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Special Issue

Critical Directions in Early-Career Gambling Studies

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Review Articles

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EDITORIAL

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EDITORIAL

A Reflection on the Past Four Years and the Future of Gambling Studies

Everything Is Different, Yet Some Things Never Change: Critical Directions in Early-Career Gambling Studies

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Introduction

We are happy for the opportunity to present a second special issue dedicated to early-career researchers and related topics. As three early-career researchers (ECRs) in the field, we are grateful to *Critical Gambling Studies* for hosting us once again and for their continued support of ECRs, specifically of the RANGES (Research And Networking for Gambling Early-career Scholars) community, over the past four years.

It would be an understatement to say that the world has changed dramatically since the publication of the first early-career special issue with *Critical Gambling Studies* in 2021, entitled "Futures of Gambling Studies: Showcasing Early Career Research." This second ECR special issue provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of gambling studies during the last 4 years, and to (re)consider the complex challenges faced by early-career academics in the field.

From the outset, we would like to emphasize that we feel that the field of gambling studies has changed in many meaningful ways in terms of perspective over the last decade. For instance, there is an ever-growing body of critical work, especially within the ECR community, which we feel denotes an extremely interesting and promising turning point for knowledge production within the field. This special issue bears witness to this change.

While so much has changed, certain challenges remain, for us as guest editors and for many of our ECR colleagues. Indeed, just like four years ago, one of us is again on maternity leave, struggling to balance the challenges of being a parent with opportunities to advance their career. Since taking on the joint guest editorial role for this special issue, another of us has left the precarious employment offered by academia for a job with more stability. Indeed, many of the ECR struggles that we spoke about in editorial for the last special issue continue to exist. We want to note them again here to acknowledge that ECRs continue to encounter these foundational issues of precarity, lack of funding for critical work, work–life balance, etc.

For us, one of the most overwhelming challenges has been the uptick in data and information as the result of a drastic increase in online gambling offerings, advertisement, and participation—which have been further amplified

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by the COVID-19 pandemic—and a corresponding increased interest in gambling research. Simultaneously, the rapid advances in technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI), have not only changed research methods and accelerated the rate of outputs, but they have also emerged as hot topics within the gambling studies field. This, coupled with enduring "publish or perish" models within academia, where quantity prevails over quality and individual jostling takes precedence over collaboration, have left us wondering about space for ECRs who are interested in critical approaches that might take more time to develop. Thinking outside the box takes time.

Researchers in this field, individually and collectively, are at a crossroads with how to best engage with the opportunities and challenges being presented. How do we navigate this new world where there is less of an onus on the individual to be able to know everything, yet more information than ever to absorb in a deeply complex reality? How do we deal with the cumulative overload of information that has culminated in a tsunami of data and information and research outputs, and which is only continuing to grow? And as ECRs, how will we have the time, especially given the precarity of our situations, to pursue critical research and push the field forward?

These emerging questions are not ones we can answer here, but they do highlight a need to support ECRs. We need to allow time for ideas to be properly processed, and for critical research to occur. Given everything, it makes sense that our theme this time is "Critical Directions in Early-Career Gambling Studies." We are so delighted to have an opportunity to spotlight ECRs who are doing incredible, diverse, *critical work* within the field. ECRs in gambling studies will continue to face the challenges we have outlined, but (luckily) they are also the best positioned to address these issues.

Article Summaries

The article "Gambling Industry Strategies to Influence the Reform of State Online Monopolies: The Case of the Gambling Industry in Sweden and Finland" by Sama and Hiilamo examines five political strategies used by the gambling industry to influence the reform of state online gambling monopolies in Sweden and Finland. The authors show that the involvement of the industry in policy-making can influence reforms and weaken state gambling monopolies. At a time when many countries are currently facing major challenges in regulating the commercialization practices deployed by the online gambling industry on the global scale, this study, of undeniable relevance, will undoubtedly contribute to reflections on the matter.

"Characteristics and Experiences of Employees who Gamble at Work: A Mixed-Methods Study" by Hudson Breen et al. takes an in-depth look at the little-explored topic of gambling in the workplace. The explosion of online gambling in recent years has effectively transformed the relationship of gambling practices in space and time, and this study provides original insights into the relationship of online gambling and the workplace. The article highlights how work spaces and gambling spaces sometimes overlap, and how workplaces can contribute to shaping gambling. It also examines workplace gambling as a social activity, and as a way to cope with adverse working conditions or a lack of job satisfaction.

In "'*All You've Got to Do Is Stop*': A Qualitative Examination of Gambling Stigma and Discrimination from the Perspective of Lived Experience," Killick et al. explore how interventions targeting gambling stigma often fail to interrupt individualized constructions of gambling harms. Lived-experience perspectives analyzed with a critical psychology lens highlight the structural dynamics and industry practices that drive gambling stigma and discrimination.

In "The Rise of Online and Sports Betting in Ghana: Observations, Driving Factors, and Societal Implications," Toklo explores the societal shift towards widespread gambling participation in Ghana, especially for sports betting. It discusses how the political, economic, cultural, and social context in Ghana can help to understand the penetration of gambling into everyday life of the Ghanaian population, in which young people are particularly involved. Toklo also shares his thoughts about the issues related to the expansion of online gambling in Ghana, including a loss of interest in democracy. With this commentary, Toklo turns the spotlight on a reality that has been poorly documented in gambling studies.

