gambling games, show a greater propensity to engage in real-money gambling, suggesting that “children may get the same buzz from playing free games as gambling for money” (Ipsos MORI, 2011, p. 3). It should be noted, however, that while the survey indicates a propensity for real-money gambling, it does not mean that playing free-to-play social network gambling games within the past week, causes young people to migrate their play over to real money. For some young people this may be true; however significantly more research is required to thoroughly understand the sequence of transitioning.

King et al. (2014) sought to further examine any associations between adolescent participation in social network gambling and monetary gambling in Australian adolescents aged 12–17 years. A total of 1287 adolescents participated in a survey addressing questions around social network gambling, monetary gambling, pathological gambling, and various mental health issues. Results indicate that individuals at risk for developing gambling problems were approximately three times more likely to have played social network gambling games than their non-gambling counterparts. Regression models confirm that “exposure to or past involvement in simulated gambling activities was a significant predictor of pathological gambling risk” (King et al., 2014, p. 310). Authors warned that the currently unregulated, social network gambling games could lead to a new profile of adult gambler, distinct in terms of behavioural schedules of betting

activity, socio-cultural perceptions of gambling, and propensity for gambling harm (King et al., 2014).

Finally, Cassidy (2013) undertook an extensive qualitative study to examine the coming together of social gaming and real-money gambling by attending 30 conferences and conducting 20 interviews with newcomers to the gambling industry who had backgrounds in the media, console gaming, financial services, and marketing, in addition to, carrying out 50 semi-structured interviews with individuals including traditional gambling operators, gaming lawyers, investors, politicians, regulators, journalists, researchers, and treatment providers. She argues, “changes in the gambling ecosystem are a result of complex interactions between producers, consumers, existing products, regulation and good fortune” (Cassidy, 2013, p. 78). With respect to convergence, she concludes that as a result of neither industry breaking down the distinctions between gambling and play, convergence is superficial. Specifically, she states that

it includes gambling operators drawing on the “hooks” of social gaming mechanics and using social gaming sites to showcase products that are available in land-based casinos in jurisdictions where online gambling is illegal. It also included social game developers producing casino games that draw heavily on the familiar anticipations of gambling and are more derivative than they are disruptive. (p. 87)

3.5 Summary and Gaps in the Social Network Gambling Literature

Social network gambling games have found themselves teetering between two worlds—games and gambling—on the popular Facebook platform. As the field has only recently emerged, scholarship has yet to catch up; however, studies are beginning to materialize, particularly with respect to the emerging literature on youth who play social network gambling games. To date, the majority of available scholarship seeking to understand social network gambling has concentrated on the convergence between SNGs and gambling, particularly focusing on whether or not social network gambling games influence players to migrate over to real-money online gambling.

While this is an important area of concentration, studies need to complement this line of inquiry by examining the lived experience of the young people who play these games. This is crucial if we are to seek a more holistic understanding of how social network gambling games function in our society, particularly with respect to the discourses surrounding the games and how these discourses shape youths' meaning making, which, in turn, influences behavioural choices. For example, how do young people perceive their play—as a form of gambling, or a type of gaming? Regardless of legal definitions, discussed in the previous chapter, a more holistic approach to understanding social network gambling will include the voices of the players, and their perceptions of their gameplay. Ultimately, it comes down to this: If a person who is playing these games thinks they are gambling, then he/she is gambling! These perceptions have significant implications for players' behavioural choices, particularly in the case of young people, who may be playing poker on social networking sites to develop the necessary skills to migrate their play over to real-money poker sites.

Individuals, particularly young people, are living their lives online—purchasing and selling products, digesting the news, acquiring information, viewing television and movies, listening to music, participating in political processes, and communicating (Derevensky et al., 2013). SNSs have become firmly embedded with the culture of our society. SNG's popularity and financial success is unprecedented, using and capitalizing on the power of social networks and personal connections, generating a new cultural position of games in society and, along with that, a potentially new demographic of the SNG player. A body of research is beginning to accumulate on SNGs; however most studies focus solely on non-casino-style games. Wohn et al. (2011) states, “what constitutes a SNG is determined more by technical aspects of how it is accessed and distributed, not by the genre of the game” (p. 3). Given the strong level of concern about social network gambling games' potential to impact vulnerable populations, particularly youth (Derevensky et al., 2013; European Commission, 2014; Gupta, Derevensky, & Wohl, 2013; Kim et al., 2014; King et al., 2014; Morgan Stanley, 2012; Parke et al., 2012; Wohl et al., 2014), the need to examine this specific genre of SNG is significant.

Despite conflicting data representing youth participation rates in social network gambling games, today's young people have high exposure to these unregulated casino-style games which are infused with game mechanics to create a game experience which encourages excessive play. My study is grounded in the literature from a variety of disciplines (e.g., new media and the

behavioural and social sciences), which makes it uniquely situated to examine the convergence between gambling and gaming and, more importantly, to not only explore youths' understandings of playing poker on *Facebook*, but also to frame my study within the powerful influence of social networking sites and the cultural discourses that are created by these new gambling games. The next chapter will examine the interplay of theoretical contributions that have contributed to this study.

4 Chapter 4: Theoretical Underpinnings

Social gambling games on Facebook are uniquely situated at the intersection of several disciplines, specifically, new media studies and the behavioural and social sciences. The evolution of these games outpaces the academic literature, therefore no particular theory, or set of theories dominates the available literature. Positioned within a conceptual framework of gambling as a public health issue, several interdisciplinary theories were woven deeply into all stages of my study to help develop a more robust understanding of social network gambling games from the perspective of the youth players, and also of the multiple levels of influence on youths' gameplay and perceptions (see Figure 1). In particular, I am drawing directly from self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), Erving Goffman's frame analysis (1986), and the social networking theory of homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Monge & Contractor, 2003).

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the three sets of theories used to underpin my study and will end with my research questions and objectives.

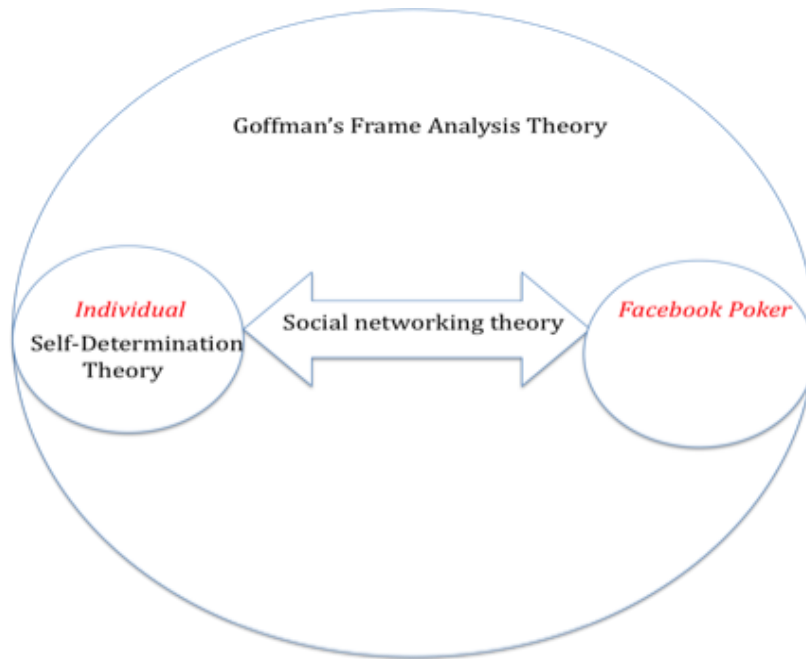


Figure 1. Interplay of Theoretical Contributions

4.1 Theoretical Positioning

Theories were used to provide context and to shape my thinking with respect to the development of my research questions and objectives, taking into consideration the current state of knowledge, and knowledge gaps, about social network gambling games and young players. And, more specifically, to go beyond the individual level of conception that dominates the current literature, by helping me assess and comprehend the multiple levels of influence and connections between people and their environments. During parts of my study, the theories also provide constructs to inform the development of interview guides, and to inform and anchor analysis and discussion.

4.1.1 Self-Determination Theory

At its foundation, self-determination theory (SDT), seeks to understand human self-motivation—why we do what we do. SDT asserts that self-motivation, rather than external motivation “is at the heart of creativity, responsibility, healthy behaviour, and lasting change” (Deci & Flaste,

1995, p. 9) and can be achieved through promoting personal autonomy and agency. It focuses on the dialectic interaction between an active, integrating human nature and social contexts that either nurture or undermine people's attempts to master and integrate their experiences into a coherent sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2002). SDT postulates that individuals have a need to feel self-determined and competent when interacting with their environment and that motivational needs such as competence (confident and masterful), autonomy (volitional and self-expressive), and relatedness (close and connected) are fundamental for an individual's coherent sense of self and functionality, which leads to increased life satisfaction. SDT posits these basic needs are not discrete variables but rather are complex and dynamic, as they can change over time, and are systematic in nature.

Motivation has been defined as “the internal and/or external forces that trigger, direct, intensify, and lead to the persistence of a behaviour” (Clarke, 2004, p. 323) and it ranges along a self-determination continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 16). At the left end of the continuum is amotivation (i.e., the absence of choice), moving right towards extrinsic motivation (i.e., deriving from factors outside the individual). Finally at the far right end of the continuum lie intrinsic types of motivation (i.e., gleaned from factors residing inside the individual and resulting in higher degrees of self-determination; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic motivation is characterized by four types of regulation—external, introjected, identified, and integrated (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

To help identify youths' motivations at the individual level, self-determination theory was used to inform and shape the development of my research. Specifically, to craft the research questions and interview guides to help delineate the role of emotional needs such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and in helping to anchor the analysis and discussion during both phases of my research. To date, SDT strongly underpins the work of many game designers and developers to help create a deeper and longer-lasting gameplay experience (Deterding et al., 2011; Kim, 2013; McGonigal, 2011; Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006), and it is used by scholars to discuss “the motivational pull of video games” (Ryan et al., 2006, p. 348). During my virtual ethnographic journey of playing ZP in Phase One, SDT was a useful framework within which to understand the environmental design and influence that youth would be exposed to while playing. Further, SDT contributed to the discussion of what motivates youth to play ZP and other similar casino-style games on SNSs.

Through the development of the Gambling Motivation Scale (GMS; Chantal, Vallerand, & Vallieres, 1994), previous research demonstrates that motivation is a key component of gambling involvement and successfully illustrates the utility of SDT when explaining the relationship between the different types of motivation and the consequences of gambling participation (Back, Lee, & Stinchfield, 2010; Chantal et al., 1994, Chantal, Vallerand, & Vallieres, 1995; Clarke 2004, 2008; Ladouceur, Arsenault, Dube, Freeston, & Jacques, 1997; Martin, Lichtenberg, & Templin, 2011).

According to SDT, intrinsic motivations refer to motivations that originate intrapsychically within an individual when engaging in an activity. With respect to gambling, intrinsic motivations would be exemplified by gamblers who wager for fun and/or excitement, and the enjoyment of learning, exploring, or trying to comprehend something new. The accomplishment of such tasks, leads individuals to find pleasure in surpassing themselves in the course of their betting activities (Chantal et al., 1995). Conversely, extrinsic motivation pertains to motivating factors that are outside of the individual, for instance, “to obtain rewards or avoid punishments” (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 17). For example, individuals may gamble 1) to gain monetary reward (external regulation); 2) for social approval (identified regulation); and 3) to remove tension caused by a self-imposed guilt (introjected regulation, e.g., playing the same lottery numbers because they would feel guilty if they did not; Chantal et al., 1995; Clarke, 2004).

It is worth noting that, originally, SDT offered me a valuable framework within which to unravel the design elements of ZP, and understand youths’ motivations for participating in Facebook poker, and the degree to which these needs intersected with their behaviour. While this was useful in its inception and directed me to where I needed to go, it became evident further along in my study that examining youths’ motivations would only tell a portion of the story about why young people are playing poker on Facebook and would need to be complimented with a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the youth. What was missing was how youth perceived their play. In essence, how they were actively making sense of their participation in relation to the industry, key stakeholders, and media frames they were exposed to while playing.

4.1.2 Erving Goffman's Frame Analysis

The sociological theorist Erving Goffman has contributed significantly to media and communication studies, in particular through his work on frame analysis, which is the study of the organization of experience. Seeking to answer the questions “What is going on here?” and “Under what circumstances do we think things are real?” Goffman emphasizes reflexive aspects of social life—that is, the ways in which what we think about what we do affect the performance of the activity itself (Manning, 1992). In his own words, Goffman's (1986), aim for frame analysis is to

isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events and to analyze the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject. I start with the fact that from an individual's particular point of view, while one thing may momentarily appear to be what is really going on, in fact what is actually happening is plainly a joke, a dream, or an accident, or a mistake, or a misunderstanding, or a deception, or a theatrical performance, and so forth.... My phrase “frame analysis” is a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organizations of experience. (pp.10-11)

Drawing from the work of Gregory Bateson (2000), Goffman seeks to understand the context-dependency of meaning with the use of frames. In essence, frames are pre-existing stereotypes that assist individuals in responding to and clarifying experiences. Frames are fluid, differing across cultures and groups, and are established from previous experience, media, journalists, and interactions and conventions in subcultures such as social networking sites. In effect, frames are everywhere.

Individuals perceive their environments through two primary frameworks: natural and social. Primary frameworks are schemata of interpretation that individuals apply to help locate, perceive, identify, and label their experiences, thereby taking something meaningless and making it personally meaningful (Goffman, 1986). Natural frameworks “identify occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, ‘purely physical.’ Such unguided events are ones understood to be due totally, from start to finish, to ‘natural’ determinants.... An example would be the state of the weather as given in a report” (p. 22). Social frameworks, on the other hand,

provide background and context for understanding interactions that take place between humans, “a guided doing,” as Goffman (1986) would say. A guided doing can be “coaxed, flattered, affronted, and threatened” (p. 22), in essence, it subjects the doer to standards and social appraisal. For example, a guided doing, or social framework, would be the newscast reporting of the weather by the reporter.

Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman (1986), frame analysis played an instrumental role in helping to elucidate both the ZP game context and how youth perceive their poker play, by significantly guiding my analysis and discussion during both phases of my study. “Goffman teaches us some basics of “reading/analyzing visual materials” (Clarke, 2005, p. 211), by focusing on ways in which power is commonly expressed. This enabled me to identify and examine the influences (as a result of design and intention) of the social frameworks (i.e., the framing of the content presented—its style, message, and channel) of the ZP game application that youth are exposed to when playing poker on Facebook. Additionally, frame analysis allowed me to better examine and understand how individual players’ and key stakeholders’ frames are congruent or divergent from the frames produced via the Facebook application.

Framing is not a novel concept and can be found in studies of media and communication (König, 2006; Scheufele, 1999), psychology of choice and decisions (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986), social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000), and, quite extensively, in gaming studies (Calleja, 2007; Consalvo, 2009; Deterding, 2009; Fine, 1983; Tobin, 2012). For example, Deterding (2009) proposes theorizing video gaming as a frame, a social interaction consisting of mutual expectations organizing our experience and behaviour in relation to a specific type of situation and/or activity.

Finally, and of particular importance to my study, Goffman (1986) states that frames may be unconsciously adopted in the course of the communication process; however, in terms of social frameworks, the element of human agency implies that frames may be deliberately manufactured to shape and influence how people perceive certain issues or topics (i.e., *fabrications*). In Goffman’s (1986) own words, fabrications refer to “the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what is going on here” (p. 83). Miller and Ross (2004) point out that framing theory attempts to delineate the often-subtle ways in which texts and images, serve “as

mechanisms of cultural definition and control ... Focusing on how message construction—in terms of meaning, internal structure, and physical presentation—affects public perceptions of the information processed” (Miller & Ross, 2004, p. 246). In essence, Goffman’s frame analysis assists in the understanding of how youth participants make meaning of or perceive their poker gameplay, in relation to the mechanisms of culture and control of the virtual environment, as created by Zynga. In addition to, how the mechanisms of culture and control of the virtual environment created by Zynga, influence the individualized motivations of young people to play poker.

4.1.3 Social Networking Theory of Homophily

Technology and online social networks have become a vital component in the daily lives of young people. Social networks are “patterns of contact that are created by the flow of messages among communicators through space and time” (Monge & Contractor, 2003, p. 3). However, they have become more than just a means for connecting with friends—this new digital environment shapes the everyday practices of young people and offers them a variety of leisure activities that are accessible 24/7. It has been proposed that one of the reasons for social networks’ popularity may be because they are technically based manifestations of human tendencies (Neal, 2007).

Social network gambling games on Facebook consist of networks in which players interact both with each other and with the system. Specifically, the games are embedded in and drawing upon existing social networks, which have the potential to spread virally (Wei, Yang, Adamic, Araújo & Rekhi, 2010). Social networking theory is a “set of theories, methods, and techniques used to understand social relationships and how these relationships might influence individual and group behavior” (Valente, Gallaher, & Mouttapa, 2004, p. 1686).

Homophily is a principle in social networking theory that seeks to explain predisposed reasons for why individuals choose certain people to befriend. It is based on that old adage, “birds of a feather flock together”—that is, we instinctively seek out relationships with others who are similar to ourselves; resulting in more homogenous personal networks, with respect to many sociodemographic, intrapersonal, and behavioural characteristics (McPherson et al., 2001;

Monge & Contractor, 2003). “Homophily limits people’s social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information that they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience” (McPherson et al, 2001, p. 415). The principle of (behavioural and influence) homophily theoretically informs this study in three ways. First, it was used as a key underlying concept to comprehend the potency of peer context; in particular that peer groups and friendship networks play an important role in influencing young peoples’ behaviour choices by associating with peers who share similar behaviour patterns. Second, it helped anchor and guide my data analysis and discussion by focusing on how social influence and diffusion in SNGs use the viral and social relationships within the game design for marketing and personal purposes. As observed by boyd (2014), “although the technology makes it possible *in principle* to socialize with anyone online, in practice, teens connect to the people that they know and with whom they have the most in common” (p. 166), reinforcing the homophilous social networks that they experience in their everyday lives with individuals who allow them to feel safe, confident, and secure.

Since the convergence of games and online social networking platforms started, one of the key characteristics that make playing poker on Facebook unique is that it is currently the only poker platform that fully harnesses communication networks and the viral power behind community and social relations. This has significant implications for not only how youth are introduced to ZP, but also their continued engagement and how they frame their gameplay.

Social games have become embedded in and thus reliant on existing social networks often referred to as “turn-based” (Wei et al., 2010), essentially meaning that players take turns. While players taking turns in games is not new, the engineering and capitalizing on social connections to create, enhance, and amplify a player’s ZP gameplay experience is new. Examples of this include the awareness (acquired via news feeds, etc.) of others’ (i.e., friends) actions in games, and the “enframing” in games—taking the contexts of interaction that don’t have to do with the game, and injecting them with the spirit of potential use. As Bogost (2010) succinctly articulates, “in social games, friends aren’t really friends; they are mere resources. And not just resources for the player, but also for the game developer, who relies on insipid, ‘viral’ aspects of a design to make the system replicate” (p. 3). This information provides a new social context, which, in turn, compels players to interact in the game (O’Neill, 2008). Players can opt to publish their daily winnings on Facebook, comparing them with friends’ winnings; send friends/players chips if they

have lost their own; invite friends as a mechanism to gain additional chips; and engage live chatting with friends and acquaintances throughout the game experience.

In sum, my study is positioned within a public health gambling framework, using several theories to understand social network gambling games. Specifically, I draw from self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985), Erving Goffman's frame analysis (1986), and the social networking theory of homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Monge & Contractor, 2003). Theories were used at various stages of my study, to go beyond the individual level of conception to facilitate the multiple levels of influence and connections between people, and their environments. Over the course of my study, the theories provided constructs to inform the development of my research questions, objectives, and interview guides, while also informing and anchoring analysis and interpretation, and discussion.

4.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The genesis of this study attempts to address several gaps that currently exist in the literature, specifically with the desire to glean an understanding of youths' lived experiences of playing poker on Facebook as a way to understand two primary research questions: What motivates youth (ages 18–24) to play poker on Facebook? And how do players perceive their participation? However, as qualitative research informs us, nothing unfolds in a vacuum; therefore, it became evident at the inception of my study that it was necessary to understand the complex social context (Poland et al., 2009). As a way to identify and unpack the multi-level influences that impact youths' motivations and perceptions, I additionally sought to delineate how the active discourses and the game design and intention shape players' poker perceptions and, in turn, their gameplay behaviours.

To achieve my study objectives, I conducted a virtual ethnographic (Hine, 2000) case study¹² focusing on Zynga Poker (ZP). Specifically, I created two study phases as a way to answer my research questions and foster a more comprehensive understanding of this new field

¹² To be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five: Research Design and Methods.

of research, taking into consideration the multiple levels of influence on youth behaviour (Bronffebrenner, 1979, 1996). Each phase is discussed in more detail below and reflects the sequence in which my study unfolded.

4.2.1 Phase One Research Questions and Objective

The objective of this phase was to use virtual ethnographic techniques (Hine, 2000; Kim, 2013) to identify and describe the influences of the game design and intention of the ZP application that youth are exposed to when playing poker on Facebook. Specifically, by personally interacting with the ZP game, I sought to analyze how the discourses play out according to the game design, as a way to understand for myself how and/or what youth may be responding to that shapes their perceptions. This will advance our contextual understanding of the larger role that technology, game design mechanics/elements, social connectivity, and media play on youths' perceptions and motivations to play.

1. What are the types of discourses active on Facebook's popular Zynga Poker (ZP) game application?
2. How do the application's social and design elements shape players' experiences of poker on Facebook?

4.2.2 Phase Two Research Questions and Objective

The objective of the second phase of my research program was to build on the analysis conducted during Phase One, using in-depth interviews to 1) understand how key stakeholders conceptualize the game, and 2) examine the lived experiences of youth who actively play social network gambling games to explore in greater detail the larger contextual issues of why they choose to play poker on Facebook and how they perceive their gameplay.

1. What motivates youth to play poker on Facebook?

2. In what ways do ZP's design elements promote, maintain, or decrease players' engagement with the game?
3. How do the motivations to play poker on Facebook promote, or not, migration of youths' play onto real-money Internet poker sites?
4. What meanings do youth and key stakeholders attribute to poker on Facebook, and what are the implications?

5 Chapter 5: Research Design and Methods

The qualitative researcher seeks not truth and morality, but rather, understanding.
- Bogdan and Taylor (1975)

Qualitative research allows the topic to be explored in its natural setting, while at the same time recognizing that no situation can be understood when taken out of context or removed from its environment. In essence, a significant goal of qualitative research is to understand how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I chose a qualitative design as it stays true to my constructivist paradigm by permitting a rich understanding of the lived experiences of youth who play ZP within a particular historical and social context.

5.1 Methodology of Enquiry: Virtual Ethnographic Case Study

The primary purpose of my dissertation was two-fold: 1) actively engage with ZP to examine how the design frames or shapes a players' experience; and 2) illustrate how this framing influences youths' motivations to play poker on Facebook and their perception of their gameplay. To understand the phenomenon that is social network gambling and the perspectives of the young players (Merriam, 1998), I conducted a virtual ethnographic case study. Both ethnography and case studies are complimentary styles of qualitative research, which are characterized by deeper examination of a topic by the researcher.

During the development of my study, I felt compelled to mix an adaptive virtual ethnography methodology (Hine, 2000) with a case study approach (Stake, 2005). According to Hine (2000), a study is rendered an adaptive ethnography when it omits certain elements found in traditional ethnographies. Using an adaptive ethnography allowed me to tailor my study in accordance with my own strategic purposes. For example, I chose to participate fully in ZP. This allowed me the opportunity to identify and examine the influences of the game design and intention of the poker application, rather than to observe my participants playing poker in the ZP community. In essence, to personally delineate what makes the ZP application an engaging and “sticky”¹³ experience for the player. This interactional investigation was followed with other ethnographic techniques such as visual analysis of the website images and interviewing both key stakeholders and youth.

The use of ethnographic techniques to study Internet interactions, also known as virtual ethnography, began to appear in the 1990s, when it became clear that online interactions could be considered as socially meaningful activities (Hine, 2008). Consistent with the more traditional approach, virtual ethnography is flexible in terms of the research design (Williamson, 2006) and involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly online to develop an understanding through experiential participation (Hine, 2008). To date, virtual ethnographic studies have been applied to many different forms of online interaction. For example, Boellstorff (2006) argued that ethnographic approaches significantly contribute to the rapidly changing gaming age by addressing the culture of gaming —“how games shape physical world activities in unexpected ways, including the lives of those who do not play games or participate in interactive media” (p. 33). In another study, boyd (2014), sought to understand and explain the new, networked social realm of teens.

Case studies investigate a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context, bounded by a specific time and location (Yin, 2009). A common misconception of single-case design is that they provide little basis for scientific generalization. Selecting the case is key, as the more significant the case, the more likely the case study will contribute to research literature. ZP was chosen as it is representative of a typical poker application on Facebook and the lessons learned

¹³ The stickiness of a game refers to the game mechanics/properties that encourage a player to play longer in the game (Pierce, 2010).

are “assumed to be informative about the experiences of the average person” (Yin, 2009, p. 48). ZP is consistently ranked one of the most popular poker applications on Facebook, with respect to monthly active users and revenue generation (Sammy, 2015). Additionally, Texas Hold’em is one of the most widely enjoyed variants of poker, with a surge in the 2000s as a result of increased exposure on television, the Internet, and in popular literature (World Series of Poker, 2015).

5.2 The Ethnographic Case – Zynga Poker (ZP)

We did anything possible to just get revenues so that we could grow and be a real business.

- Mark Pincus¹⁴ (2009)

We live in a visually dependent culture, and analyzing images is “predicated to some degree on understanding the world that produced it” (Clarke, 2005, p. 219). I begin this description of the ethnographic case with a brief introduction to the ZP application on Facebook. Specifically, by illustrating the overview of the company, some background information on their free-to-play business model, and their casino game category (in which ZP resides). In addition, to providing a visual image of what the game application looks like.

Zynga was an early pioneer of social games, founded in 2007, with a mission of “connecting the world through games.”¹⁵ Today Zynga offers a multitude of social games across a number of different categories (e.g., farm, casino, words, racing, people simulation games). ZP was their first game, established in July of 2007. Since that time, Zynga has gone on to develop social games that are currently played in 175 countries, using a number of different platforms—mobile, on the Internet through their website, Zynga.com, in addition to a variety of social networking sites such as Facebook and Google+. Since its inception, Zynga games such as ZP,

¹⁴ See Arrington (2010). The quote is extracted from speech that Mark Pincus (founder and previous Zynga CEO) gave at UC Berkley which can be accessed online at <http://vimeo.com/3738428>. Quote is spoken approximately around 10:40 into the video.

¹⁵ As articulated on their website <http://company.zynga.com/about/our-story>.

Farmville, Words With Friends, and ChefVille¹⁶ have consistently ranked in the top ten Facebook games (in terms of Monthly Average Users [MAUs], according to AppData). ZP continues to be one of their top grossing games within their portfolio of social games (Zynga, 2014). In December 2011, Zynga became a publicly traded company on NASDAQ.

Currently, the casino category consists of two games; ZP and, more recently, Hit It Rich Slots. Both games are experientially identical to traditional gambling games minus the option to legally extract your winnings from the game. As articulated in Zynga's annual report (2014), "some of our games or features are based upon traditional casino games, such as poker. We have structured and operate these games and features, including ZP, with the gambling laws in mind and believe that these games or features do not constitute gambling" (p. 9).

5.2.1 Market Share

To date, Zynga is clearly a market leader within this growing field. According to the blue paper published by Morgan Stanley (2012), Zynga has a 300 million monthly player base, which equates to about one-third of all social game players. However, when you focus specifically on the social gambling market, Zynga's monthly player base is about 60 million, giving it a market share of around 45%. More specifically, when you focus deeper on just the poker market, Zynga has a market share of approximately 75%, as determined by monthly active users¹⁷ (MAUs), which in 2012 was estimated to be approximately 40 million monthly players—which typically is around 6–7 million players every day.

¹⁶ Farmville and Chefville are a genre of Zynga games that simulate such things as farming and planting crops, and restaurant creation, respectively. All built on social relationships, in-game gifting, and cooperative crafting to succeed in the games. Words With Friends is a multi-player word game developed by Zynga which closely resembles the classic board game Scrabble.

¹⁷ MAUs are determined by the number of players during the month. However, it should be noted that this number does not include unique users (MUU), and many players will play more than once per month (Morgan Stanley, 2012).

5.2.2 Free-to-Play (F2P) Business Model

For the most part Zynga's social games follow a freemium or free-to-play business model—where players can play the core game for free, but have the option to buy virtual goods (e.g., additional chips and virtual gifts) when desired. This is important because, while Zynga generates revenue through a variety of activities—in-game sales of virtual goods, mobile game download fees, and advertising—their primary revenue source is the sale of virtual currency that players use to buy in-game virtual goods (Zynga, 2014). In 2013, Zynga reported \$873,266 in annual earnings, with online games revenue (e.g., in-game virtual goods, mobile game download fees) contributing \$759,752 and advertising revenue contributing \$113,694¹⁸ (Zynga, 2014). According to Zynga's annual report (2014), “in order to sustain our revenue levels, we must attract, retain, and increase the number of players or more effectively monetize our players” (p. 20). To date, approximately two percent of total players pay for virtual goods, which equates to roughly 1.3 million Monthly Unique Players (MUPs).

In 2012, Zynga entered into an agreement with bwin.party¹⁹ to develop and operate real-money gambling games currently only offered in the United Kingdom. In 2013, ZyngaPlusPoker and ZyngaPlusCasino were launched and Zynga is presently evaluating these real-money gambling games to “determine whether or not they are on strategy and aligned with our near term market opportunities and priorities” (Zynga, 2014, p. 22). Zynga's partnership with bwin.party leaves it well positioned to capitalize on any conversion from social to real-money gambling (Morgan Stanley, 2012).

5.2.3 Zynga Poker Application

Images have a sensory prominence within ZP. Words such as *poker*, *get chips*, *tournaments*, *buy in*, and *max bet* are meant to conjure up images of gambling while, on the flip

¹⁸ Total annual earnings reported were \$1,281,267 (online game revenue = \$1,144,252; advertising revenue = \$137,015) in 2012 and \$1,140,100 (online game revenue = \$1,065,648; advertising revenue = \$74,452) in 2011 (Zynga, 2014).

¹⁹ bwin.party is a market leader in the online gambling industry, known for its strong technology and marketing skills (Morgan Stanley, 2012).

side, phrases such as *leaderboards*,²⁰ *friends online*, *play now*, *levels*, and *standings*, incite a feeling of competitive games/play. The two screen-shot images below represent the primary game areas that players access, within the game—Main Lobby home page (Figure 2) and the Poker Room (Figure 3). Each will be briefly described, with a more detailed analysis of the images found in the following chapter.



Figure 2. Screenshot of Zynga Poker’s Main Lobby (Home Page). Image captured from the authors computer on April 30, 2013.

The main lobby (as shown above) is the initial screen that players encounter when they enter the game application. What is immediately noticeable is that ZP has personalized the experience with a welcome message and a list of friends that are currently online, instantly making the player feel like the game is specifically tailored towards him/her. The image is pleasing to the eye, with subtle colours and easy to understand navigation of the page - despite

²⁰ Leaderboards provide a visual representation of where players rank within the gamefied play system. Leaderboards can be partitioned into different categories, allowing player the opportunity to compare their quantified levels of play.

the fact that there is a lot going on. At the top of the image, is the array of other Zynga games—all just a click away—brightly coloured and highly animated. In the centre of the screen is a table window, listing the poker tables players can choose, depending on which game type the player prefers (i.e., Texas Hold'em game tables, Texas Hold'em tournaments, VIP Club Texas Hold'em tables). Various filter and game options are presented in the lobby window, such as very low stakes at beginner tables or higher stakes for more advanced tables; min/max buy-ins; the preferred number of maximum players at a table; and the speed of play (i.e., normal/fast). Located at the bottom of the image, is a personalized leaderboard, representing your standing with respect to chips accumulated and recent participation. Finally, the home page offers players quick access to purchasing chips and additional side games such as blackjack.

When players click through to one of the many poker rooms (as shown below), the image is pretty standard, with elements congruent to what poker players may find on a professional online site.



Figure 3. Screenshot of Zynga Poker's Poker Room. Image captured from the authors computer on April 30, 2013.

Finally, the poker room, like the main lobby, is presented in colours that are bright and pleasing to the eye. It displays elements such as the leaderboard and player status and achievements. The poker table takes up the majority of the page, offering empty seats for players to choose their position around the table. Just below the table is a meter box indicating how good of a hand you currently have. This feature helps players learn the ranking of good hands, which will help with more strategic and knowledgeable wagering. Finally, beside the meter box, the game page includes a chat box for all players around the table and on the other side is an additional game panel that allows players to win more chips through small, one-off games.

5.3 Research Study

My research study consisted of two phases conducted sequentially to secure a comprehensive understanding of poker play on Facebook (Table 1). Results from the first phase were integrated, as applicable, into the development of the interview guides for Phase Two. Findings were elaborated upon and explored in more detail with the interview participants as a means of illuminating the elements of the game design. In this sense, the multiple phases of inquiry are used “not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives, but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new deeper dimensions to emerge” (Jick, 1979, p. 603–604).

Table 1: Research Phases, Objectives, and Methods

Research Phases	Objective	Method/Analysis
Phase One	To identify and examine influences of the game design and intention of the ZP application that youth are exposed to when playing poker on Facebook.	Situational and thematic analysis of interactional journey to capture textual and visual images, alongside

		game design elements.
Phase Two	To build on the analysis conducted during Phase One, to understand how key stakeholders conceptualize the game and explore in-depth the larger contextual issues of why youth choose to play poker on Facebook and how they perceive their participation.	Thematic analysis of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and youth who play ZP poker.

Each phase of the research design will be expanded upon in sequence, first outlining the data generation and sampling strategies for Phase One, followed by the participant recruitment and data generation for Phase Two.

5.4 Phase One: Data Set

As a way to identify and examine the influences of the game design and intention of the ZP application (app) that youth are exposed to when playing poker on Facebook, I participated in an ethnographic journey playing ZP. Specifically, the data set consisted of the extant texts and visual images found on the application, captured during my interactional journey. *Extant texts* refers to texts which the researcher has had no hand in shaping and which provide opportunities to examine particular discourses to help explore, explain, justify, and foretell individuals' actions (Charmaz, 2006). The extant texts and visual images derived from the ZP app on Facebook were used to help delineate the influences of the game design that youth are exposed to at the environmental level, which shape how youth perceive their play and what motivates them to continue to play.

