

# A qualitative examination of online gambling culture among college students: Factors influencing participation, maintenance and cessation



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- Qualitative research: focus groups
- Population: college students
- Objective: achieve a better understanding of the factors attracting students to online gambling including the role played by social media sites.
- More importantly, the issue of migration between the play-for-fun gambling social media sites and online gambling was of primary interest.

# Why focus groups?



- When focus group dynamics work well, the information obtained can take research in new and often unexpected directions, providing rich information and revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain inaccessible by more conventional data collection techniques.

# Method



- 6 focus groups were conducted with college students aged 18-24:
  - Three focus groups with regular online gamblers (N=21). Predominantly male (86%)
  - Three focus groups frequent users of social media websites who may have gambled occasionally in traditional land-based venues (N=30). (57% male vs. 43% female)
- Conducted by myself , with the assistance of Jeff and/or Michael

# Online Gamblers focus group script



Everyone who is participating in this group has indicated gambling online for money. That makes you the experts. We are turning to you to help us understand certain things related to online gambling activity. We are not looking to find out personal information on your play activity; we are looking for information in general.

1. For example, I'd like to gain a better understanding of the things that lead to online gambling in the first place. Based on what you know, what are the factors, the events, or the influences that result in a young person deciding to bet money on gambling activities online?
2. You know that social media sites have gambling-type games such as Texas-Hold'em or Sloto-mania. In your opinion, do you think experience with these games leads a person to seek online gambling sites? In other words, do these types of games serve as a form of initiation to gambling online with real money?
3. In your opinion, do you think people who gamble online have particular personality traits, or factors that are unique to them that make them more likely to gamble online?
4. There are a lot of gambling sites out there. How do you choose one over the other?
5. What are the features that render one online gambling site more appealing than another?
6. If you think about the sites that are "not good", sites that you have navigated away from, what were the things you did not like?
7. What are the pros and cons of online gambling?
8. Once you are engaged in an online gambling session, what usually makes you decide that it is time to stop?
9. What strategies do people your age tend to use to minimize their risks? Are there common responsible gambling practices?

# Social Media focus group script



Everyone who is participating in this group has indicated using social media sites on a regular basis. That makes you the experts. We are turning to you to help us understand certain things related to use of social media. We are not looking to find out personal information about you, we are looking for information in general.

1. When you think about social media sites like Facebook, what is the first thought that comes to mind? What do you like best about social media? What do you like least?
2. You all must be aware of games that are offered on sites such as Facebook. I'm talking about games such as Farmville, Words with Friends, etc... What, in your opinion, are the benefits or downfalls of these games? Overall, do they contribute to your well-being? If not, in what way? Which games have the greatest appeal?
3. There are also gambling-type games such as Texas Hold'em and simulated casino play offered on these sites. Texas Hold'em is actually the most popular of all the games offered on Facebook (62 million fans on their page). What, do you think, is the appeal of these free gambling-type games?
4. Even though there is no real money exchanged, people do seem to get very caught up in the gambling-type games, often playing for longer than intended. Due to recent developments, Facebook now allows online casinos to advertise on their site. What are your opinions on this? Would you ever click on the casino ads?
5. We are interested in your impressions (based on your own experiences or those of others whom you know) about what role, if any, social networking sites play in promoting or encouraging online gambling behavior (for real money).
6. Do you think individuals who never would have considered gambling online, will gamble now that they are exposed through these social media sites?
7. Online casinos often offer "play for fun" options, allowing you to play without real money. In your opinion, what are some advantages or downfalls of these play-for-free options?
8. Thinking about the free games on social media sites as well as free-play options on online gambling sites, would people be likely to move from free games to paying games? Why or why not?

# General Observations



# Quote



*"A general progression starts with these Facebook entertainment games, which are purely for fun, and some people take it to the next level where the its for fun and money. That's where we are now most of us, and then some people will take it eventually to the next level where the fun has disappeared and they are just doing it for the money."*



# Online gamblers



- Primary themes:

1. loss of control (ease of spending money, the fast speed of online games, the tendency to be more impulsive when gambling online)
2. online gambling had fewer restrictions (i.e., easier access especially for underage youth, less social pressure to play well, no need to leave your place, simple use of credit card, gambling instructions and odds provided)
3. responsible gambling practices (setting limits to time and money spent but not with use of any features offered)
4. manipulations by online providers (including promotion/advertisement tactics)
5. play for free games on social media sites (including their link to online gambling)

# Social media users



- **Primary themes**

1. keeping people connected (playing games is a social thing after all)
2. enhancement of self (good for the ego)
3. social media is an integral part of daily life, and that to not be part of it is isolating
4. Fosters obsessive behavior- need to check-in regularly
5. Mixed feelings about games: waste time, all consuming (think about games even when not playing them)

# We are very interested in how those two worlds link



Play for fun



Play for pay



“I didn’t understand how I got from one place to another place, from playing for fun to being in trouble.”