In their commentary, "(Un)Lucky Designs? What Game Jams Can Contribute to Critical Gambling Studies", Hoebanx and colleagues get off the beaten track and present how they use an innovative research method—game jams—to explore the role of luck in gambling games. This piece shows how this avant-garde interdisciplinary and participative research method can contribute to developing critical studies in the gambling field. Indeed, beyond the construction of the concept of luck, the piece highlights how this method can be used in a participative and collaborative way to generate ideas and reflections on contemporary gambling-related issues such as the gamblification of games.

In the next commentary, Emma Casey provides a reflection on her book *Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience,* published in 2008, as well as insights into her experiences as an early-career scholar at that point in time. Opening with a vivid depiction of its delivery (pun intended), Casey describes navigating the success of her book while balancing early motherhood and the challenges related to the dissemination of her work. She discusses progress within the field since the release of her book, with caveats for how certain challenges remain, and she concludes by outlining future avenues of research that she hopes will be explored.

In the final commentary, "The Contextual Nature of Stigma and Gambling: What Difference Does it Make to Help-Seeking?," Hitch and Hoon provide, from an intersectional perspective, an in-depth reflection on stigma in the gambling field and its impact on help-seeking. Using the case of veterans suffering from PTSD and struggling with gambling, they outline the necessity of taking into account the complexity of the context in which individuals evolve in order to better understand the differentiated impact of stigma on these individuals and on help-seeking.

Helen Keane is a well-known feminist sociologist and the author of *What's Wrong with Addiction?*, a still-influential research text published more than 20 years ago. In "So, What *Is* Wrong with Addiction?: A Conversation with Helen Keane," Professor Keane shares her reflections about her career and the challenges she encountered in her professional trajectory, ranging from gender discrimination to difficulties associated with ECR status. Reading this interview, we have to admit that some challenges stand the test of time. Professor Keane also shares her thoughts on the current state of critical research in the field of addiction.

Finally, this special issue includes a review of Tim Simpson's new book, *Betting on Macau: Casino Capitalism and China's Consumer Revolution* (2023), written by Kah-Wee Lee. This book review offers a very interesting conversation between two experts coming from different academic backgrounds about the gambling industry in Macau.

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space to showcase the work of ECRs, and for their support and confidence throughout this editorial project. A special thanks to Kate for her judicious advice and her always kind and constructive guidance throughout this process. We would also like to thank all the reviewers who contributed to this issue for their rigorous work and productive feedback.

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Katie Palmer du Preez (KPP) has no conflicts of interest to declare. In the past five years, including while working on this special issue, she has received no research funding. KPP is employed outside academia by a health workforce development NGO that is funded by the New Zealand national health commissioning body, Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora).

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gambling Industry Strategies to Influence the Reform of State Online Monopolies: The Case of the Gambling Industry in Sweden and Finland

Thomas Babila Sama, Heikki Hiilamo

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Gambling Industry Strategies to Influence the Reform of State Online Monopolies: The Case of the Gambling Industry in Sweden and Finland

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Abstract: The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate the strategies used by the gambling industry to influence the reforming of the state online monopoly into a licensing system in Sweden in 2019, and to weaken the state online monopoly in Finland. Methodologically, this study used primary data from 9 expert interviews in both countries and secondary data from prior literature, which were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The results identified five main political strategies used by the gambling industry: (1) *Information*, through lobbying politicians; (2) *Constituency Building*, through forming an alliance with interest groups; (3) *Policy Substitution*, through promoting alternative policies and self-regulation; (4) *Legal Infringements*; and (5) *Regulatory Redundancy*. The study concluded that the involvement of the gambling industry in policy-making influenced the change of the state online monopoly into a licensing system in Sweden in 2019 and is weakening the state online monopoly in Finland.

Keywords: Case study, gambling, monopoly, policy, Finland, Sweden

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Introduction

The harmful use of products with addiction potential, such as online gambling, has a serious effect on public health and well-being (Adams, 2013). Gambling is known to cause depression, violence in the family and society, and losses of economic resources (Hofmarcher et al., 2020). Globally, around 26% of the population gamble, representing about 1.6 billion people worldwide; while 4.2 billion people gamble at least once per year, among which 17% gamble online (Casino.org, n.d.). Gambling is an example of an unhealthy commodity industry (UCI), which are industries or groups of corporations with a significant share of their product portfolio comprising unhealthy commodities with high profit margins aimed at, and easily accessible to, large numbers of consumers (Stuckler et al., 2012).

The theme of this study was to analyze gambling industry (GI) strategies in two stable democratic countries—Sweden and Finland—where gambling has serious effects on public health (Hofmarcher et al., 2020; Marionneau et al., 2023). According to annual surveys in 2021 and 2022, 72% of people aged 16–87 in Sweden gambled in the last year (Fahlén & Hejdenberg, 2022). Problem gambling is a public health issue in Sweden that affects about 4% of the population (approximately 420,000 people), and an additional 130,000 people share a household with someone experiencing gambling problems (Hofmarcher et al., 2020; Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2024). Similarly, in Finland, a recent population survey found that about 78% of people aged 15–74 gamble (Grönroos et al., 2024). Problem gambling in Finland is a public health issue affecting approximately 3% of the

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population, or about 112,000 people (Salonen et al., 2020; Tammi et al., 2015).