The texts available for analysis on the poker application are limited as the application consists primarily of two main visual images (i.e., The Lobby and Poker Room; Figures 2 & 3). With respect to the textual data, four of ZPs documents were analyzed: About Us, Community Guidelines, Purchasing Terms of Service, and Zynga's Annual Report; 2014). Additionally, the two main visual images were examined. These pages were chosen as they set the stage by introducing the players to the Facebook application they have chosen to participate in and to what they will be exposed to when playing, and also they show how ZP actively frames poker on Facebook. To obtain the richest data possible, the timelines of the three user profiles were also analyzed, specifically investigating differences in poker-related postings and profile-targeted advertising, along with other Facebook notifications.

Players participate in ZP through their existing personal profiles²¹ on the Facebook platform. As a way to capture the data for analysis, I created three user profiles (between the ages of 18-24) using fictitious names and personal information. The fictitious profiles varied according to gender and frequency of play, but were all residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Research informs us that currently more males play online poker than females (Gainsbury, 2012), so two male user profiles, and one female profile were created. With respect to frequency of play, user profiles reflected varying degrees of poker participation: high, medium, and low time played. Research by Shead et al. (2012), reported estimated gambling frequencies among university-student Internet gamblers as follows: high-frequency players are individuals who play more than 2 hours/session, twice a week or more; medium-play individuals devote from 30–60 minutes/session, 1–3 times/month; while low-frequency players spend less than 30 minutes/session, once a month. Table 2 outlines the data collection schedule over a one-month period. To ensure maximum exposure and variety on ZP, sessions for the players I created (i.e., high-, medium-, low-frequency players) were not played concurrently and were played at various times throughout the day.

²¹ Facebook profiles are your collection of photos, stories, and experiences that tell your story. Your profile includes basic personal information, in addition to your "Timeline." Some things individuals can do on their timeline are: add cover and profile photos, add life events, view a log of your Facebook activity, share your app activity, and see highlights from each month—just to name a few.

My ethnographic journey playing ZP over the course of a month was captured with Screenflow 3.0 video capture software (<http://www.telestream.net/screenflow/>), alongside the use of field notes during my gameplay sessions to encapsulate my experiences and observations. Screenflow 3.0 allowed me to document the applications extant texts, images, game mechanics, and user profiles during this study by recording the contents of the entire monitor, while simultaneously capturing audio data if required.

Table 2: Player Gameplay Sessions

	High (Male) (17 yrs old)	Medium (Male) (20 yrs old)	Low (Female) (22 yrs old)
Week 1	Two 2-hour sessions	One 45-minute session	
Week 2	Three 2-hour sessions		One 30-minute session
Week 3	Two 2-hour sessions	One 45-minute session	
Week 4	Three 2-hour sessions	One 45-minute session	

It was originally anticipated that by playing as three fictitious players (varying by gender and frequency of play) I would be able to discern variations in the players timelines' with respect to poker-related postings, profile targeted advertising, along with other Facebook notifications. In hindsight, this proved not as insightful as hoped, in part, as a result of playing from the same IP address for all players.

5.5 Phase Two: Data Set

In Phase Two, I sought to build upon the findings in Phase One to gain a more complete understanding of how playing poker on Facebook was perceived, by both key industry

stakeholders and youth, in addition to comprehending what motivates youth to play. Specifically, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 industry and academic key stakeholders, followed by 15 youth, ranging from 45 to 90 minutes in length. Interview guides (Appendix 1 for key stakeholders, and 2 for youth) were developed using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954). CIT is inductive in nature providing in-depth information about participants' experiences of a particular behaviour and focuses on the significance to the people involved (Gremier, 2004; Koch, Strobel, Kici, & Westhoff, 2009; Schluter, Seaton, & Chaboyer, 2008). For example, during my interactional journey playing ZP in Phase One, it was evident that by strategically designing player progression and achievable challenges throughout the game, game designers fostered a more compelling and engaging experience, both mentally and emotionally. As I improved my skills and accomplished new challenges, I developed a growing sense of competence in my poker gameplay over the course of the month. I wanted to tease this out with the youth during their interviews, so one key CIT question I asked them was, "Thinking about when you play poker on Facebook, could you describe what you are feeling and thinking while playing?" To further, ascertain a rich narrative of youths' poker participation, additional exploratory questions focused on players most memorable and challenging poker experiences.

Both key stakeholders and youth were recruited through a purposeful sampling strategy. The purposeful sampling approach selects participants because of their characteristics and knowledge of the information that is required, in addition to the willingness to reflect on the pertinent phenomena. All participants were asked to provide basic demographic information through the completion of the Background/Demographic Information Form (Appendix 3 for key stakeholders, and 4 for youth). The information helped to describe my sample and was collected at the end of the interview. This allowed for the interview to take on a conversational tone at the onset. The form was optional, and all participants chose to complete the form. Tables 3 and 4 illustrate specific background information of all participants. To protect participant's anonymity and confidentiality, some information in the tables has been omitted and the names of the respondents have been replaced with pseudonyms. For the youth, casual, culturally appropriate first name pseudonyms were chosen. For the key stakeholders, pseudonyms consisting of a formal prefix and letters were used.

Table 3: Key Stakeholder Demographic Data

Key Stakeholder	Professional Title	Disciplinary Area	Work Field(s)	Years in Field	Income	Residing Country	Country of Birth	Ethnocultural Background
Mr. N	CEO	Social Gaming	Policy	10	\$90,000 +	UK	England	British
Dr. I	Professor	Gaming	Research	13	\$90,000 +	Canada	United States	American
Dr. K	Professor	Gaming	Research,	6	\$50 – 74,000	US	Germany	European
Ms. E	Research Director	Gambling	Research	7	-	UK	England	British
Ms. D	Lawyer	Gambling	Legal	18	\$90,000 +	UK	Wales	British
Ms. M	Director of Policy	Gambling	Policy	10	\$50 – 74,000	UK	England	British
Dr. G	Director of Commissioning	Gambling	Research	13	\$50 – 74,000	UK	Northern Ireland	British
Mr. L	Director	Social Gaming	Legal	2	\$90,000 +	UK	England	British
Ms. B	Youth Outreach Worker	Gambling	Education (Gambling prevention)	3	\$30 – 49,000	Canada	Canada	Canadian
Dr. O	Professor	Gambling	Research, Clinical, Education	25	-	Canada	United States	American
Ms. H	General Manager	Gambling	Education (Gambling Prevention)	4	-	Canada	Canada	British/ Native Canadian
Mr. A	Content Manager	Gambling	Education	6	-	US	United States	American
Mr. F	Affiliate Manager	Gambling	Research, Marketing	10	\$90,000 +	UK	Canada	Canadian
Mr. C	Director/Instructor	Gaming	Education, Game Design	20	-	United States	-	American
Ms. J	Game Designer	Gaming	Game Design	20	-	US	-	American

Table 4: Youth Demographic Data

Youth	Sex	Age	Job Title	Income	Ethno-cultural Background	County of Birth	Purchased Chips on Zynga	Played Poker outside of SNS	Learnt to Play
Mark	Male	24	Transportation Designer	\$50,000 - \$74,000	Chinese/ Canadian	Taiwan	No	No	Self-taught
Adam	Male	21	Student	-	Vietnamese Canadian	Canada		Yes	-
Kalya	Female	20	Student	< \$30,000	Filipino	Philippines		Yes	Family
Aria	Female	23	Student	< \$30,000	South Asian	-		No	Self-taught
Danica	Female	22	Student	< \$30,000	Bosnian	Bosnia		No	Family
Hana	Female	21	-	\$30,000 - \$49,999	Korean/ Japanese	Korea	Yes	Yes	Friends
Paul	Male	24	Line cook	\$30,000 - \$49,999	Caucasian	Canada	Yes	Yes	Family
Benjamin	Male	18	Student	-	Jewish	Canada		Yes	Friends
Bataar	Male	23	Student	-	Mongolian	Mongolia	No	Yes	Friends
Abby	Female	21	Student	< \$30,000	Caucasian	Canada		Yes	Family
Zahra	Female	24	Student	< \$30,000	South Asian	India		No	Self-taught
Jaya	Female	19	Student	< \$30,000	South East Asian	Canada		No	Family
Amir	Male	21	Student	< \$30,000	South Asian	India		No	Self-taught
Ella	Female	18	Student	< \$30,000	Cantonese	Canada		No	Family
Chung	Male	21	Student	< \$30,000	Chinese	China		Yes	-

5.5.1 Key Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews with key industry stakeholders were included in the research study as I felt that given the novelty of social network gambling games, perspectives from professionals affiliated with both gaming and gambling were necessary to help acquire a more complete understanding of how these games are perceived. While key stakeholders spanned different fields of knowledge, this element of my research helped glean stakeholder positions, various power dynamics between the various participant groups, as well as their propositions on how the field should move forward. The interview guide that I developed for key stakeholders concentrated on topics such as career development; professional experiences; perception of gaming, gambling, and social network gambling games on Facebook; knowledge of games' design elements; youth problem gambling; future speculations about social network games on Facebook; and the exploration of any questions that arose from Phase One of my study. Topics were selected to reflect themes that would help address the specific research questions, in addition to gaps within the current literature. For example, following my interactional analysis of ZP, the desire to seek out key stakeholders' understandings of the specific game design features prompted me to ask, "What are the most powerful design features of social network games?" As a result of some internal workplace policies, several key stakeholders were not permitted to accept an honorarium for their participation; therefore, in an effort to be consistent, key stakeholders did not receive an honorarium in thanks for their participation in the study.

5.5.1.1 Sampling Strategies

Key stakeholders were drawn from published articles (both trade/industry and academic) on gaming, and gambling as well as from industry leaders/presenters found through key social gaming/gambling conferences and publically-available organizational information (i.e., Social Gaming and Gambling Summit, The Social Gambling Conference, iGaming, International Social Games Association [ISGA]). Specifically, fifteen key stakeholders were selected because of their knowledge and experience with social network gambling games, spanning across a wide spectrum of disciplines—legal, industry, academia, youth gambling prevention/education, game development/professionals, and Internet marketing/advertising.

Once a list of names of potential key stakeholders (with appropriate contact information) was created, I sent an email containing information about the study inviting prospective participants to take part in the study (Appendix 5). If a key stakeholder declared interest in participating, follow-up email(s) were sent to discuss any questions about the study he/she may have, in addition to setting up a convenient time and place for the interview. At the end of the interviews, I encouraged key stakeholders to share with colleagues my contact information to who might also be of benefit to my study.

Due to the truly global nature of poker playing on Facebook, key stakeholders in the related industries reside both inside and outside of Canada. As such, interviews were conducted in Canadian locations including Toronto, Peterborough, Montreal, and Stratford; in the US in Atlanta and Manhattan; and in London, England. To optimize my travel, where possible I scheduled interviews around key industry conferences (i.e., Social Gaming and Gambling Summit, The Social Gambling Conference, and the Digital Games Research Association [DiGRA] Conference), which usually resulted in multiple interviews being conducted at one location within a few days. The key stakeholder interviews took place over three months (August – October of 2013).

5.5.2 Youth Interviews

Central to my research objectives was to understand the lived experiences of youth (ages 18–24) who play poker on Facebook, specifically to ascertain what motivates them to play and how they perceive their participation. This particular age demographic was chosen as evidence reveals that within it there are high gambling-participation rates, and higher gambling-related harms compared to the adult population (Hardoon & Derevensky, 2002; Olason et al., 2011; Volberg et al., 2010).

The youth interview guides focused on questions relating to game-playing history and experiences; Facebook game-playing habits; perceptions of gaming, gambling, and social games on Facebook; and perspectives on game design elements, and problem gambling. As with the key stakeholder interviews, topics were selected that would best address the specific research

questions, would follow up on any findings from Phase One, and would address gaps within the current literature.

5.5.2.1 Sampling Strategies

Youth participants were recruited primarily through posted flyers (Appendix 6) in buildings (e.g., bookstores, libraries, student dorms, athletic facilities, and student service centres) around universities in the GTA - Toronto, York, and Ryerson, and George Brown College. Additionally, posters were placed in the YMCA of Greater Toronto community youth employment centres. These locations offered an ideal setting to recruit, as youth ages 18–24 comprise their primary demographics. Recruitment posters were also digitally uploaded to Toronto-based classified advertisement websites such as Craigslist and Kijiji. Youth participants were required to (1) have a current account on Facebook's ZP and have actively played (at least once a month) over the past year;²² (2) be between the ages of 18 and 24 years; (3) live in the GTA; and (4) be fluent in conversational English.

All fifteen of the youth interviews took place at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto. Youth were given a \$25 gift card (either Indigo or President's Choice) in appreciation for their participation, in addition to being reimbursed with two transit fares to cover their transportation expenses to and from the interview.

5.6 Data Management

All the data generated through both phases were transformed into digital format so that the data could be managed electronically using HyperRESEARCH software to facilitate the process of transcription, management, storage, and analysis (Dupuis, 2002). All the interview audio files were personally transcribed verbatim as a way to enhance research rigour by

²² The focus of the youth in-depth interviews was on the participants accounts of playing ZP, therefore I felt it essential that they have played fairly consistently over the past twelve months, so as to be aware of any changes to the gaming platform that may have occurred, etc.

minimizing the additional degree of influence/interference introduced into the analytic process that can occur when transcription work is assigned to someone other than the researcher (Bucholtz, 2000; Tilley, 2003).

As Bucholtz (2000) states, transcription is an “act of interpretation and representation” (p. 1463). In essence, constructed text influences the analytic process, which is why it was necessary for me to be aware not only of the transcription process (What decisions I made during the transcription process.) but also any interpreted decisions (What is transcribed.). This was tracked through memos during all stages of data transformation.

Using HyperTRANSCRIBE software, I transcribed the audio files in a raw, spoken style, without too much punctuation, while preserving linguistic inflections (e.g., laughing), filler words (e.g., um, yeah, oh), and silent moments. This allowed the construction of the text to be as true to my interpretations of what was said during the interview as possible (Tilley, 2003). After reviewing the transcripts for accuracy, I removed, as needed, any extraneous utterances and added any necessary punctuation.

5.7 Analytic Strategies

My research protocol used a number of data analysis processes that were congruent with the study, my objectives, and the methods of data generation used. With respect to Phase One, situational analysis of visual discourses (Clarke, 2005), and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were conducted on the website application textual and visual data, while the game mechanics were conducted using the 5-Step Player Journey Framework (PJF; Kim, 2013). For Phase Two, the in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. A detailed description of each analysis technique is described below.

5.7.1 Situational Analysis of Visual Discourses

Within particular social worlds, images, symbols, cues, and signs work in particular ways in their own conventions of visibility that frame meaning making (Becker, 1982). However, with respect to qualitative methods for the analysis of visual images produced by mass media, the

literature is neither well developed nor standardized (Figuerola, 2008), despite the presence of visual materials in most, if not all, of the situations of inquiry that we research (Clarke, 2005). ZP is a visual environment; therefore, to derive a complete understanding of the discourses embedded with the game, I conducted a situational analysis of the poker applications visual images and texts. Guided by the work of Clarke (2005), I sought to open up my visual images for analysis, by conducting three kinds of memos: locating memos, big picture memos, and specification memos (Clarke, 2005), were completed on the two main visual images in ZP (i.e., The Lobby and Poker Room).²³

The goal of the three memos is to begin focusing on the larger image as a whole, noting global impressions that would be later broken down into smaller sub-units as an attempt to uncover concrete ways in which these more macro-impressions are transmitted to the viewer (Figuerola, 2008). For example, the initial locating memo describes how the image fits into the situation of inquiry, sketching the social world(s) that produced the visual: Why was the image selected? Where did the image come from? Who produced the particular image? For what audience? What are its goals and intended uses? Next, the big picture memo consists of three parts—first impressions, the big picture, and the little pictures, as a way to detail what is going on in the visual. Finally, the specification memo is where you begin to break down the image so that you can see it from multiple perspectives. The goal here is to step outside the frame through which we normally view an image, paying particular attention to smaller, usually ignored aspects. For example, I deconstructed the image through addressing several topics: selection, framing, featuring, viewpoint, light, colour, focus/depth of field, presence/absence, intended/unintended audiences, composition, texture, scale and formal/proportions, technical elements, relationship to other media, references, remediations, situated-ness, relations with visual cultures, commonness/uniqueness, work of the image, and injunctions to viewers (Clarke, 2005). The memos that I created then went on to serve as the textual data to be coded for further thematic analysis alongside the applications extant texts, as described in the next section. Traditional situational analysis of visual discourses uses grounded theory to analyze the textual data generated from the memos. The intention of my study is exploratory in nature, rather than being a desire to construct a conceptual theory about youth social network gambling; therefore, I chose to

²³ Images of both The Lobby and the Poker Room are located previously in Section 5.2.3 (Figures 2 and 3).

conduct a compatible, complimentary-method thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As argued by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis should be considered a qualitative method in its own right; however, thematic coding is “often performed *within* ‘major’ analytic traditions such as grounded theory” (p. 78).

It should be noted that one of the challenges in mapping the visual data is partiality—parts, elements that may be missing that, I knew as an experienced analyst, were really present in the broader situation of the image. In an effort to deal with partiality, I tried to specify these while also noting their explicit absence. For example, there were many implicated actors, and institutions, such as the larger social context of Facebook and the larger social-network community of friends, that an individual may have that were not captured in my image.

5.7.2 Thematic Analysis

Consistent with the aims of this study and my research questions, I conducted an interpretive thematic analysis on the data generated from both the textual and narrative data derived from the website application and the in-depth interviews. Specifically thematic analysis seeks to progress analysis from “description, where the data have simply been organized to show patterns in semantic content, and summarized, to interpretation, where there is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). It is not a linear process, but rather a recursive process, where movement is back and forth as needed through the stages of analysis.

Thematic analysis occurred through both phases of the study. First, in Phase One, thematic analysis was conducted on the textual data both from the poker application and the constructed memos generated from opening up the visual images. While during Phase Two, thematic analysis was performed on the interview data from both the key stakeholders and youth. Specifically, I followed a classic set of coding strategies for qualitative thematic analysis as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006), which included (1) familiarizing myself with the data through transcription, reading, and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas (in this case through my

memo writing); (2) generating initial codes,²⁴ coding specifically for features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collecting data relevant to each code (See Appendix 7); (3) searching for themes by collating codes into potential groups and so forth, specifically by gathering all relevant data to each potential theme; (4) reviewing themes and checking if themes worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set generating a thematic map of the analysis; (5) refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells by generating clear definitions and names for each theme; and (6) producing a written account, specifically, selecting vivid and compelling extract examples which reflect back on the analysis, the research questions, and the literature, culminating in a scholarly report of the analysis.

Concepts to guide the coding journey can come from a variety of sources (e.g., can be constructed from theoretical frameworks, research questions, or the data themselves) that are not mutually exclusive (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In essence, I coded my data as part of my analytical process, reflecting both the original accounts and observations of the participants (that is, grounded and inductive), but starting from pre-set aims and objectives (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000).

As Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss, “researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (p. 84). During coding, the theoretical connections of influence varied according to the data. For example, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryna, 2002) played a significantly larger role during the original shaping of some of my research questions, initial coding, and analysis of the youth interviews. Social theories such as Goffman’s frame analysis (Goffman, 1986) and the social networking theory of homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Monge & Contractor, 2003) strongly guided the initial coding and analysis of the ZP application in Phase One of my study.

To ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of my findings during the thematic analytic process, I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis (See Appendix 8), which consists of criteria to examine during all stages of the thematic analytic process (i.e., transcription, coding, analysis, write up). To illustrate, I made sure that the

²⁴ More in-depth discussion about coding will be discussed in section 5.7.1.

themes had not been generated from a few examples and were internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive; data had been analyzed—interpreted, made sense of, rather than just paraphrased; and there was a good fit between what I claimed I did, and what I had done (i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent; Braun & Clark, 2006). This was important, particularly during Phase One when I conducted the situational analysis of visual discourses using both textual and visual data. For example, the harmlessness discourse was constructed from four codes: game, fun, fairness, and play; all of which I felt fostered the perception that ZP is an innocent form of gameplay entertainment without the possibility of any related harms. According to ZP’s Community Guidelines, “Zynga games are a fun way to connect with friends and to meet like-minded people”, while also, “Our community thrives on trust, fair play, and good gamesmanship.” Additionally, I felt that ZP’s use of cute animation and cartoon-like graphics throughout the entire application visually create a happy and playful ambiance (see Figure 4). In essence, establishing a non-threatening atmosphere, ‘as if’ this was just child’s play.



Figure 4. Screenshot of ZP’s family of social games. Image captured from the authors computer on April 30, 2013.

A more in-depth discussion about establishing trustworthiness and rigour in the entire qualitative research study is located later in this chapter.

5.7.3 Interactional Analysis: 5-Step Players Journey Framework

Guided by the 5-Step Players Journey Framework (PJF) by Amy Jo Kim (2013), I was able to delineate what design elements make the ZP application on Facebook sticky and engaging for the player. There are many ways to break down the elements of a game, and similarly, many frameworks created by professional game designers. As a preliminary side note, I chose to use the 5-Step PJF after I had become aware of Amy Jo Kim during a conference I had attended on

gamification. Amy Jo Kim is an internationally recognized social game developer with a PhD in Behavioral Neuroscience (from the University of Washington). She founded and is currently game designer and CEO of Shuffle Brain (<http://www.shufflebrain.com/>). Kim developed the 5-Step PJF after working on several different projects with key industry companies such as Zynga, Netflix, and MTV, when she noticed common patterns through the game design and testing processes, which secured player engagement.

The 5-Step PJF is a powerful, actionable design framework developed around five principles for sustained engagement. The first principle is *player insight*. Achieving retention to the game is an awareness of who your player is and an understanding of your player's motivation in order to design a system that captures a particular type of human nature and then to structure the system to couple with the related social action which you wish those players to experience. Inspired by Bartle's Player Types (1996), and years of experience designing social games, Kim identified four key player patterns: Explore, Compete, Create, and Collaborate (see Figure 5). Once you understand your player, game elements can be tailored to suit the dynamics of the player(s) and a practical system can be designed based on common motivational patterns.

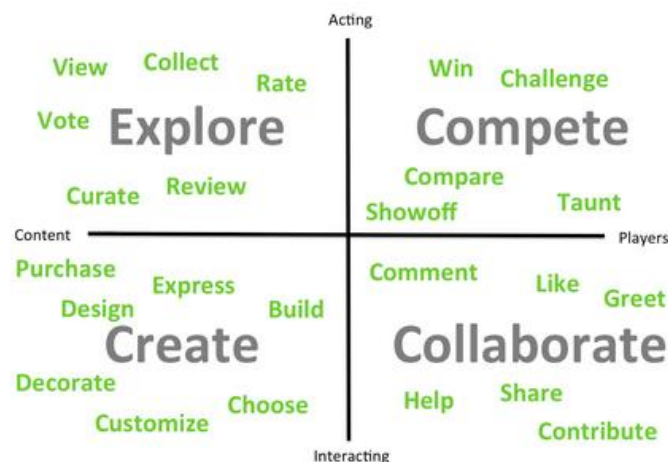


Figure 5. Kim's Social Action Matrix. Image captured from <http://www.slideshare.net/amyjokim/players-journey-5step-design-framework-for-longterm-engagement>, with permission from author.

The second principle to drive sustained player engagement is *motivation*—which relates to tapping into the unmet needs of the players, specifically incorporating activities that are both intrinsically and extrinsically rewarding. Drawing directly from Deci and Ryan’s (1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002) Self-Determination Theory,²⁵ Kim (2013) argues that extrinsic rewards encourage players to complete simple tasks/activities throughout the game, while intrinsic rewards (i.e., designed for learning, mastery, autonomy, purpose, belonging, fulfillment) drive sustained engagement.

Understanding the *player lifecycle* is the third principle. Specifically, paying particular attention to how the game unfolds over time and designing appropriate elements within the gaming system. In Figure 6, Kim (2013) illustrates how game designers can tailor different aspects of the game to cater to the player journey, specifically being attuned into a player’s entry skill level, and desire for improvement over time.

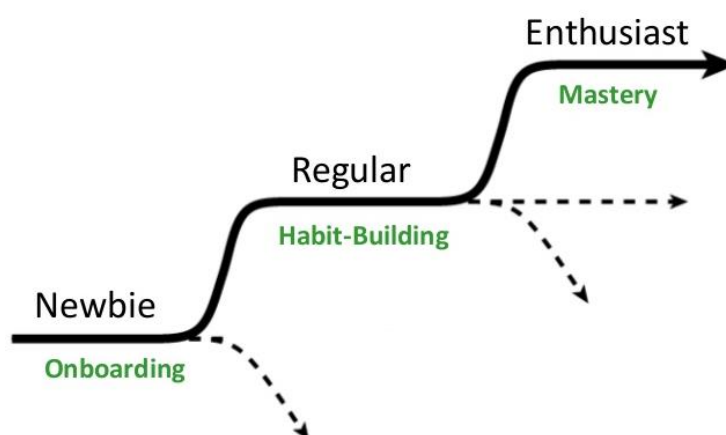


Figure 6. Player Lifecycle. Image captured from <http://www.slideshare.net/amyjokim/players-journey-5step-design-framework-for-longterm-engagement>, permission from author.

Progress is the fourth principle in designing for a fully engaging game experience. Designers must understand how a player progresses through the game, making sure that there are markers that reveal to the player that they are learning and advancing towards mastery. Finally,

²⁵ As outlined in detail in Chapter Four.

engagement loops are the final principle. As broken down by Kim (2013), first engagement needs to be triggered, followed by feedback and progress designed to elicit motivating emotions, and finally the player's participation is directed with a compelling *call to action* (CTA; see Figure 7). In essence, the game needs to be designed to move the players down the engagement funnel from beginner to master.

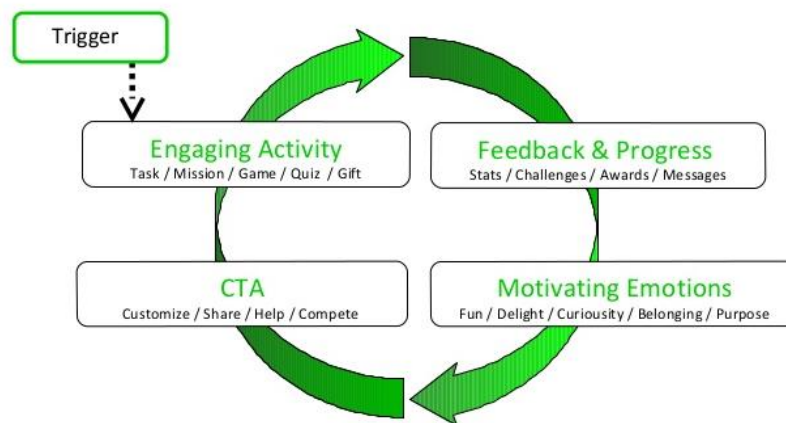


Figure 7. Engagement loops. Image captured from <http://www.slideshare.net/amyjokim/players-journey-5step-design-framework-for-longterm-engagement>, permission from author.

During my adaptive virtual ethnographic journey in Phase One, I was able to examine the poker application through this five-step framework, as a mechanism to personally participate in and delineate specific features of the player experience such as triggers, feedback, progress, and motivating emotions that are meant to keep players engaged and retained—essentially influencing their perspectives and behaviours.

5.8 Analytic Memos

Throughout my data generation, analysis, and writing journey, I undertook analytic memos as a way to capture my thoughts, in addition to comparing and connecting threads throughout my

data. Some methodologies recommend that you label, classify, and keep separate different types of memos according to their primary purpose (e.g., coding memo, theoretical memo, analytic note; Saldaña, 2013). To clarify, I will be using the term analytic memos to refer to all types of memos; as to me, all memos are analytic in nature regardless of content and were used through my entire analytic journey (i.e., data generation, transcription, analysis, theoretical discussion). Memos were constructed and tagged in Evernote.²⁶ Evernote allows users to incorporate text, images, audio, video, and scanned documents all into one file, using tags so I can easily search through them in the future. Tags are keywords in notes to differentiate my thinking about methodology, coding, analysis and interpretation, and so forth. For example, memos that were more reflexive in nature (as opposed to analytic) were tagged ‘reflexive’.

As Clarke (2005) explains, “memos are the best way to confront discursive data—‘mute material evidence’—and your own analyses. Memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data and throughout the analysis. Those conversations are even more important in the absence of speaking subjects who often inadvertently confront our hidden assumptions and cherished ideas” (p. 202). Specifically, analytic memos played a crucial role in providing a locale for my analytic ideas, to help determine silences within the findings, raise data to a conceptual level, as well as present connections between thematic categories and their properties. Memo writing is meant to be unstructured and informal, and it occurred during every phase of my dissertation. For example, analytic memos played a significant function during the situational analysis of the poker application (as described in section 5.7.1 above); specifically to help describe the visual material fully, in essence, to put the picture into words so to enable the act of seeing (Clarke, 2005). Below is a portion of my *big picture memo*, used in the situational analysis of visual discourse (Clarke, 2005) during Phase One. The purpose of the big picture memo is express: 1) first impressions, 2) the big picture, and 3) the little pictures.

Friday, August 2nd

²⁶ The Evernote app is a digital workspace that lives across your smartphone, tablet, and computer and has powerful search and discovery features (<https://evernote.com/>). I upgraded to Evernote Premium to ensure maximum data security protections.

I find the overall visual very distracting, a significant amount going on that your eyes need to pay attention to. A variety of games that you can click on, as well as the game displays at the top of the page for all of Zynga's other games. Reminds me of the old arcades that when you walk in, the colours, and games options overwhelm you. You definitely feel like you may have wandered onto a casino floor.

However, the actual usability/playability of the room is very good, meaning that it is not difficult to discern what you are there to play. For example, there is an ease of finding an available seat, below the table is your hand action options which also show how good your hand is, where to purchase or try to win more chips, and allows you to easily see your other "poker buddies" currently online.

There are a lot of game elements that have been incorporated into the poker room that provokes a sense of competition, socialization, opportunity to play, and track how well you are doing via chips and levels. At the centre of the visual is a large poker table, typical of what you would see in a casino or on TV. The dealer is sitting at the top of the table and is a very feminine, sexualized woman scantily dressed.

The bottom of the screen is more cluttered and less graphic. It contains a large leader board which allows you to send free chips to friends, see which one of your friends has recently played, and who amongst your friends has the most chips.

Overall, the poker room has several key elements: the poker table, many ways to socialize and invite friends to play, many ways to play several different types of games in addition to poker, many ways to easily purchase chips, and is personalized for me (with my name, my friends, my achievements, etc.)

Further, during the analysis of the in-depth interviews, memos were used to document and reflect on my ongoing coding processes and thematic choices; how my process of inquiry was taking shape; and what emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts I was beginning to witness in my data.

5.9 Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, I am ethically obligated to ensure that this study does not cause harm to the participants. Ethics approval to conduct the in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and youth was initially granted on July 26, 2013 by the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto, and awarded annual renewal until July 25, 2015 (Appendix 9). In accordance with exclusion criteria (Article 10.3) of the (Canadian) Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010), the situational and thematic analysis of extant texts and visual images in Phase One did not require review by an institutional research ethics board because all the information was publicly available.

5.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and authenticity are the criteria to assess the “goodness” of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 2000a). Specifically, this study’s trustworthiness has been achieved using different evaluation frameworks, deployed at different stages of the research process. For example, to establish trustworthiness of the entire study, I adopted Charmaz’s (2006) criteria for evaluating constructivist research: originality, credibility, usefulness, and resonance. While Braun and Clarke’s (2006) 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis was specifically used to establish methodological rigor during the thematic analysis process, satisfying Charmaz’s (2006) credibility criteria.

5.10.1 Originality

Criteria to examine originality, prompts the researcher to answer questions such as: “Does your analysis provide a new conceptual rendering of the data? What is the social and theoretical significance of this work?” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182). Social network gambling games are an emerging entity, which to date, very little research exists to help foster a better understanding of the phenomenon, particularly with respect to youth. Firstly, while scholarship is beginning to provide an understanding about player migration from social network gambling over to real-money wagering, I could not find a comprehensive study exploring the discursive messages embedded in the ZP application and, in turn, how those discourses may influence youth engagement. Secondly, this study is located within a constructivist paradigm, strongly drawing on Goffman’s frame analysis to help understand the meanings that both youth and key stakeholders attribute to ZP. This lens, offers an alternative way to think about and comprehend youth participation in social network gambling games.

5.10.2 Credibility

According to Charmaz (2006), credibility is obtained when researchers take into account questions such as “Are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis?” And “Are the data sufficient to merit your claims?” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182). Credibility was achieved utilizing Braun and Clarke’s (2006) 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis to establish methodological rigor (See Section 5.7.2 above; Appendix 8).

5.10.3 Resonance

Resonance within the study is evaluated through the question: “Does the research portray the fullness of the studied experience?” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 183). Specific methodological choices were made to link macro and micro levels of analysis. For example, the situational analysis of visual discourse of the ZP application, in addition to the in-depth interviews can help to explore the major positions taken, and not taken, in the data, as well as difference, concern, and controversy around issues in the situation of inquiry.

5.10.4 Usefulness

Finally, Charmaz (2006) asks researchers to consider: “How does my work contribute to knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world?” (p. 183). As previously discussed in the literature review chapter, significant concerns about social network gambling games exist; however, there is a dearth of research currently helping us to understand them. To date, the limited amount of academic scholarship available is derived from a singular disciplinary, quantitative approach, rather than using a qualitative, constructivist position to further our understanding of how youth perceive their social network gambling gameplay. The knowledge generated from my study will significantly impact youth gambling prevention and education programming, which will be further discussed in the discussion chapter.

5.11 Representing Qualitative Data

There is no one style that qualitative researchers need to adhere to when presenting their findings. Rather, researchers must attend to the balance between description, analysis, and interpretation, so that their write-ups fit with the author’s research paradigm, purposes, and methods (Sandelowski, 1998). To achieve this important balance, several methodological decisions were made. For instance, Phase One of my study emphasizes framing the ZP setting or landscape. During the presentation of these findings my writing will take on a more interpretive form, calling attention to not only the presentation of my analysis, but also focusing on an explanation of the findings, which may at times be intercut with references to literature. This will create a more transparent link between the description and analysis, and my interpretative end product.

Whereas, in Phase Two, a primary objective of this study is to illuminate how ZP’s framing influences youths’ motivations to play poker and their perceptions of their gameplay. For this reason, I chose to focus on showcasing youths’ lived experiences of poker play on ZP using their own words.

6 Chapter 6: Phase One Findings – Framing the Landscape

Frames are like the border around a picture that separates it from the wall and from other possibilities.

- Altheide (2002, p. 176)

In this chapter, I present an analysis and interpretation of the ZP application on Facebook. Thanks to technological advancements over the past decade, gambling, and in particular poker, has experienced a period of rapid growth and transformation. New platforms have been developed and new cultures have emerged, forever changing the look and experience of gambling, as we have known it.