# What are the commonalities between the two?



4 major commonalities were identified

1. Online gambling and social media sites provide excellent opportunities for *learning how to gamble* so that when they play with friends or at the casino they have the “skills” to be successful.

Social media sites, in particular, used to learn how to gamble without risking real money, and without social intimidation.



2. Play-for-fun & gambling sites were *easily accessible* (smart phones, tablets or computers)
3. They helped enhance how individuals feel about themselves.

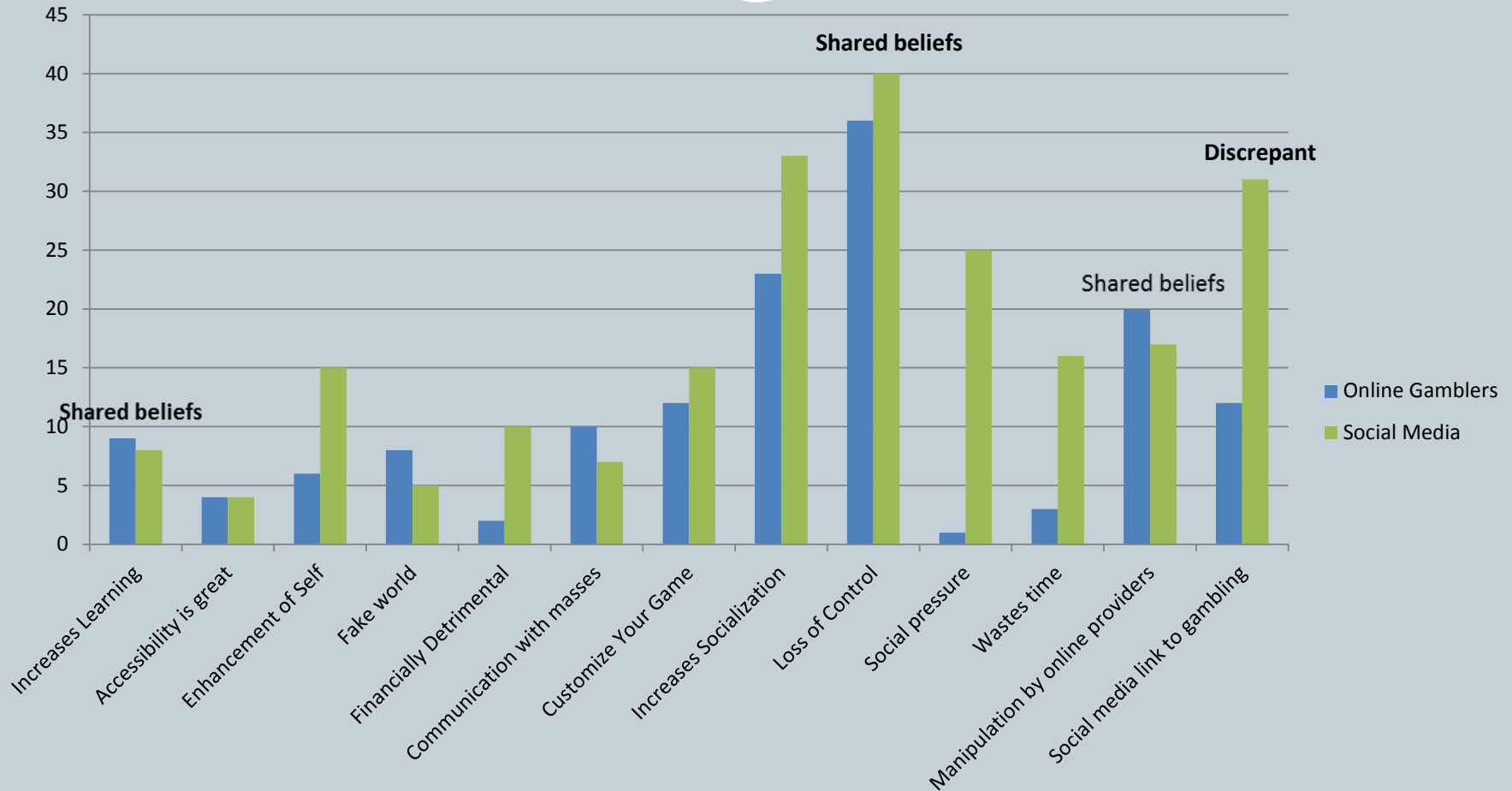
i.e., Successful, competitive, connected, learning, ego boost



4. Loss of control: Social media users expressed concerns about the *addictive aspect* of *Facebook* almost as much as online gamblers expressed how easy it is to *lose control* when gambling online.