The Nordic States of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden had established gambling monopolies on grounds that they help to prevent fraud and money laundering, and their proceeds could be channelled to their host societies. In the last decade, Denmark (in 2012) and Sweden (in 2019) ended their monopolies and opened their online markets to competition using a licensing model for international operators (Forsström & Örnberg, 2019). Meanwhile, Finland and Norway continue to operate the only fully monopolistic gambling regimes in Europe (Marionneau et al., 2021; Nikkinen & Marionneau, 2021), even though the GI has grown into a global business in the 21st century (Sulkunen et al., 2020).

In Finland, the gambling monopoly is heavily criticized because of its harmful practices and failure to protect consumers, among other things (Järvinen-Tassopoulos et al., 2021). There is evidence that the international gambling industry is somehow involved in a campaign against the online gambling (OG) monopoly in Finland (Örnberg & Tammi, 2011), and offshore gambling companies are increasingly operating in the Finnish market, which is also gradually eroding the state monopoly (Horner, 2022). There is also evidence that the GI in Sweden influenced the reform of the state online monopoly into a licensing system in 2019 because similar increases in OG had eroded Sweden's monopoly, allowing outside companies to operate easily in the Swedish market (Börjesson & Arvidsson, 2019; Horner, 2022). So far, there is fairly little evidence of the strategies that the GI might have used to influence the reform of state online monopolies in Sweden and Finland, but there is a fair amount of literature about the strategies the alcohol industry (AI) and the tobacco industry (TI) used to influence public policies in Finland (Hiilamo, 2003; Sama & Hiilamo, 2019). Studying the different regulatory trajectories in Sweden and Finland offers interesting avenues for comparison that might allow us to predict future reforms in Finland and perhaps Norway, both of whom still operate fully monopolistic gambling regimes in Europe (Marionneau et al., 2021; Nikkinen & Marionneau, 2021).

Sweden was chosen as a comparative case study because, historically, it had the same state OG monopoly system as Finland before switching to a licensing system in 2019 (Binde, 2013; Matilainen, 2017; Örnberg & Tammi, 2011; Sama & Hiilamo, 2019; Sama et al., 2021). As of 2019, all gambling companies are required to obtain a license before they can legally operate in Sweden (McDonald et al., 2023). The Swedish Gambling Authority (Spelinspektionen) issues the licenses, and it is tasked with ensuring the legality, safety, and reliability of the Swedish gaming and gambling market. In contrast, in 2017, Finland merged its three state monopoly operators (with separate monopolies on lotteries, slot machines, casino games, horse and sports betting) into a single Finnish government–owned betting agency called Veikkaus (Selin et al., 2019). The aim of the centralized monopoly system in Finland is to better compete with operators from abroad and to prevent internal competition between the local operators. The two countries thus chose diametrically different paths when dealing with the new global digital gambling context (Tukia & Rydman, n.d.). During the time of data collection for this study, the GI in Finland was allegedly in the process of weakening the state's online monopoly (Horner, 2022). Finland is also preparing to adopt a licensing system by 2026, whose aim is to prevent and reduce economic, social, and health-related harms resulting from gambling, and to improve the channelling rate of the gambling system (Finnish Government, 2023, pp. 120–121). The channelling rate refers to the amount of gambling that takes place using services regulated by national legislation and supervised by the national authorities

This study answers two research questions: (1) What strategies were used by the gambling industry to influence the reforming of the state online monopoly into a licensing system in

Sweden in 2019? and (2) What strategies are being used by the gambling industry to weaken the state online monopoly in Finland?

Methods

Gambling policy formation can be analyzed from two opposing policy positions: (1) gambling revenue, or the economic benefits of gambling; and (2) the harmful impacts of gambling (Selin & Nyrhinen, 2022) (although other positions also exist). The first of these policy positions is held by those who focus on the beneficial aspects of gambling, such as the GI (who seek to exploit gambling markets), state monopolies (who consider gambling to be an important source of revenue for many social causes), and good-cause beneficiaries (who receive funding through gambling revenues for sports, culture, education, youth work, and other social and health activities). The second position is held by those who focus on the harmful aspects of gambling, such as experts in the social and health consequences of gambling, and the public-health actors who seek to prevent those consequences.

While acknowledging the role of other stakeholders, this study focuses on the role of the GI for three reasons: first, marketing by the GI is known to significantly influence gambling prevalence, while restrictions on gambling are a key element of gambling control (Guillou-Landreat et al., 2021). Second, the GI markets products that are harmful to people's health and well-being. Third, so far, there is fairly little evidence of the strategies that the GI might have used to influence the reform of state online monopolies in Sweden and Finland, though there is a fair amount of literature on the strategies used by the AI and the TI to influence public policies in Finland (Hiilamo, 2003; Sama & Hiilamo, 2019). We used the neo-pluralistic perspective in research on organized interests, which emphasizes the importance of contingency and context when studying how different types of interest groups behave (Lowery & Gray, 2004). Our approach was to study the ways in which the GI intervened to influence the reforming of the state online monopoly into a licensing system in Sweden in 2019, and how the GI is currently influencing policy-making to weaken the state online monopoly in Finland. This approach is in the context of corporate political activity (CPA) (Bhuptani et al., 2022) undertaken by OG operators in their campaign to open monopolies for their commercial interests.