Gregory Bateson (2000) posits, “the frame around a picture, if we consider this frame as a message intended to order or organize the perception of the viewer, says ‘Attend to what is within and do not attend to what is outside.’” (p. 187). As previously mentioned, frames can significantly influence how individuals conceptualize “What is it that is going on here?” (Goffman, 1986) and need to be considered when seeking to fully understand the environmental influences that impact how players perceive their play. As Clarke (2005) argues:

Increasingly, historical, visual, narrative, and other discourse materials and nonhuman material cultural objects of all kinds must be included as elements of our research and subjected to analysis because they are increasingly understood/interpreted as both constitutive of and consequential for the phenomena we study. (p. 145)

The primary objective of this first phase of my research study was to identify and examine influences of the game design and intention of ZP that youth are exposed to when playing poker on Facebook. To achieve this goal and to answer the specific research questions, I personally interacted with the game over a course of a month to examine: (1) What are the discourses

embedded in Facebook's popular ZP application? and (2) How do the game's social and design elements shape youths' experiences of poker on Facebook?

6.1 Discourses of Social Connection, Harmlessness, Empowerment, and Virtual Consumerism

My analysis and interpretation shows how four discourses are constructed on the ZP site to frame poker: Social Connection, Harmlessness, Empowerment, and Virtual Consumerism. Each will be elaborated upon below.

6.1.1 The Social Connection Discourse

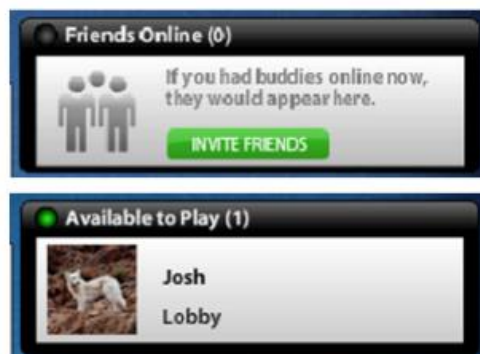
Perhaps, unsurprisingly, ZP emphasizes the importance and prominence of social connections within the game. As clearly outlined in the application's Community Guidelines, "Zynga games are a fun way to connect with friends and meet like-minded people." ZP's About Us document articulates that players "have the option to play at any table, meet new people from around the world or join friends for a game," in addition to "interacting with other players by chatting, completing challenges and sending and receiving gifts." Both documents represent the underlying assumptions that ZP is built upon.

The social connections discourse is reinforced with specific features directly constructed within the ZP application. The main lobby (see Figure 8) highlights intentional elements that have been chosen to enhance social connections between players.



Figure 8. Screenshot of Zynga Poker’s Main Lobby (Home Page). Image captured from the authors computer on April 30, 2013.

For example, the images in Figure 9 illustrate how players can immediately see which one of their friends is currently playing poker and where within the application they are located. The large banners at the bottom of ZP’s main lobby and poker room pages offer free chips to players who invite Facebook friends to come and join. From the moment that players enter ZP, there are constant design features that allow players to see and connect with both poker “buddies” within the system and friends that are a part of their larger Facebook community.



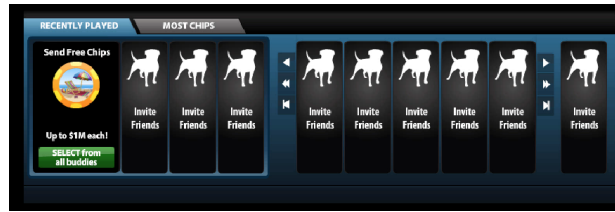


Figure 9. Social connection design elements from ZP's Main Lobby. Images captured from authors computer on May 15, 2013.

Once players enter into the main poker room (see Figure 10), there are two prominent social connection design elements: the dealer and the chat box feather. The primary poker table is located prominently in the centre of the image; the colours of the room are bold and eye-popping – demanding attention.



Figure 10. Screenshot of Zynga Poker's Poker Room. Image captured from the authors computer on April 30, 2013.

At the top centre of the table is a female dealer. The female dealer's gaze is focused as if she is looking directly through the screen at you, personally inviting you to take a seat and join in the game. Having a dealer is an important representation decision, as it helps the game application and the playing experience feel “real”, like you would feel if you were physically

sitting down at the table in a casino. Her gaze offers the players an immediate connection into the game.

Below the primary poker table is the chat box feature. Participants can chat with fellow players while playing a hand of poker through the chat box feature that is constantly located at the bottom right of the poker room page (see Figure 11). The chat box builds on that warm invitation from the dealer by allowing players to see who has joined or left the table, in addition to creating a forum for players to congratulate each other on good hands or just engage in general conversation. For example, in the chat box image below, “Wanda” is able to discern that “Arthur” has now left the table, but is also able to interject social conversation with fellow players when she laughingly admits “I don’t have to go out to have a party.”



Figure 11. Chat Box Feature from ZP’s Poker Room. Images captured from authors computer on May 15, 2013.

Finally, the invitation below, which is posted on players’ personal Facebook homepages by ZP, illuminates how ZP is using the viral nature of SNSs, along with the lure of extrinsic rewards, to motivate players to recruit new players (e.g., friends) to their games (see Figure 12). In essence, ZP is harnessing the power of social connections as an effective marketing tool.

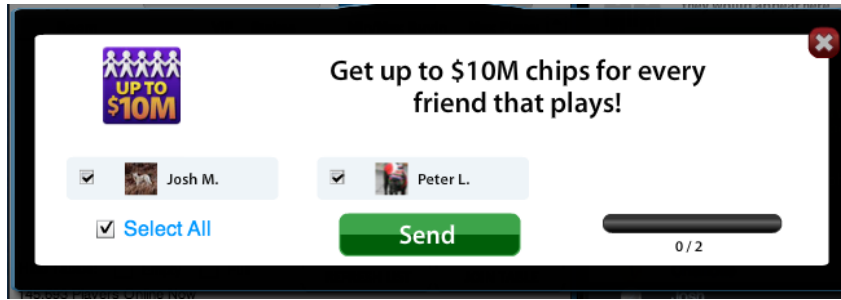


Figure 12: ZP’s Recruit-A-Friend Invitation. Image captured from authors computer on June 2, 2013.

This discourse directly pertains to the experience of relatedness. According to Social Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002), relatedness refers to “feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by others, to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one’s community” (p. 7). Social network gambling, as I refer to this game genre, is called that because the gambling games are embedded within social networking sites. This foundational social platform that ZP is directly implanted into inserts several layers of social connections into the game.

In sum, as Crawford, Gosling, and Light (2011) argue, “as research increasingly would seem to suggest, a key pleasure, motivation, and appeal of online gaming is its communal nature, as well as the need to locate gaming within a wider social setting” (p. 14). The discursive theme of social connection assembled by ZP clearly illustrates how the motivational need for relatedness is thoughtfully constructed into its popular poker application.

6.1.2 The Harmlessness Discourse

The game of poker has “come a long way from cigar-store back rooms and dingy basements” (Schwartz, 2006, p. 494), finding itself prominently featured in the virtual lives of individuals on Facebook. I found that the second discursive theme constructs ZP as a harmless game. As illustrated previously, it is my interpretation that the textual and visual images available on ZP are an example of how Zynga is actively framing poker as a social game between friends, as opposed to a form of gambling (Zynga, 2014) which would hold monetary (i.e., losing money/credits) and other risks (e.g., preoccupation with playing, spending too much time) for

players. This results in the perception that ZP is an innocent form of gaming entertainment without the possibility of any related harms.

ZP is embedded within Facebook's social networking platform. This, in and of itself, helps to construct the game as harmless, as FB has become a taken-for-granted part of a daily online ritual for many, connecting itself directly into a player's social world. As a youth gambling analyst, I am aware that early exposure to gambling is a significant risk factor for experiencing gambling-related harms as an adult (Gupta & Derevensky, 2008; Volberg et al., 2010). However, many young people are not cognizant of this; as a result, participating in ZP on FB is void of any critical examination, particularly with respect to their own gameplay perceptions and behaviours. Furthermore, instead of having to be 18 years old to legally venture into the local casino or play on professional online poker sites, individuals are only required to be 13 years of age to create a FB profile and begin playing poker.

Within ZP itself, the game draws heavily on visual images, with minimal text (as shown above in Figures 2 and 3). It is this interplay between the two elements within the application that helps me analyze what might be going on discursively. At the top of the screens are arrays of other Zynga games that one can play which are just a click away—all brightly coloured and cartoon-like. These cute images suggest harmlessness, drawing on discourses of carefree childhoods. By bordering ZP with other Zynga-affiliated games, it conveys an overall image of fun and the animation exudes an element of innocence, reminiscent of many childhood games, despite some of the games more mature content that outside of FB would be regulated and age-restricted (see Figure 13). As shown on the banner, a game like Zynga Slots falls between non-gambling themes games, such as Farmville and Empires and Allies, while Lucky Play Casino resides alongside two other games, both of which are also not based on traditional casino-type games. Embedding games based on traditional gambling-type activities alongside non-gambling types games helps to construct ZP, Lucky Play Casino, and Zynga Slots, as just another game within a repertoire of harmless activities.



Figure 13. Zynga's Portal of Games. Image captured from the authors computer on April 30, 2013.

As I mention previously, my analysis of ZP demonstrates a level of deliberate personalization in its design, as a way to enhance social connections within the application (as illustrated above), while also a mechanism to establish trust. Personalization within the game refers to the use of personal information, including real names, lists of friends, demographics, location, and more, as a means of personalizing SNSs applications for a more tailored experience (Toch, Wang, & Cranor, 2012). The uses of personalization technologies have become widespread on SNSs and have increasingly been recognized as a key factor in instilling online trust (Briggs, Burford, De Angeli, & Lynch, 2002). For example, immediately upon entering the application, ZP welcomes you by name and players can instantly see a list of their friends who are currently playing (see Figure 14). Additionally, all communication, via email and/or posted onto one's Facebook homepage, is personally addressed to the player by name.



Figure 14: Personalized Welcome. Image captured from authors computer on May 15, 2013.

Finally, according to ZP's About Us document, "Zynga Poker is the largest free-to-play online poker game in the world." The very nature of the concept free-to-play²⁷ may contribute to players perceiving their play as an innocent form of entertainment, implying a harmless activity because no real money was wagered.

6.1.3 The Empowerment Discourse

The third discourse highlights the combination of textual and visual elements on ZP that reflect an empowering frame, creating an environment where players feel more confident about their poker gameplay. ZP has strategically integrated a lot of design elements that relate to skill development and reinforcement for accomplishing certain in-game achievements. At the basic game level, players feel a sense of accomplishment as they win hands, play in tournaments, accumulate virtual chips, and build up Experience Points (XP).²⁸

The images in Figure 15 exemplify the various mechanisms that ZP deliberately incorporates into their gaming experience to construct a player's sense of empowerment over their poker ability and progress through the game. For example, ZP enhances that sense of confidence and efficacy in one's poker ability by posting mastery messages on a players FB timeline for friends to see and utilizing pop-up windows and in-game notifications to highlight specific in-game poker accomplishments.



²⁷ As previous described in Chapter Five, the free-to-play business model allows players to play the core game for free, but have the option to buy virtual goods when desired.

²⁸ Experience Points (XP) are explained in greater detail later in the chapter under the Player Journey Framework section discussing how players progress through the game.



Figure 15: Empowerment Messages. Images captured from authors computer on May 17, 2013.

The achievements players attain, in comparison to fellow poker competitors, can also foster an empowered sense of self, and can be used track poker play statistics to illustrate skill development over time. ZP captures detailed player data and profiles for every player. All profiles are made visible to fellow players by hovering over the player's avatar. It is this player data that helps determine Leaderboard²⁹ standings and eligibility to play in tournaments, working as a reputational system that highlights trophies and personal standings. Figure 16 is an example of my high frequency player's profile. As shown, the profile highlights a standard array of statistics, such as my best hand, number of hands won, highest chip level, and largest pot won, amongst other key variables. Competitiveness, whether it is against other players, or directed as a form of self-improvement, can significantly impact one's confidence. This analytic profile page is designed as a retrospective tool for players to examine their own game highlights, in addition to helping to provide hand histories of players' opponents.

²⁹ Leaderboards provide a visual representation of where players rank within the gamified play system. Leaderboards can be spliced into different categories, allowing players the opportunity to compare their quantified levels of play.

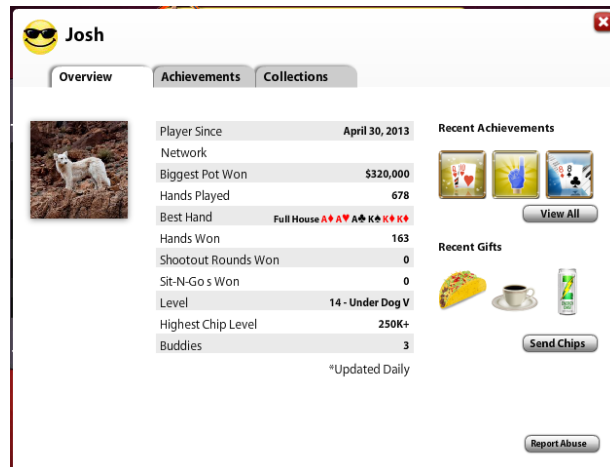


Figure 16: Personal Profile Page. Image captured from authors computer on May 10, 2013.

This discourse is directly related to the motivational need for competence. As outlined by Ryan and Deci (2002), competence refers to “feeling effective in one’s ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one’s capacities” (p. 7). Within ZP, players “seek challenges that are optimal for their capacities and to persistently attempt to maintain and enhance those skills and capacities through the activity” (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7).

6.1.4 The Virtual Consumerism Discourse

In recent years, selling virtual items for real money has become a lucrative business model in games (Lehdonvirta et al., 2009; Zynga, 2014) and is the final discursive theme that was predominantly portrayed in ZP. The virtual consumerism discourse centres on the games textual/visual elements, which reflect the increasingly common practice of infusing game mechanics with the consumption of items.

According to both Zynga’s annual report (2014) and their About Us document, “Zynga Poker has been a top 10 grossing game in the Apple App Store.” Documents also state, “Through the gift shop, players can personalize and decorate their seat at the table” while also “sending and receiving gifts, including poker chips.” Figure 17 reveals the virtual gift shop, selling drinks and

snacks, in addition to entertainment tokens and international flags that, once purchased, accompany your avatar (either temporarily or permanently).

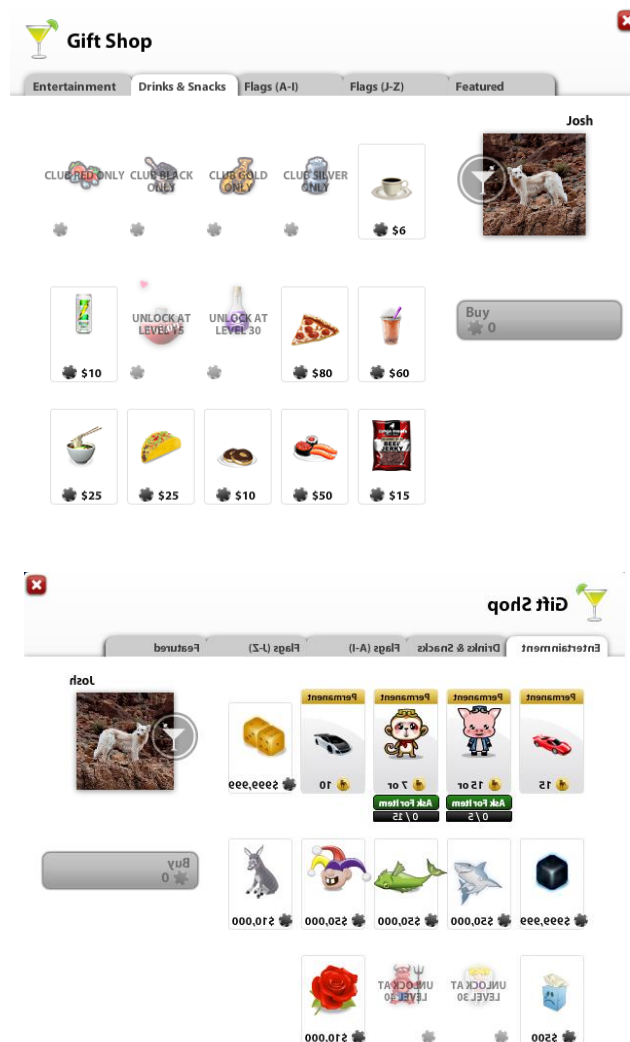


Figure 17: Virtual Gift Shop Items. Images captured from authors computer on May 10, 2013.

There are two types of currency in ZP—chips and casino gold. Chips are used for basic game playing and can be used across Zynga games. There are several ways a player can receive more chips: referring friends to play, logging in on a daily basis, winning hands, sending chips to/from online buddies, and purchasing. Casino gold, on the other hand, is ZP's in-game currency and can only be purchased once players have depleted their complementary 8 pieces received

upon registering to play. As shown above in Figure 17, chips can purchase the majority of gifts; however, the permanent gifts can only be purchased with casino gold.

One component of the virtual consumerism discourse is the ease of access for players to purchase additional chips or casino gold when required. As the screen shot in Figure 18 illustrates, there are a number of design features on the page that allow players to instantly click to have the opportunity to purchase additional chips through various payment options. For example, at the top of the screen, players can easily click on the link *Get Chips & Gold!* and instantly a pop-up window appears that allows players to select a number of different package options for both chips and casino gold, paying conveniently with a variety of payment options.

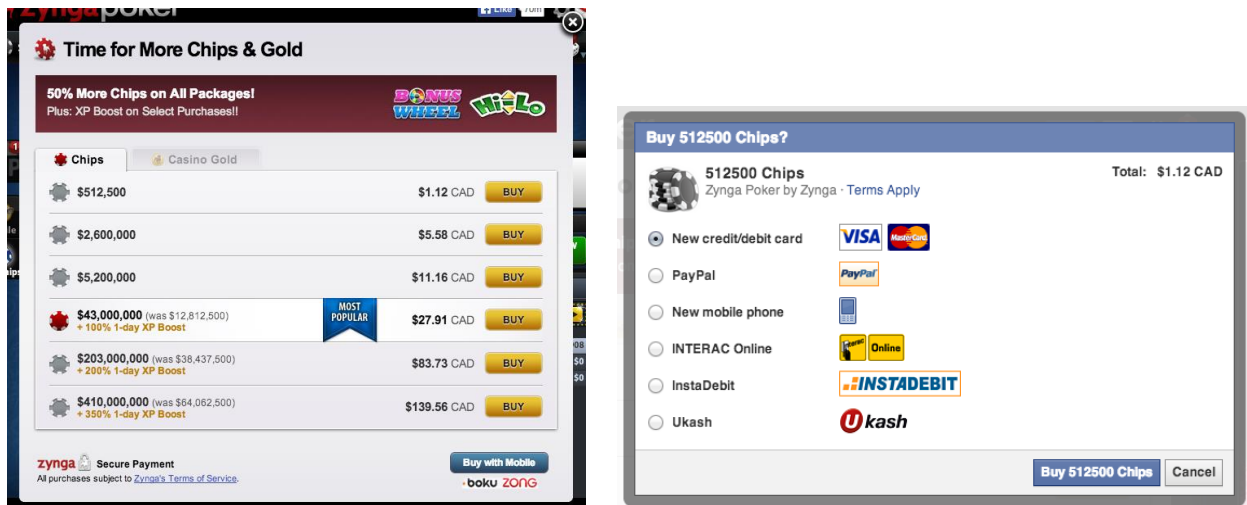


Figure 18. ZP Purchasing Virtual Chips. Images captured from authors computer on May 10, 2013.

Further, if players find themselves having a run of bad luck over a series of hands, ZP automatically shows a pop-up window, which informs players how much they have lost, alongside the option to immediately purchase additional chips to get back in the game and, essentially, chase their losses (see Figure 19). It should be noted, that within the gambling field, the term *chasing*, refers to when players try to win back the money that they have lost and has been cited as one of the observable behaviours of individuals who may be gambling at problem

levels (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2012). By actively encouraging *chasing*, not only is ZP prompting player's to virtually consume, they are also further reinforcing the harmlessness of this activity by understating the true nature of this particular behaviour.



Figure 19. Instant Pop-Up Window to Purchase Additional Chips. Image captured from authors computer on May 10, 2013.

Finally, similar to any consumer purchase, purchasing chips or casino gold on ZP is subject to their Terms of Service. There is an interesting contrast between the wording of the Terms of Service document and the previous discourses of social connections, empowerment, and harmlessness, as constructed by ZP. The discrepancy seems to be managed by obscuring the Terms of Services as a tiny link on the bottom of the payment options pop-up window (see Figure 18) or on the bottom of the poker room screens, centering significant attention to the ease with which virtual currency can be purchased, but hiding the legal framework that surrounds the purchase. For example, according to the Terms of Service, players “have no right or title in or to any such goods or virtual currency appearing or originating in the Service,” and “Zynga has the absolute right to manage, regulate, control modify, and/or eliminate such virtual currency and/or virtual goods as it sees fit in its sole discretion.” Players who violate the Terms of Service are subject to being banned from all Zynga games, in addition to opening themselves up to potential legal repercussions. Essentially, Zynga is trying to ensure that in-game virtual currency, holds no value outside of ZP, by safeguarding itself from players who may wish to “buy or sell any Virtual

Currency or Virtual Good for ‘real world’ money or otherwise exchange items for value” (Zynga, Terms of Service document). In essence, securing it’s non-adherence to the legal coordinates of gambling—consideration, chance, and prize (Owens, 2010).

To summarize, this section presented the four discourses active in Facebook’s popular ZP application—social connection, harmlessness, empowerment, and virtual consumerism. Discourses significantly contribute to the shaping of how players perceive and experience their poker gameplay. In the following section, I present the next phase of my ethnographic journey with ZP to examine, for myself, how the design elements frames or shapes a players’ experience.

6.2 Interaction Analysis: 5-Step Players Journey Framework

In the field of gaming, it has long been discussed that game mechanics make web and game design more engaging and sticky³⁰—a characteristic which is intended to get players to spend long periods of time on the site. The next phase of my analysis was guided by Amy Jo Kim’s (2013) 5-Step Player Journey Framework.³¹ In this section I put myself into the frame, presenting the findings from my interaction with the ZP application, organized under five subheadings: player insight, motivation, lifecycle, progress, and loops. It should be noted that some of the images might be similar to those previously shown; however, they bear repeating to illuminate the design elements that contribute to making ZP a sustained, compelling user experience and, in turn, promoting youth engagement with the application.

6.2.1 Player Insight

The first principle for achieving retention to the game is an awareness of who your player is and an understanding of their motivation to play (see Figure 20).

³⁰ Once again, the stickiness of a game refers to the game mechanics/properties that encourage a player to play longer in the game (Pierce, 2010).

³¹ The 5-Step Player Journey Framework is described in detail previously, in Chapter Five, along with the data management that allowed for the collection of data for this analysis.

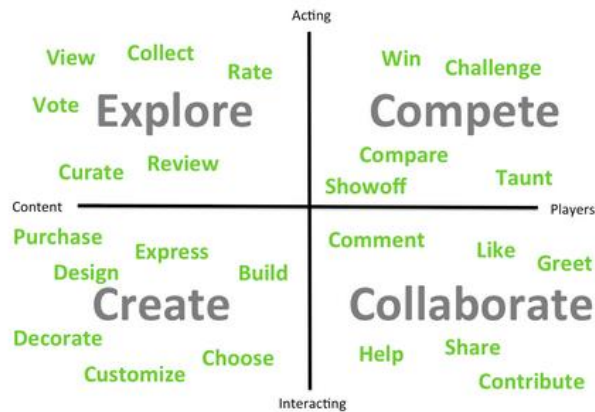


Figure 20. Kim's Social Action Matrix. Image captured from <http://www.slideshare.net/amyjokim/players-journey-5step-design-framework-for-longterm-engagement>, with permission from author.

Texas Hold'em is a competitive poker game where the objective is generally clear—have the best five-card poker hand at the end of the game. Throughout my playing sessions, it became evident that the poker application was strongly catering to players who were motivated by competition. For example, key game elements were portrayed, such as (1) leaderboards indicating your positioning amongst your friends (with respect to chips won), (2) daily wall posts, and (3) HiLo Challenges with friends, all of which included such words as *rank*, *challenge*, *rematch*, *climb to win*, *standings*, and *brag to friends* (see Figure 21).



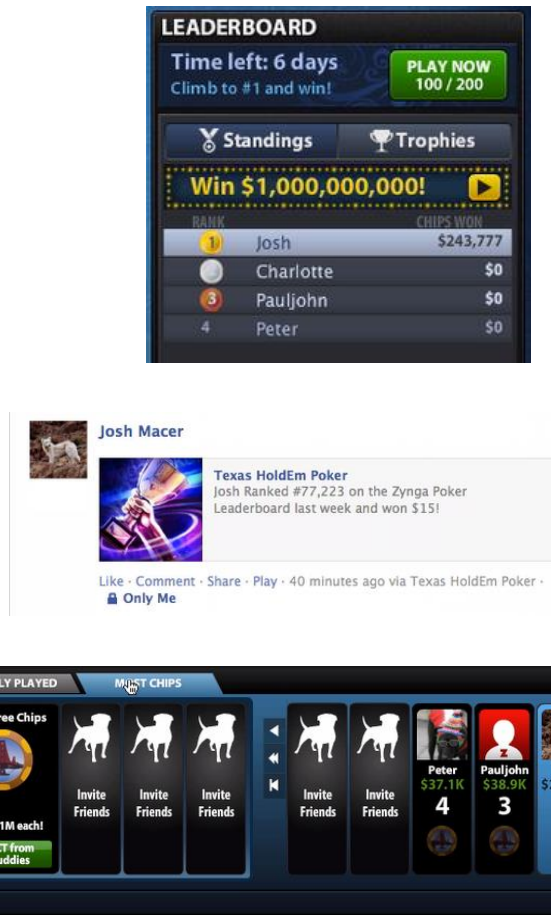


Figure 21: Examples of Competitiveness. Images captured from authors computer on June 12, 2013.

As previously mentioned, poker on SNSs is set apart from other professional online poker sites because it is embedded within an already established and flourishing social networking system, such as Facebook. Social network gambling games allow players to tap into their need to express themselves, further catering to the player who is motivated to play through a need to create an identity for him or herself. For example, players can play poker using their personal Facebook profiles, choosing/changing their avatars/profiles at their desire and their profile walls can display posts indicating to themselves and their friends that they are poker players and enjoy the game. Further, players have opportunities to purchase virtual goods. As previously mentioned, virtual goods are non-physical, abstract objects that players purchase with virtual currency to customize the look and appearance of their avatars, or then can send them to other

friends/players within the game. The images in Figure 22 illustrate the virtual gifts that my high frequency player, Josh, received while playing. As shown, these gifts get displayed beside one's avatar around the table.



Figure 22: Examples of Virtual Gifts. Images captured from authors computer on June 12, 2013.

ZP is an international application that allows players around the world to come together and play. One popular form of identity expression is to purchase an international flag that represents where you are from to accompany your avatar. Figure 23 is a screen capture of the gift shop where players can purchase the international flags of their choice.

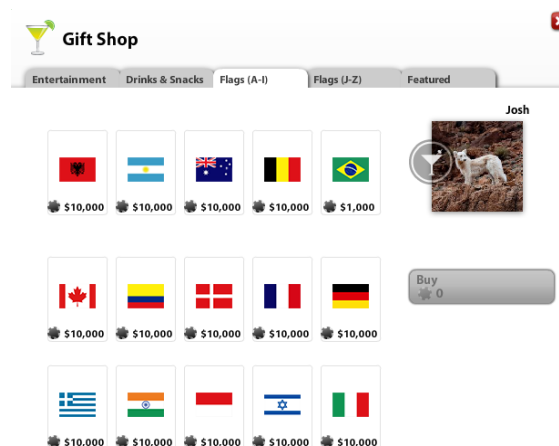


Figure 23. Virtual Flags Available for Purchase. Image captured from authors computer on May 10, 2013.

6.2.2 Motivation

Table 5 outlines the various game elements and associated motivations that I documented while playing poker on Zynga (Images captured on authors computer between May-June 2013). Of particular interest, I found that while ZP is actively trying to connect to players unmet needs—competence, autonomy, relatedness—the relatedness activities seem to be extrinsically³² positioned to motivate players with the lure of additional chips. For example, by inviting friends to join the game, players can receive \$10 million worth of additional chips (see Figure 24).

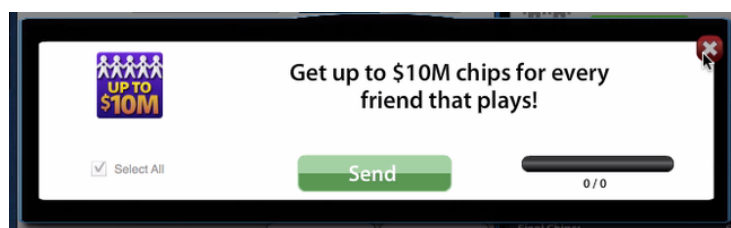


Figure 24: Wall Post Invitation for Free Chips. Image captured from authors computer on June 2, 2013.

By attaching the relatedness game elements to extrinsic rewards, such as virtual chips for every friend recruited to join, ZP is harnessing the players desire to receive more chips as a marketing strategy, while at the same time, providing an external trigger to cue users with a call to action of what to do next (i.e., invite friends; Eyal & Hoover, 2014). These motivational incentive messages usually occur through ZP posting on a player's wall post, or through an email sent directly to the player. According to Eyal and Hoover (2014), relationship triggers—"one person telling others about a product or service" (p. 45)—can be a highly effective marketing strategy as they can "create the viral hyper-growth" (p. 45) that many game designers are seeking. In essence, what this has now done is blur the line between user-generated content and viral

³² Extrinsic motivation behaviours are those whose motivation is based on an offering of a tangible reward for doing the activity (e.g., virtual poker chips; Ryan & Deci, 2002)

marketing for their own purposes, which, I would argue, may not at all be linked with players desire to connect and relate to friends.

6.2.3 Lifecycle

Facebook has over a billion registered users, and thousands of games to choose from, making it a player's market. Therefore, games need to maintain a balance between skill and challenge throughout the entire lifecycle of the game, no matter what the skill level of the player. While playing poker on the application over a month, it was easy to recognize how ZP was catering to the different skill levels of players. Below, I draw from my experience playing poker on the site to illustrate the various design elements throughout the game targeted to what Kim (2013) refers to as (1) Beginner onboarding, (2) Habit-building for regular players, and (3) Mastery for experts.

6.2.3.1 Beginner Onboarding

Figure 25 depicts the initial screen that players come to as they enter the application. No matter what a player's skill level, there is an instant welcoming feeling through the personalization of the texts and the receiving of free chips. There is an ease of entry into the game—whether it is to learn to play or to find a table in the lobby. As a beginner player myself, I found that I quickly progressed from Level 1 after only 2 hands, while also receiving a “welcome wagon” achievement bonus. ZP also gives users an opportunity to enable the “hand strength meter” which offers players a way to determine how good one's hand is once the cards have been dealt. I found this feature very helpful in developing my skills while playing throughout my research which, alongside my quick progression through the game levels, significantly helped to build a level of confidence in my poker game.

Table 5: Player Motivations

Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness
<div>Purchase Virtual Goods</div> <div><div>Gift Shop</div><div>EntertainmentDrinks & SnacksFlags (A-I)Flags (J-Z)Featured</div><div><div><div>CLUB ONLYCLUB BLACKCLUB GOLDCLUB SILVER</div><div><div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div>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Figure 25. Welcome Screen Examples. Images captured from authors computer on April 30, 2013.

6.2.3.2 Habit-Building

The habit-building phase needs to accommodate regular players by offering fresh content/activities/challenges, essentially so that players don't get bored. I would argue that, on an

ethical level, designing a game to be habit-building, is similar to designing the game to have addictive properties. It is worth noting that I use the word *addictive* here, not referring to addiction with respect to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5 (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), but rather referring to the perspective of the youth interviewed (Brus, 2013) who referred to their pre-occupation with thinking about poker and a strong desire to continue to play despite running out of chips or time. This will be elaborated upon further in Chapter Seven when I discuss the lived experiences of youth who play ZP.

Figure 26 shows a self-titled “habit forming” pop-up screen that informs players that they can “get rewarded for playing ZP every day. The more consecutive days you play, the more chips you’ll get”!

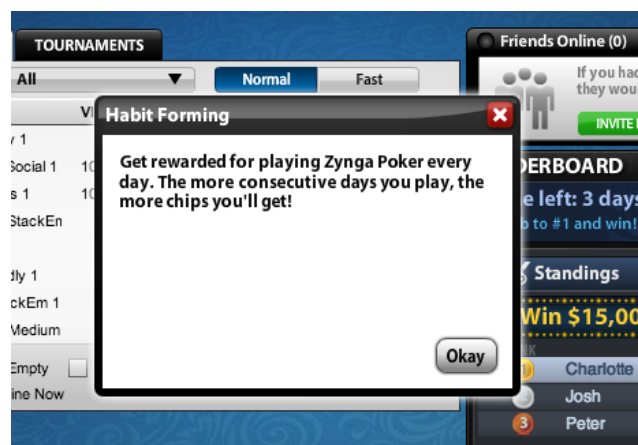


Figure 26. Habit Forming Message. Image captured from authors computer May 12, 2013.

As mentioned, I consider myself to be a beginner player and while Zynga has created a great poker platform for the “newbie” player (according to Kim’s (2013) player lifecycle), I can also see how ZP was designed to meet the needs of the regular and more advanced players. For example, the main lobby gives players access to a variety of tables with different stakes, in addition to a wide array of tournaments (see Figure 27).

Room	Stakes	Min/Max Buyin	Players
Hollywood - Medium 5	40K / 80K	800K / 16M	8 / 9
Card Shark - Medium 1	2K / 4K	40K / 800K	8 / 9
Slick - Advanced 1	1K / 2K	20K / 400K	8 / 9
Slick - Social 2	1K / 2K	20K / 400K	8 / 9
Player - Medium 1	200 / 400	4K / 80K	8 / 9
Big Dog - Newbie 4	100 / 200	2K / 40K	8 / 9
Big Dog - Pro 4	100 / 200	2K / 40K	8 / 9
Learning - Newbie 4	25 / 50	500 / 10K	8 / 9

Figure 27. Poker Tables Available. Image captured from authors computer June 12, 2013.

Poker is a game that constantly changes thanks to the randomness of the deck—no two hands will ever be the same. Additionally, the very nature of online poker delivers a faster-paced poker game experience, with time allocations to play one’s cards that lead to short wait times between hands. ZP offers players (who have reached Level 3) an opportunity to play at the fast tables, which have even shorter time allocations than the normal tables. Because of this, I would argue that Zynga doesn’t have to include many specific design elements to capture the attention of the regular player—you just need enough chips to continue playing. By extrinsically motivating players with high chip daily payouts, regular players are naturally going to log in to receive free chips—essentially creating a daily habit.