These activities were perceived as all-consuming.

# Comparison of online gambler and social media gps





# Social media and online gambling- Migration?



- Many indicated that they learned how to gamble on *Facebook*, commenting that it served as a poker training ground.
- There was an expressed concern about how online site providers use psychological principles of persuasion to manipulate users and migrate people from the play-for-fun sites to online gambling sites.

# Lack of consensus on link



- Social media users perceived a greater relationship between social media and online gambling than did online gamblers.
- Social media users do not gamble online as a conscious choice based on their personality styles, a general distrust of the Internet as well as awareness that gambling is risky.
- In contrast, online gamblers perceived the link between playing for virtual money versus real money, was minimal despite many stating that they learned how to play Texas Hold'em on *Facebook*.
- Online gamblers explained that the interfaces of the games were significantly different (social media being much less sophisticated) such that individuals attracted to one medium would likely not be attracted to the other.

# Motives for play or gambling



- **Social media gp**

- Fun
- Social competition and/or connectedness
- Training for real gambling

- **Online gambler gp**

- Self-enhancement (elevation of mood, feel better about oneself, relieve stress)
- Enhancement of experience (placing money = more exciting)
- Opportunities to learn (about sports games and how to gamble properly)

# Surprisingly...



- Minimal awareness that serious problems could arise from online gambling, despite their understanding of how easily one could lose control.
- The general theme: they felt immune to serious problems and in control given they are “educated”

# Manipulation by online providers



*-Once you play for fun, you sort of get people into the gambling, you think ok, this would be great if it were real money, so you try. That's the way the websites make you go through that road.*

*-... and obviously the companies like Facebook give out the information let's say things that you are doing like all the games poker even though it's not for money. Your side bar has all advertisements that are personalized to you so for me I see a lot of gambling, sports, apparel stuff and stuff like that is all on my side bar. They try that's how Facebook makes money. It's an easy way to push you get you into gambling.*

## Unexpected finding: online gambling less risky than land-based gambling



*-In person, there are a lot more people influencing your behavior. You get really down on yourself if you lose in a public environment. It is very humiliating. The people keep pressuring you to keep playing to win back your money whereas at home you can stop anytime you want.”*

*-If you are betting and my mom is “Well let’s go for dinner” and I’m not going to be “Well let me bring my laptop” – I’ll come back to this later”*

*-...if you go to the casino it takes more time, you have to drive there, plus you socialize. Once you’ve invested in that process you know you’re dumping all kinds of money.*

# Unexpected finding: Fake world



- Participants expressed a feeling that what happens online is somehow distinct and separate from what happens in the real world, yet were aware the two are intricately linked in the sense that the consequences of actions are realized



*“You look at other people and they have scores that are ridiculously higher than you, and you like have to find a way to beat that score. And you waste the whole day and in the end it doesn’t matter because it’s not real. It’s in the fake world. There is regret afterwards.”*





*-If you transfer from Facebook to online gambling, you still have the mentality that you are in a fake world and you are used to playing with fake money and you forget that the money you are spending is real.*

# FUTURE STEPS



- This qualitative project represents the first time researchers have established this link.
- This link, however, now needs to be examined more in depth empirically.

# Longitudinal Study



## ***Participants (N=170; 66 Male, 102 Female, 2 missing)***

Student and community sample (via Mturk)

Age:  $M = 25.10$  years;  $SD = 8.40$ )