The qualitative data collected for this study were divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected between March and September 2022 from interviews with experts who were knowledgeable in gambling policy-making in Sweden and Finland. There were nine groups of informants: researchers from universities and institutes, private research companies, industry interest groups, gambling monopoly operators, gambling licensing authorities, public health and well-being agencies / non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government ministries, consumer protection agencies, and law firms specializing in gambling. A total of eighteen interviews were conducted for this study, with nine informants from each country (see Table 1). Some interviewees were selected by snowball sampling (Naderifar et al., 2017), where research participants are asked to assist researchers by identifying other potential subjects to interview. Unfortunately, an equal representation of expert interviewees could not be found for all the groups of informants in Sweden and Finland, thereby creating an imbalance. The reason to interview different groups of experts, including Veikkaus, was to have multiple perspectives on the same interview question.

All the interviewees were contacted via email by the researcher requesting an interview. In the email, the interviewees were sent open-ended interview questions (see Appendices 1 and 2) so they could prepare their responses in advance. They were informed of the purpose of the study, the duration of the interview, how the data would be used, and that the results would be

anonymized as part of our research ethics process. All the interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. They were later transcribed using the *Grain* application (Grain Intelligence, n.d.). Secondary data were collected through a qualitative method from prior literature, journal articles, news articles, and websites using search terms like "gambling and monopoly" and "Sweden and Finland." The paired search terms were entered into databases, such as EBSCOhost, PubMed, ProQuest, Scopus, Web of Knowledge, and Google Scholar, using their default search settings. Given the scarcity of peer-reviewed literature in the field, grey literature in English, Finnish, and Swedish (e.g., internet articles, blog posts, newspaper articles, and reports) were included in the secondary data. Data collected in other languages were translated into English.

In the context of case study design (Yin, 2014), the data for this study were analyzed qualitatively through a thematic content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). We approached the interview data with a constructivist / interpretative approach, where we assumed that the informants, despite not being neutral actors, conveyed relevant and truthful information in their responses. Thematic content analysis was used to classify or code the data into a number of categories. In the framework of analysis, GI political activity was divided into *strategies* containing individual *tactics* (the methods by which a corporation attempts to exert influence), and *frames* containing individual *arguments* (the reasons given by a corporation as to why they oppose one idea or support another). The data were coded under the framework adopted by Sama and Hiilamo (2019) for the strategies used by the AI to influence the reform of the Finnish alcohol law; this framework was adapted from the five TI strategies developed by Savell et al. (2014). This framework was initially developed by Hillman and Hitt (1999) for corporate political strategy formulation. The coding categories (strategies and tactics) were amended for our data analysis. In this study, "strategies" refer to the direction and scope of the GI's CPA campaign to open up the Swedish and Finnish OG markets for their commercial interests, while "tactics" refer to the means by which a strategy is carried out. The inclusion criteria in the results were that each individual tactic and argument used by the GI to influence policy in Sweden and Finland had to be supported by verifiable evidence, such as a clear citation, direct quote from the interview data, or references from secondary data. Only tactics and arguments directly related to the influence of policy-making were included for analysis.

Results

We identified five main political strategies: (1) *Information*, under which the GI in Sweden directly lobbied politicians in the Swedish Parliament through Members of Parliament (MPs) of left-wing parties like the Social Democratic Party (SDP) (Socialdemokratiska arbetareparti); while in Finland, the GI indirectly lobbies politicians in the Finnish Parliament through MPs of right-wing parties like the National Coalition Party (NCP) (Kansallinen Kokoomus). (2) *Constituency Building*, under which the GI in Sweden formed an alliance with interest groups to lobby against the monopoly, though this was not the case in Finland. (3) *Policy Substitution*, under which the GI in Sweden and Finland promoted alternative policies and self-regulation. (4) *Legal Infringements*, under which the GI in Sweden used the legal system to argue that the monopoly was a violation of European Union (EU) laws, though this was not the case in Finland. (5) *Regulatory Redundancy*, under which the GI in Sweden and Finland argued that the monopoly was redundant (see Tables 2 and 3).

(1) Information

Our results indicate that, in Sweden, the first and most prominent tactic used by the GI was lobbying for their commercial interests. Respondents said the GI in Sweden lobbied

politicians through an alliance called the Swedish Trade Association for Online Gambling (Branschföreningen för Onlinespel, BOS), which is made-up of international gambling companies (IGCs) from Malta and Gibraltar like Mr Green, LeoVegas, and Kindred Group. Respondents said BOS and some smaller operators had direct contact with politicians in the Swedish Parliament through working-group meetings with MPs of left-wing parties like the governing SDP, which they used to influence the change from online monopoly to licensing system in 2019. The main arguments by the GI were that: (a) Sweden was no longer in a monopoly because over 50% of the online market was on unregulated sites owned by companies that were not paying taxes to the Swedish state; and (b) the lack of borders when it comes to OG made it difficult to keep the monopoly (Börjesson & Arvidsson, 2019). According to one respondent: "*More and more Swedes were gambling on unregulated sites, which made the monopoly worthless. This was over 50% of the online market*" (researcher). The GI also argued that, due to digitalization and globalization, the monopoly should be opened up because there was no other option.