There are countless ways to receive free chips daily and “forming a habit is imperative for the survival of many products” (Eyal & Hoover, 2014, p. 2). In fact, it became evident to me during my gameplay journey that ZP was trying to engineer my poker play into a daily routine or habit. I noticed that I would create a daily log-in routine, regardless of whether I played or not, just so I could receive free chips from a variety of sources: the daily email offers, playing the Lucky Bonus Slots game daily, and watching my “best hand” videos, just to name a few (see Figure 28).



• Email-Exclusive Surprise Briefcase.

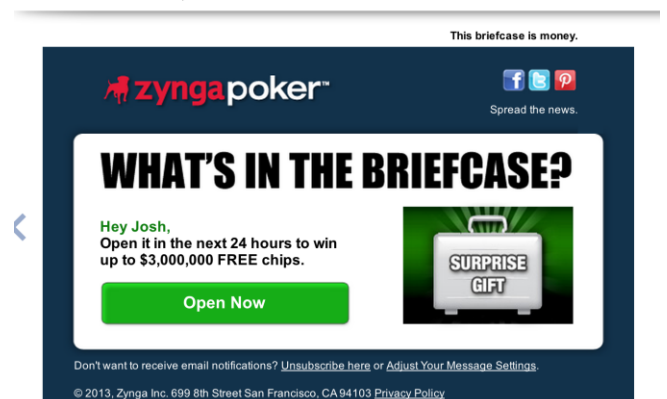


Figure 28. Examples of Daily Free Chip Opportunities. Images captured from authors computer June 13, 2013.

Additionally, as shown in Figure 29, players can earn free chips through innovative third party marketing strategies that solicit players to conduct surveys, watch videos, and install additional apps.

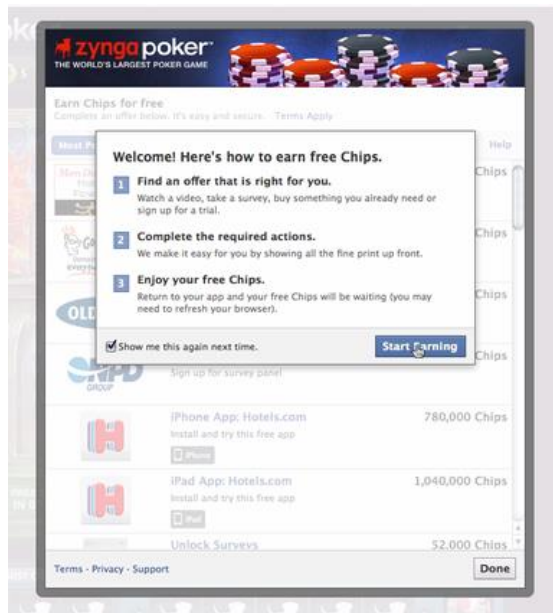


Figure 29. Third party marketing strategies. Images captured from authors computer on June 14, 2013.

6.2.3.3 Mastery for Experts

For those players who need to feel a part of something exclusive or who wish to receive recognition and status for their achievements and skills, ZP offers access to its Players Club (for a small fee)—a loyalty program that rewards the top players. As illustrated in Figure 30, the Players Club is geared to attract the more skilled poker players, offering VIP players access to members-only, high-stakes tables; double experience points for games played; free, limited-edition virtual items; and a VIP badge on your avatar for all to see.

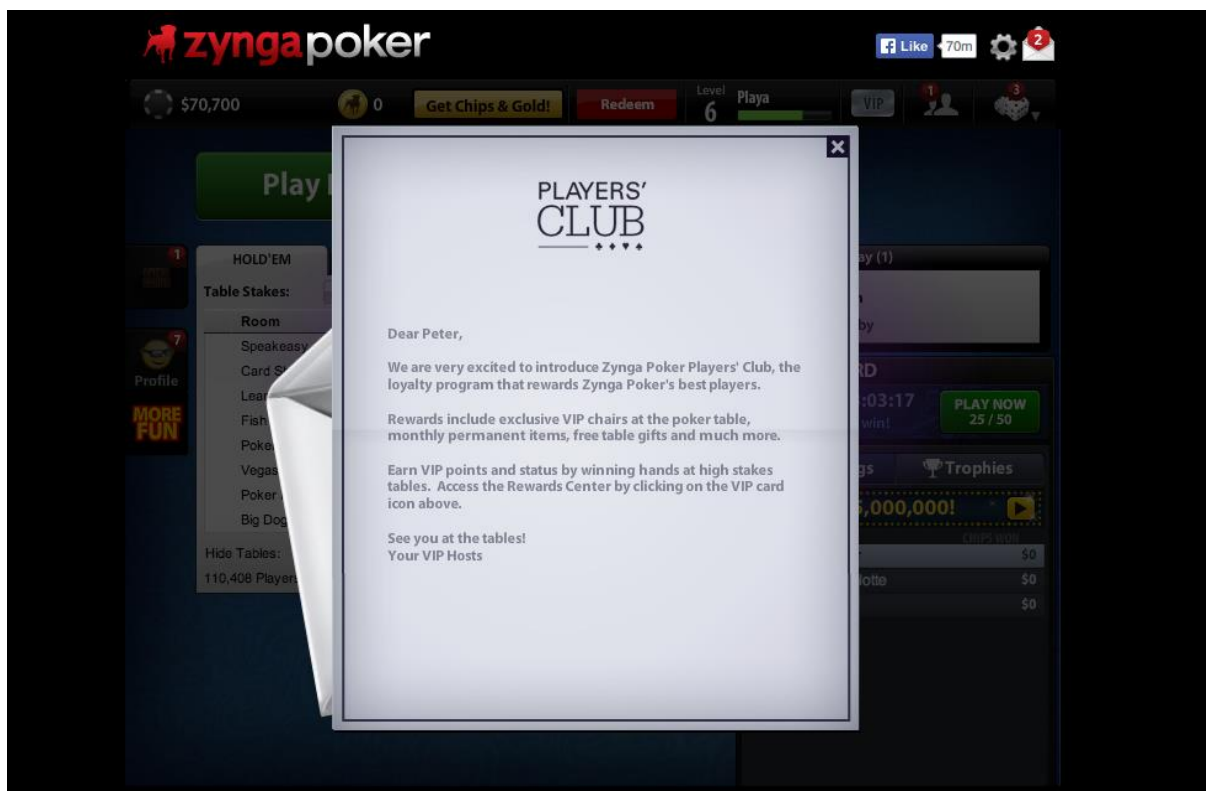


Figure 30. VIP Players Club Invitation (received by email). Image captured from authors computer on June 15, 2013.

6.2.4 Progress

Keeping score in ZP, through Experience Points (XP) and in-game currency (both chips and gold), is a key design element that helps players quantify their progression through the game.

Experience Points are uni-directional, meaning that they only increase as a direct reflection of players' actions and accomplishments while playing poker. Virtual currency (in-game credits) is bi-directional and can be either purchased or earned through successful hand wins (Kim, 2013).

All players begin at Level 1³³ (Fish) and players gain XP as they play hands, win hands, and enter and win tournaments, for example. The larger the pot, the more XP players receive. In addition, a variety of game gifts are unlocked and rewarded to regular players at certain accomplishment levels within the game. For example, players cannot play at the fast³⁴ tables until they have reached Level 3. Table 6 outlines the levels achieved for my high frequency player over the course of one month. As outlined, players move through the initial levels fairly quickly as there are fewer XP required to move up a level.

According to Ryan and Deci (2002), competence—a felt sense of confidence and effectiveness in action, is considered one of three psychological needs which “serve to define those contextual factors that tend to support versus undermine motivation, performance, and well-being” (p. 27). While competence does not directly refer to the attainment of a skill or capacity, it does relate to feeling effective in one's interactions and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities, leading individuals to seek out challenges and continually attempt to maintain and enhance those skills and capacities through activity. I found that over the first few sessions of play, the speed with which I progressed through the initial levels definitely contributed to a sense of competence. It also influenced a sense of competence with respect to how I felt others perceived my level of skill. One of the first statistical quantifiers that I would look at in my fellow players, as a way to gauge their skill levels of play, was their achieved XP level. It became an additional measure of how to evaluate myself against my competition around the table.

³³ The highest players can advance to is Level 105.

³⁴ Fast tables refer to the speed of play. Meaning that players have less time to make a decision during a hand than at the normal tables.

Table 6: ZP Level Achievements

Session	Level	Name	XP Required
Week 1_Session 1	1	Fish	0
	2	Fish	5
	3	Fish	30
	4	Fish	40
Week 1_Session 2	5	Playa	60
Week 2_Session 1	6	Playa	100
Week 2_Session 2	7	Playa	137
	8	Playa	176
Week 2_Session 3	9	Playa	215
Week 3_Session 1	10	Under Dog	254
Week 3_Session 2	11	Under Dog	306
Week 4_Session 1	12	Under Dog	358
Week 4_Session 2	13	Under Dog	410
Week 4_Session 3	14	Under Dog	462

6.2.5 Loops

The final principle builds on all of the previous ones discussed above: designing engagement loops reflecting a player's journey lifecycle (i.e., Onboarding, Habit-building, and Mastery). As shown in Figure 31, I incorporated examples from my playing experiences into the loop diagram to illustrate the various design elements that ZP uses to help create an immersive playing experience. First, it was obvious that ZP focuses on a variety of trigger activities to engage new players in the site, or to encourage regular players to return through a heavy campaign of email invites from friends, daily Facebook timeline reminders, and personal email offers.

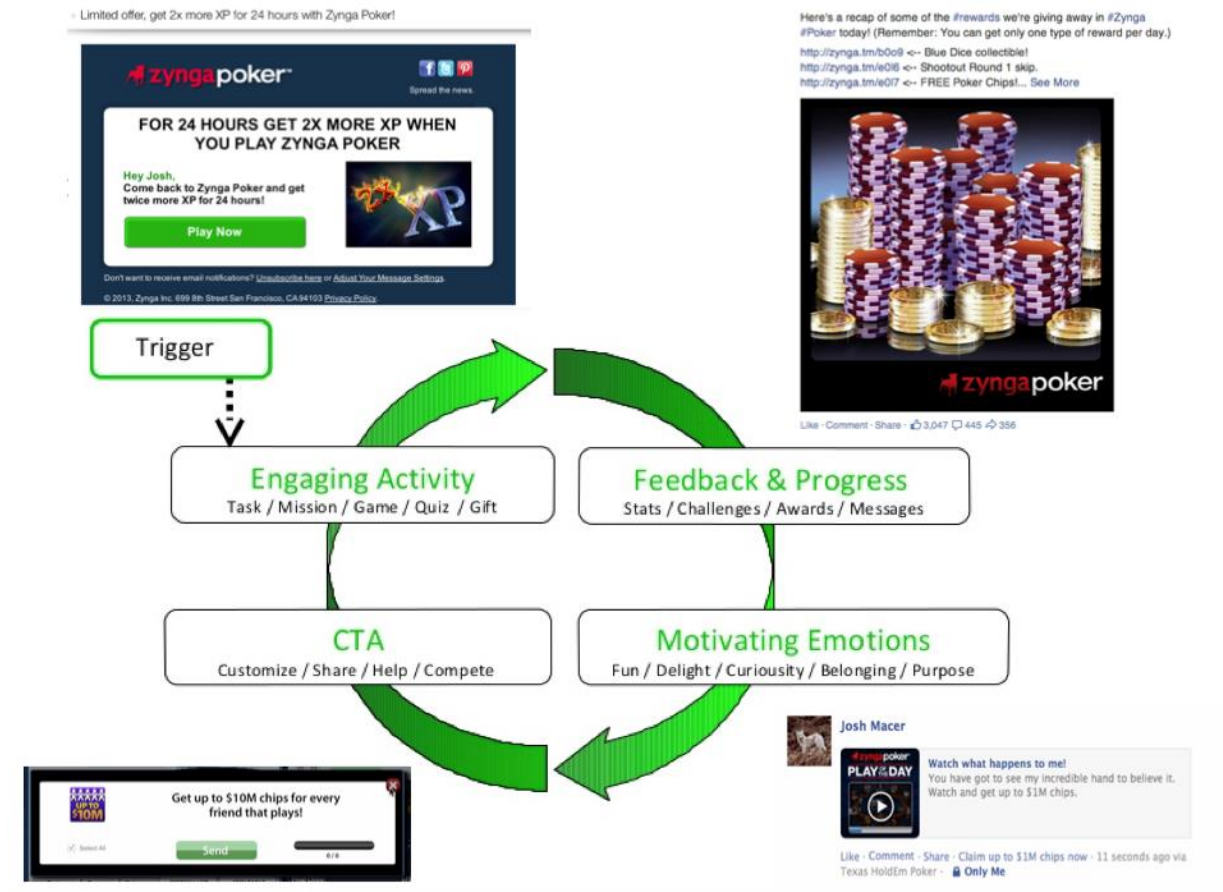


Figure 31. ZP's Use of Engagement Loops. Images captured from authors computer on June 12, 2013.

6.3 Conclusion

Within this phase of my study, I sought to personally interact with ZP over a course of a month to examine: (1) What are the discourses embedded in Facebook's popular ZP application? and (2) How do the game's social and design elements shape youths' experiences of poker on Facebook?

My findings illustrate how visual images and texts powerfully work together to render a discourse (Clarke, 2005). Discourses, such as social connection, harmlessness, empowerment, and virtual consumerism, were found to actively play out according to the design of ZP. Further, after a month of personally putting myself into the game by playing poker and engaging with the

discourses and intentions of the game design, I argue that Zynga has designed ZP to be a fully engaging journey for players, catering to both their emotional and their skill-driven needs. In essence, Zynga has actively designed a habit-forming product, linking their game into the daily routines and emotions of many players. This is not surprising, given that it is widely acknowledged within the gaming industry, that commercial gaming companies, like Zynga, are harnessing theories of human psychology to engineer a gameplay experience to compel players to keep playing (Bogost, 2010; Eyal & Hoover, 2014; Kim, 2013; McGonigal, 2011).

The following excerpt from one of my locating memos during this phase, answers the question, What are the intended goals of the visual material? I concluded that the visual images of ZP are intended to achieve several goals: 1) To be visually pleasing so that players feel invited into the poker game they are entering; 2) To allow users to instantly see other players, both friends and strangers; 3) To provide easy access to purchasing additional chips and gold; 4) To foster a sense of friendly competition between players via leaderboards; 5) To invite new friends to play; 6) To entice players with additional opportunities to gain free chips through side games such as blackjack and Hi/Lo; and finally, 7) To introduce players to the larger family of Zynga games.

With respect to gambling, ZP depicts the latest installment of the continuing transformation of poker—a game that has been played for centuries. The game of poker may have had its genesis in players' basements and dingy backrooms; however, thanks to the Internet, expanded media attention, and now SNSs, the game has new visibility that is attracting a new audience while challenging our understanding of gambling.

As an ethnographer, I conclude that ZP serves to (a) both shape and divert public consciousness in ways that weaken public understanding of gambling and gambling-related harms; (b) actively incorporate design elements that make the game more sticky and engaging; as well as (c) increase social acceptability and contribute to an overall discourse that social gambling is a harmless form of entertainment with few negative consequences. Further, I propose that ZP depicts the emerging new face of poker—a game that has been played for centuries. By incorporating many design elements that have not previously been a part of legally regulated online poker sites, ZP is now visually similar to the gaming sub-culture. Keeping true to the essence of the game of poker, this blurs gambling with gaming. While poker has always fallen

under the larger rubric of gaming, players for the most part were always quite different from those in other areas of gaming, specifically due to poker being classified as a form of gambling³⁵ and, therefore, having to adhere to legal age restrictions and a regulatory framework.

In the following chapters, I will present my findings from the in-depth interviews with both key stakeholders and youth players. By including multiple perspectives, my aim is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social network gambling from various points of view, including my own as an ethnographic analyst. In essence, a comprehension that focuses on a full understanding of social network gambling and the interdependence of its parts.

7 Chapter 7: Phase Two Findings – Key Stakeholder Interviews

This chapter presents the findings from the key stakeholder interviews. Given the novelty of social network gambling games, I felt it was important to understand the various perspectives from professionals across a variety of associated fields, specifically, to answer the research question: What meaning do key stakeholders attribute to poker on Facebook, and what are the implications? The chapter will unfold as follows: (1) What is going on here, which examines key stakeholder perspectives, (2) implications, and (3) concerns regarding the industry.

7.1 What is Going on Here?

Overall, there is no one social network gambling perspective consistent from key stakeholders, but rather two broad conceptualizations about “What it is that’s going on here”: the legal-based frame, and the experiential frame. In essence, there was a consensus amongst professionals that social network gambling games currently represent a convergence between gaming and gambling and that there is a lack of evidence available to help guide our

³⁵ As illustrated in Chapter Two, several definitions of gambling exist across the literature. For the purposes of this research, it is assumed that poker is a form of gambling, as defined by Korn and Shaffer’s (1999) definition: Risking money or something of value on the outcome of an event involving an element of chance when the probability of winning is less than certain.

understanding of this emerging trend. However, when key stakeholders were asked to articulate how they define gambling, and further, if they consider social network gambling games to fall under that definition, there was a degree of variability in responses.

7.1.1 Legal-Based Perspective

My analysis revealed that a few key stakeholders are relying on a traditional legal definition of gambling to guide their understanding of how social network gambling games should be conceptualized. As presented in Chapter Two, legally, gambling games must have three components: consideration, chance, and prize. In essence, money in, a game involving an element of chance, and the potential to win a prize. However, as noted, what constitutes those individual elements is often up for debate and can vary according to jurisdictional interpretation. Within this frame of interpretation, social network gambling games, such as ZP, are not considered gambling, because, as Ms. M mentions, “unless you can cash out then, legally, it cannot be gambling.”

This point of view relies heavily on framing social network gambling games as just another form of entertainment, based on a business model that provides the game free of charge, but encourages players to spend money on in-game purchases. Participants have the ability to put money into the game by buying virtual chips, but will never be able to redeem chips for cash and physically take that money out of the game. For example, as Mr. N states, “you can spend money for entertainment, either to prolong the length of time that you can do that [play ZP] beyond the free period, or you can pay to enhance the experience.”

With regard to the legal coordinates of consideration, chance, and prize, there is an inherent assumption within this perspective that centres on prizes being synonymous with money and therefore, as it stands now, that in-game virtual chips do not hold value outside of the game. However, given the lack of clarity that currently exists around the definitions of these elements, the legal-based perspective of social network gambling games depends on a prize relying solely on this assumption. For as Mr. L indicates, “the biggest risk to the industry is trying to argue that there’s no value for the currency outside of the game, because as soon as you attribute value to it, it becomes gambling, under the traditional definition.”

Mr. L draws attention to an important point in his quote, connecting this perspective to that of the industry. I noted that during the interviews, this conceptualization of social network gambling games was defined as such by key stakeholders who, directly and indirectly, held close ties to social network gambling industry operators. As Mr. L indicates above, the stakes for the industry, which is currently unregulated, are pretty significant, if social network gambling games were to be considered gambling, or more specifically, if prizes were defined as money and/or money's worth, which may hold value outside of the game beyond just financial. To maintain the level of freedom the industry currently has, ZP has to continue to construct these games as just another form of free-to-play entertainment, and keep alive the harmlessness discourse that was active in the analysis of ZP, as presented in the previous chapter.

7.1.2 Experiential Perspective

In addition to the legal-based perspective of social network gambling games, I constructed a second perspective based on the data, as a way to understand “What it is that is going on here.” The experiential perspective extended beyond being guided by legal coordinates, consisting of a more complex examination of the mechanical elements of the games themselves, alongside the experiential nature players feel or perceive while playing. Mr. G articulates this perspective nicely when he says:

Rather than trying to define “Is it? Is it not?” it’s basically looking at what the nature is—the sum of its parts and what it does ... For me, it’s much more important that we look at the components of what it is, and what we think it might do to those who play it, as well as the people who are attracted to that. And of course, in what way, if at all, is it different from traditional forms of gambling.

This point of view draws heavily on examining the similarities and differences between social network gambling games and regulated gambling games, as a way to understand, as Mr. G says, “the sum of its parts and what it does.” The key stakeholders assert that games like poker, slots, and so forth are essentially gambling games with similar elements, despite where they are played and players receiving no cash reward. For example, there are indistinguishable game elements between poker on SNSs and real-money Internet poker sites, in particular, players are

still wagering something, and there's still an element of risk. As Ms. E, a gambling researcher says, "you've still got that decision-making process." The "sum of its parts and what it does" leaves players experiencing the same highs and lows as players wagering with real money. Mr. A, a professional poker player himself, sums it up nicely when he says, "the end process is similar in the brain—which is just, I'm winning or losing and I'm getting the same sort of adrenaline rush from that." The result, as Ms. D, a lawyer, argues, is that social network gambling games are "a bit like the candy on Hansel and Gretel's witch's house, in the sense that it just dresses up something that is actually, at its core, a poker game."

Unlike social network gambling games framed from a legal perspective, which carries strong implications for the industry, conceptualizing these games based on the mechanical elements of the games and players' experiences tends to focus on the implications for the players and, more specifically, how they perceive their poker gameplay. Not surprisingly, this experiential perspective was primarily held by researchers, both in the fields of gambling and gaming, in addition to individuals working in youth gambling prevention who have an understanding of potential gambling-related harms. The differences between these perspectives, highlights the importance of who defines the problem: the industry, relying on traditional legal frameworks which have not kept up with the technological evolution of these games, or disciplinary fields who focus on the players, who may or may not perceive their poker gameplay as gambling. The following by Ms. E reinforces this point:

You're looking at these products in this social networking environment and are you looking at them going, "Well, I'm approaching this from a gambling perspective, and these games are gambling almost," or are you looking at it from a gaming perspective and going "These are games that have a gambling content"? It's gonna be bits of both, it's never going to be one or the other ... I think what we're missing in this is we're missing the voice of the people who are actually using these sites, because if a person who's using them thinks that it's gambling, then it's gambling ... We can sit and talk about this till we are blue in the face, but actually I think it probably comes down to the perception of the user.

To conclude, the key stakeholders articulated two separate perspectives in their interviews to understand "What it is that is going on here?" First was a legal-based perspective, which

considers social network gambling games, not as a form of gambling, but rather a harmless form of entertainment. This perspective is grounded in the assumption that when using the legal gambling coordinates of consideration, chance, and prize (Owens, 2010), social network gambling games, as Ms. E states, are “missing the traditional element of money out”, and if we “stick to the money out rule, then that [conceptualizing of the games] makes it clear.”

However, the second perspective for understanding “What is it that is going on here?” argues for a more comprehensive approach to conceptualizing social network gambling games, by taking into consideration players’ perceptions and experiences, alongside the mechanical elements of the games, such as wagering something of value on and an outcome that involves the element of chance (Korn & Shaffer, 1999). The following section will examine the implications of how social network gambling games are framed.

7.2 Implications

I assert that how games are framed matters, particularly with respect to young players. As will be discussed below, there are some implications to the lack of clarity around how social network games are conceptualized. First, there is significant confusion that surrounds the social network gambling sector, which I would argue, is a result of deliberate deception and of stigma associated with gambling. Second, the social network gambling sector is currently unregulated, and there is a growing debate over the regulation of these games that ultimately comes down to the question, What value does virtual currency hold?

7.2.1 Confusion

The conclusion I reached at this point in my analysis is that there is deliberate deception taking place in the industry to actively frame poker on Facebook as just another form of gaming. For example, one way this takes place is through tight constraints that are placed on funded research, as Ms. E says, forcing researchers to adhere “to a tight list of what they count as gambling.” This matters, because “it really shades how you think about it [gambling] and the understanding of how youth might think about it in particular.” This deception has been taking

place, as Dr. G remarks, “right from the origins of the gambling industry,” but now it gets a bit more complicated with social network gambling games.

The following comment by Ms. J, a game designer, illustrates, in her own words, how key stakeholders from the gaming industry take this deception personally. There is a distinct feeling that while gambling falls under the larger umbrella of games, framing gambling games as gaming is deceiving and not fully acknowledging the similarities and differences between the two industries.

I know that gaming is sometimes used by people who make gambling games [to] refer to their industry. It’s a little contentious because the people who are making other types of digital games, we also call ourselves gaming, and we call those games gambling. Being on this side of the fence, I think of gaming and games as including all sorts of things, being an extremely large umbrella where gambling is actually a subset of gaming ... In fact, I think that a lot of people who are in gaming, as opposed to gambling, really look down on gambling.

A key point that Ms. J alludes to above, is the stigma associated with gambling that has been around for years. Gambling has always been a very loaded term, for some continually being associated with the illegal gambling operations run by organized crime in the twentieth century, and the witnessing of how gambling losses transformed Las Vegas from a desert outpost into one of the world’s top tourist destinations (Schwartz, 2006). It has only been over the past couple of decades that gambling has begun to be seen as a socially acceptable leisure activity, largely because of the powerful deliberate and misleading reconstruction of gambling as gaming by the gambling industry (Derevensky, 2012). As a researcher and clinician working in the gambling field, Dr. O makes this point when he asserts, “I think society as a whole has normalized gambling. We don’t even want to call it gambling anymore; we want to call it gaming in general. The industry has done a remarkable job on turning gambling from a sin and vice to a socially acceptable form of entertainment.”

Key stakeholders working in the larger gaming field are continuing to actively uphold the stigma associated with the term *gambling*. The following two excerpts, from Dr. I and Ms. J, who both work in the gaming field, speak about the “dirty secret” that gambling has become to the larger digital gaming world.

Dr. I: When people say “gaming,” it’s like one of those “What do you mean?” moments. “Oh, you’re talking about gambling. Yeah, that’s like a different thing.”... I would say it’s [gambling] sort of like the dirty secret. In game studies, no one wants to talk about gambling ... It almost never comes up and I think part of it is because games studies, early on, tried to distance itself from all of the talk of violence and effects and addiction, and so with gambling it was just like “never mind,” “stay over there.”

Ms. J: Its [stigma] really is just an extension of the moral approbation of the rest of society. It’s more like someone you’re related to, right? You’re like “Pfft, that’s really bad, please don’t associate me with my brother ... because he is the bad sibling, and I am the okay sibling. I’m trying to work my way towards respectability.” Gaming, as opposed to gambling, is really obsessed with respectability. There are a lot of currents in gaming right now trying to be like, “No, we should be considered seriously. We should have our own New York Times critic and have works in galleries, or a New York Times reviews of games.” Being associated with gambling is really bad for that. It’s like having the cousin who reveals that you come from a non-classy background, while gaming is trying to be “No, no, we’re not like that. We’re a totally different type of person.” ... I think that part of the reason why people in gaming look down on gambling is because we kind of know how it works, why it’s exciting, and then we look down on gambling for really heavily leaning on that stuff and using it to make money. It is very much like there is someone in your family. You know all about the bullshit that goes on in your family and you’re like “I completely disagree with the way that the other person reacted to our family situation.” It’s, one, never going to get respectable that way and, two, I just think it’s kind of wrong. I would never do that [rely heavily on mechanics to make money].

It is clear that there is a sense of disagreement between key stakeholders’ understandings of poker on Facebook. What we see is that tensions exist between the two industries; however, both are trying to separate themselves from the stigmatized “dirty secret” that is gambling. Significant confusion exists about how to frame social network gambling games. This confusion illustrates the significant power that industries have in shaping the public discourse and discussion around these games. As Ms. J puts forth, “the blurred line between gaming and

gambling is going to continue because we don't have a clear line of what they are, and because one world is constantly trying to go into the other."

7.2.2 Regulation

Some of the complexities and inconsistencies expressed above are a result of legal definitions varying from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, ultimately hinging on a lack of clarity around what constitutes a winning prize and whether a winning prize, other than money, holds value. The variance in interpretation was said to be "very stimulating" from the legal perspective, because "we're [lawyers] constantly looking at pieces of legislation, regulations, interpreting our way around it." As articulated by Mr. L in the previous section, the industry has a lot at stake, "because as soon as you attribute value to it [currency], it becomes gambling, under the traditional definition." The implication of which, would lead to some form of regulation of the social network gambling industry that is currently unregulated. Fellow lawyer, Ms. D explained it like this:

If you look up the definition, "What's a prize?" it's something in money or money's worth. For example, when you say "money out," the fact that something sits—you've won something but you can only access it by playing again—probably still qualifies as money out. Other countries look at this and they say, "Well no, if you've actually spent money because you want to acquire something, and that acquisition has an aspiration value, or that acquisition is something that has an aspirational value either from you or your peer group, then we have to be slightly objective about it in saying, "You wouldn't have spent that money had that carrot not be at the end of it," whatever that carrot is.

This has resulted in some regulators finally "getting to the logical brick wall, which is, "I don't care that it doesn't quite fall into this category, I don't like it. It just doesn't feel right to me" (Ms. D). However, this varies across jurisdictions, and across interpretations of the definition of gambling, as currently written in their statute books. For example, as Mr. L explains,

Belgium has a slightly different definition of what they consider as gambling, so they don't actually require any money to come out of it. So, they essentially have a blacklist of operators that it considers to be illegal if it advertises into the country without a license,

and they have put two social gaming producers on that blacklist because they considered it to be gambling. The UK's looking into it, doing their research, basically trying to identify whether there are risks in these types of games, and if there are risks, what are they? Australia is doing the same. Similar in North America, however, they've got so many things going on with their online gambling laws that I think this is taking a bit of a backseat.

Key stakeholders were in agreement in thinking that some form of regulation is on the horizon, as Mr. L predicts, "maybe as soon as eighteen months to three years." Given the popularity and financial success of social network gambling games, alongside the natural alignment the industry has with real-money wagering, the reasonable progression of the industry would be expansion and "convergence with real-money gambling."

Finally, there was a consensus amongst some key stakeholders that the industry would be smart to self-regulate before other industry groups, such as consumer protection, data protection, or financial service protection groups, come in to regulate social network gambling games. As Mr. F, who works in the area of gambling and marketing says, "because it's the companies responsibility" and it would be "most beneficial to the industry, because if they don't, you're leaving it in the hands of the government." Further, self-regulation would create a level of confidence in the players that are currently playing these games. Speaking as someone who holds close ties to the industry, Ms. M argues, "I think all industries need to be self-reflective and all industries need to have other people look at them to make sure there is social responsibility in anything that we do."

7.3 Concerns

Many interviewees articulated potential challenges associated with social network gambling games and, further, feelings of concern for youth who play these games. I constructed a couple of sub-themes from the interviews, specifically (1) the potential for youth to migrate their play from Facebook over to the real-money online poker, and (2) a sense of timelessness that youth are experiencing as a result of being so engrossed while playing these games that they lose track of time and other activities around them.

7.3.1 Migration to Real-Money Poker

As highlighted in the literature review, there is a deeply felt concern within the academic and prevention fields that the youth who currently play poker on Facebook may migrate their play over to the online real-money poker sites—in essence, that social network gambling games may serve as teaching or grooming sites for youth. Not surprisingly, key stakeholders representing both of these sectors within the gambling field further reiterated this sentiment. As Dr. O states,

As a clinician, I think there will be a number of people who become both addicted, for a lack of a better word, to both [*sic*] the social gaming side, but will also migrate, try their luck on the Internet gambling site or the online gambling site and will experience problems. They also may generate and transfer their perceived skills from social gaming, to land-based environments as well.

This perspective on the potential for youth to migrate their gameplay over to real-money wagering, focuses on the experiential nature of the games, and whether or not young players “think they are replicating a real-life gambling environment.” The concern centres on players not being able to distinguish the differences between the two product types and, as Ms. E says, “the ways in which players might play differently and the different risks that are involved.”

In contrast to the framing of social network gambling games above, there was a strong industry-based voice that felt that poker players who currently play these games on SNSs have different needs and desires than individuals who participate in real-money wagering. Therefore, migration from one site to the other is unlikely, or will remain relatively small. Further, in the following excerpt, Ms. M explains what she calls the “coffee effect”—essentially predicated on the assumption that individuals will not be willing to put money into something that they can get for free.

There’s this thing that’s been called the coffee effect. I’m happy to give myself a treat everyday. I’m happy to spend three bucks on a coffee at Starbucks. If Starbucks started giving me coffee for free, and then after ten coffees said to me, “We want you to pay three bucks,” I’m not going to pay. I’m going to give it up. Because I’ve always paid for

something at the beginning, I'll pay for it, but because I never paid for it, I'm not going to start now. And that is what I think is happening with the idea that people will move from free poker to the pay sites. There are people who will naturally pay for it; they're quite happy to pay for it, you wouldn't need to give them that incentive. The numbers of people that transfer from free-to-play to pay are quite small.

Within this perspective, key stakeholders admit that there will always be a small percentage of players who transition from the free-to-play market to the real-money sites. Not because the free-to-play sites act as a catalyst for migration to real-money sites, but rather because statistically when dealing with such large player populations, there will always be players interested in both forms of poker. During our interview Mr. N recalled,

There was recently an article in Gambling Compliance from a guy who has both a [sic] real-money and social bingo sites, and he was saying, "Yeah, we've got a conversion of 6%—we've converted 6% of our social gamers into real-money bingo players." And I'm just trying to look at that—6%, is that really a conversion? Or do people whom [sic] like bingo, some of them play real-money, some of them play social, and some of them play both?

Overall, what is evident in the analysis of the key stakeholder interviews up to this point is that a participant's point of view is strongly aligned with their occupational position within their respective fields. Essentially, migration from social network gambling games, over to real-money wagering is talked about very differently between the two camps within this sector—professionals representing youth gambling research and prevention, and stakeholders who have some affiliation (directly or indirectly) with the social network gambling operators. During my interviews, professionals representing the gaming field were quite ambivalent about the topic. My findings are not surprising, given whom I interviewed. The sample of key stakeholders was purposefully interviewed to represent a wide spectrum of disciplines, which would expectedly produce different knowledge's and perspectives. It was my intention to understand these divergent views, as a way to compliment my own lived knowledge as a public health youth gambling researcher who has worked in the area of youth prevention for many years.

To conclude, the issue of the lack of evidence, alongside a lack of consensus about "What is going on here?," is about prevention and critical timing, technological advancement and so

forth—specifically about ensuring that the content of youth gambling prevention and education programs is up-to-date and relevant to what youth may currently be playing. The following excerpt from Ms. H, who works in the area of youth gambling prevention, sums this up nicely.

It is really important to ensure that the research about gaming and gambling are [*sic*] up-to-date and relevant. Far too many studies in this area, and particular [*sic*] with youth, are dated and, in an era of continual advancement of technology, if we don't keep up we're not going to be able to practically innovate for programs of prevention ... We were hearing it not only from the youth, but we were hearing it from the teachers, saying, "We don't know what's going on here" and from parents, "They're online a lot." And when it becomes a problem, we'll then treat it, but not before because we don't have the evidence and unfortunately it's going to be too damaging to then go back and do the prevention work.