## ***Method***

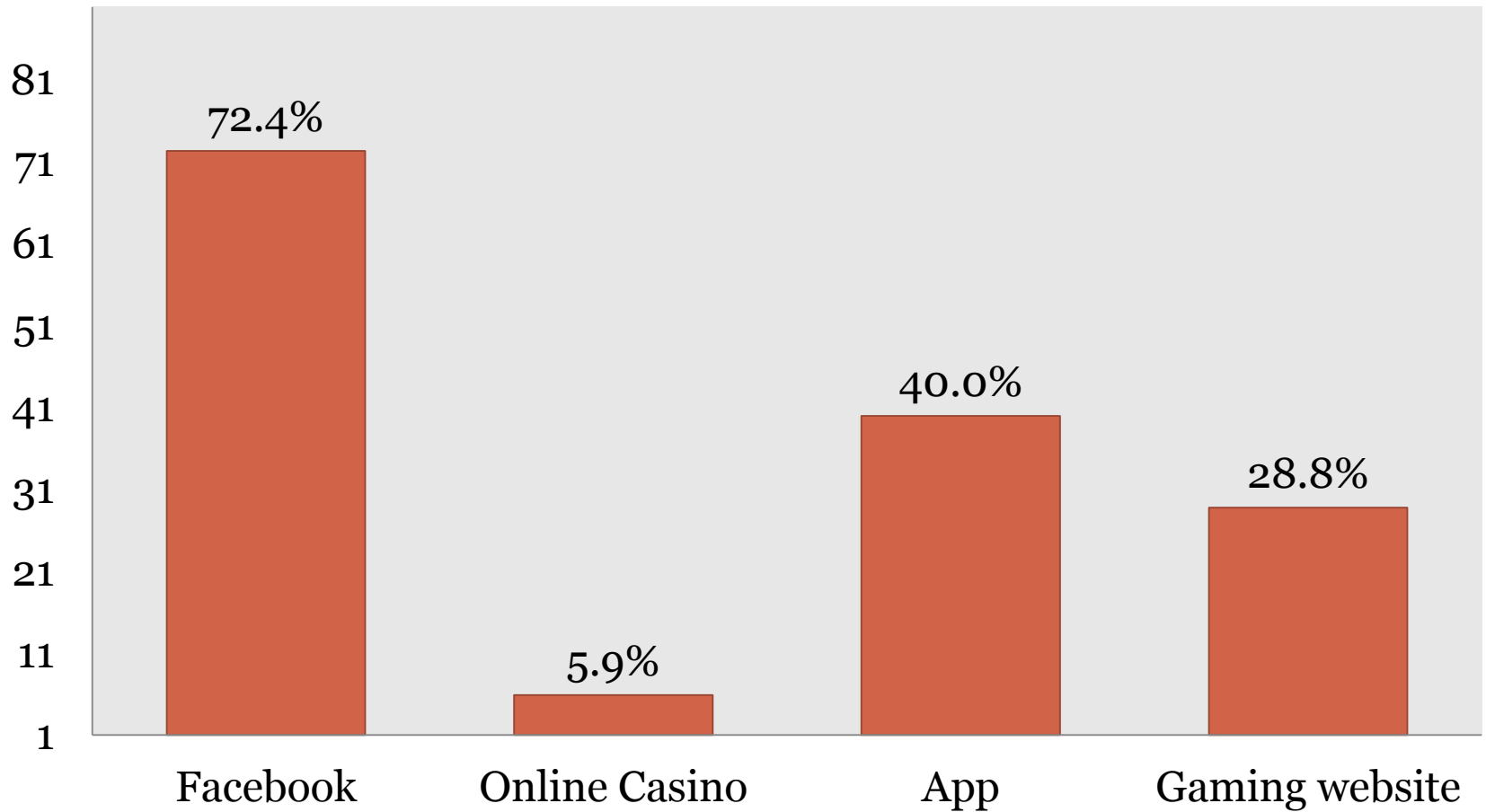
Time 1: People who indicate they ONLY play for fun

Subsequent Waves: 6, 12, 24 months later (to be collected)