In Finland, our results from the interview data also indicate that the first *Information* tactic is political lobbying, though it is not the most prominent tactic as it was in Sweden. Respondents suspected that big IGCs in the Finnish OG market (e.g., Betsson) hire lobbyists in public relations companies or use their representatives in Finland to indirectly lobby politicians (e.g., MPs of the right-wing NCP) who are in favour of liberalizing the gambling as well as the alcohol monopoly in Finland (Tigerstedt et al., 2020). This is also reflected in the NCP-led government program that, as of June 2023, advocates for the licensing of the OG monopoly in Finland (Finnish Government, 2023, pp. 120–121). Some left-wing MPs are also in favour of licensing the online monopoly because they think the monopoly has lost its competitiveness in the digital market (Koivula, 2023; *YLE News*, 2023). The GI's main argument for changing the online monopoly to a licensing system like Sweden's is that Finland is no longer in a monopoly. Nearly 50% of the Finnish OG market is on unregulated sites owned by IGCs that do not pay taxes to the Finnish state, nor do they protect consumers from harm (Horner, 2022; *YLE News*, 2022). As in Sweden, the main argument is that it is difficult to keep a monopoly in this age of digitalization. A respondent spoke about an attempt to prevent OG through payment blocks:

> *I don't know if this is going to be effective because I think people who want to gamble online will still be able to do so on unregulated sites. This is the biggest problem for the legality of the Finnish monopoly system.* (researcher)

A second tactic was economic benefit to the state. The GI in Sweden argued that a licensing system would be economically beneficial to the Swedish state because it would generate tax revenue from the OG companies in the Swedish market that were not paying taxes to the Swedish state nor protecting the consumers from harm. According to a respondent: "*The rise of online betting had gradually eroded the monopoly established in 1938, with other companies able to operate easily with online betting in the Swedish market without paying taxes to the state nor protecting the consumers from harm*" (public health actor). This was a logical argument because, in the first three quarters of 2018 for example, online operators without Swedish permits reported a gross gaming revenue (GGR) of SEK4.5 billion, without paying taxes nor protecting consumers (Granlund & Hamrén, 2018). According to a respondent, the government became aware of the loss in tax revenue and high problem-gambling rates on unregulated sites, and decided that the OG market would be opened up to competition by a licensing system (Nordic Welfare Center, 2017).

In Finland, the GI is also arguing that changing the monopoly to a licensing system will generate

tax revenue for the Finnish state from IGCs that are currently offering gambling services to Finns on unregulated sites (*YLE News*, 2023). According to a respondent: "*About half of the digital gambling market in Finland, valued at around €520 million during the first half of 2022, went to foreign operators who do not pay taxes to Finland*" (researcher) (see *YLE News*, 2022). Another respondent said: *"Overall, Finnish politicians are thinking about the possible increase in gambling revenue if the transition to a licensing system is made"* (researcher) (see Finnish Government, 2023, pp. 120–121).

A third tactic was the use of the media, both online social media and traditional media, to lobby the public and give the impression of greater support for the industry's position. Respondents said the GI in Sweden (e.g., Ladbrokes) used social media to lobby the public; for example, posting on Facebook, as Twitter was less influential in Sweden when the re-regulation of the Swedish gambling market began around 2006 (Binde & Romild, 2019; Börjesson & Arvidsson, 2019). Another respondent emphasized the role of traditional media by saying: "*The GI in Sweden was also active in traditional media like newspapers, and they had lots of advertisements, press releases, and articles in newspapers from 2008 when social media was not yet big in Sweden*" (gambling licensing authority). Though Swedish law forbade advertisements from unlicensed gambling companies, the law was largely ineffective because of legal technicalities and because Swedish authorities had no influence over the content of commercial television broadcasts from abroad. For example, in 2014, about three quarters of all gambling advertisements in Sweden were made by unlicensed companies (Binde & Romild, 2019). According to one respondent, the GI was also active in public debates involving right-wing politicians who were in favour of licensing OG because over 50% of the online market was on unregulated sites owned by companies that were not paying taxes to the Swedish state: "*In the debates, the GI and some right-wing politicians wanted the unlicensed OG companies to be included in a licensed Swedish market so that they would be paying taxes to the Swedish state*" (public health actor).

The use of social media, particularly Twitter, to lobby the public and shape the news and public agenda is the most prominent tactic used by the GI to influence policy-making in Finland. Respondents suspected that the GI in Finland hires content creators, actors, athletes, influencers, and consultants to lobby the public through Twitter posts to give the impression of greater support for the industry's position that Finland should adopt a licensing system. It is common for IGCs to use their affiliates or influencers on social media to make their voices heard and for advertising (Lindeman et al., 2022). One respondent said:

> *The suspicion is due to the ways some of the influencers discuss on Twitter against the monopoly with contents that are organic, including posts, videos, stories, and hashtags like <#veikkauskratia> that are shared by their followers, or sponsored where the influencer is paid to increase the visibility of the organic content to target specific audiences*. (researcher) (see Zelefsky, 2022)

Some influencers criticizing the monopoly have as many as 152,300 followers on Twitter. A respondent discussed the position of the critics of the monopoly by saying: "*The transition to a license system will increase the degree of channelling and will make the restrictions on gaming to be more effective than at present*" (researcher).