7.3.2 Loss of Time

The concept of flow, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), relates to "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even when at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (p. 4). Several key stakeholders spoke about the concern that when youth play casino-style games on Facebook, in addition to other forms of games online, there is a destruction of time that happens for players. Specifically, there is a concern that when youth are playing these games, there is an inability to realize how long they have been playing the games for, at the cost of other important activities and tasks.

To date, within the problem gambling field, oftentimes the focus tends to be about the financial implications to the player. With respect to the potential harms associated with social network gambling games, the focus needs to shift from what are the financial consequences to how much time are young people spending playing and thinking about games like ZP. As Ms. H explains,

We've got kids wasting away hours on these types of activities, and not seeing it as being an issue. When you look at the broader spectrum, we're so concerned with health and

activity, but yet we're not addressing that this gambling and gaming is contributing to it. I think we need to redefine what problem gambling is.

As explained by Dr. I, a researcher in the gaming field, and Ms. B, a youth gambling prevention advocate, explain below, the sense of timelessness is amplified by the online medium and the 24/7 accessibility of these games, in addition to specific game design elements that psychologically draw people in and destroy players' awareness of how long they have been playing. As I argue previously in Chapter Seven, game designers are actively incorporating design elements that make the game more sticky and engaging; this is reiterated in the following excerpts.

Ms. B: With online games et cetera, ultimately the huge problem is the vortex that you go into. So, it's not just playing poker but it's the loss of the sense of time that's the problem, and it's like that with everything online, whether it's watching TV online, playing games on Facebook, or just reading articles online. Because it takes you to the next article, or the next video, or next game, so they lose track of time. We all do. I do it all the time, so I think one of the most problematic part [*sic*] of the online experience, is the medium, and that will never change now.

Dr. I: It's a space that is always available and beckoning, and the mechanics of MMOs [*sic*; Massively Multiplayer Online Games] are about working together, people rely on you, advancement, you need to put in the time to advance. These are also things that will then pull you to play for many hours. With something like poker, it's always available; there are always people to play with, and with a game like that, if suddenly you're down, you then want to get back. It's like the casino that's always open. It's just, usually with the casino, there's not one right near you.

7.4 Conclusion

The game of poker has been around for centuries and, as several key stakeholders articulate, the popularity and resurgence that poker has been experienced in the physical world is

being replicated in the current digital terrain. By incorporating the traditional game of poker into SNSs, it is allowing youth to be a part of the excitement, without having to be of a certain age or to risk money on a professional poker site. However, that isn't to imply that risks are not involved.

In sum, there was a lack of consensus amongst key industry stakeholders about how to conceptualize poker, and other casino-style games, on Facebook. This lack of consensus is not surprising given key stakeholders have ties (either directly or indirectly) with social network gambling operators, while others come into the study representing their own positions, whether that be youth gaming and gambling prevention, or research. However, this lack of consensus on how to frame “What is going on here?,” alongside the lack of research evidence, has led regulators to be concerned and begin scrutinizing these games, leading stakeholders, despite their positions, to predict that some form of regulation is on its way, and even suggesting that the industry be proactive and self-regulate.

My analysis of the key stakeholder interviews concluded that there are potential challenges associated with social network gambling games, specifically around (1) the potential for youth to migrate their gameplay from Facebook over to real-money online poker sites, and (2) a sense of timelessness that youth are experiencing as a result of playing these games and losing track of things around them, which have significant implications for youth gambling prevention and awareness programming. The perspectives from the key stakeholders enabled a more thorough understanding of social network gambling games. In particular, my analysis illustrates the significant power that industries have in shaping the public discourse and discussion around these games. This public discourse can significantly impact how players perceive of their gameplay, and in turn, the potential risks that may be associated with the game.

Given how the field is being framed, according to what I found, I am interested in understanding how this framing influences young people, both their perceptions and behaviours. The next chapter builds on these findings by shifting over to presenting the analysis of the findings from my youth interviews.

8 Chapter 8: Phase Two Findings - Lived Experiences of Youth Poker Play

This chapter lays out the analysis and interpretation of the findings related to the youth in-depth interviews, focusing on the lived experiences of youths' poker play on Facebook. A key objective of the youth interviews was to paint a picture of how playing poker on Facebook is actually experienced by youth in their everyday lives. These findings will specifically answer three of my research questions. The first question is to describe what motivates youth to play poker on Facebook, while the second builds on the first in order to understand how the motivations to play poker on Facebook promote, or not, migration of youths' play onto real-money Internet poker sites. The final point is to understand in what ways ZP's design elements promote, maintain, or decrease players' engagement with the game. My analysis illustrates several key themes, which I will outline in the chapter as follows: (1) the lived experiences of youths' gameplay to demonstrate how they got started, the duration of their poker sessions, currency of gameplay, the emotional and cognitive aspects of play, and the role of lucky gestures, (2) the motivations to play ZP, and (3) the migration from ZP over to real-money gambling.

8.1 Lived Experiences of Youths' ZP Gameplay

The lived experiences of youths' ZP gameplay illustrate the important ways in which ZP is woven into their daily lives. As the analysis demonstrates in the forthcoming sections, ZP's design and social elements, as identified in Chapter Six, play a significant role in how the youth began playing, and also in contributing to a level of immersion that at times, made many youth feel that they were addicted to the game. From the perspective of the young players, being "addicted" was a humorous self-reflective label to describe being obsessed with playing ZP, usually accompanied with losing track of time.

Furthermore, of particular interest are the multiple meanings that chips have for the youth: representation of status and skill, a catalyst for competition, and, oftentimes, the discerning factor between the casual and serious poker player. All of which directly contribute to the rollercoaster ride of emotions and thoughts that youth experience over the course of their ZP gameplay.

8.1.1 The Initiation of Poker Play

As previously mentioned, ZP is uniquely embedded within the ever-popular Facebook social platform. Knowing how youth were initially introduced to ZP is an important element in understanding youths' lived experiences of social network gambling and what impact that may have on the framing of their poker play.

The findings of my discourse analysis of the ZP application (as presented in Chapter Seven) revealed a significantly popular component of the game: the reward of free virtual chips for introducing new friends to the application. This call-to-action feature, as many game designers refer to it, was instrumental in the participants first learning about ZP and subsequently engaging in ongoing participation by directly tapping into youths' desires for social connection, as discussed above. The youth unanimously felt, that one of the biggest drivers in introducing them to playing poker on Facebook was invitations from friends, specifically, with the lure of receiving free chips when they joined. Many participants were already familiar with the game of poker, either playing occasionally with friends and family or by themselves on their home computers. Essentially, familiarity with Facebook, alongside the ubiquitousness of Social Network Games (SNGs) on the platform, fostered a sense of harmlessness about ZP, dissipating any concerns players may have had about beginning to play poker. Jaya's experience encapsulates what many of the youth revealed over the course of our interviews. "A lot of people were playing it. I saw it on a bunch of people's newsfeeds and also through the invites that friends would send me. It looked like fun, so I decided to hop on the poker train." As Amir recalls, "Somebody sent me a request to join. So, I just clicked the link and I found it. I was bored, you know, and sitting alone in my room deciding what to do. My friends were all playing, so I said, 'Just do it,' and it proved to be a great way to kill time."

Not only were the invitations and advertisements, strategically placed on the youths' newsfeeds as incentives to start playing poker, they also served as ongoing reminders to play, triggering reconnection after a short hiatus from playing. Amir explains it like this:

Because so many people are still playing poker, it still constantly shows up on your newsfeed. It's just so in your face, that you end up just playing it again and again. Even

though I sometimes get bored of it, like if I continuously start to get bad hands and stop playing for a little while, I'll often forget about it, but then it comes back on my newsfeed and I'll just start playing again.

The viral nature of current marketing strategies—which many companies, like Zynga, are capitalizing on—allows SNGs like ZP to tap into individuals' existing social connections to introduce the game to new audiences who may never have been exposed to poker before, or who were not even seeking such activities.

8.1.2 Getting Lost in Poker Play

The youth were asked about their general poker behaviour on ZP, focusing on how often they played, and how long their play sessions tended to be. Depending on how busy they were with either school or work, they would play poker for anywhere from half an hour per day all the way up to eight hours, or an entire night sometimes. Duration of play depended on several factors. For instance, youth would play longer if they were playing with friends or family, were participating in a tournament, or if they were on a winning streak.

Danica: Last month because I was on break and my friends were all on break, we played a lot [laughing], probably a couple of hours a day—mostly around 4 hours, and at the least forty minutes. Enough time to get a few good hands in.

Benjamin: It varies from when there's school and not school. When there is no school, I'll check in on it, once a day, and then when I'm in school, maybe like once every four days. I try not to play too long. If I have more time, then I'll probably lean more towards two hours, but if I'm in school, an hour tops.

Chung: During one of the tournaments, I think I usually play for a couple of hours because you have to play continuously. It's not like you can just back out. At the end of one once, I lost on purpose because I wanted to back out. Generally though, if I play for

more than an hour, then I'm like "What am I doing with my life? [laughing] This is Facebook poker, it's not even for real money."

As both Amir and Hana describe below, there are times when they can be so into the game that a sense of timelessness comes over them and before they know it, they have been playing for an entire night. Amir and Hana explain that it is easy to get wrapped up in the game when you are playing with friends or a significant other, as was the case with Hana. Similarly, as Chung describes above, the realization that they have been playing poker for extended hours, can often lead to a temporary feeling of guilt, particularly since they are not wagering real money.

Amir: I once played for the whole night, my friends and I were so much into the game, we didn't sleep. After that happens, I sometimes feel guilty that I wasted my time on poker, like it is nothing, not even real money. But you lose track of the time and your whole day is spent sleeping and then you wake up again and play some more. Mostly happens when we are on vacation from school or something like that. Nothing to do but just play.

Hana: Oh God, I went on a streak of, like, eight or nine hours. We [her boyfriend who also plays poker] both stayed up. I was on the laptop, he was on the phone, and we just stayed up all night. Time just went by really quick, but then we started getting really tired and when we looked at the time, we were like "Oh shit!" It was like four or five in the morning. We said we would just play a couple of more hands and that's it, but then that ended up being a couple of more hours.

Hana goes on to explain that the sense of timelessness that occurred during her play was a result of her becoming "addicted" to ZP. She noticed that she was becoming preoccupied with the game—constantly playing, thinking about playing or about hands that resulted in loss, checking her stats, which prompted her to generate innovative ways of receiving free additional chips from other players, or cheating, with her boyfriend Paul, to win large pots of money. This sense of timelessness was cited by many of the youth as occurring during the course of some ZP play sessions.

Hana: People can get very addicted to online games and I would say I was hooked on it [ZP] at a certain point in my life. I was obsessed with it. Paul and I would both go back home and then we would just play for hours without talking to each other. I was always checking my poker stats everyday and we would send money from one account to another, and then we would actually kind of cheat and we would set up at the same table. It's easier when you have a phone to do that, but you can do it on the computer as well.... So either myself or he would join the table that one of us was sitting at and we would tell each other what hands we would have. If one of us had a good hand and the other person didn't then we would make a bet or we would raise the bet to try to weed out other people and then the other person would fold, and then either one of us would win the money.

Hana was among several youth interviewed who disclosed that they felt they were “addicted” to ZP, at some point over the course of playing the game. In their own words, being addicted to the game was a result of spending significant amounts of time playing ZP, in addition to constantly thinking about the game when they were not playing.

Ella: I guess I am kind of “addicted” to poker now [laughing]. I say that because yesterday I lost about \$100,000,³⁶ but I managed to gain it back. I was like, “I have to win it back!” or I had that feeling that I had to at least break even 'cause you don't want to go leave the table or just leave the game empty-handed.

Aria: The game is so addictive. Even if you are not playing for free and even if you don't have time, you still make time to play. It's like there are so many different levels in the game. Once you start it, you tend to win and you then tend to think, “Oh, it's so nice and I'm getting some money and stuff like that.” After a few levels you start losing and you think, “Oh Lord, what did I do wrong?” That's when you start to realize you are getting

³⁶ Ella is referring to \$100,000 in virtual in-game currency, known as ZP chips.

closer to the game and getting interested. I started going to that addicted level. I would lose track of time, not even being cognizant of the time. Sometimes the phone is ringing and I still don't hear it. I just don't want to take the call, it's just that addictive.

What the narratives of Hana, Ella, and Aria exemplify is the level of immersive play that youth can experience while playing ZP—a pursuit that oftentimes results in a significant time drain that youth experience when playing, and the humorous self-reflective label of being “addicted”. The concept of addiction is an interesting one that was witnessed throughout the interviews by many young people. Within the youth narratives, addiction appeared to be defined as a cultural phenomenon (Goggin, 2014), rather than specifically relating to any one person's pathology or medical diagnosis. However, it held special meaning to the youth, as it seemed to represent a turning point in one's gameplay from a casual form of entertainment to something that required a level of zealous dedication or devotion. To the youth, being “addicted” didn't necessarily symbolize problematic gameplay or a precursor to transitioning over to real-money wagering, but rather a side effect of being fully immersed in the game. It was this pull of the game, which added an element of competition and excitement, and contributed to players' continued engagement in the game.

8.1.3 Currency of Poker Play

Chips within the game of ZP held significant value for the participants. Not only was it the required in-game currency to play ZP, for many it was recognition of status within the game—an indication of their levels of skill and winning, a visual representation that fosters competition amongst friends and fellow players, and, very often, the distinguishing factor between the casual and serious poker player. The following sections examine the role of chips more closely, paying attention to how youth accumulate chips, and what leads some youth to purchase chips.

8.1.3.1 Accumulating Chips

If there was one consistent thread throughout all of the youth interviews, it was the players' love for accumulating chips. Below are some comments from the youth that illustrate that "it's all about winning and making chips.... everything is all about the chips!" (Aria)

Adam: My mindset when I go into Zynga is to just accumulate as many chips as I can. I want to see an increase in chips and/or money or points accumulated.... You want to win, that's all it is. And I kind of like that, even if I'm playing with my friends or strangers. Even though I'll be, like, friendly with them, as soon as I sit down at the poker table and there is just chips involved, it's like, "Hey, I want those, give them to me!"

Hana: I eventually came to a point of really wanting to just have more money than everybody else at the table, or getting to a higher level than other people at the table. Right now, I have a couple of million and change.... When things are going well, all I keep thinking is that I can't stop now; I just have to keep playing until I hit a bad streak and I have to make more money!!

As highlighted in the previous section, a sense of timelessness often comes over players during the game. As Chung and Jaya disclose below, it is the winning of chips that drives the desire to continue playing in the hopes of prolonging the experience of winning and the possibility of accruing more chips.

Chung: All I am thinking about is to get more chips. Like sometimes, I can be very greedy, you know [laughing]. If I'm winning, then I keep on playing because I want more and more. That's all I'm thinking about. And it's like sometimes, I'm so passionate about playing poker, like sometimes if I'm playing with my friends and they have more chips, then all I want to do is beat them in the amount of chips that we have. It's like competitiveness, competing with my friends and other players.

Jaya: I like the chips, want the chips, but it's not too terrible if I were to lose them. I wonder if there is another way I can put this? It's like money, but different. In a way, though, I guess I do think of them as money. It's as if I were rich, and they were expendable. If only [laughing], but yeah, they are expendable, they can be used, but I still want them.

The youth commonly referred to the virtual chips used to play ZP as money, despite not having purchased chips with real money. Based on the young people's experiences, the distinction between the value of chips and the value of money is not always clear, as articulated above by Jaya and Chung. During our interview, Danica described the connection between losing chips and the emotional response, which the loss can trigger for many players. As she was recalling her playing experience, the ambiguity about whether or not she perceives virtual currency as a form of money became evident. In the end, however, she changes her position as a result of the emotional value within the game that chips hold for her:

I love the feeling of betting a lot of money and then the anticipation before the last card gets shown and knowing whether I've won or lost all that money. I don't want to say it's like a thrill, but that is sort of what it is a little bit like, even though it's not real money ... I don't look at chips as money, but I do see it as kind of a sort of currency. I know it's not money, but it is like money. It's hard to explain it.... Oh, actually, I guess I do see it as money, because I just thought about it for a second and I realized that I do sort of get angry and agitated when I lose a lot of chips [laughs].

Given that many participants often referred to virtual chips as money and/or currency, I began to probe deeper into whether or not they deemed chips as similar to money. The data revealed a struggle to articulate and define chips and their perceived relationship to real money. It became evident that for some youth, virtual currency had become essentially a synonym for money within ZP, developing a social life and value all on its own.

Aria: Chips are so attractive to me. Every time you have some chips, you tend to spend it [*sic*]. You tend to spend and you tend to play more. I think it is a form of money, and if you want to play you need chips, otherwise you cannot.

Zahra: For me, I see chips as money. They give you a chance to get to the next level or probably take more risks and bet more. Chips, they're like the lifeline for your game. Essentially, you can do more things when you have more chips in your hand.

Each piece of data seems to represent various perceptions on the experience of winning chips because it allows players to: play the game, play more of the game, achieve more levels, take risks, bet more—or as Zahra says “do more”—because they are like a lifeline. These examples illustrate the various symbolic meanings that chips have for the youth, which develop over time and can take on a non-monetary social value of a different kind.

The strong desire or, as Ella describes, love for chips, drives youth to do many things. As reported in Chapter Seven, ZP dangles the reward of free chips for players who spend time on the site continually playing and increasing their levels, inviting friends, and logging in daily, in addition to playing a multitude of side games to gain free chips. Below are narratives of the youth recounting various tactics they have used over the course of their poker gameplay to acquire the much-sought-after form of virtual currency.

Ella: When you play forty hands within a 24-hour limit, you can gain a treasure chest that gives you extra chips. So for example, one week I had 95,000 and then just last week I had about one million because I earned that one million during that week, playing my forty hands per day.

Paul: I do my daily spin everyday. I've been spinning everyday for the last five plus years. I might not play poker everyday, but I will do my daily spins—on both my computer and the phone. It's cool; ZP offers *two-for-ones* right now. They upgraded their spins to a

multiplying one. You used to just spin and, say, you would get \$700. Now, they multiply your winnings anywhere between one and fifteen. It's awesome. I actually completed all of the achievements, every one of them. Do you know what I mean? The four rows of achievements and all the different things you can collect. I collected all of them many times, and I've done all the achievements. I can't get anymore actually. I've maxed them all out. I can't even get any more bonuses that way.... I've done everything to get chips, even completing the surveys and stuff. The biggest one I got was for [sic] \$150,000 for a survey, and that one took a while to process. I did it, but thought I'd get the chips immediately, but I didn't. It took a few days to process it. There are some where I had to watch a YouTube video on something and they'd give you 5000 chips.... I've even invited my friends to get chips. I've got tons of friends on Facebook, probably invited about 45 of them.

As the data seems to illustrate, ZP's in-game design elements to promote and maintain players' engagement with the game have been successful with the youth interviewed. For instance, Paul goes on to discuss, one of the many tasks he undertakes to get free chips from ZP is participating in ZP's call-to-action marketing strategy, which rewards players with free chips if they successfully get their friends to enroll and begin to play. In this sense, friends cease to be just friends anymore, but rather become resources, like chips, for both the player and the game developer (Bogost, 2010). This peer-to-peer viral marketing program to earn free chips for play was engaged in by almost all of the youth interviewed.

Chung: I've definitely invited friends to get chips, lots of times. At one point, I invited my entire Facebook list of friends, about 200 or so. I just clicked *select all*, basically [laughing]. But the thing is, they have to also play as well, in order for me to get the chips. I honestly can't remember the actual amount, but I think it was like I got 500 chips per person. In the end, I received a couple of thousand chips from it, so it was about 10 to 15 friends who decided to join. Not many, but some. It's Facebook, right? I don't even know half of the people on my friends list [laughing].

Aria: I'm always thinking about making money, winning, enrolling more people, getting a bigger table, playing at higher levels.... If you want more chips without spending money you have to invite people and if they don't accept, then you have to try to invite new people to the game. I've enrolled about 70–80 people [laughing]. Yeah, everybody is so jobless. They are all like my besties and we all belong to the same group, so everybody at some point of time was all interested in the online games which are on Facebook. That's how we move onto the levels, without spending money.

Aria has referred to joblessness as a kind of backdrop for friends who can become the kind of resource that has value to players in their pursuit to obtain free chips. This speaks to who she feels are her fellow players of ZP—a younger demographic, probably still in school, with no familial obligations yet. In her words, older individuals work and “nobody has time to play regularly,” which is also reflective of one of the key motivation themes—escapism.

Mark nicely summarizes the complex relationship between new viral marketing strategies purposely designed into the game to promote players' ongoing engagement, which can fuel an obsessed level of play, and the ongoing pursuit of chips. Like many of the youth, Mark self-identified as once being addicted to ZP, and was brought to laughter while recalling (in disbelief) his past behaviour, which was directed at obtaining the chips required to sustain his level of play, without using real money to purchase chips.

I was addicted, let me tell you [laughing]. When Facebook poker first started, there weren't a lot of people and one time I lost it all! So what did I do? Instead of going back for the bonus or buying back in with actual money, there was an option to invite friends and then you get a bonus. So what did I do? I go ahead and create 20 Facebook, Yahoo, Hotmail accounts—random ones. And then you have to do the slow transfer and I would play against myself and lose. It's a really painstakingly long, tedious way to get your points back, but that goes to show you how addicted I was back then.... Also, when you sign back in everyday, ZP encourages daily usage, so when you log back in, there's the daily bonus of free chips. For example, today when you log in you would get \$1,000 and then tomorrow you get \$2,000 and so forth. So there was an incentive to play everyday. You have to be really desperate to want to get back in there everyday on that many

different profiles and play, and that's how desperate I was. Of course, now I'm not [laughing].

Once again, Mark's story highlights the potential addictiveness that players can experience while playing ZP, but also illustrates how youth navigate the ZP system over time, revealing a kind of resilience—finding their way back from problematic levels of play, which was all too often discussed by the youth participants.

8.1.3.2 Purchasing Chips

The social network gambling industry research informs us that 98% of players do not spend any money in the games (Morgan Stanley, 2012). Consistent with this finding, the majority of youth interviewed had not purchased chips in ZP. As described in the previous section, youth are quite adept at receiving free chips through daily spins, sending out game invites, and gifting from friends. However, there were several youth that felt inclined to put money into the game as a way to accrue more chips and move forward through the game when they felt that they needed an extra push. As Zahra explains, purchasing chips was a way for her to advance through the game to the next desired level:

There are times when I have chips by my side and then all of a sudden I see them all go into the dealer's hands. I was like, "What just happened?" and then I'm left with no chips. It is at this crucial stage when I think I might win next game, so that's when I end up buying chips—at that stage when I randomly lose them. You don't expect that the chips will be gone out of your hand.

Zahra speaks about randomly losing chips, and the feeling of unexpectedness that happens after a bad hand. For her, the decision to purchase chips is made when she is not quite thinking straight and believing the next win may be around the corner. ZP makes it extremely easy to

purchase additional chips through pop-up messages that trigger players to spend money when they have experienced significant loss of chips, thus capitalizing on a player being on-tilt, feeding the emotional rollercoaster that can often accompany such a loss or losing streak. Similar situations were detailed by other youth:

Aria: I put money into the game when I keep losing and losing and sometimes I continue to have a hope that I can win. After I keep losing, a window pops up and shows me that if I put in this amount of money, I could win my losses back. That is when I put in money. I have put in money about 12–17 times. I usually put in 25 rupees, 50 rupees, and stuff. For 125 rupees, you get 1500 points/chips. I think I have spent about 1000 rupees, which is big money in India.

Hana: I've purchased chips a couple of times. We [Paul] both actually used our phones because you can use your phone number, associated with your credit card, to buy money.... For myself, I eventually came to a point of really wanting to just have more money than everyone else at the table, or getting to a higher level than other people at the table.... Whenever you are going through a losing streak, after you exit the tables, there is a pop-up window that says you've lost so many chips. I think for me it was something like 300,000 chips or so. So to regain them quickly, there is a pop-up that comes up. It connects through to your mobile and [you can] pay through it or pay money for it. They're [ZP] always very pushy toward people trying to buy the chips or buy gold.

A couple of youth mentioned that they have yet to purchase chips for fear of the slippery slope on which they will find themselves once they take that first step. Abby articulates the worry nicely:

I have yet to put money into the game. I just don't trust myself to even do that because I don't know what [is] going to happen. What if I find it too easy to just add money in the game and I just keep adding it? I don't want to step into that realm, and I've seen so many

people waste so much money and I hear ridiculous horror stories of people spending hundreds of dollars.

In sum, the youths' lived experiences identify the significant passion for ZP chips that players have, and the social and personal meanings that they hold for them, beyond financial value and entry into the game. Over the course of the youths' gameplay, many self-identified as being addicted to the game at one time or another, indicating a level of immersive engagement with ZP, oftentimes, as a result of wanting to accumulate chips. This is inline with my previous analysis that illustrates that the design elements that ZP has embedded in their game not only promote and encourage players' engagement with the game, but, in some cases, provoke youth to purchase chips with real money. However, their narratives also demonstrate how the youths' ZP gameplay can fluctuate over time, coming back from periods of problematic levels of play. This gameplay behaviour is reflective of a more healthy form of online gaming entertainment (Korn & Shaffer, 1999; YMCA, 2015).

8.1.4 In Pursuit of Winning – Emotional and Cognitive Aspects of Poker Play

Gambling is experiential in nature, encompassing what the individual both feels and thinks throughout gameplay. During the interviews, youth were asked to describe their most memorable and challenging poker experiences on Facebook. The findings revealed a roller coaster ride of emotions that often accompanied a player's pursuit of winning. Youth described feelings of elation and joy when they were winning, while feelings of sorrow and, at times, anger occurred when losing. Youth were able to recall, with great clarity, those games where a significant number of chips were either won or lost. Of particular interest, is how incredibly real, this virtual world appears to be to the players. What follows are three narratives that offer examples of the analysis, revealing the interplay between cognition and emotion that can occur during poker play.

Zahra was a twenty-four year old graduate student who self-identified as a serious player.

As with many of the youth interviewed, one of the reasons she loves the game of poker is because it gives her an opportunity to think strategically—to gain the mental tools to adapt her own game and to figure out the plays of her opponents:

I'm constantly thinking and calculating. Your mind is never at peace, to be honest with you. You're constantly, like, "What's going to happen? What will this person bet?" I'm constantly looking at how many chips I have, other players' chips, the leaderboard telling you the scores, and everything. So your mind is constantly racing, which I enjoy. It's not in a bad way, I enjoy all of it.

Zahra goes on to explain how all this thinking and calculating impacts her emotionally throughout the game. For Zahra, the game significantly changed when she moved up through the higher levels, as she became a more serious player:

As a beginner, it's pretty easy to just play your sets and just guess what the other person is doing based on the cards that are thrown and everything. But as the levels keep going higher, you now have to think about what the next person's move is—what's going on and how they are placing bets.... I feel anxious at times, it's a bit of an adrenaline rush. You have to remind yourself that, at the end of the day, it's a game. However, sometimes emotions override all this, and you just want to throw in money and see what's going to happen. Sometimes I can't analyze the patterns easily, and I lose my cool so badly that I just quit the game in the middle and then I go.

Hana and Paul are in a relationship and have a child together. Both are passionate about ZP. Similar to Zahra, Hana describes how she takes a moment to remind herself that she is just playing a game at times when her emotions are getting out of control:

I usually just start off trying not to take it seriously because I tend to get very angry and very ticked off if I end up losing several hands in a row and losing large amounts of money. I try not to let myself get to that point, so if I start losing two or three hands in a row, then I just tell myself I can't play anymore cause I don't want to end up losing more money because I'm just going to get really angry and I'm going to hurt my phone. I start off trying to take it and remind myself it's nothing more than just a game, you know. It's not life or death, but I end up really getting into it and then I start getting angry and I start cussing out the players [laughing]. It's not good.

As Hana recalls, experiencing a significant losing streak can be a result of many factors: risky betting, an inflated sense of how many chips you have, and underestimating how quickly, you can lose your chips when playing at the higher stake tables. As mentioned in the previous section, poker players can often experience a clouded and emotional state during play, commonly referred to as experiencing tilt, which may impact their ability to make wise decisions. Experiencing tilt, Hana recalls the rise and the emotional fall when both she and Paul lost a significant number of chips:

We were up 70 million [laughing], and Paul lost most of it to just riskier betting and stuff like bluffing a lot. He was caught in his bluff.... It was not really fun going through a losing streak. I went from having 70 million, all the way down to a couple of hundred thousand because we just thought, you know, we had lots of money, we can just bet crazy and we can sit at bigger tables. But I've noticed that sitting at bigger tables is really scary because people are sitting with tens of millions, and they're betting a couple of million each time. It adds up and it's kind of huge, so I didn't do that for very long, but then it wasn't soon enough. It was too late after, and I was already at the point where I was only down to a couple of million and I just kept losing after that for some reason. It's like the more money you have; the poker program is just designed to just screw you over.

However, on the flip side of the losing streaks were the big wins that all the players were

able to recollect, usually evoking similar levels of enthusiasm and joy. Paul remembers clearly the elation that accompanies big wins:

I love to play, especially in the tournaments. The ones where there are like 500 people in them and it's kinda cool and you just take your time. Everybody starts with a thousand and if you get your money up to 3000 in a few hands, then BAM! You just sit on it and you just wait and wait for some people to get eliminated, and hopefully you're in the top 100. Then there is [a] fifteen-minute break and I try to calm down. Hana can tell you, I get all excited and I get right into it. Like, I'm in the top 100 now and I'm guaranteed a prize of something and one time I finished first and got the grand prize! I was like, "WOW!" It was \$1.5 million!!!

Finally, Ella is an eighteen-year-old undergraduate who loves all things related to gaming. Specifically, she disclosed her love for the rush of emotions that she feels while spending time competing on games with her friends:

It's kind of like there's an adrenaline rush and excitement when you're playing and when you win, especially when you win. I feel, like, semi-tense and excited to see what's next. Sometimes I'm bored and then I just fold and wait for the next hand. And then other times, I feel either exhilarated when I did win, or disappointed that I could have won.

As Ella goes on to explain, sometimes "lady luck" just isn't on your side and depending on how you wagered throughout the game, significant losses in chips can occur. *Chasing*—the act of players trying to win back the money that they lost, is often a typical behaviour of gamblers who experience losses in real-money gambling activities. Chasing has been cited as one of the observable behaviours of individuals who may be gambling at problem levels. Youth in my study described similar tendencies to chase their losses after losing significant pots of money at the

poker tables, usually as a result of risky betting or of just experiencing bad luck with the final card drawn.

Ella: I usually go all in when I have face cards, or maybe same suit, close straights or if I already have a pair, then I bet all in. It also depends on the pot. If I'm already around 40,000, then I'll go all in and see what happens. That's what I did the other day and I ended up losing 100,000 'cause I tried it twice. I was really close but then suddenly the final card flipped over and he got two pairs, and that's why I lost. I was so upset! I was like, "Okay, I have to win it back and I'm not leaving this table until I win it back" [laughing]. And I did 'cause the person across from me, he had 1,000,300 chips that he won during the game and he dropped down to 800,000 by the end cause I took them back.

8.1.5 Inviting Luck

Lucky rituals and tokens have long held a prominent position in the world of gambling, as a way players invite "lady luck" to be on their side. From never forgetting to bring your good luck charm to kissing the dice before tossing them down the roulette table, all in the belief that these gestures have a powerful influence that can grant players luck and good karma. It is also customary for card players to tip the dealer when playing at a casino, partly to uphold a collegial table image, but also in the hope that the cards drawn will fall in their favour.

The role of such customs within ZP is no different. From my personal experience playing ZP during this study, tipping the virtual dealer³⁷ was common practice amongst players, and as the youth reveal they felt that, it was ZP's way of emulating real-life poker. They acknowledge that they don't necessarily see the purpose, but continue the practice in the hopes that they will receive winning cards. As Paul describes,

³⁷ Tipping the dealer is a customary gesture at land-based casinos, where players at table games tip the dealer at the table chips or cash, in a similar fashion to tipping restaurant servers or bartenders.

I don't know why I do it, just because it's there. I know it is weird; I'm really just giving my money back to ZP. Isn't that so stupid? But you know, whenever I win a big hand, I always tip the dealer. Sometimes I even tip the dealer when I start playing as a ritual because I think I will be dealt better cards.

For Hana, what started as an illusory ritual to invite good luck into her poker sessions, eventually became a prerequisite just on the off chance that this gesture would bring good luck. "It's kind of a superstitious thing. I just do it because I think I'm going to get dealt a good hand. But I do know its just silliness, but do it out of habit now, just in case." Similarly, Bataar laughingly admits, "if I tip the dealer, I will get better cards. I will continue doing it because I think that if I don't tip the dealer, she will think of me as mean and bring me bad luck."

Overall, the virtual world of ZP offers players a poker experience similar to what they would find in a traditional land-based casino. Despite players' better judgment, the ritual of tipping the dealer is a widely undertaken practice that feeds into their deeply held desires to surround themselves with positive energy and enticing "lady luck" to be on their side.

8.2 Why Youth Play Poker on Facebook

Escapism, sociality, and advantage in competitive play were motivations that players cited for playing poker on Facebook. More specifically, youth are playing poker on Facebook as a mechanism of distraction, in an effort to relieve boredom, and as a way to relax. Second, Facebook poker serves as a conduit for social connection between friends and fellow poker players. And finally, playing poker on Facebook satisfies youths' needs for competition, while also serving as a training ground for participants to develop much needed skills to gain strategic advantage over their opponents. Each will be elaborated upon below.

8.2.1 Escapism

I play in my spare time and when I'm super bored.

- Zahra

The need to escape was a common theme for why youth played poker on Facebook. That is, they used poker as a way to elude boredom. Benjamin sums it up quite succinctly when he says: “It’s just a time consumer, a way to relieve boredom and to get away from things.” Hana’s response further captures this sentiment when she explains that playing poker is a way to fill the time when she is bored or to occupy the time gap between classes, appointments, and other scheduled events in her daily life:

I play when I am bored, or when I’m on my way to somewhere, and I just need to kill time or something. I had noticed that a lot of people out in public, whether on the train or something, they are always playing games on their phones. I was never really into something that much, and I just really wanted to get myself into a hobby and just something to do that could kill the time whenever I need to. I’m a phone fanatic and I had a hard time finding a game that I really liked and wanted to play constantly on a regular basis. I have only two or three games now that I play, because I can’t play poker when I’m on the subway.... Basically, it’s just my way of killing my time in places like that.