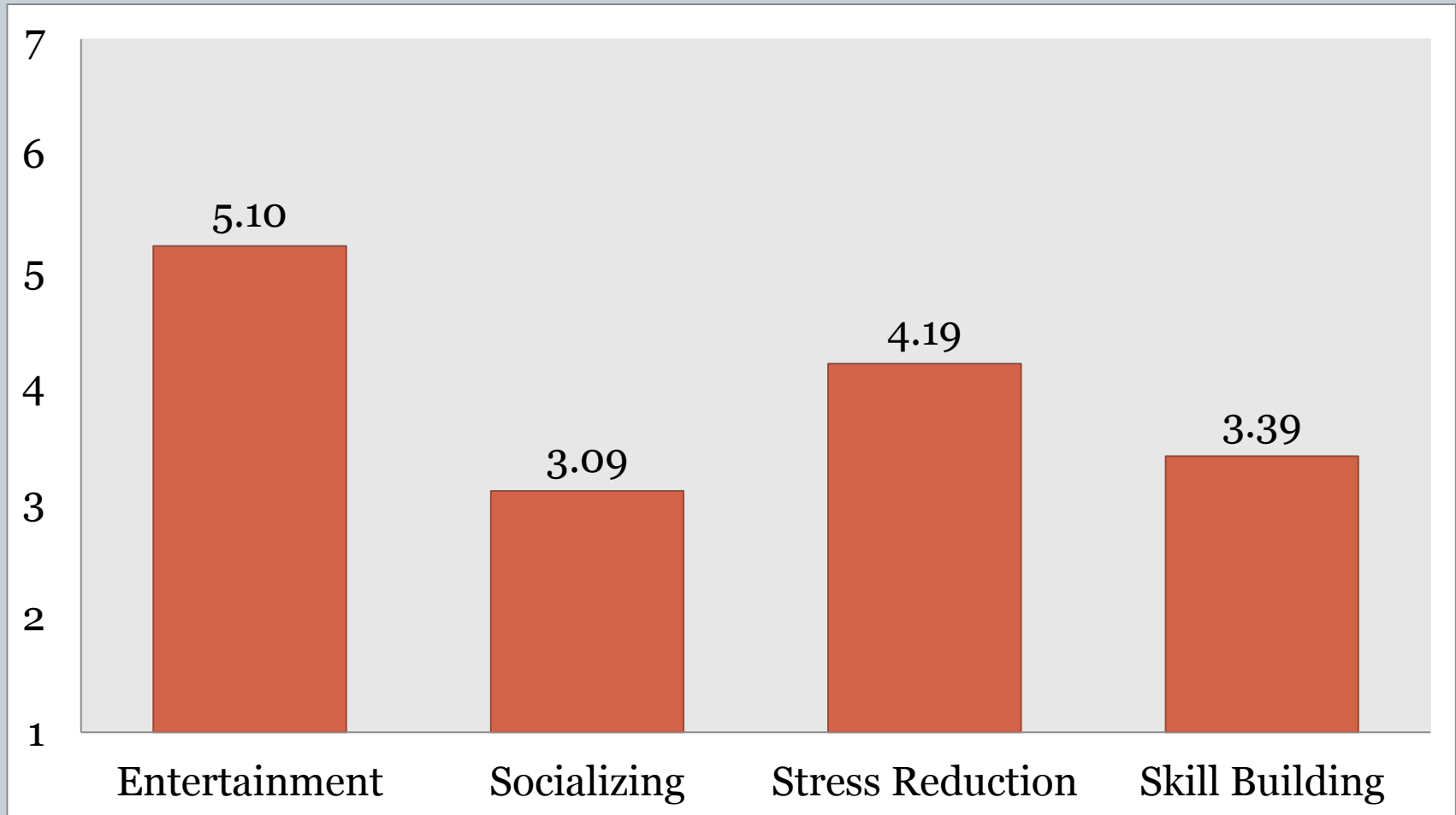
## ***Measures***

- Where do you play?
- Motivation to start playing for fun:
  - Entertainment, Social, Stress reduction, Skill building
- Initiator of session play:
  - Friends posting scores
- Time spent playing
- Do you pay for credit?

# Where do you play?



# Motivation to Start Playing for Fun



# Do Social Network Score Posts Prompt Gaming?



- Multiple regression



- ENTERTAINMENT:  $p < .001$



- SOCIALIZING:  $p = .03$



- STRESS REDUCTION:  $p = .80$



- SKILL BUILDING:  $p = .05$

# Does Motivation Predict Time Spent?



- Multiple regression: Motives on time spent



- ENTERTAINMENT:  $p = .03$



- SOCIALIZING:  $p = .16$



- STRESS REDUCTION:  $p = .85$



- SKILL BUILDING:  $p = .001$

# Have you ever paid to get credit on games?



- Multiple logistic regression on paid for credit



- ENTERTAINMENT:  $p = .05$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = .10$



- SOCIALIZING:  $p = .09$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = .43$



- STRESS REDUCTION:  $p = .11$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.81$



- SKILL BUILDING:  $p = .03$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 6.04$



# Does Motivation Predict PGSI score?



- Multiple regression: Motives on time spent



- ENTERTAINMENT:  $p = .53$



- SOCIALIZING:  $p = .60$

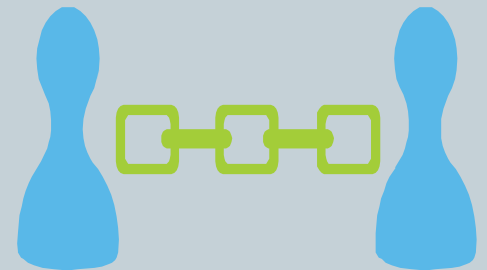


- STRESS REDUCTION:  $p = .37$



- SKILL BUILDING:  $p = .008$

# Data collection continuing



Play for fun

Play for pay