The last tactic was the use of commissioned or disseminated research reports and citations. For example, in 2012, BOS published a commissioned research report about the regulation of OG in Sweden. Their aim was to influence the regulation and taxation of the portion of the market accounted for by operators regulated with a

Swedish license (Trunkfield, 2012). By so doing, the GI in Sweden populated the evidence base with research that, among other things, would benefit their commercial interests when the OG monopoly changed to a licensing system.

The GI is also using disseminated research reports and citations to influence public opinion in Finland, mostly through social media, and specifically through Twitter. Examples of this use of research reports can also be found in online articles, such as Horner (2022):

> The situation has escalated little by little. Veikkaus' sales and GGR have decreased every year of the company's operation. Veikkaus' GGR was around €1.8bn when the company started operations. According to this year's forecast, the GGR is about €1.0–€1.1bn. The drop has been in six years by about 40%[.] Veikkaus' market share of all gambling in Finland was at the 90% level, but now it is only about 2/3. Veikkaus has only 50% of gambling in digital channels, compared to 73% six years ago. The worst situation is in particularly competitive areas, in fixed-odds betting and online casino games, where Veikkaus' market share is only about a third. That has happened in a situation where Finland further tightened gambling legislation from the beginning of 2022 and made it more difficult for offshore companies to operate.

As a result, Finns have increasingly transferred their gambling to offshore companies where they are no longer under the supervision of the Finnish authorities (Horner, 2022). A spokesperson for the GI also argues that:

> The situation cannot continue like this, and now it is better for everyone that the gambling system in Finland would change. That opinion was said by the CEO of Veikkaus in August when the company reported its H1/2022 result. Veikkaus, therefore, announced that it no longer considers it reasonable to continue as a monopoly company, at least in competitive gambling areas. (Horner, 2022)

According to Koivula (2023), the current situation in Finland is in many ways analogous to neighbouring Sweden and Denmark, where the shift from OG monopolies to licensing systems began when the national monopoly operators Svenska Spel and ATG (Sweden) and Danske Spil (Denmark) began to advocate for a licensing system.

(2) Constituency Building

Constituency building has often been linked to indirect lobbying by unhealthy commodity industries (UCIs) like the TI and AI (Sama & Hiilamo, 2019; Savell et al., 2014; Savell et al., 2016). Our results indicate that the GI in Sweden used constituency building as a strategy to lobby for a licensing system in 2019 by forming the BOS alliance in 2012 (Swedish Trade Association for Online Gambling, n.d.). Through this alliance, the GI was able to build partnerships with left-wing parties like the governing SDP, through both individual politicians and the ministry responsible for gaming policy. These partnerships were then used to lobby against the online monopoly and to advocate for a licensing system (*Gambling Insider*, 2022). Alliances of UCIs influence policies by opposing public health measures and by making public opinion appear to be on the lobbyists' side (Savell et al., 2016). According to a respondent:

> *It was the big IGCs, such as Kindred and Betsson together with a couple of other smaller operators, that properly started to push for a licensing system in Sweden. They created the trade association BOS in order to hasten-up the process of re-regulation of the gambling market in Sweden*. (lawyer)

In Finland, our results indicate that the GI does not have constituency building as it exists in Sweden because Finland has a full monopolistic gambling regime (Marionneau et al., 2021; Nikkinen & Marionneau, 2021). However, the Finnish Gambling Association (FGA) (Suomalainen Rahapeliyhdistys ry), which is an independent, non-profit organization aimed at bringing experts and stakeholders in the GI under one roof to share information and discuss the development of the existing gambling system in Finland, to reflect the requirement for high-level consumer protection, notes that:

> The Finnish Gambling Association notes that the GI in Finland has been reformed numerous times without achieving the set objectives. The Finnish gambling system and legislation need immediate reform to clarify regulation, bring foreign operators within the scope of Finnish law, ensure responsible gaming, strengthen the state's tax base, and create new jobs in Finland.
>
> The Finnish Gambling Association recommends that the new government program include a transition from the monopoly system for gambling to a blue and white combination model during the upcoming parliamentary term. In the license-based system, some gambling activities, such as sports and digital casino games, are opened to responsible, rule fulfilling, and tax-paying operators. The cornerstone of the new system should be responsibility and effective prevention of gambling-related harm, as well as channelling as much of the gaming as possible into the official regulated system. (Vähänen & Ripatti, 2023)

These recommendations align with MPs of the right-wing parties like the NCP and left-wing parties who are in favour of liberalizing the gambling monopoly in Finland because they think the monopoly has lost its competitiveness in the digital market *(YLE News*, 2023). These recommendations are also reflected in the NCP-led government program that, as of June 2023, advocates for the licensing of the OG monopoly in Finland (Finnish Government, 2023, pp. 120–121). According to a respondent: "It is the IGCs with the biggest market share in the digital market in Finland, such as Betsson, that are advocating for change of the gambling monopoly into a licensing system" (researcher).