Benjamin’s admission of using ZP as a way to “get away from things” further speaks to the motivation of using gameplay as a temporary diversion. For instance, the majority of youth interviewed were post-secondary students and, for them, the urge to play came during times of studying, a means of distraction. Today’s young people have been characterized as the multi-tasking generation (Moreno, Jelenchick, Koff, Eikoff, Diermyer & Christakis, 2012; Tapscott, 2009), often spending time digitally juggling between devices and computer screens. The youth corroborated this claim, disclosing that they keep their Facebook poker applications continually open for the option of play, while simultaneously studying. Adam nicely sums up this perspective when he says,

I want to play when I usually want to be distracted—sometimes studying, sometimes when I’m doing an assignment. If I’m studying for 5 hours or so and my brain starts to get

tired of studying and I want to keep it fresh, I will play a couple of hands of poker. Then I'm like, "Okay, that's good, I'm refreshed." I just want to get my mind off of studying. The funny thing is, technically, when I am playing poker I am studying that as well, so now I'm studying 2 different subjects at the same time. But I like having it in the background to just do, or if I can't sleep at night, I will just go and play because there is nothing better to do.

Mark shares a similar experience to Adam's. Playing poker becomes a relaxation ritual to temporarily escape a stressful mindset, which can often occur after a long day of work or school; however, the perception of a settled mind is really only a shift in focus that gives the illusion of mental relaxation. As Mark goes on to explain, playing poker is relaxing until you begin to lose and then your emotional and cognitive responses can get the better of you: "When I have time to play, it's kind of like a relaxing thing for me. It's a good, relaxing habit to get away from your daily stresses, that is, until you start losing."

In sum, I found that the participants used ZP as a mechanism to escape—a routine way to shake off boredom, in addition to temporarily sidestepping away from a stressful activity or after a long day.

8.2.2 Sociality

Facebook and the new digital culture have created spaces that extend the way that friends communicate and socialize when they are not physically spending time together. Not surprisingly, this behavioural trend was encapsulated in the second theme as to why youth enjoy playing poker on Facebook. ZP is firmly embedded within a player's larger social network, significantly drawing on those connections and incorporating them into gameplay.

Being able to connect socially with friends and have an opportunity to make new friends, who share a similar love for the game of poker, was a powerful reason why the youth played poker on the Facebook platform. As the lives of young people get more complicated with school and other priorities, the ability to organize and coordinate a friendly game of poker between

friends proves to be more difficult. Mark elaborates on the convenience that playing ZP on Facebook has added to his off-line friendships, with respect to scheduling and getting together socially to play:

When you want to actually sit down in person and play poker, it's a hassle. Someone has to bring all the chips, and you have to agree on a location, et cetera. It's not easy to get everyone around at the same time. So, it's kind of like a convenience to have this thing sitting on your phone and your laptop. You can pull up any time you want. You can play for however long you want, with no limitation. Your friends can come and go.... I have about 10 or 15 friends who I like to play poker with. It is rare we play all at once, but usually there's at least two or three people online at once. I can quickly see if any of my friends are online. If not, then I will come back later.

Alongside the social connectedness that ZP cultivates with existing friends, Mark further explains how ZP has precipitated the making of new friends, whom of which share similar interests.

When I first started playing poker, I lost quite a bit to this one person. I was new to the rules and the system, so I lost frequently to this one particular fellow. Months later, I ran into him again and I don't think he recognized me but I certainly recognized him and luck was on my side that day and I ended up winning most of his chips. What are the chances of meeting someone again? I actually contacted him and we met up in person. So, this game actually fosters getting to know people with similar interests. It's actually real people sitting behind these monitors, playing the same game that you are.

It just so happened that several young people I interviewed had come to Toronto to study, which meant leaving behind friends and family from a different region of the world. For them

playing poker on Facebook was a way to reconnect socially and stay in contact with loved ones who were geographically faraway. According to Danica:

I started playing poker because I'm from Bosnia. I go there every summer, and when I was back home a couple of years ago, we [friends and family] collectively decided that we should play a game on Facebook, because everyone's on Facebook over there, and we don't really have a way to stay connected, other than Skype. Not a lot of them have a consistent Internet connection, so Skype can be iffy sometimes. So, we collectively decided to play poker. There's a chat function on ZP, so we can talk on there, and we can send each other those little gifts. It's really fun.... It's like we are playing in our own little private poker party.

The chat function was a favourite design feature of the ZP application. The ability to converse during poker play added a level of realism to the online game that usually is only experienced when you are playing in person. An authentic social feeling experienced during the game is also enhanced with features, such as being able to “gift” friends with virtual drinks and chips. As Bataar states,

I like the chat feature. We can chat with each other and when somebody has a good card, I can say ‘nice hand’ or ‘well-played,’ et cetera. Being able to give players around the table drinks and funny gifts is also very fun aspect of the game. It replicates how I would play poker with my friends. It is very similar to reality.

One of the key motivating factors for playing ZP on Facebook for these participants is related to the social connections they are able to make and maintain, which is linked to the wider use of social media in young people's lives. Of particular interest is how ZP became a replacement for in-person socialization, either to mitigate geographical distance, or eliminate the

complexity around planning a poker gathering with busy friends. The social motivations behind youths' ZP gameplay, not surprisingly elaborates on the discursive framing and the game mechanics that I presented earlier on in Chapter Six.

8.2.3 Competition, Training, and Strategic Advantage

*I'm learning to play poker better. It's not like I want to gamble all the time, but maybe
if I learn how to play better,
then I can play poker and compete against my friends who are good.*
- Kalya

Kalya's quote above epitomizes the third theme in why the youth interviewed played ZP on Facebook. The game of poker is a game of skill, chance, and mental strategy. Mastering the game involves learning to quickly calculate odds, recognize betting patterns of fellow players, and perfect the art of bluffing. The very essence of the game brings out the competitive nature of many players.

All participants self-identified as having a competitive personality, and satisfying their competitive nature was a significant reason why many played the game. There is no shortage of social network games available to players, but not many of the games offer a continual avenue to compete with friends and fellow players. Poker on Facebook triggers an adrenaline rush for players when placing the wager and waiting for the final cards to be revealed, and the zealous pursuit of winning chips fuelled their competitive nature. Mark describes the role of competition in his poker play:

I play because it's a thrill. When you think you are better than other people, and you want to become better, and through poker it's kind of a way to prove yourself, especially with the ranking, to see how good you are compared to the rest of the players. In a way, it's an opportunity to compete without putting yourself in a spot of actually paying money. That's my biggest motivator—to compete—because in my daily work, I don't get to

compete with other people. In sports, chances are you will never have an opportunity at being [in] the top thousand. There is an opportunity here. If you have some luck, you have some skill, you could be right up there.

Competitive play manifested in different forms in the participants. For example, Aria explains, “I’m competitive about everything. I’m always thinking about making money, winning, and throwing people off the table. I’m even competitive with respect to how many people I enroll into the game and playing at bigger tables for higher stakes.” For other players, the drive to compete at times impedes their mental equilibrium essential for optimal play. The term *tilt* refers to a common poker condition, which occurs when emotions interfere with a player’s ability to think straight. This undesired state usually results from frustration after making a bad play or experiencing a run of bad luck. For the novice player, inexperienced in recognizing *tilt triggers*, being *on-tilt* can be emotionally draining and result in a significant loss of chips. Amir’s narrative illustrates his experience of being on-tilt, when he explains, “In one night I just lost everything. I was playing for 2 or 3 hours and I lost everything. All because I was competing and it got the best of me. There was this guy who I was competing against and I wanted to divert him and take away all of his chips.” Players’ experiences of being on-tilt, suggest that the experiential nature of losing on ZP is similar to that commonly encountered by real-money gamblers.

From a design-feature perspective, not surprisingly, the leaderboards, which visually depict players’ current standings against each other, were a favourite game element of the competitive participants. Players loved the leaderboards and were driven by the need to rank highest amongst their friends. Achievements such as catching up in games, and chip accumulation during a game offered bragging rights and a way to compare progress with others, often leading players to say, “Go on Facebook and see,” as Bataar proudly brags to his friends about where he currently ranks and how much money he recently won. As Danica explains, a player’s status on the leaderboard can change quickly, constantly tempting players to play more to remain on top, or to bring down the current players who are proudly residing there:

It is sort of a goal of mine to stay on the top of the leaderboard in the amount of chips. It's motivation for me to play. When I see my friend has ten thousand more chips than me, it's kind of motivation to play. I always feel the urge to play a couple of more hands, so I can win and be the first on the leader board.

For many of the young people interviewed, Facebook poker offers a training platform to “improve my skills and practice, so when I play with my friends with real money, I will win!”—as Bataar relates. More specifically, it provides players a forum to develop and deepen their poker skills, while simultaneously tapping into their existing social networks. As Adam recounts:

I was researching sites and was surprised to see there was a free-to-play application on Facebook. I had a friend who was really into social games, and he got into ZP as well. I was looking for a place that I can hone my skills and that was the only software I knew to practice on with friends, because it was hard meeting up with friends to play in real life.

Many youth recalled, as beginner players, not being able to adequately gauge their opponents' strategies, and just throwing down cards based on what the other players were doing.

My analysis reveals a feedback loop that occurs between a player's competitive nature, skill development, and competitive advantage. Specifically, the skill development that the participants achieved over time, led them to strive for a competitive advantage that, in turn, refuelled the competitive spirit, which had brought them to play ZP on Facebook in the first place. Once players developed a certain level of skilled play, participants reported loving the constant mental challenges that arise during the course of poker play: What's the right play to make? What cards do my opponents have? Can I successfully bluff myself to a win? For the most part, the youth participants were currently, or had previously been post-secondary students, which may help to understand the need for some cerebral stimulation. Chung described the passion for this strategic thinking:

It is kind of a brain puzzle. It's about optimizing your own plays, and making sure you get the most value out of what you play. It's also about predicting what your opponent plays, so that you can either [*sic*] set up a trap for them to play right into, which is one of the most satisfying feelings ever! Ultimately it's about trying to avoid your opponent from beating you. That's the main reason I why I play. I'm trying to predict what eight other people are thinking, based on very limited information. It's fun to try to piece the puzzle together.

Finally, training to improve one's poker skills would not be complete without some level of post-game analysis to assess how players stack up. Almost all of the youth disclosed consulting profile statistics throughout their game sessions to help deduce the levels of players at the table. For Hana, she is always looking to see "the level of the players; how many hands they have played; the number of hands they have won, lost; and what has been their best hand." Zahra explains that she quantifies her poker play as a tool to "help choose the table I want to play at and as a way to assess my position at the table."

For the most part, like Hana and Zahra, participants strategically consulted player statistics to assess the levels of skilled play of their opponents. However, some participants also spent time at the conclusion of their poker sessions, on a post-session examination of their hand histories. This reflexive self-assessment was used to examine past hands played and also as a way to fine-tune the smaller, in-game decision-making skills. As Adam explains:

I spend about 15 minutes after each play session examining my stats, specifically, looking at the hands that I found interesting. It doesn't always have to be like, "Hey, I won a big pot, or lost a big pot." For the most part, I am simply looking at the nuances of my play. For example, "I raised, he raised. Why did I fold?" And then I think, "Oh, the fold was correct, because the person has a certain table image, and I don't think the person is capable of this, I think the fold was correct."

All the youth interviewed, were passionate about the game of poker. ZP is a game of both skill and chance. Given players' zeal for the game of poker, it could be expected that a key motivation for why youth play, is for the love of competition and to develop their skills to gain a strategic advantage over their opponents. Further, during the course of our interviews, several youth informed me that they played poker to develop the necessary skills to advance to the next level—to transition over to real-money gambling.

8.3 Migration From ZP Over to Real-Money Gambling

As discussed above, I present different motivations for youth to play ZP: to escape boredom or connect socially with friends and fellow players, while also offering youth a training environment to become more skilled at poker to gain a competitive advantage over other participants. For some youth, playing ZP was also a way of developing a level of skilled play to gain the confidence required to eventually transition over to real-money wagering. Zahra was one of those participants. As she explains:

I love when I play with a tougher group of players, I feel like I am improving my knowledge about the game. When you are taking a risk, and if you are enjoying the game at that level, then if you win at that level, it makes it more interesting and makes me want to play for real money. Just to have the feeling.... Right now I don't think I'm that good in the game where I can go and win money. But yeah, with a bit of practice and time, I can probably master it, and for sure, then I will move over to real-money.

When discussing the migration of poker play from social gambling to real-money gambling, the youth conceptualized it as “levels of the game,” specifically that there were two tiers of poker a player could engage in—the first tier being social network gambling, which is very popular with individuals who want to keep the game really casual and fun. Then there is the second tier—real-money gambling, oftentimes beckoning a certain type of competitive player

who wishes to try their hand at making some real money, or as Zahra says “taking a risk.” Adam described it like this: “The way I see it, there are two tiers levels. First tier is ZP, and then you have the real-money sites. I always have thought of ZP as the lower tier, kind of like a practice ground per se.” Adam was one of a few participants who reported having already played on a real-money online site. To his surprise, he realized that “people that were playing ZP were a lot like the players who were on the real-money sites. I realized they were the exact same as players who played the high-stake tables on Zynga.”

The fact that Adam perceived a level of similarity between social network gambling and real-money players has significant implications, not only for Adam, but other players like Adam. As my analysis conveys, many youth were motivated to play ZP to develop a level of skilled poker play. For these types of players, as Zahra says like to “take risks”, ZP could most definitely been seen as a practice arena for real-money gambling. For in the end, gambling is as much about risking money or something of value, as it is about the chance to win money or something of value.

Only a handful of youth revealed having played real-money poker; however, others described a desire to make the leap over to real-money gambling, but identified several barriers that were currently holding them back. First, was a lack of confidence in their perceived levels of skill and second was currently being a student with limited financial resources. The quotes from both Danica and Aria illustrate the participants’ desires to eventually migrate their ZP play over to real-money gambling.

Danica: I would definitely consider transitioning to play for real money once I’m more comfortable with being consistent with winning. I would definitely take the risk of playing with real money, but I don’t think that’ll happen anytime soon because I’m a student now and I can’t afford to lose my money (laughing). For now, I see ZP as a way of developing my skills and getting better.

Aria: I have yet to take my gambling to that level. As a student, I’m dependent on my parents, so can only put money up to a certain level. So to go to that next level, I will need more money, which I can’t afford right now.... If money were not an issue I would

definitely play for real money. Maybe I could win over there. Right now, I can't go there, but I could see myself there, the game is that into my head!

In sum, my analysis reveals that playing Facebook poker serves several functions for young people. Of particular concern, however, is the desire of some youth to use ZP as a poker-training environment that would allow them to gain the confidence and skill required to migrate their gameplay over to real-money wagering.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the lived experiences of youth who play poker on Facebook as a way to answer three research questions: (1) What motivates youth to play poker on Facebook?, (2) How do the motivations to play poker on Facebook promote, or not, migration of youths' play onto real-money Internet poker sites?, and (3) In what ways do ZP's design elements, promote, maintain, or decrease players' engagement with the game? The analysis indicates three motivation themes as to why youth play poker on Facebook. Specifically, youth play ZP as a way to relax and escape boredom, to connect socially with friends and fellow players, and to satisfy their desire for competitive gameplay, while also developing their skills to become a more skilled and strategic poker player. The findings also demonstrate that some youth use ZP as a poker-training environment that allows them to gain the confidence and skills required to migrate their gameplay over to real-money wagering.

Finally, my analysis with the youth reveal that various game elements embedded within the design of the game promote and maintain players' engagement with ZP, specifically, building off of youths' love for chips, and, in some cases, pushing youth to purchase additional chips.

9 Chapter 9: Framing Youth Poker on Facebook: A Spectrum Model

As stated throughout, the inclusion of young people's perspectives on how they frame their ZP gameplay is crucial to fully understanding the potential impacts of social network gambling games. This chapter presents key findings that indicate that youth perceive that their poker gameplay on ZP is a form of lower-stakes gambling, in essence, "gambling lite". In addition, youth believe that ZP being embedded within Facebook is a significant factor not only in them starting to play ZP on a regular basis, but also in their desire to use ZP as a training platform to develop poker skills and confidence so they can eventually move their gameplay over to real-money wagering on professional poker sites. In the first part of this chapter, I will answer the following questions: What meaning do youth attribute to playing poker on Facebook? What are the implications?

At the end of Phase One of my study, I argued that Zynga had designed ZP to be a fully engaging experience for players, including elements of gameplay that cater to both players' emotional and skill-driven needs. As a result, social network gambling games, like ZP, are attracting a new audience and further blurring the lines between gaming and gambling. The analysis and interpretation of all my findings over the course of two phases of research led to the creation of the Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling, which will be presented in the second section of this chapter. I am proposing to dissolve the dualism which exists between SNGs and gambling as a way to better understand the phenomenon of social network gambling and, in turn, to better address the needs of players, particularly adolescents and youth.

Before presenting the Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling, I will discuss: (1) whether or not youth consider poker on Facebook as a form of gambling, and (2) whether they feel that the Facebook platform may, or may not, influence their perceptions of the game. This will be followed by (3) a discussion of the influence that Facebook has on youths' understandings of "What is going on here?," and, in turn, implications for players' behaviours.

9.1 Youths' Perceptions of Their ZP Gameplay

To ascertain what meaning young people attribute to their poker playing on Facebook, interview questions sought to elucidate: (1) whether or not youth considered poker on Facebook as a form of gambling, and (2) whether they feel that the Facebook platform may, or may not, influence their perceptions of the game. The sections below will address the analysis of both topics in turn.

Much confusion and uncertainty surrounds how young people perceive their ZP participation. Participants took their time before answering and had difficulty clearly articulating how they make meaning of their poker play. Specifically, the youths' perceptions of ZP gameplay fell into one of two themes: (1) youth felt that it was a lower stakes form of gambling; or (2) youth didn't consider poker on SNSs as gambling if you did not purchase chips with real money or if you played as a skilled player. Each theme is elaborated below.

9.1.1 "Gambling Lite"

Several young people specifically felt that playing poker on SNSs was a form of gambling, just for lower stakes—in essence, "gambling lite". The framing of their gameplay in this particular manner focused on the actual wager in the game—players are still risking something of value, even if it is only a virtual chip that they may or may not have purchased with real money. They also consider ZP as a form of gambling because their gameplay embodies similar experiential thoughts and emotions that players encounter when wagering with real money. In their own words, here is how a couple of youth perceive their play as a form of gambling:

Hana: ZP is a form of gambling. Even though it's just virtual currency and it doesn't really affect your finances in real life, you are still risking something, you're still betting on something, and you're either gaining something out of it or you're losing something from it. And people can get very addicted to online games just as much as real life

gambling. I would say I was hooked on it at a certain point in my life. I was really obsessed with it.

Benjamin: ZP is a double whammy, gambling is a game, and this is gambling and a game. I see it as virtual gambling, with lower stakes. Much lower stakes because the stakes are the value placed inside the virtual coins, whereas, in real-money gambling, you can end up spending your monthly cheque—the stakes are a bit higher.

As these examples illustrate, despite whether a player puts real money into the game or not, or their inability to cash out their winnings, some young people perceive their poker gameplay as a lower-stakes form of gambling. This gambling perspective is consistent with a definition of gambling that relies on player's ability to wager money or something of value on the outcome of an event involving chance when the probability of winning is less than certain (Korn & Shaffer, 1999). Conceptually, this definition does not distinguish between lower or higher stake wagers.

The notion of lower-stakes gambling is an interesting one. It instinctually implies an activity characterized as less risky—similar to Adam's "first-tier" level of poker. For the youth players, participating in lower-stakes poker (i.e. ZP) essentially reduces the risk level of potential financial losses—a mechanism to qualify and make sense of financial risk along a continuum, from low to high. Throughout the youth interviews, participants only seemed to recognize potential gambling-related harms in monetary terms, despite experientially framing games like ZP as a form of "gambling-lite".

As was evident in the key stakeholder interviews, the word gambling is often a loaded term, which was evident in the hesitation and deep thought that occurred during some of the youths' responses during the interviews. Abby, for example, wasn't originally quite sure if she felt that ZP should be considered gambling, until later during our conversation when she was beginning to describe what she felt and thought during her gameplay:

When I play poker, I feel relaxed, calm, more or less focused, but then I get excited when I do win the big-risk type of thing. That's funny [laughing], it sounds like gambling. [hesitation] That's the funniest thing. All of a sudden, I am like, "Damn, I do think about it like gambling."

In all of the interviews where youth considered ZP a form of gambling, I found that their conceptualizations had nothing to do with whether or not players were physically able to cash out their winnings. As illustrated in the previous chapter, youth loved the experience of ZP, describing in detail their wins and losses, oftentimes referring to chips as money, which held significant emotional meaning and value. Many youth felt that ZP was capitalizing on the recent poker boom by offering players a free-to-play alternative that directly tapped into that desired gambling experience. As Adam observes, "ZP is just trying to emulate real-life gambling."

Adam goes on to explain his perspective of the slippery slope on which players can find themselves when they justify their ZP experience as just another form of gaming:

A lot of teenagers and young adults got into the game because they could get their quick gambling fix and then they start treating chips as their points, and they want to get as much as possible. They then try to see it as a game, not gambling. Thinking, "Oh, it's like I'm in a casino, but since I'm not wagering money, I'm just wagering points, it's just a fun little game and just do whatever I want and not have any consequences." I think those are the people that are more inclined to actually buy credits, because as soon as they think "Oh, hey, I'm not gambling, I'm playing it like an innocent little game, sure I'll buy more chips." But they fail to register that it pretty much is gambling.

Adam's quote draws attention to how the framing of poker play as gaming, can impact players decisions to eventually purchase chips with real money—similar to the lived experiences revealed by some youth who had in fact spent their money on the game. For those players, it was never their original intention to purchase chips. Rather, the decision to no longer play for free

came much later, after they were fully immersed in ZP and felt the need to increase their levels of play, excitement, and risk, or after having lost a significant number of chips.

9.1.2 For Me It's a Game, but Not for Others...

For other youth, there was a level of dissonance when it came to how they perceived their own ZP gameplay, versus the participation of others. One area of confusion and hesitation about how to make sense of these games was contingent on whether or not players were using real money to purchase virtual chips. For instance, several youth felt that since they themselves were not putting money into ZP, they were just gaming, not gambling. Their play was framed as just another form of entertainment—an opportunity to get the experience of gambling, but without wagering any money, similar to playing video games. However, their whole perception of the game changed when they considered other players who purchased virtual chips with real money. ZP was then considered a form of gambling for those players who were spending their own money on the game. The following excerpts from Bataar and Mark describe this level of dissonance between their own gameplay and the paid poker play of others.

Bataar: Hmmm, that's a tough one. I don't think so because I don't pay for chips. I am not losing real money or winning real money. For me, playing poker on Facebook is just for fun.

Mark: To be honest, for me I don't consider it gambling. It's entertainment to myself. Simply, because I feel like that, unless I actually spend money and buy virtual currency, then I don't think you have anything on the line, other than your pride. But for some people, I know that they take it very seriously, and to them, when they put money into the game it would definitely be a form of gambling.

As the previous chapter revealed, several youth disclosed that they have purchased virtual chips with real money. Aria was a participant who disclosed that she has put her own money into the game to buy additional chips when she was running low or when she felt that, she wanted to

advance her gameplay to a higher level. After careful consideration during the interview, she admitted that she did in fact feel that she was gambling, just at a lower-risk level as a result of the small amount of money she had put into the game. However, she acknowledged that for others who do not purchase chips, ZP would not be considered gambling. In her own words, Aria admits:

In a way it is gambling [silence and giggling while she thinks] ... It takes your money for sure, but it is a smaller amount. So, it then comes down to how much you put in. High stake gambling is more of high level and more amounts. So I think this is small-level gambling when you put money into it.

Similar to Aria, Paul is another ZP player who has spent his own money on the game. He acknowledged that by placing real money into the game, he was initially gambling. However, Paul felt that this was similar to an initial investment that he was actually able to capitalize on over time, thanks to his skilled level of play. From his perspective, he did lose that money in certain hands, but also won it back in others, and in fact, made more money once he started to play more strategically. Paul reiterates:

When you put in money, then yes, very slightly, it would be gambling. But I put in ten dollars and I got about ten million chips. But that ten million also got me twenty, almost thirty million, and even fifty at one point because I won some really big pots. In the beginning, I gambled and I lost because I was stupid about it ... So, I guess it is like gambling because if I lose at the ten-, twenty-thousand-dollar tables and I lose the minimum there, I lose it all. Then I get ticked off and so I go to a bigger table with more money, to win it back. That's when it's kind of like gambling. People, who lose, want to try to double and then triple that so they gain a bit or just get back what they lost. That's when it's bad.

In this narrative, we see the relationship between perceived poker skill and gambling conceptualization, which is particularly interesting. While skill development was a motivating factor for the youth to play ZP, perceived poker skills were closely tied to players' perceptions of ZP as just another form of gaming. Winning hands and accumulating chips, allowing players to not have to play with real money, reinforced this perspective. This was particularly true if players were participating in tournaments. However, this perspective was also gendered, with the male youth frequently noting that a higher level of skilled play and strategic thinking required in poker meant that ZP was not framed as gambling.

The ability to play poker at a perceived higher level of skilled play than other players became a way that many male users justified their losses. There was an expectation that losses would occasionally occur, but a presumption that they would eventually see a return of investment. Losses became rationalized as a run of bad luck, and an opportunity to learn. It was through a skilled level of play that they would eventually come back out on top. Adam explained the relationship that poker has with skill in this way:

I see it as a game, as a zero-sum game. Where if you can outsmart the people you are playing with, you can accumulate money, but the main thing is that you can learn from your wins and losses. I mean the best-case scenario is that you always win and you always learn. But more often than not you are just making a bit of money or losing a bit, but I have never thought of it as gambling because of this, where if my friends lose money or their chips, they are usually like "Oh god, I gambled it away." But to me, it is "Oh no, it's a learning experience," so I don't really mind losing at times.

Male players, who perceived themselves as skilled in poker, and as only gaming, disclosed that they felt that users who spend money on the game don't actually have skill. Those unskilled players are essentially purchasing their way through the game, which deems them as unworthy opponents. As Mark indicated, "Those aren't real poker players. If you think about a tournament, if you lose, you can't buy your way in again. Poker is all about skill for me."

Mark's narrative draws our attention again to the stigma that surrounds the term gambling, and even further to the stigma associated with the types of gambling. For example, the game of poker was considered a deep and strategic game of skill, unlike other games based purely on chance, such as roulette or bingo. There was a pride associated with identifying as a real poker player, which many of the male participants deeply associated with.

The relationship between skilled poker play and gambling has a long history, which is evident in the current debates around the framing of poker (i.e., a game of skill versus chance; Bjerg, 2010). Adam's quote illustrates that this debate has been woven into how young people are making sense of their poker play when he mentioned, "Gambling is any other game, other than poker, where you just toss your money around and hope you get lucky—like roulette, blackjack, craps, slots, et cetera."

Ultimately, all the youth felt that in some way, either for themselves or for others, ZP could be considered a form of lower-stakes gambling. This speaks to the way that having ZP embedded within the Facebook platform may influence not only how young people frame their ZP gameplay, but also the implications this framing may be having on their poker behaviour, which will be discussed in the next section.

9.2 Facebook Influences on Youths' ZP Perspective and Behaviour

I thought it was important to understand from youth whether they felt (or not) that playing ZP on Facebook not only altered how they perceived their gameplay, but also had an impact on how they played. According to Goffman (1986), the interplay between the framing of a situation and an individual's behaviour is neither static nor simplistic. In essence, the "frame of activity" allows an individual to constantly adjust their behaviour based on how they make sense of what is going on in any given social activity.

Interviews revealed the importance that Facebook had to how youth were introduced to ZP, the framing of their gameplay, and their subsequent poker participation. The findings of my discourse analysis of the ZP application (as presented in Chapter Six) revealed a significantly popular component of the game—the reward of free virtual chips for introducing new friends to the application. This call-to-action feature, as many game designers refer to it, was instrumental

in the participants first learning about ZP and subsequently engaging in ongoing participation. The youth were unanimous in feeling that one of the biggest drivers to introducing them to playing poker on Facebook was invitations from friends, specifically, with the lure of receiving free chips when they joined.

Many participants were already familiar with the game of poker, either playing occasionally with friends and family or by themselves on their home computers. However, being embedded within Facebook, ZP enticed youth to play poker by harnessing the power of players' online social networks. Jaya's experience encapsulates what many of the youth revealed over the course of our interviews. "A lot of people were playing it. I saw it on a bunch of people's newsfeeds and also through the invites that friends would send me. It looked like fun, so I decided to hop on the poker train." As Amir recalls,

somebody sent me a request to join. So, I just clicked the link and I found it. I was bored, you know, and sitting alone in my room deciding what to do. My friends were all playing, so I said, "Just do it," and it proved to be a great way to kill time with my friends, without the risk of wagering real money.

The invitations and advertisements, strategically placed on the youths' newsfeeds, were not only incentives to start playing poker, they also served as ongoing reminders to play, triggering reconnection after a short hiatus from playing. Amir explains it like this:

Because so many people are still playing poker, it constantly shows up on your newsfeed. It's just so in your face, that you end up just playing it again and again. Even though I sometimes get bored of it, like if I continuously start to get bad hands and stop playing for a little while, I'll often forget about it, but then it comes back on my newsfeed and I'll just start playing again.

In these last quotes from Amir, we can see how the harmlessness discourse plays out in the youths' perceptions of ZP, dissipating any concerns players may have had about beginning or continuing to play poker. Other than several youth reporting being addicted to ZP at sometime during the course of their gameplay, participants never felt that it was causing a problem for them apart from occasionally being preoccupied thinking about the game and spending more time than anticipated playing. In fact, it wasn't until the interviews that many youth had even thought about what problem gambling was or, more specifically, how playing ZP could become a problem for some players despite, for the most part, perceiving ZP as a form of gambling lite.

To conclude, I argue that viral nature of current marketing strategies—which many companies, like Zynga, are capitalizing on—allows SNGs like ZP to be introduced to new audiences who may never have been exposed to them and were not even seeking such activities. As the lived experiences reveal, though it started out as an instrument for socialization, once players were immersed into ZP, many continued to play to develop the necessary skills to migrate their gameplay over to higher-stakes, real-money poker. As Amir said, “ZP is a really safe poker site,” offering players an opportunity to build confidence and train with little or no perceived financial risk.

9.3 A Public Health Framework and Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling

As mentioned, the Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling was developed from the findings of my current study. The game of poker is considered a deep and engaging game which, thanks to increased media attention in recent years and to the Internet, more specifically SNSs, has now attracted a new audience of poker players catering to both players' emotional and skill-driven needs for competition. The result is games like ZP, which represent the continuing transformation of poker by the continued blurring of the lines between gaming and gambling. The lived experiences of my participants demonstrate, gaming and gambling are not and should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as intertwined activities sharing similar elements. As such, games like ZP present new challenges to protecting young people from harm, not only to key stakeholders in related fields but also to young people, regarding how these games should be conceptualized and made sense of.

Gambling has long been considered a public health issue (Korn & Shaffer, 1999), with public health scholars acknowledging “society’s representation of gambling can have a profound impact on youth” (Skinner et al., 2004, p. 264). Korn and Shaffer (1999) in their seminal monograph, view gambling as a spectrum of activities that can range from healthy gambling to problematic gambling, “acknowledging that there are both positive and negative dimensions associated with the activity” (p. 292).

As an initial step in the development of the Spectrum Model, I adapted Korn & Shaffer’s (1999) foundational public health framework and Skinner’s (1990) alcohol spectrum to reflect social network gaming/gambling (see Figure 32). The Public Health Framework for Social Network Gaming/Gambling similarly presents gameplay across a continuum, from healthy to problematic, linking to a range of problems and appropriate public health interventions, and prevention, harm reduction, and treatment interventions (Korn & Shaffer, 1999; Skinner, 1990). It also conceptualizes the fluidity of gameplay across the continuum to illustrate how players can move across the spectrum over time, which will be illustrated in more detail in the Spectrum Model (see Figure 33).

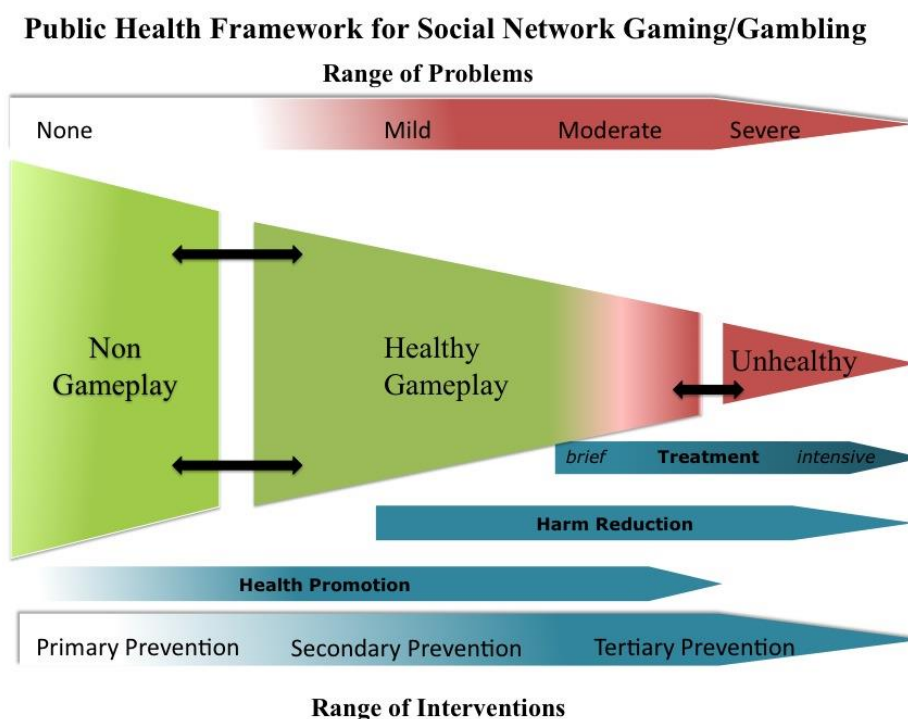


Figure 32: Public Health Framework for Social Network Gaming/Gambling

The aim of the Spectrum Model is two-fold:

1. To dissolve the dualism that currently exists between gaming and gambling by demonstrating that players' perceptions of social network gambling and their experiential gameplay can span a myriad of dimensions that flow between the two ends of the spectrum.
2. To draw attention to and respond to, the potential mild levels of problematic gameplay, which can create challenges, not only for players, but also for gambling researchers and key stakeholders developing and implementing youth gambling prevention and education programming.

As mentioned above, the spectrum helps to illustrate the transitory and episodic nature (Slutske et al., 2003) of social gambling gameplay at the individual level. In this spectrum, there are six dimensions of gameplay that need to be considered: money, competitiveness, training environment, temporality, chasing losses, and rituals. The dimensions of social network gambling gameplay range from healthy to problematic (as illustrated from left to right) and are fluid and interrelated. This means that players' behaviours are not stable, but rather can move within and between positions across the spectrum at any particular time. Additionally, the dimensions of gameplay may at times be connected to each other, presenting in some players as a single dimension, while other players may experience several dimensions at once. For example, youths' behaviours can be displayed as healthy on one dimension (or several) at any one given time, while similarly, more problematic on others, resulting in various permutations of poker gameplay.

