



Short Communication

Comparing undergraduate and community-recruited adult non-gamblers' motives for not gambling: Do they differ?



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Research focusing on non-gamblers may have utility for identifying protective factors against gambling disorder.
- Previous research has identified why young adults abstain from gambling, but these findings may not generalize.
- This study collected reasons for not gambling from a community-recruited sample of non-gamblers.
- Lifetime non-gamblers provided motives for not gambling that are similar to those found in young adults.
- Community non-gamblers emphasize financial risk and place less importance on social influence as reasons to abstain.

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ABSTRACT

The field of gambling studies has extensively focused on isolating risk factors for developing a gambling disorder. Conversely, little attention has been paid to identifying protective factors against gambling disorder among people who choose to not gamble at all. Moreover, the limited number of studies that have focused on non-gamblers have neglected to differentiate current from lifetime non-gamblers. The purpose of the present study was to examine motives for not gambling among a diverse sample of adult lifetime non-gamblers recruited from the community and to compare these motives to an undergraduate student sample of non-gamblers from a previous study. Participants consisted of 219 lifetime non-gamblers (45.2% male) from the United States recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The previously recruited sample consisted of Canadian undergraduate students ($n = 196$). Eight distinct categories of motivations for not gambling were identified in the sample of adult community non-gamblers, which corresponded closely with previous findings from the student sample. However, comparisons between the two samples revealed that adult lifetime non-gamblers were more likely to provide financial motives as reasons for not gambling. Whereas, the student sample was more likely to mention disinterest and the influence of others as reasons to avoid gambling. Results suggest that the choice not to gamble among lifetime non-gamblers may reflect a more conscious, values-based decision when compared to undergraduate non-gamblers.

The gambling literature has placed substantial emphasis on identifying risk factors for gambling disorder (GD) by focusing on gambling populations (e.g., Dowling et al., 2017). In contrast, comparatively little research has focused on identifying protective factors against GD and even less attention has been paid to individuals who choose to refrain from gambling altogether. This oversight is of potential importance as non-gamblers (NGs) may possess unique characteristics which influence their decision not to gamble (Lalande et al., 2013). Motives for why individuals choose to engage in an addictive behavior are believed to be an important mechanism which can predict later problematic use (Milosevic & Ledgerwood, 2010; Stewart & Zack, 2008). In a similar

vein, it is possible that pinpointing the reasons for why NGs choose to abstain from gambling will also help to identify factors that protect people from developing GD.

One limitation of previous studies that have examined protective factors in gambling has been how 'non-gamblers' are operationally defined. For instance, Lalande et al. (2013) defined this group as individuals who had reported no gambling over the previous 12 months, whereas Lam (2006) considered only lifetime NGs (LNGs). In addition, when individuals are asked about their gambling activity, highly normative forms such as lotteries are commonly overlooked, leading some individuals to consider themselves to be 'non-gamblers' despite

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purchasing lottery tickets (Lange, 2001). Furthermore, studies examining NGs have largely focused on demographic factors, with little attention paid to motivations for abstaining from gambling. Identifying reasons for *not* gambling may be beneficial, as the alcohol literature has shown that these motivations are useful for pinpointing protective factors against drinking problems (e.g., Epler, Sher, & Piasecki, 2009).

A previous study by Rash and McGrath (2016) addressed some of the limitations in the extant literature using an undergraduate sample of ‘pure NGs’ (i.e., no gambling in the past 12 months). In assessing open-ended reasons for not gambling, eight distinct categories of motives were identified: financial reasons and risk aversion (FRA); disinterest and other priorities (DOP); personal and religious convictions (PRC); addiction concerns (AC); influence of others’ values (IOV); awareness of the odds (AWO); lack of access, opportunity, or skill (LAOS); emotional distress (ED); and other (OTH), which encompassed motives that were too ambiguous to be categorized. The most commonly reported motives were FRA (44% of primary motives and 33% of overall motives). Other commonly reported motivations were DOP and PRC, with > 10% of both primary and overall motives falling into these categories.