(3) Policy Substitution

Policy substitution is used as a strategy by UCIs to prevent the implementation of formal regulations and to promote alternative policies (Jernigan, 2012). Respondents said the GI in Sweden promoted alternative and self-regulation policies from a consumer protection perspective by advocating for a licensing system that would protect consumers, as one respondent expressed:

> *More and more gambling was online outside of the monopoly system and this posed a public health risk from a consumer protection point-of-view of the gamblers. Some gamblers were gambling and getting in debts outside of the monopoly system and so, with the licensing system, we would put some pressure on the licensed companies to protect the consumers, such as pushing one button to exclude yourself from all the gambling companies that have a license.*" (private research company).

Respondents said the GI in Sweden also advocated for fair competition in the licensing system because foreign companies should not be subject to regulations that are too strict; nor should they be asked to pay high tax rates, as this might discourage them from applying for a license (Nordic Welfare Center, 2017; O'Boyle, 2022).

In Finland, the GI also promotes alternative policies by arguing, according to one respondent, "*that a licensing system will be a win-win situation for Finland from the taxes that the licensed companies will pay to the Finnish state*" (researcher). The GI in Finland also promotes self-regulation policies by arguing "*that the monopoly should be licensed because online gambling is very difficult to regulate, or the way we need to regulate it will create other problems and other questions*" (researcher) (see *YLE News*, 2023). The GI also emphasizes responsible gambling and individual responsibility of the gamblers because they think gambling is an individual rather than a social issue (Marko et al., 2023). By so doing, the GI is attempting to shift the blame for gambling harm to individuals and away from society. The focus on individuals or a group of problem gamblers provides the industry with a frame that has the potential to invalidate the focus on harm prevention at a societal level (Gordon & Reith, 2019). This is also logical because, in Finland, the majority of gambling revenues are derived from people gambling on a weekly basis, from problem gamblers, and from gamblers of poor socioeconomic status. Lower-income earners also spend more on gambling than high-income earners in Finland. There have also been correlations between gambling levels and educational background, unemployment, poor health, and high use of intoxicants (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2023).

(4) Legal Infringements

In 2014, the EU Commission sued Sweden for failing to change its rules for online betting and poker games (Fioretti, 2014). Sweden was said to have violated EU laws on the free movement of goods and services because Swedish authorities did not adequately supervise the commercial activities of the exclusive monopoly operator, Svenska Spel. According to a respondent, "*Sweden was referred to the EU Court of Justice for imposing restrictions and promoting online betting services in a way which was inconsistent with EU law*" (industry interest group). These arguments questioning the legality of the monopoly shifted the focus of the debate away from public health and consumer protection measures to the commercial interests of the GI.

In Finland, no cases of *Legal Infringement* arguments were given against the monopoly; although, in 2006, the EU Commission initiated infringement proceedings against Finland and several Member States regarding restrictions on remote sports betting (European Commission, 2006). These proceedings were closed in 2013 alongside an announcement from the Commission that it would not take further measures to challenge the Finnish State monopoly (Marionneau & Hellman, 2020).

(5) Regulatory Redundancy

The GI in Sweden argued that the state gambling monopoly was unfair and redundant because, as one respondent expressed:

> *while Svenska Spel has made significant changes, some people think it still holds an unfair position. Some think the government should not own a business in a sector it also regulates. A state should set the rules for commercial gambling companies and make sure the companies comply with the rules, rather than be an active player in the market itself.* (lawyer) (see O'Boyle, 2022)

In Finland, the GI also uses redundancy arguments on social media, as expressed by a respondent:

> *monopolies generally are not a good way of mitigating health dangers or other problems because they have become historical remnants. Veikkaus's monopoly has been rooted in the idea of regulation, but as most games today happen online, people in Finland are playing games run by foreign operators that are not paying taxes to the Finnish state nor protecting*

the consumers from harm. (researcher) (see Schmitz & Fettig, 2020)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify the strategies used by the GI to influence Sweden's reform of its state online gambling monopoly into a licensing system in 2019, and to weaken the current monopoly in Finland. The results confirm Savell et al.'s (2014) work on the TI and Sama and Hiilamo's (2019) work on the AI; which is to say that gaining access to political decision makers with the same ideological convictions was an important GI strategy for influencing policy-making in both Sweden and Finland. As of June 2023, the NCP-led government program in Finland also advocates for a licensing of the OG monopoly to prevent and reduce economic, social, and health-related harm resulting from gambling and to improve the channelling rate of the gambling system (Finnish Government, 2023, pp. 120–121). We found no evidence of donations to politicians who supported the commercial interests' approach of the GI in either Sweden or Finland. Previous studies indicate that UCIs like the AI and the TI forged direct or indirect partnerships with government agencies to share information because, in addition to political interests, they shared common business interests (Hoe et al., 2022). Such partnerships advance the commercial interests of UCIs rather than public health interests because UCIs merely promote policies that fail to reduce harms, such as those caused by gambling (Wardle et al., 2019). The results indicate that the GI in Sweden and Finland influenced policy-making using *Information* tactics like "economic benefit to the state" and "commissioned or disseminated research reports and citations." We found no evidence of misinformation or disinformation in the referenced reports in both countries, though the studies were commissioned by BOS in Sweden and Veikkaus in Finland (Horner, 2022; Trunkfield, 2012).

The use of social media, specifically Twitter, emerged in this study as an important *Information* tactic for influencing policy-making by the GI in Finland. In Sweden, however, Facebook and traditional media (e.g., commercial television advertisements, press releases, and articles in newspapers) were more prominent because other types of social media (e.g., Twitter) were not yet popular when the re-regulation of the gambling market began in 2006 (Börjesson & Arvidsson, 2019).