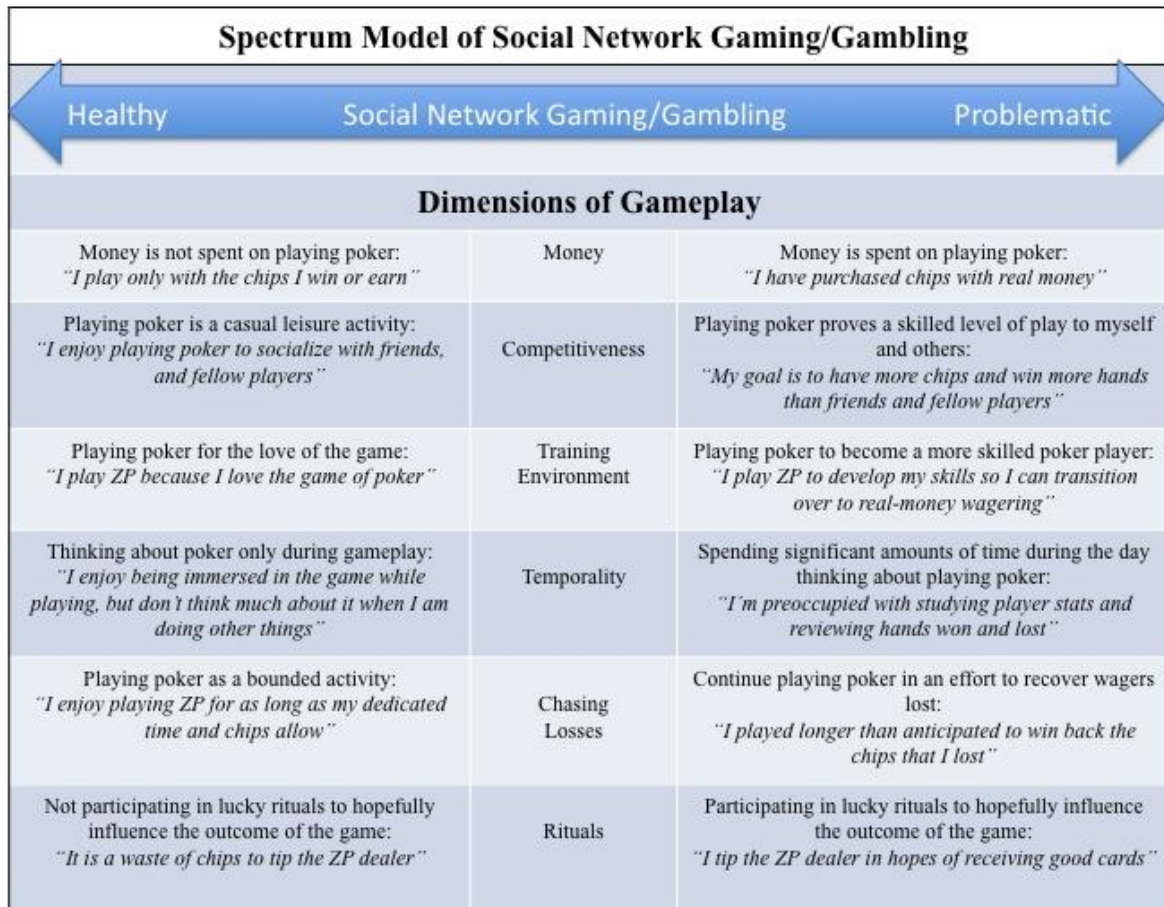


Figure 33: Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling

Each dimension is described below:

1. Money – Refers to whether players are spending real money on the Facebook poker game, purchasing virtual chips, and/or gifts for themselves or fellow players. This behaviour can range from players only playing with the chips that they win or earn, to users purchasing additional chips with money when they have run out, or wish to increase their play to the next level.
2. Competitiveness – Encapsulates a players need to prove, to themselves and fellow players, that they are more skilled and have more chips than their competitors. This dimension can range from users participating in social network poker games as a way to

socialize with friends and fellow players, to being driven by the need to accumulate more chips and win more hands than friends and strangers.

3. Training environment – Speaks to a motivating factor as to why players may be participating in social network poker games. Specifically, ranging from some players participating in social gambling games because they truly love the game of poker, to trying to develop a level of skilled gameplay to build confidence and eventually move over to real-money wagering on professional poker sites.
4. Temporality – Describes the amount of time that players are spending thinking about their poker gameplay. This dimension can range from players only thinking about poker while they are in the midst of playing, to spending significant amounts of time and energy, outside of their gameplay, thinking and strategizing about the game and reflecting on hands, both won and lost.
5. Chasing Losses – Relates to players' poker behaviours once they have run out of chips due to hands lost. For players who participate in social network poker as a bounded activity, they will just play for as long as their time and chips allow, while the other end of the dimension reflects poker players' behaviours when they continue to play poker in an effort to recover chips lost.
6. Rituals – Pertains to poker players' attempts to influence the outcome of the game. This dimension can range from players understanding that there is an element of chance in the game, and not participating in any rituals in the hopes of influencing the results of the wager, to players believing they might be able to shape the outcome of the game.

9.4 Reflections

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

- Aristotle

Over the course of my research, I was oftentimes reminded of the quote above, coined by the philosopher Aristotle. This phrase ultimately speaks to the notion of holism—that the understanding of a system is complex and the relationships between the parts are crucial

(Jackson, 2003). Simply put, a ‘system’ refers to an interrelated set of elements whose function depends on its parts and the connections between those parts (Jackson, 2003; Meadows, 2008).

To date, the dialogue and available literature surrounding social network gambling games—specifically, how to define and understand them—has essentially centred on the independent legal gambling provisions of consideration, chance, and prize, focusing on these three elements in isolation, despite the lack of definitional clarity that exists for the terms, without a fuller understanding of how these elements come together to shape how youth perceive ZP, and without taking into account their lived experiences as players.

The spectrum model is based on findings of my own research. At the same time, it integrates with the existing literature in the areas of both gaming and gambling. The literature in the gaming and gambling fields, highlights both the attempts to define what it is we are talking about when we use the words gaming and gambling, and also the difficulties in coming to an agreement about these terms. Not only is the process of defining a difficult one, it is also not a neutral one, always carrying with itself questions of power (Arjoranta, 2014). To date, dialogues regarding the definition of social gambling games have been significantly driven by industry and related key stakeholders, who have set the terms and boundaries for how a discussion is carried out.

“In the liminal spaces between definitions live things that resemble the ones you are trying to fence inside your boundaries, but are faulty in some small way” (Arjoranta, 2014, para. 3). Traditionally, gambling has been considered to be a boundary case under the larger rubric of gaming (Juul, 2003). I argue that social gambling games have become an example of a similar boundary case, located between gaming and gambling, challenging the gambling field to now ask the question, “What kind of purpose the definition is trying to fulfill, what kind of phenomena it is leaving out, and why?” (Arjoranta, 2014, para. 65). As illustrated by the findings from the key industry stakeholders, regulators in countries such as Belgium, the UK, and Australia are beginning to ask these very questions, as there is something about social network gambling games that just doesn’t feel right. As it currently stands, social network gambling games, such as ZP, will be significantly impacted if we begin to define these activities as gambling under the traditional legal definition, specifically if winning a prize, other than money, holds value. As Mr. L indicated in our interview, “The biggest risk to the industry is trying to argue that there’s no

value for the currency outside of the game, because as soon as you attribute value to it, it becomes gambling,” and, with that comes regulation.

The lived experiences expressed by players, as illustrated in the previous chapter, highlight the complexity behind conceptualizing social network gambling games as just another form of gaming or gambling and, in turn, demonstrate their position as a boundary case between the two fields of gaming and gambling. Youth are experiencing the thrill of the wager, the suspense of the call while waiting for the outcome, and finally the win or loss of the pot—which is congruent with gamblers wagering real money. Also, all youth perceived that under certain circumstances (i.e., playing with real money and not being a skilled player), ZP was a form of lower-stakes gambling and a potential training ground to develop the skills and confidence to begin to wager on professional online poker sites.

With respect to the spectrum model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling, the following quotes by participants Danica, Chung, and Hana illustrate how different dimensions of gameplay can be located within the spectrum at any particular time, and are not static. In her own words, Danica elucidates that, from her perspective, the skill development dimension of ZP gameplay is not fixed, but rather that players’ behaviours can move within and between positions across the spectrum over time.

I can definitely see how it [ZP] would be gateway for more competitive, online poker websites. It just sort of sets the foundation, in a non-threatening way. Like, you learn how to play, and then you get confident when you’re winning the fake chips and you begin to get confident about betting a lot of chips. So then you’re like “Oh, I can play real poker,” and then you go to real poker and you lose real money. I can totally see how people would begin to think that they could totally do this [gambling]. I can totally see how this can make a person want to move onto something that’s more competitive, and more risky.

The following quote by Chung, describes how, for him, ZP represents a bounded form of entertainment that he enjoys playing at the end of his school day. Chung’s behaviour is representative of a more healthy way to play ZP, understanding the limits of the game. While he

is playing, he is fully immersed in the game, but only for as long as his time and chips allow, rarely leading him to participate in chasing behaviours to win back chips that he may have lost.

I usually play when I come home from school—playing poker for, at most, thirty minutes of my day. It's a nice way to relax and enjoy the game without spending money. So I just pop open ZP, play a couple of hands, and then I'd be like, "Oh, yeah, time just went by," or "Ok, I'm done with all my money for now," so that's it, it gets shut down and I get on with my night.

Finally, at the end of my interview with Hana, she became quiet for a couple of minutes. Upon reflection, she realized that her attitudes towards the game might be changing, in particular, her decision about putting any more real money into the game:

Hmmm, this interview has actually made me reflect a lot more about how often I play and why I play—what reasons I play it for now. Looking back on it, from how I was playing it before, I think it was really stupid and really a waste of time for me to actually be spending money on paying for chips. I need to think about the game just as a form of entertainment.

Hana's reflection after our interview has significant implications for prevention initiatives. My interview was the first time that she had had an opportunity to sit back and critically reflect about her ZP gameplay. In particular, what she is feeling and thinking while playing, along with some of the important aspects of why she plays and what keeps her playing? Critical incident questions (Flanagan, 1954) allow youth to share their stories and tap into their personal thoughts, feelings, and actions. A larger discussion on the implications for prevention will be addressed next in Chapter 10.

9.5 Conclusion

Games are a sociocultural phenomenon and therefore, they should be defined and redefined in a hermeneutic circle that enhances our understanding of them. This process of redefining will tell us valuable things about the discourse of games at any given moment. It will also highlight some aspects of games, some of which may not previously have been discussed, therefore providing more things for scholars to study. This may provide a way out of the established discourses that have become so self-evident that we are no longer to see them clearly.

- (Stenros and Waern, 2011; as cited in Arjoranta, 2014, para. 68).

Technology, more specifically Facebook, is now blurring the two fields of gaming and gambling, regardless of regulatory issues. For example, game designers commonly use gambling elements, such as the mechanics of randomness (e.g., dice or the dealing of cards), to make the game more uncertain for players, while social network gambling games are using social mechanics found in online games, such as leaderboards, chat features, and the players' social connections via Facebook, to capitalize on the emerging unregulated gaming platform that Facebook has become.

The emergence of casino-style gambling games on SNSs, such as Facebook, challenge our current understanding of gambling, raising considerable concerns, particularly regarding youth. The prevailing knowledge promotes the dualism between SNGs and gambling, based on the traditional legal coordinates—consideration, chance, and prize. Social game developers are actively designing and framing social network gambling games as a harmless form of entertainment, shielded from regulation that accompanies a legal distinction of gambling. As discussed previously, tensions exist between the two industries; however, both are trying to separate themselves from the stigmatized “dirty secret” that is gambling. I would argue that as a result of this disagreement, alongside the deliberate deception around terminology, significant confusion exists about how to frame social network gambling games. This confusion that is created illustrates the significant power that industries have in shaping the public discourse and discussion around these games. It also has significant consequences, not only for the individual players, and in this case youth (specifically how they perceive their play), but also their parents,

the larger community, and organizations that are trying to develop and disseminate evidence-based youth gambling prevention and awareness initiatives. As Ms. J puts forth, “the blurred line between gaming and gambling is going to continue because we don’t have a clear line of what they are, and because one world is constantly trying to go into the other.” We need to take back the power from the industries shaping the current public discourse, and dissolve the dualism that currently exists between gaming and gambling. Essentially, to stop speaking different languages so we can, as Dr. K suggests, form “a coherent public gestalt that people can recognize.”

However, the question that remains unanswered, is how do youth perceive their poker participation on Facebook? Significant implications exist if youth perceive their poker play as a form of gambling, despite there being no legal designation. If an individual thinks they are gambling, then they are gambling. This perception can influence their gameplay, both now and in the future.

The described Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling is the first step to integrating youths’ voices and lived experiences into the conversation about how social gambling games become conceptualized by researchers, key stakeholders, and ultimately young people. It seeks to dissolve the dualism that currently exists between gaming and gambling, while also drawing attention to the potential for mild levels of problematic gameplay that players can experience.

10 Chapter 10: Discussion

Through a two-phase research study, I sought to: 1) examine the intentions of the game design and the influences of the ZP game design that youth are exposed to while playing poker; 2) explore and try to understand the various perspectives of key stakeholders; and 3) investigate youths’ (aged 18–24 years) lived experiences of poker play on Facebook to understand what motivates them to play, and how they perceive their participation.

My findings support a spectrum model of social network gaming/gambling and particularly highlights the fluidity and transitory nature of youths’ gameplay that can range from healthy to problematic behaviours. I argue that gaming and gambling are not and should not be

viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as intertwined activities sharing similar elements. This means players' behaviours can move within and between positions across the spectrum.

This spectrum was created from a foundational public health perspective of gambling (Korn & Shaffer, 1999) and alcohol problems (Skinner, 1990). From a public health perspective, as individuals working in the area of youth gambling prevention and awareness, a priority should be to: a) *promote* informed and balanced attitudes and behaviours towards social network

gambling;

b) *prevent* youth social network gambling-related harms; and

c) *protect* at-risk youth from social network gambling related harm.

Further, we need to examine the benefits and unintended negative consequences. There is an obvious entertainment factor inherent in many gambling activities; however, concerns must be raised about the unintended negative consequences.

In this final section, I will use the dimensions of gameplay from my spectrum model to discuss several findings and how they connect with the literature to help understand social network gambling. The following sections then discuss the implications of my research, point out some limitations of the study, and conclude with final thoughts.

10.1 'Money' and 'Chasing'

Once one recognizes that a piece of silver in [the world of the game] can have value, just like the US dollar, one must realize that a silver piece is not merely like money—it is money

- Castronova (2005, p. 47)

The sale of virtual goods/currency has become a key revenue stream for social network gambling game operators (Facebook Inc., 2012; Media & Entertainment Consulting Network, 2010; Morgan Stanley, 2012) despite ongoing debates about how to conceptualize these games. As outlined in Chapter Two, the current dominant public discourse is relying on the legal

coordinates of consideration, chance, and prize to guide the categorization of social network gambling games (i.e., gaming vs gambling; Gainsbury et al., 2014; Miller, & Howell, 2014; Owens, 2010) despite the lack of clarity defining each component and the fact that the law was created before virtual currencies existed.

The question then becomes, what is the value of virtual currency? Virtual currency and virtual goods, hold real value for people (Downs, 2010), as there is an implicit rate of exchange. For an individual, that value may be equivalent to a dollar amount designated as the amount for a chip for continued play, something that can be exchanged for virtual goods, or it may represent a mechanism for increasing social capital amongst fellow players. While players' initial participation in ZP does not require real money, once chips have been depleted, players can purchase additional chips via major credit cards, PayPal, or pre-paid gift cards available at major retail outlets. Previous research informs us that social network gamblers who made in-game purchases, were eight times more likely to transition to real-money gambling, than those who played for free (Kim et al., 2014). The ability to purchase chips for real money, has significant implications for youth, particularly with respect *promoting* informed and balanced gambling behaviours, and *preventing* youth from gambling-related harms.

As illustrated in the findings from my interactional journey (Chapter Six; see Figure 34), after a player experiences a run of bad luck and loses a significant number of chips, a pop-up window will appear in the centre of the player's screen inviting the player to get back into the game, and in essence, "*chase*" his/her losses. Zynga's game developers have designed ZP to help trigger and expedite a player's desire to purchase additional chips with real money, by capitalizing on a player possibly being on-tilt and being driven by emotions and not thinking clearly.



Figure 34. Illustration of Financial Flow. Images captured from authors computer on May 10, 2013.

According to Schüll (2012), over the past few years technologies of financial flow have advanced rapidly, “eliminating obstructions in the physical and temporal flow of the wagering activity ... shrinking the time that transpires between a player’s impulse to continue gambling, thus minimizing the possibility of reflection and self-stopping that might arise in that pause” (p. 68). As Schüll (2012) discusses, the introduction of a “cashless” system to casinos, made coin payouts obsolete by replacing everything with a bar-coded player loyalty card. The impact, not only increased gambling revenue, it increased cost efficiencies as well by freeing up staff time and space on the casino floor (Eadington, 2004; as cited in Schüll, 2012).

While Schüll’s (2012) book focuses on the electronic gambling machine, (i.e., slot machines), her analysis about how slot machines are designed to streamline gamblers access to money perfectly illustrates the ease of access that social network poker players have to purchasing chips on ZP, particularly after significant chip losses when they are more prone to continue playing in an effort to recover lost wagers (i.e. chasing). For example, the number of various payment methods (see Figure 35), illustrates that with one easy click, players can “circumvent any obstacle to cash” (Schüll, 2012, p.70) so as to simply continue to play.

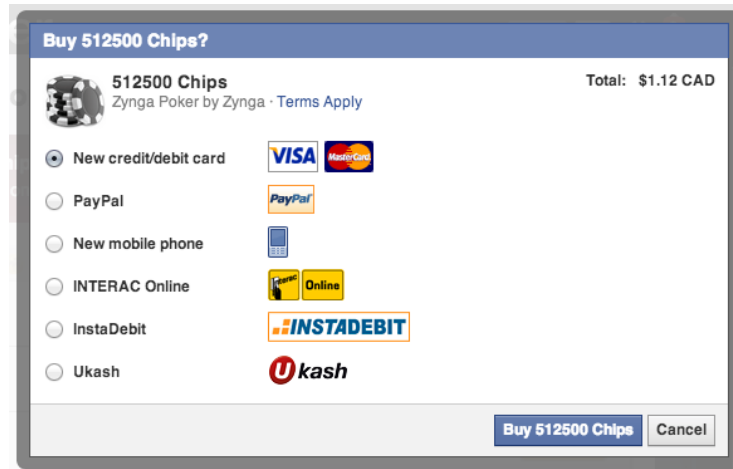


Figure 35. Payment Methods. Images captured from authors computer on June 12, 2013.

My findings support previous research arguing that there is a societal and social value associated with today's virtual currencies, beyond monetary value as defined by the real financial economy (Castronova, 2005; Goggin, 2012; Jacobs, 2012; Kinnunen, et al., 2012; Lehdonvirta et al., 2009; Zelizer, 1997). The combination of game mechanics with the consumption of virtual items has led to a new form of consumerism (Jacobs, 2012) and an in-game revenue model commonly used by SNGs (Lehdonvirta, 2009). This form of virtual consumerism has been referred to as the third wave of digital consumption (Lehdonvirta, 2012), or the growing ludic³⁸ economies (Goggin, 2012). "These ludic economies, contribute to radically shifting notions of what constitutes a 'real', or legitimate market" (Goggin, 2012, p. 448).

Finally, in addition to purchasing virtual chips with ZP, a black market economy has been created by third-party broker websites³⁹ for the buying and selling of virtual currency. During a key stakeholder interview, Ms. D argued that virtual currency does have value, specifically, asserting:

³⁸ Ludic comes from the Latin word *ludus*, which is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as relating to play or playfulness (Ludic, n.d.)

³⁹ Third party independent websites (such as Mom's Chips <http://www.momschips.com/>, ZP Chips <http://www.zpchips.com/>, or Facebook Poker chips <http://fbpokerchips.info/>) allow users to purchase or redeem social media virtual poker chips using PayPal, or a major credit card.

If it [virtual chips] didn't have value, nobody'd want it and nobody'd trade it, so it's crazy to say it doesn't have value. It has an aspirational value.... You need to ask, can this be converted into money? Well, yes it can if you can sell it. If someone is willing to pay for it [virtual chips]—as in hard cash—it must have a monetary value. This is evident by the current black market.

The laws pertaining to online currency and the developing digital economy are evolving fast and have sparked some debate in courtrooms around the world. A recent court ruling in the United Kingdom set a precedent when a man pleaded guilty to stealing \$12 million in online virtual currency (Hacker Faces Jail, 2011). The presiding judge ruled that virtual currency does in fact have real monetary value and is worthy of the same legal protection (Gainsbury, 2012).

The work by Vivian Zelizer (1997) can help us to make sense of the “changing symbolism of money with people’s varied, complex, and often surprising uses of their monies” (p. 35). She argues that by defining money solely in economic terms, we deny the concept of multiple currencies, those that “exist outside the sphere of the market and [are] profoundly influenced by cultural and social structures” (p. 18). While the concept of multiple currencies leads us into a difficult terminological terrain (Zelizer, 1997), I would argue that, as a result of this third wave of digital consumption and emerging ludic economies that are present in social network gambling games, it is a discussion that needs to take place. As demonstrated by the findings of my study, youth are purchasing virtual currency with real money, and virtual goods are not about the objects per se, but rather their ability to express an emotion or feeling—whether as a form of personal expression or, in my study, connection with fellow players. In a live poker game, this would be similar to buying a round of drinks for everyone at the table. It is a consumptive ritual that fosters a sense of community with fellow players. Virtual items become “invested with some sort of socially constructed realness as a result of playing a role in human communication and exchange” (Castronova et al., 2009, p. 686)

10.2 ‘Competition’ and ‘Training’ - What is Going on Here?

The very essence of the game of poker brings out the competitive nature of many players, my participants included. Consistent with previous findings (Bradley & Schroeder, 2009; Gupta

et al., 2013; Meerkamper, 2010; Wohl et al., 2014), my study shows that a strong motivator for individuals to engage in free-to-play poker was to achieve the status of a skilled player in order to be able to compete with friends and fellow players. For some youth, this motivation went one step further as a mechanism to sharpen their skills for later migration onto real-money wagering sites. My findings, along with previous research, clearly substantiate these trends among social network gambling players (Derevensky et al., 2013; Gainsbury et al., 2014; Gupta et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014; King et al., 2014; Morgan Stanley, 2012; Ozuem & Prasad, 2014; Parke et al., 2012; Wohl et al., 2014), especially today's young players. Of particular concern is that social network gambling sites, like ZP, familiarize young players with gambling and actually desensitize them to potential gambling-related harms. Further, sites like ZP may encourage individuals to migrate their play over to real-money sites, as a result of increased confidence in their perceived levels of skill as demonstrated through their gameplay on social network gambling sites (Derevensky et al., 2013).

To date, the social network gambling operators and affiliated spokespeople and reports (Delany, 2014; Miller & Howell, 2014) frame these games as an old form of play that has evolved with technology, primarily engaged in by players over the age of 18 years as a harmless form of entertainment, for which there is, as yet, no evidence to support the "moral panic" as put forth by youth gambling researchers. The work of Goffman (1986) can help us understand, not only how ZP is actively constructing itself as a harmless form of gaming (as illustrated in Chapter Six), but also the impact that industry-framed reports can ultimately have on how players may perceive "What is going on here?"

The communication literature explains how deception can include both verbal and non-verbal messages "that involve the manipulative use of contextual features to generate a false framing of the situation" (Hopper & Bell, 1984, p. 289). Drawing on the work of Goffman (1986) to help explain, the previous legal definition of real-money poker as a form of gambling (adhering to the coordinates of consideration, chance, and prize; Owens, 2010) is a primary gambling framework, which, for the most part, all players understand and acknowledge. However, depending on your interpretation of what constitutes those legal coordinates, social network gambling games find themselves at a difficult crossroads, where industry operators have an opportunity to transform the gaming experience into an unregulated activity potentially seen

by others as something different. Goffman's (1986) ideas to understand this transformation, into a secondary framework, is altered by two processes: keying and fabrications.

First, Goffman (1986) discusses how play fighting and rehearsals/practicing are ways in which humans apply keying to an activity. He describes the key as: "the set of conventions by which a given activity already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity and seen by participants to be something quite else" (pp. 43–44). However, an important aspect of keying is that "participants in the activity are meant to know and to openly acknowledge that a systematic alteration is involved" (p. 45). Examples of applied keying within the findings of my study are as follows: Youths' lived experiences illustrate how ZP is being used by some as a training environment to practice their poker skills, and the players acknowledge a transformation of the original game of poker has occurred, which is why they perceive ZP as a form of gambling lite—offering similar gambling experiences, without necessarily having to play for real money.

The question, with respect to these games, and the implication for young players and both primary and secondary prevention efforts, then becomes, at what stage does "practicing" become a problem, particularly for vulnerable populations? As mentioned in the beginning of thesis, social network gambling is reminiscent of the history of candy cigarettes. Candy cigarettes were considered to be "so real looking it's startling" (as cited in Klein & St. Clair, 2000, p.363), prompting concerns that tobacco companies were "trying to lure youngsters into the smoking habit" (ibid). At that time, public health researchers could not argue that candy cigarettes "cause" experimental tobacco smoking behaviour in students. However, results of studies could support the claim that "candy cigarettes provide opportunities for children to engage in smoking-related play" (Klein et al., 1992, p. 30), in turn, "selling the social acceptability of smoking: (ibid, p, 27).

Going back to the work of Goffman (1986), a second process of the transformation of primary frameworks is what he calls fabrications. Fabrications, refers to the "intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage an activity so that a party of one or more other will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on" (p. 83). I would argue that through the discourses and many design elements highlighted in Chapter Six, Zynga is actively fabricating the game of poker (already meaningful in terms of primary frameworks) to intentionally present social network gambling as something entirely different—a harmless form of gaming, distinctly

separate from regulated gambling—similar to what the candy cigarette manufacturers did previously until research began to indicate the need to protect young people from products that promote the social acceptability of smoking and the need for more targeted primary prevention efforts (Klein et al., 2007).

To conclude, similar to candy cigarettes at one time, the portrayal of social network gambling as a harmless form of play is accessible to anyone over the age of 13 yrs (when you are legally able to establish a Facebook profile). ZP may not fulfill the legal definition of gambling, but I would argue is not a harmless form of play. ZP is symbolic of real-money poker, and may become one of the first experiences a child or young person may have with gambling. This will undoubtedly contribute to what motivates young players to participate in poker and how they perceive of their gameplay.

While my study focused on youth who were legally able to participate in real-money gambling either online or at other venues, most admitted that they had been playing poker on Facebook for many years prior to becoming of age to legally gamble. As Chung recalls, “I started playing poker when I first got on to Facebook, which was in ninth grade. I remember thinking, ‘Hey, I could probably play with all sorts of people’, and I’m not betting real money.” A key goal in gambling prevention is to delay the age of onset of initiation into those games until they are legally eligible to participate. This can only be accomplished by including the growing body of evidence, this study, and previous ones (Chapter three) into larger policy decisions regarding balancing concerns about desensitizing young people to gambling games before they are legally able to participate.

10.3 ‘Temporality’

One thing that I found especially interesting about the youths’ lived experiences of playing ZP to relieve boredom and to distract, was the disregard of time that accompanies escaping into gameplay, oftentimes as result of being, in their words, “addicted”. As my interactional journey playing ZP illustrates, game developers are purposely designing engagement loops to create an immersive and habit-forming gameplay experience (see Figure 36), which can result in the theft of a players time (Bogost, 2010; Crary, 2014).

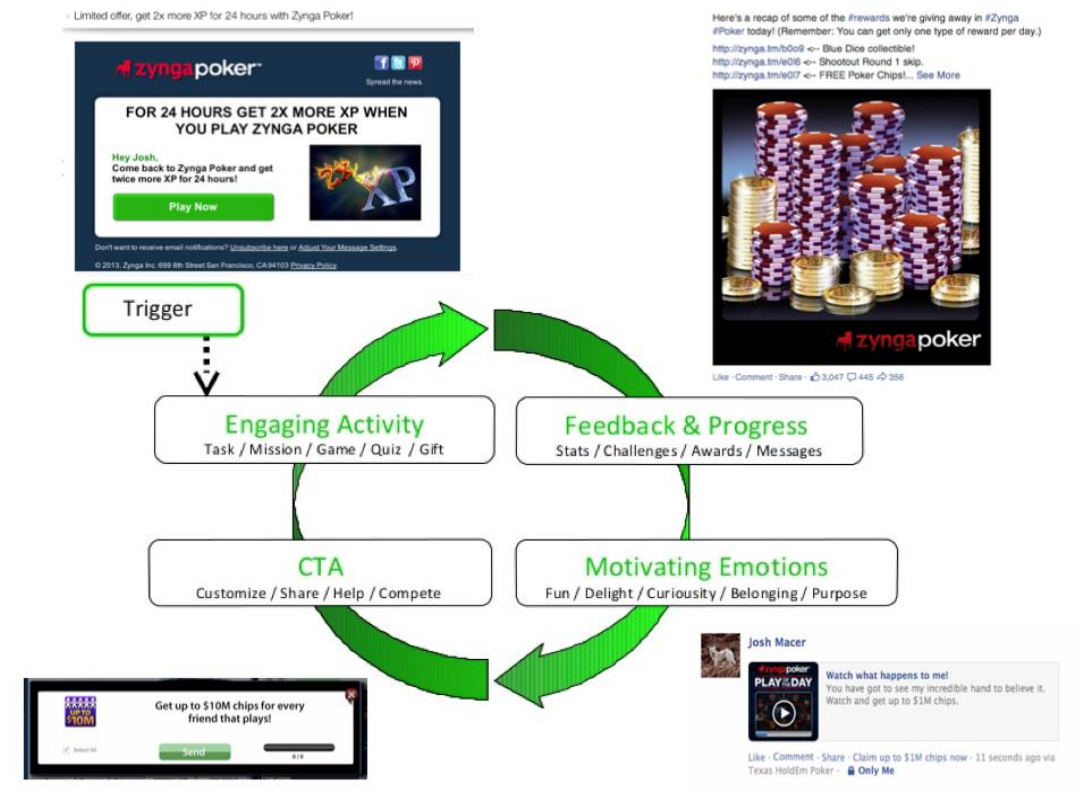


Figure 36. ZP Designed Engagement Loops. Images captured from authors computer on June 12, 2013.

It is worth mentioning, that while I was guided by Kim's 5-step journey framework (Kim, 2013), recent work by Eyal & Hoover (2014), in their published book *Hooked*, explains the 'Hook Model' – a four step process many successful companies embed into their products to subtly encourage customer behaviour. The hook model illustrates similar looping mechanisms to Kim's work, such as triggers, action, variable rewards, and investment (i.e. a players commitment to the activity).

Natasha Dow Schüll (2012), in her book entitled: *Addiction by Design*, draws on the work of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008), and his writings on the condition of "flow" to help us understand "the state of absorption that players can find themselves in when immersed in the an activity in which attention is so focused that a sense of time fades, along with the troubles and concerns of day-to-day life" (p. 166). According to Csikszentmihalyi (2008), flow is commonly described by a sense of timelessness that results by the rhythms dictated by the

activity - “often hours seem to pass by in minutes” (p. 66). To experience flow, according to Csikszentimihalyi (2008), there has to be four pre-conditions: “a sense that one’s skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how one is performing” (p. 71). As Schüll (2012) indicates, machine gambling possesses each of these properties. I would extend that argument by suggesting that ZP similarly possesses each of these pre-conditions of flow, set forth by Csikszentimihalyi, as illustrated in the lived experiences of the youth. For example, Amir readily admitted, “I once played for the whole night, my friends and I were so much into the game, we didn’t sleep.”

Csikszentimihalyi (2008) acknowledges the potential addictiveness of any flow activity, referred to as “psychic entropy” – a negative sort of flow with the “power to suspend negative affective states such as boredom, anxiety, and confusion” (Schüll, 2012, p.167). However, Schüll (2012), quickly points out that Csikszentimihalyi is staying true to his existentialist lens, by regarding dependency resulting from an individuals’ natural tendency rather than from any specific properties of a given flow activity. Of particular importance to Schüll’s (2012) work on machine gambling, and similarly highlighted here in my thesis, is the crucial element of the consideration of taking into consideration the commercial interests of the game design companies. As Schüll (2012) nicely articulates,

An understanding of flow is relevant to the design of leisure products and services, he [Csikszentimihalyi] neither elaborated on the profit motives behind the design of user flow nor reflects on how these motives might lead to products and services whose configuration risks drawing users’ escape motivations in a “backwards” direction, such that they lose themselves without self-actualizing gain” (p. 167).

Finally, the available literature asserts that gambling, both for youth and adults, has often been shown to be a means by which gamblers can escape problems (Derevensky, 2012; Gupta & Derevensky, 2000; Schüll, 2012; Thomas, Sullivan & Allen, 2009; Wood & Griffiths, 2007). My current study builds on this previous body of literature. As my findings, and the work of Schüll (2012) indicate, the relationship between the design elements of a gambling activity and an individual player’s interior state must be considered.

Sensory atmospheres (i.e. colour schemes, sound, and light) can significantly impact a player's interior state. These atmospheric strategies, as Schüll (2012) indicates, operate at a "level that is not consciously detectible" (p. 46), evoking an emotional and physiological response from players. Drawing on the "immersion paradigm", Schüll (2012) illustrates how the design of both casinos and gambling machines, hold players in an uninterrupted motion, ultimately increasing playing time.

The gameplay dimension of temporality can be addressed through public health primary prevention strategies such as health promotion. For example, building on the theoretical concepts of contemplation (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992) and decision balance (Stretcher & Rosenstock, 1997), time management interventions could promote balanced time management in relation to social network gambling and other activities (Korn et al., 2006).

10.4 'Lucky Rituals'

The final dimension of social network gambling gameplay on the spectrum model addresses the various rituals that players do to invoke "lady luck" into the game. To date, lucky rituals accompanying gambling play have been understudied, with most of the studies conducted in the 1990's, framing them as a form of pathology (Simmons, 2012). However, despite the dearth of literature examining these interesting traditions, lucky rituals do exist in both real money and social network gambling games. As the lived experiences of my participants illustrates, despite players acknowledging the "silliness" behind these gestures, tipping the virtual dealer was common practice amongst players. For the youth, tipping the dealer was a way to hopefully be dealt better cards, but also they felt that it was ZP's way of emulating real-life poker.