While Rash and McGrath (2016) provided novel information about NGs, responses came from a sample of undergraduate psychology students, who are likely not representative of the gambling population at large (Gainsbury, Russell, & Blaszczynski, 2014). Thus, the aim of the present study was to extend these findings by assessing motivations for not gambling among a more diverse sample of NGs recruited from the community. In particular, we sought to determine whether the same eight categories of motives previously identified would be found in the present study, and, if so, whether the proportions of motives in each category would be consistent with findings from the previous study. We did so by comparing the frequencies of motives from community-recruited adult non-gamblers (present sample) to the undergraduate sample in Rash and McGrath (2016).

1. Method

1.1. Procedure

This study received ethical approval by the University of Calgary’s Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board. Participants in the present study consisted of American LNGs recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which has been shown to yield reliable and valid data in assessing addictive behaviors (Kim & Hodgins, 2017). As the legal age to gamble in the United States varies by jurisdiction, the present study permitted only those aged 22 years and older to participate to ensure that participants’ motivations for not gambling were unrelated to restrictions based on their age.

A recruitment notice was posted on MTurk and interested participants were directed to a survey hosted by Qualtrics. Upon providing informed consent, participants were asked to select any of 15 gambling activities that they had ever participated in *over their lifetime* (including charity raffle/fundraising tickets; lottery tickets; instant win/scratch tickets; slot machines; video lottery terminals; table games at a casino; poker for money in a public facility or at home; card games, board games, or games of skill; sports lotteries; bingo; betting on horse races; Internet gambling; arcade/video gaming; and other). Eligible participants who selected ‘I did not bet or spend money on any gambling activity’ were then asked to participate in the present study. Participants then provided information about their age, gender, ethnic background, income, and were asked to self-generate their top three reasons for not gambling in rank-order. Specifically, they were asked to “think about what motivates you to NOT gamble and briefly list the top three reasons in rank order (e.g., #1 = the most important reason, #2 = the second-most important reason; #3 = the third-most important reason)” (Rash and McGrath 2016).

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of Rash and McGrath (2016) and the community-recruited sample.

Characteristics	Undergraduate (N = 196)		Community-recruited (N = 219)	
	N	%/M (SD)	N	%/M (SD)
Gender ^a				
Male	28	14.3	99	45.2
Female	168	85.7	119	54.3
Age	196	21.2 (3.7)	219	36.2 (10.7)
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	94	48.0	175	79.9
Non-Caucasian	102	52.0	44	20.1
Religious affiliation ^b				
Muslim	29	14.9	3	1.4
Catholic	29	14.9	46	21.2
Other Christian	33	16.9	18	8.3
Other	46	23.6	65	29.8
No religious affiliation	58	29.7	85	39.2
Marital status ^c				
Single			114	52.1
Married/common-law			105	47.9
Education ^c				
Less than post-secondary			35	16.0
Some post-secondary or higher			184	84.0
Income ^{c,d}				
Less than \$30,000			36	16.4
\$30,000–\$49,999			41	18.7
\$50,000–\$69,999			64	29.2
\$70,000–\$89,999			33	15.1
\$90,000 and over			33	15.1
Employed full-time ^c				
Yes			164	74.9
No			55	25.1

^a One MTurk participant reported identifying as neither male nor female.

^b One undergraduate participant and one MTurk participant did not report information about their religious affiliation.

^c Rash and McGrath (2016) did not report information about participant marital status, education, income, or employment.

^d Twelve participants did not report information about their household income.

1.2. Participants

Participants in the present study consisted of 219 LNGs, with 99 males and 119 females (one participant indicated ‘other’). The average age of the sample was 36.1 years ($SD = 10.9$) and the range was 22 to 74. In comparison, the sample from Rash and McGrath (2016) consisted of 196 current Canadian undergraduate non-gamblers (28 males and 168 females). The average age of that sample was 21.1 years ($SD = 3.7$). Demographic characteristics of both samples are presented in Table 1.

2. Coding and categorization

The data were analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach in which unique themes were identified from open-ended responses. Next, themes that shared substantial conceptual overlap were collapsed. Following this, the final motives groups for categorization were chosen. Individual motives were then separately placed into these categories by a member of our team and a trained research assistant. A second research assistant reconciled any discrepancies. Of the 646 total motives provided, 635 (98.3%) could be categorized. Prior to reconciliation of coding discrepancies, interrater reliability was calculated and indicated high agreement between the two coders (Cohen’s kappa = 0.85).

A series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to determine whether motives differed based on participant age. Chi-square analyses were calculated to determine whether motive categories differed based on gender, income, and religious affiliation. In

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