Lucky rituals are ways for participants "to grasp some kind of control in an uncontrollable environment" (Simmons, 2012, p.45). More specifically, lucky rituals are defined as repetitive actions done by players after a "good" play or prior to gameplay to evoke luck (Simmons, 2012). Simmons (2012) argues, that "once rituals are reinforced by a positive outcome, individuals will continue to use the rituals" (p. 46). This behavioural conceptualization is congruent with the "illusion of control theory" (Langer, 1975). Essentially, the illusion of control precipitates players

to have faith in their own abilities to alter the randomness of the game, and in turn, the games' end results (Dixon, 2000; Simmons, 2012).

The issue of primary importance for youth gambling prevention is to reduce individuals' illusionary control. Players need to understand how specific behavioural rituals they may do when gambling, as a way to help gain a sense of control, do not influence the outcomes of the games. As we know however, influencing people's behaviour is a complex undertaking. Given the dearth of literature on the use of lucky rituals when gambling, prevention interventions could greatly benefit from a deeper understanding of the use of rituals to invite "lady luck" into the game.

10.5 Implications

Based on the findings of my study, and their impact on youth, the following implications for research, practice, and policy are suggested.

10.5.1 Research

To fully understand social network gambling, further academic research is needed (Derevensky et al., 2013), particularly if we are to truly understand the implications for young players. This following section will suggest two areas for future research: 1) verifying my spectrum model, and 2) the role of big data.

10.5.1.1 The Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling

The cumulative findings from my study led to the development of my spectrum model, arguing for the dissolution of the dualism that currently exists between gambling and gaming. Future studies would benefit from verifying the dimensions of gameplay and further developing the model by going back to youth participants and other stakeholders, such as parents, poker players from various age demographics, and youth gambling awareness and prevention workers. For example, it would be interesting for future research to examine younger populations, in

particular to understand why they play, and if their reasons are similar or different than their older counterparts.

The lived experience of young people in my study articulated a fluidity of gameplay between healthy and problematic social network gambling over the course of their participation. Of particular importance is the need to understand this transitory nature over long periods of time. To determine what constitutes problem social network gambling gameplay, and the possible associated harms that youth may experience; in essence, empirically verify the conceptual foundation and measures of the spectrum model.

Concern seems to be warranted about ZP (and similar Facebook gaming applications) being a training ground for players to develop their poker skills and confidence in order to eventually transition their gameplay over to real-money wagering on professional Internet sites. Currently, a large-scale longitudinal examination of factors that predict migration from social network gambling to Internet gambling is underway (Wohl, 2014). The research by Wohl et al. (2014), and the larger gambling field, would benefit from a longitudinal qualitative component to go beyond the numbers to further understand youths' lived experiences over time—and in this way, their personal narratives and perceptions would be taken into consideration.

Numerical data representing various types of change over time is valuable information; however, change is also contextual. This could be accomplished through soliciting participant diaries from youth, and follow-up, face-to-face interviews. Additionally, similar to my current study, a virtual ethnographic study, with the help of tracking software, could be undertaken to observe participants playing poker over time. For example, a diary could be guided by a series of questions, focusing on participant's thoughts on particular dimensions of their gameplay, such as chasing losses, preoccupation with the game, and decisions to put money into the game. Diaries could provide contextual foundations for follow up interviews, establishing valuable contextual information to support statistical data.

10.5.1.2 Social Network Gambling Games and Big Data

At any given second, SNG developers have access to various kinds of analytics (e.g. daily active users, monthly active users, lifetime value (LYV; Fields, 2014), with the end goal of

evaluating players' behaviour to become more profitable. As discussed in Chapters Six, harmlessness was a discourse found to be active in the ZP application. This discourse was constructed during my analysis partially based on ZP's use of personalization technologies. Personalization has increasingly been recognized as a key factor in instilling online trust (Briggs et al., 2002) - fostering a more intimate connection between the player and the game, but also as a result of SNG developers having access to large quantities of player data.

As articulated by boyd & Crawford (2012), big data is "less about data that is big, than it is about a capacity to search, aggregate, and cross-reference large data sets" (p. 2). While the purpose of my study was not to directly investigate the roll that big data plays in social network gambling games, it is evident that it also cannot be overlooked in the discussion of the games and the influence that developers use of advanced metrics have on youth gameplay decisions.

According to Fields (2014), "anyone with a stake in the financial performance of social and mobile games needs to learn how to live, sleep, and breathe metrics" (p. 57). For years, land-based casinos have been tracking player data (e.g. live play behaviours, dining habits, spending patterns), in an effort to provide good customer service and to generate player value for marketing purposes (Martin, 2014; Schüll, 2012). However, never before has real-time data metrics been able to be used to directly enhance or modify the design of the game (in a timely fashion) according to customers gameplay behaviour. As articulated by game designer, Everett Lee,

Games that are given away for free introduce interesting methods of monetization, or in traditional financial terms, interesting means of generating revenue...The designer will always need to think about how he/she will drive players to spend real money in the game...Social game companies have teams of people integrating analytics, poring over the data the analytics generate, and running tests to fine-tune the monetization engine (Fields, 2014, p.73-74).

An interviewee in Schüll's (2012) study asked, "How can they expect people to gamble responsibly when they build machines that make them [players] behave irresponsibly?" (p.274). I argue that the same ethical concern lies in the free-to-play social network gambling games. Today's use of big data provides game developers the tools to tailor and modify free-to-play games according to changes in the player base (Fields, 2014), with the goal to use personalization

technologies to “extract money from players in tiny increments, on a minute-by-minute basis...to massage the details of the game mechanics and content over time to improve profitability” (p. 65). This can be a dangerous seduction for game developers focusing on maximizing profits through customizing the gameplay experience. Several ethical questions need to be addressed, particularly when it comes to youth and underage players. What are the implications for young gamblers who are being personally encouraged to immerse themselves in their gameplay as a result of advanced metrics and personalization technologies? Moving forward it is crucial that future research begin to understand the role of big data and the possible unintended negative consequences of targeting player behaviour for profit maximization.

10.5.2 Practice

As outlined in Chapter One, social network gambling games are currently referred to by a myriad of terms, leading to confusion and debate about their status—gambling or not gambling. The findings from my research, alongside previous research (Gupta et al., 2013; Ipsos MORI, 2011; King et al., 2014; Korn et al., 2010) and studies currently underway (Wohl et al., 2014), when taken all together, illustrate that we can no longer rely on the vague legal coordinates of chance, consideration, and prize to define casino-style games on Facebook, specifically when it comes to understanding the unintended consequences that can occur for vulnerable players such as youth. Particularly, the lived experiences of social network poker players demonstrate that gaming and gambling are not and should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as intertwined activities sharing similar elements. The implication of this significantly contributes to current youth gambling awareness and prevention initiatives, by expanding the programs to be more inclusive with respect to a range of social network gambling behaviours (i.e., from healthy to problematic). Prevention programming needs to include topics such as gaming, paying particular attention to demonstrating the merging of the two entities. Essentially, as youth gambling prevention advocates, we need to build our messaging on the premise that if social network gambling players believe that they are gambling, then they are gambling!

The implications of my research findings for practice go one step further, arguing that the prevention community needs to come together and agree to the development and use of a consistent language to refer to these games. While this may be difficult, I would argue that it is

essential. As my findings suggest, language and discourse significantly shape how individuals perceive these games, and in turn, can influence their behaviour. How can we expect youth gambling prevention messaging to be impactful if key stakeholders, such as operators, researchers, regulators, and not-for-profit prevention organizations are all speaking different languages?

10.5.3 Policy

Social network gambling games and “their regulation remain the hottest topics in the gambling industry” (Derevensky et al., 2013, p. 17). In light of the evidence, several scenarios regarding regulation are possible as a way to move forward. The first scenario is to stay the course and let social network gambling games continue to remain unregulated. However, this would be done with the recognition that the gambling and gaming industries are continuing to blur and converge, and players’ gameplay behaviours can move between healthy and problematic over the duration of their participation. This scenario would benefit from a longitudinal research study to examine over time if players gameplay behaviours are not stable, but do in fact, move within and between positions across the spectrum at any particular time.

The second scenario is for the social network gambling industry to self-regulate. To date, calls for the regulation of these games have been voiced, with significant opposition from operators claiming that customers are only paying/playing for entertainment (Derevensky et al., 2013) and that there is a lack of scientific evidence warranting concern for the games and/or their players (Delany, 2014). Given the building support for the concerns about social network gambling games, the need to revisit and rethink the possibility of self-regulation is warranted.

The third possible scenario would be for external regulation. Several key industry stakeholders I interviewed articulated that regulation, without a doubt, is what the future holds for the social network gambling industry. As Ms. D said,

Pandora’s box has been opened ... however, you dress it [regulation] up, that’s what will happen. You’ll either have data protection, consumer protection, or financial service

protection ... That's saying that anything that creates a black market economy by virtual currency, really has to be looked at in a wider context.

Finally, a fourth possible scenario would be for various key stakeholders, across both gaming and gambling industries, to come together to create and sign a memorandum of understanding. As an effort to minimize possible risks and associated harms for vulnerable populations such as youth, the development of a memorandum of understanding would be an impactful tool to proactively develop a strategy for social network gambling games. Key stakeholders in government departments and agencies, academic researchers, advocacy groups, not-for-profit youth gambling prevention educators, commercial business operators, and knowledge users (i.e. players), could come together to help shape healthy public policy in the areas of advertising, financial purchases and payments, game mechanics and functionality, age restrictions, and the implementation of responsible gameplay measures similar to those currently existing on professional online gambling sites. To date, the International Social Games Associations (ISGA) has put forward best practice principles to “provide guidance to the social games industry on consumer protection, accountability and transparency” (ISGA, 2015, para. 1). However, while the ISGA is open to continual evaluation and evolution of the principles, as they stand now, these principles were developed from the perspective of the social games operators, with no involvement with players, which originates from the premise that all social network games are consumed only for their enjoyment and fun, and that social network gambling games are not a form of commercial gambling (Miller & Howell, 2014), therefore currently posing no harm to players (Delany, 2014), specifically vulnerable populations such as youth. Additionally the current principles are vague, which leaves them open to interpretation.

10.6 Considerations

It is worth paying particular attention to a few points about my study. First, it has been said that, “as with dogs, Internet years run faster than human years. The best estimates indicate a ratio of 4.7 to 1. That is, in one human year, a given Internet application, browser, etc. will experience changes and adaptations which a person or a brick-and-mortar business would expect

to undergo in about five” (Owens, 2011, p. 699). Over the course of the 2 years in which I conducted this study, both Facebook and ZP went through a period of growth and transformation, which is indicative of content on the Internet. For example, in the early fall of 2014, Zynga launched a big redesign of its flagship ZP for mobile. The overhaul was meant to be more realistic, with less animation and included using players’ photos. According to a statement put forward by Facebook, Jon Lui, Vice President of Games, Zynga Casino, announced “we set out to create the most authentic and immersive poker experience that mirrors the fun and excitement consumers have on real casino floors—all in a free-to-play social game” (as cited in Kunz, 2014, para. 2). As a result of negative customer feedback, within 2 months, Zynga further announced in a press release the relaunch of their retired ZP Classic, alongside the new innovative ZP—now offering players the choice of two versions (Allerman, 2014). The discourse analysis and my interactional player journey is a snapshot of ZP Classic over the course of a year, which both the key stakeholders and youth were familiar with during the time of the study.

Second, my research program was grounded in a constructivist approach, seeking to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of how people experience and give meaning to their ZP gameplay within their social and cultural contexts (Groleau, Zelkowitz, & Cabral, 2009). The aim of my study was to be more representative of those individuals who have similar lived experiences to the participants in the study (Morse, 1999). Similarly, I chose to conduct a virtual ethnographic case study focusing only on one poker application on Facebook: Zynga Poker. I recognize that other scholars might have selected other interpretive approaches using different methods. There is some caution required in extrapolating the findings of my study to other social network poker games on Facebook. However, I believe that ZP is representative of a typical poker application on Facebook, and the findings are still very informative about the experiences of the average youth poker player on social network gambling games (Yin, 2009). ZP is consistently ranked one the most popular poker applications on Facebook, and many youth interviewed voiced their preference of ZP over other available poker applications. My spectrum model conceptually illustrates participants’ gameplay flow between gambling and gaming. As discussed previously, a qualitative, longitudinal analysis of the fluidity of gameplay would be an important next-step for the study like the one I conducted. For example, to understand conceptual generalizability, it would be interesting to consider how some of my analyses from ZP, including the spectrum model, might be transferable to similar gambling applications on Facebook.

Third, according to the concepts of Goffman (1989), individual frames can vary across cultures and over time. This study was conducted in a particular geographic location and time. Youth interviews were conducted over the course of four months, therefore it may be expected that some historical and cultural differences were not captured in the data. It is my hope that future work in this area will create opportunities to further examine my ideas.

Finally, as mentioned, an aim of this study was to examine what motivates youth to play poker on Facebook, and how they perceive their gameplay, not an assessment of the potential for gambling-related harms. Further research is encouraged to explore if social network gambling may lead to the prevalence of problem gambling.

10.7 Final Thoughts

Technology, and more specifically, SNSs, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and Twitter, are increasingly defining and shaping the world around us, creating our new social realities—how we communicate with friends, how we get jobs, and how we work and play.

A common question a dissertation is asked to answer is, so what? People have gambled for hundreds of years, even before there were currencies (Schwartz, 2006), and gambling has always been considered a form of gameplay (Goffman, 1967; Juul, 2003). However, social network poker is just the latest reconfiguration of the game, which has been played in basements and around kitchen tables for centuries. My study is a necessary component to understanding the larger gambling puzzle as both gambling games and their platforms continue to transform as a result of technological advancements.

At the present time, the social network gambling industry is unregulated in the majority of countries worldwide, primarily because it is not considered to be gambling according to various interpretations of the traditional legal coordinates of consideration, chance, and prize. Valued at US\$2.9 billion in 2013, the social network gambling industry challenges our conventional understanding of gambling, regulation, and consumption.

This study used a public health perspective to investigate youth poker on Facebook. A public health approach to gambling offers a population health perspective that is not restricted to a narrow focus on the more specific area of gambling addiction. It promotes the examination of societal risks and protective factors that encourage or discourage the transition from recreational to problem-related gambling (Shaffer et al., 2004). Both the Public Health Framework and the Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling, does exactly that by providing new understandings, and warnings as we move forward to understand social network gambling opportunities and the possible benefits and unintended negative consequences for young players. Further, the model highlights the nonlinearity of gameplay (Reith & Dobbie, 2013) expressed by the youth – fluctuating between healthy and problematic behaviours over the course of their participation.

Currently, the minimum age requirement to create a profile on Facebook and engage in social network gambling applications is thirteen years of age. The emergence of this new gambling frontier and its low barrier to entry, inevitably adds a new layer of risk and ethical considerations for public health, particularly with respect to developers ability to gather and use large amounts of player engagement metrics. In essence, a game developer's capacity to tailor the gambling experience according to any given player's social and behavioural patterns of gameplay.

While research is beginning to emerge, it is safe to say that it has not kept up pace with the rapidly evolving technologies and this new gambling landscape. However, despite this growing body of knowledge, there is a dearth of discussions considering any relevant ethical issues that take place in the cultural context of this new genre of gambling and its use of advanced data analytics. The findings of my study call attention to potential ethical and risk concerns about game mechanics, and the use of big data to personalize players' gameplay to help optimize player engagement and monetization.

Young people today are being exposed to gambling opportunities many years before being legally able to gamble with real-money in land-based casinos or Internet gambling sties. Of particular concern, is that social network gambling opportunities are now firmly embedded within social media platforms, such as Facebook, where young people have created and developed a daily social presence. Understanding the environmental context that surrounds Facebook poker is

crucial, particularly with respect to the protection and prevention of gambling-related harms to vulnerable populations, such as youth.

The findings from my study, alongside previous research indicates that the lack of accountability and concerns that social network gambling sites are “teaching young people to gambling” (Morgan Stanley, 2012, p. 6), are warranted. Further, and of equal importance, youth perceive their ZP gameplay as a form of gambling. This is of particular concern for youth who may not have engaged in such an activity until much later on, which could lead to the migration of their play over to real-money gambling sites once they develop a level of experience and skilled play.

10.7.1 My Journey and the Journeys that Lie Ahead

Within this final section of my thesis, I wish to reflect back on my dissertation journey, paying particular attention to the lessons learned—essentially going beyond the results to suggest ways we can move forward. As articulated by Norman (2006), a doctoral dissertation serves several purposes: 1) to provide the student with a chance to further knowledge in the art and science of conducting independent research; 2) to provide faculty with the means to evaluate a student’s ability to conduct research and develop original ideas about the nature of a particular subject matter; and 3) to contribute to the body of scientific knowledge in a given field. The following will highlight my achievements of the first and third objectives during my research process.

For the majority of people, gambling occurs without developing problems; however, a significant number do experience gambling-related harms. To date, the emergence and growth of the social network gambling industry has outpaced academic scholarship. My contribution to both the field of public health, and more specifically to the areas of youth gambling and gaming, are both theoretical and practical. My findings, along with development of the Public Health Framework and the Spectrum Model of Social Network Gaming/Gambling, argues for the elimination of the dualism that currently exists between the two fields – offering an opportunity for all key stakeholders, including operators and players, to come together and work in partnership to understand and address the issue of social network gambling.

To date, the studies of gambling and gaming have had very little to do with each other, despite the fact that they are both areas of study that fall under the larger rubric of game research. As my study illustrates, a convergence is beginning to take shape as a result of the evolution of technology, which sparked the emergence of social network gambling games. Up until embarking on my research journey, I had only examined these games from my respective gambling lens. This study allowed me the opportunity to immerse myself within the field of gaming. I spent significant amounts of time attending, talking to, and learning from various key gaming conferences. To my pleasant surprise, the fields felt quite different with respect to the underlying disciplines and related knowledge that supported each area of study. This added a level of complexity to my study; however, it also offered a unique opportunity of a way to move forward.

A significant amount of dialogue has taken place over the past few years, essentially articulating that the fields of gaming and gambling are converging (Downs, 2010; Derevensky et al., 2013; Gainsbury et al., 2014; Griffiths, 2009, 2013; Kim et al., 2014; King et al., 2014; Korn et al., 2010). However, most of the studies to date, only have examined social gambling games primarily from a psychological perspective.

Moving forward, there needs to be a paradigm shift in the way we conduct research in this field. Throughout my journey listening to the key stakeholders and the youth, I was reminded of the value of systems thinking. As a conceptual framework, systems thinking helps foster a new way of understanding complex situations, which, I would argue, would include gambling on SNSs. Systems thinking offers an alternative paradigm to design and interpret research (Jackson, 2003), in this case, unpacking the possible benefits and unforeseen negative consequences of social network gambling. By not only focusing on the properties of the system's component parts, it opens up the examination of positions and relationships among the parts (National Cancer Institute, 2007). By examining the domains of influence, we can begin to foster a stronger appreciation for the complexity within potentially competing systems.

Albert Einstein famously wrote, "Problems cannot be solved at the level of thinking that produced them." This current study provides an opportunity to see how interdisciplinary research can come together, and provides important lessons to both fields. With respect to social gaming, as history and technological advancements have illustrated, social network gambling games maybe the latest, but definitely will not be the last, transformation of gambling games. Future

studies would be wise to embrace a systems approach by adopting an integrated approach to eliminating the dualism that currently exists between both the gambling and gaming fields.

Based on my research findings, this is the best way forward.

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APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide for Key Stakeholders

Key Stakeholder Interview Guide

Initial questions

1. How did you learn about this study?
2. Why did you decided to participate in this study?

Contextual questions

1. As a way of getting started, could you tell me how you became interested in your field?
2. What are your favourite aspects of working in this field? Why is this so intriguing for you?
3. Tell me about the most challenging aspects of working in your field? Why is this so challenging for you?
4. What do you understand to be the similarities (if any) between gaming and gambling? What do you see as the differences?
5. How you would define the terms gambling and gaming?

Social gambling questions

1. Thinking about the current explosion of social gaming/gambling on *Facebook*, what are the reason(s) behind it's popularity?
2. Social games on *Facebook*, seem to follow ebbs and flows in popularity, however *Zynga* poker has been able to maintain their popularity over the past number of years, what do you think may contribute to their sustained popularity?
3. Why do players find social gaming/gambling attractive and enjoyable?
4. Thinking specifically to your job, what you think the future holds for social gaming/gambling applications?
5. What are the most powerful design features of social gaming/gambling applications?
6. Are you familiar with youth gambling problems? If so, what do you think about it?
7. What ways could playing poker on *Facebook* be a problem?
8. What are your thoughts about problem gambling? Problem gamblers?

Ending questions

1. Is there anything else that has occurred to you during the interview?
2. Is there anything else you think I should know about social gaming and gambling?
3. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX 2: Interview Guide for Youth

Youth Interview Guide

Initial questions

1. How did you learn about this study?
 2. Why did you decided to participate in this study?
-

Contextual questions

1. As a way of getting started, please tell me about the first time you played games on the Internet - can you describe what games you played and the circumstances? I am curious about what lead to you starting to play? *Probe – what promoted you to start playing (i.e. person, situation etc.)? your age? the context(s) in which you played? what game was your favourite game?*
 2. What games do you currently play? Describe the circumstances in which you currently play? *Probe – the context/nature of when/where/who you play? favourite games?*
 3. Why do you play poker on Facebook? *Probe – feel better, socialize, develop skills, recognition?*
 4. Thinking about the Texas Hold'em poker app, describe your favorite features about the application? *Probe – design, animations, communication box, game options, technology?*
-

Critical incident questions

1. Thinking about when you play poker on Facebook, could you describe what you are feeling and thinking while playing? *Probe – sense of excitement, want to win, paying attention to other players moves, nothing at all?*
 2. What was your most memorable poker experience you have had on Facebook? Why was it so memorable for you? *Probe – pleasure from winning a hand, competition, winning money/credits, outsmarting others, bluffing, playing with all your friends?*
 3. Describe the most challenging poker experience you have had on Facebook? Why was it so challenging for you? *Probe – lost money/credits, couldn't read other players, not competitive enough, wasn't playing with friends?*
 4. Thinking about when you play poker on Facebook, what do you think are the important aspects to why you play? What keeps you playing? *Probe – socializing, learning skills, winning, relieves boredom?*
-

Subsequent/ending questions

1. When you play poker, how do you obtain credits to continue to play? *Probe – from winnings, purchase thru Facebook, purchase off Facebook?*
2. What ways could playing poker on Facebook be a problem for someone? *Probe – spending too much time/credits, wanting to play for real \$\$ outside of Facebook? What about for yourself?*
3. Could you tell me about your thoughts about problem gambling? Problem gamblers? *Probe – Could it happen to you? What do problem gamblers look like? Losing \$\$\$, family, committing crime?*
4. Is there anything else that has occurred to you during the interview?
5. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX 3: Background/Demographic Information Form – Key Stakeholders

Date:

No:

Personal Background for Key Stakeholders

I would appreciate if you could provide some personal information.

Completion of any or all questions on this form is optional.

Work Background

Job Title:

Organization Affiliation:

Do you consider yourself a member (either formally or informally) of any of these fields? Please circle all that apply:

Video game/gaming

Gambling

Gambling prevention

Social networking sites

Legal

Marketing/Advertising

Other _____

How many years have you been working in this field(s): _____

Do you consider yourself a member of any of these fields? Please circle all that apply:

Researcher

Clinician

Practitioner

Teacher

Policy advisor

Developer

Other _____

Which other terms not mentioned above can be used to describe your work role?:

Which of these terms best describes your prevention intervention work (if applicable)? Please circle all that apply:

Primary prevention

Universal prevention

Secondary prevention

Selected prevention

Targeted prevention

Other _____

Personal Background

Please circle all factors related to you:

Sex: Female

Male

Age: Under 35

35-45

46-55

56-65

66-75

Over 75

Income:

Less than \$30,000

\$30,000- \$49,999

\$50,000-\$74,999

\$75,000-\$89,999

More than \$90,000

I prefer not to answer

How would you describe your ethno-cultural background?

What is your country of birth?

What is the language you spoke most often at home when growing up?

APPENDIX 4: Background/Demographic Information Form – Youth

Date:

No:

Questionnaire for Youth

I would appreciate if you could provide some personal information.
Completion of any or all questions on this form is optional.

What social networking site are you a member of?

Which sites do you spend the most time on?

How much time you think you spend on these sites a day?

Have you ever played poker outside of any social networking sites (i.e. professional gambling sites)? If so, which ones?

No

Yes:

What do you like to do on *Facebook*? (Check all that apply):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poker | <input type="checkbox"/> Other games |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chat | <input type="checkbox"/> Post pics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Look at friends timelines | <input type="checkbox"/> Support groups/pages I believe in |

_____ Click on advertisements

Who taught you how to play poker?

_____ Self taught _____ Friends _____ Family members _____ Others

How did you get involved with playing poker on *Facebook*?

☐ Friends
 ☐ Family
☐ Advertisement
 ☐ Media attention/News
☐ Wanted to learn how to play
 ☐ Saw on my Timeline

Do you play poker on other social networking sites? If so, which ones?

No

Yes: _____

Who do you primarily play poker on *Facebook* with?

- _____ Good Friends
- _____ Acquaintances (but still “Friends” on *Facebook*)
- _____ Strangers on the *Texas Hold’em* application
- _____ Family

Background

Job Title (if applicable):

Organization Affiliation (if applicable):

School (if applicable):

Personal Background

Please circle all factors related to you:

Sex: Female Male

Age: 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

Income:	Less than \$30,000	\$30,000- \$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999
	\$75,000-\$89,999	More than \$90,000	I prefer not to answer

How would you describe your ethno-cultural background?

What is your country of birth?

What is the language you spoke most often at home when growing up?

APPENDIX 5: Key Stakeholders Interview Request Letter



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO DALLA LANA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Youth, Poker & Facebook: Making Sense of Taking Chances

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Jennifer Reynolds, Ph.D. candidate in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. The research is being carried out under funding from The Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre.

What is the study about?

The aim of this study is to collect information on gambling opportunities on *Facebook* and what motivates youth to participate. Furthermore, I am interested in exploring the environmental context of popular *Facebook* gambling applications and what makes them attractive to youth. I will be speaking with different stakeholders, such as game developers, gambling & gaming researchers, lawyers, and youth gambling educators, who are engaged in this emerging field, along with youth from the general public who currently are playing poker on *Facebook*.

The intentions of this study fall within a gambling-neutral perspective, to provide important information on an emerging new gambling arena, that to date, has been under studied.

What does it involve?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately **60-90 minutes**. The interview will take place on a day and in a location most convenient to yourself. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. In addition, you will be asked to complete a brief form requesting details of your academic and personal background (e.g. sex, education, personal income, and ethno-cultural background).

What are the risks and benefits of my participation?

I know of no risk from participating in the study. Your participation will contribute to gathering knowledge about the youth gambling on social networking sites. You may receive a summary of the results if you wish.

Will the information I share be kept confidential?

The interviews **will be completely confidential**; what you say will not be discussed with anyone. No names or personally identifying details will be attached to any of the data. All documents (e.g. digital audio files) and other research materials will be stored in a secure, locked office, inside a locked cabinet, and all data will be processed on a secure, password-protected computer. The consent forms will be kept locked separately from other study data. The digital audio recordings will be destroyed immediately after they have been transcribed and all textual data will be destroyed 7 years after the completion of the study. In any presentation or publication resulting from this research, the data will be presented in summary and will not reveal any identifying information, including your name, department, name of research studies, or the name of any associations/organizations you are involved in.

If you would like any further information about any aspect of the study, please contact:

Researcher:
Jennifer Reynolds
Phone: XXX
Email: XXX

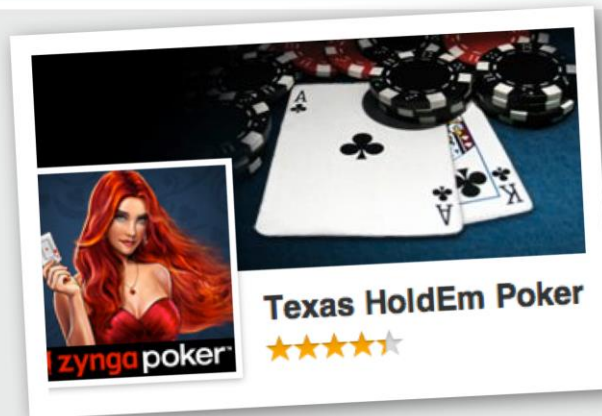
Supervisor:
Dr. Harvey A. Skinner
Phone: XXX
Email: XXX

If you have questions about your rights as a subject in a study, please call the Research Ethics Manager at XXX.

Thank you for considering taking part in this study.

APPENDIX 6: Youth Recruitment Flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON FACEBOOK ZYNGA POKER



Do you play poker on Facebook?

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study of poker opportunities on Facebook and what motivates youth (18-24 yrs) to participate. As a participant, you would be asked to participate in a 45 min - 1 hr interview. Interviews will be completely confidential and no names of personally identifying details will be attached to the data.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$25 gift card (Indigo or President's Choice), and you will be reimbursed with two TTC tokens to cover transportation expenses to and from the interview.

For more information, please contact Jennifer Reynolds (PhD Candidate) at:
jennifer.reynolds@utoronto.ca or 647 344-9303

This study is based out of the **Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University Toronto** and has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the University of Toronto Research Ethics Committee.

Jennifer Reynolds- Facebook Poker
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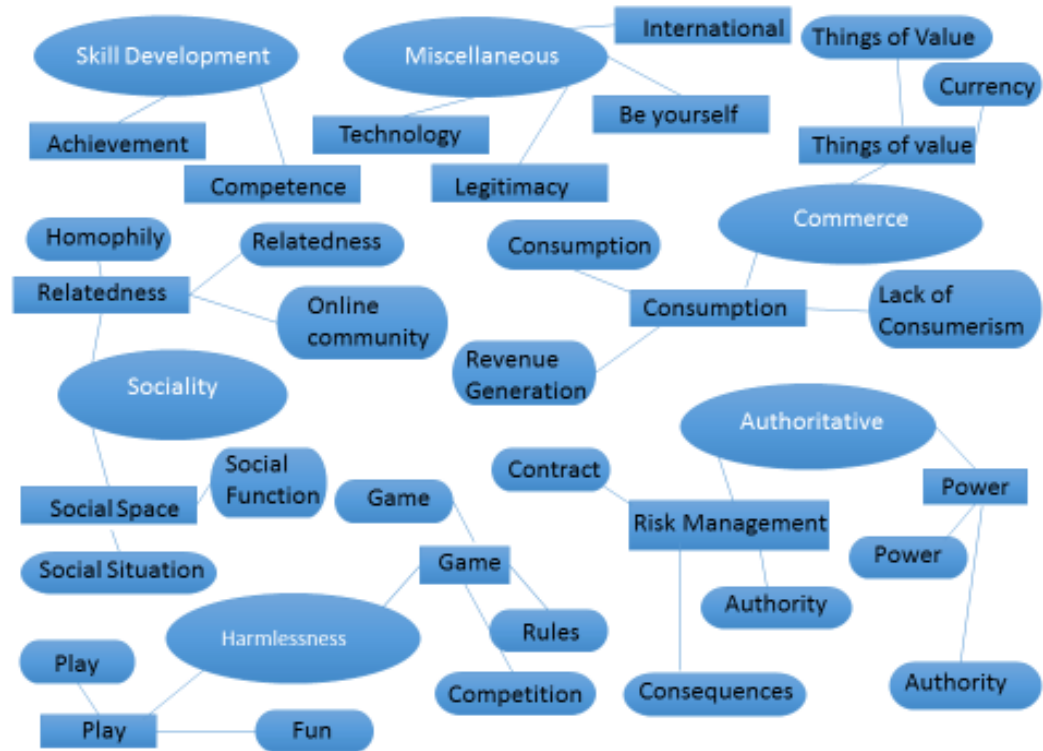
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APPENDIX 7: Thematic Analysis Initial Coding

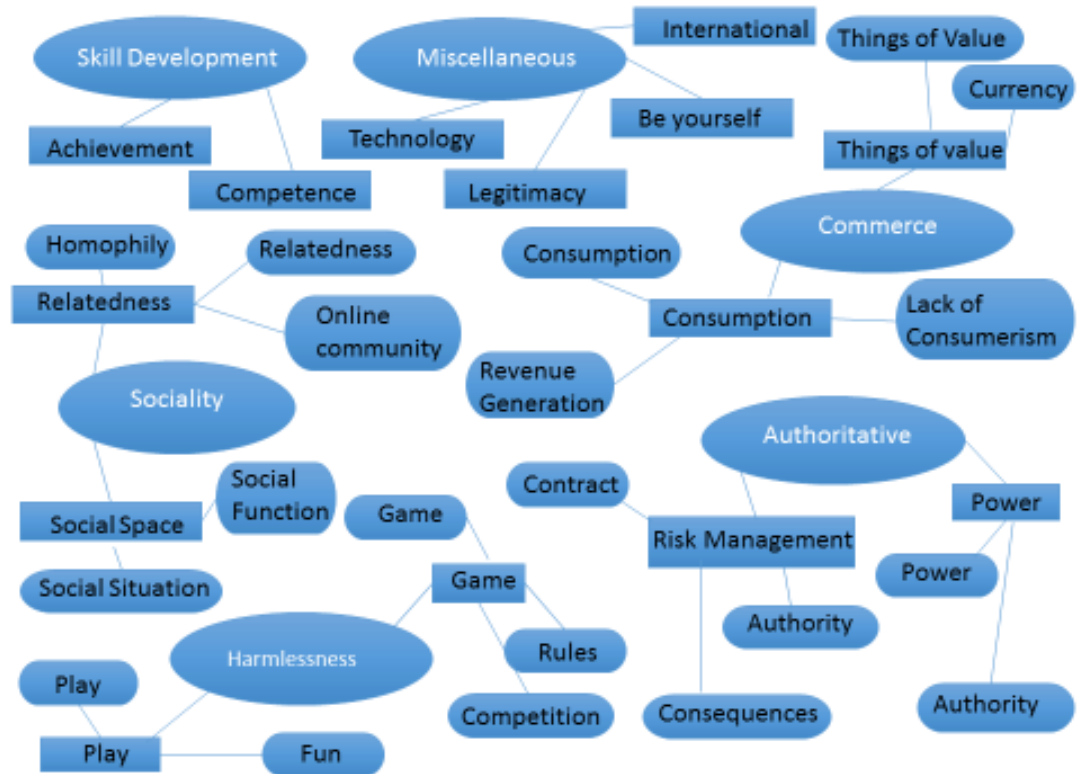
Phase One Initial Coding



Phase Two Key Stakeholder Initial Coding Map



Phase Two Youth Initial Coding Map



APPENDIX 8: Braun & Clark's 15-Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis

Braun & Clark's (2006) A 15-point Checklist for Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis

Process	No	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribe to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed _ interpreted, made sense of _ rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other _ the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it an once-over lightly.
Written Report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done _ i.e. described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The research is positioned as active in the research process; themes do nto just 'emerge'.