Our results also indicate that constituency building was used as a strategy by the GI to influence policy-making in Sweden, though this was not the case in Finland. A previous study in Finland (Sama & Hiilamo, 2019) found that the AI successfully used both information and constituency building to influence the reform of the Finnish alcohol law from restrictions to liberalization.

Our results indicate that the GI in Sweden successfully engaged in CPA to influence policy-making by lobbying, shaping the evidence base, and promoting self-regulatory policies favourable to their commercial interests. As of June 2023 in Finland, the NCP-led government program has adopted some of the GI's arguments to license the online monopoly by 2026 (Finnish Government, 2023, pp. 120–121). The gambling policies in Sweden, Finland, and other Nordic countries are often presented as unique because of their strong emphasis on public-health protection and because of the exceptional role of the state in the regulation of gambling (e.g., Finland and Norway, which still have full state monopolies over their gambling industries) (Örnberg, 2006). Globally, the GI's involvement in policy-making is not new, and there has been a recent increase in the industry's efforts to be seen as a key partner in policy-making (Sulkunen et al., 2020).

Our results add to the evidence of CPA by the GI and demonstrate a great similarity in the tactics used to influence policy-making in Sweden and Finland, though some disparities also exist. The

main similarity is that OG in Sweden was increasingly occurring on unregulated sites owned by foreign companies that did not pay taxes to the state and did not protect consumers from harm. This influenced Sweden's decision to change their gambling system from a state online monopoly to a licensing system (Börjesson & Arvidsson, 2019). A very similar situation is currently happening in Finland (Horner, 2022). In contrast:

1. the GI in Sweden had direct contact with politicians, while in Finland it is indirect;
2. the use of social media, specifically Twitter, is more prominent in influencing policy-making in Finland than it was in Sweden (Börjesson & Arvidsson, 2019);
3. the GI in Finland was not found to be active in traditional media, whereas in Sweden the GI used advertisements, debates, and articles in newspapers; and
4. constituency building and legal infringements were used in Sweden, though these were not the case in Finland.

Our results also shed light on two additional GI strategies: legal infringements and regulatory redundancy, which were developed by Savell et al. (2014) but were not relevant to Sama and Hiilamo's (2019) framework.

Overall, our results indicate that the GI has used strategies that are similar to those used by the AI to influence policy-making for their commercial interests (Sama and Hiilamo, 2019). We conclude that the involvement of the GI in policy-making influenced the change of the state online monopoly to a licensing system in Sweden in 2019. In Finland, the involvement of the GI in policy-making is also weakening the state online gambling monopoly to the point where the NCP-led government has decided to replace it with a licensing system by 2026 (Finnish Government, 2023, pp. 120–121).

Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this study is that it provides a broad overview of the tactics and arguments used by the GI to influence policy-making against the state online monopoly in Sweden and Finland. The study's attempt to categorize the industry's strategies, tactics, and arguments suggests that the findings may be applicable to other UCIs (e.g., the alcohol and tobacco industries). Since this study discusses CPA undertaken by the GI in their campaign to open up the Swedish and Finnish online markets, another strength of this study is that it represents a contribution to the literature of CPA by the GI and perhaps that of the Commercial Determinants of Health (CDoH) (de Lacy-Vawdon & Livingstone, 2020; Hancock et al., 2018).

However, this study also has a number of limitations: First, we were unable to find an equal representation of expert interviewees for the nine groups of informants in Sweden and Finland, which created an imbalance. Second, the secondary data used in this study for the two non-English speaking countries of Sweden and Finland were mostly in English language. But all the material in Swedish, Finnish, and other languages were translated into English language, which may have somewhat limited the extent of our analysis. Third, we did not have access to internal GI documents that might have shed light on the strategies identified in this study or any other strategies, including directly or indirectly targeting political decision makers. Fourth, the identification of the tactics and arguments and the jurisdictions in which they are used in this study depend on interviews and secondary data. Closely related to this is the fact that the results focused mainly on the commercial interests of the GI in Sweden and Finland, whereas the GI may use a more diverse set of tactics and arguments in other policy-making areas. Finally, despite triangulating our interview data with secondary data, we were not able to check the validity of all the statements of our informants.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

This study has identified five main strategies used by the GI to influence policy-making in

Sweden and Finland. This study may be useful to policy-makers who wish to understand how the GI influences policy-making. The strategies identified in this study might be useful to policy-makers and public-health actors in Sweden, Finland, and elsewhere who are attempting to counter efforts to influence policy-making by the GI. This study has further developed the framework for classifying the CPAs that were outlined by Savell et al. (2014) for the TI and adapted by Sama and Hiilamo (2019) for the AI. We have shown the policy and scholarly value of applying these frameworks to other UCIs, like the GI. Future research could investigate the role of social media in influencing gambling regulation in Finland. Future research could also investigate responsible gambling measures implemented in Sweden since the transition to a gambling licensing system, with a view to identifying best practices for Finland, which is planning to make a similar shift by 2026.

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Tables

Table 1. Distribution of interviewees by expertise in Sweden and Finland.

Level of expertise	Sweden / Number interviewed (9)	Finland / Number interviewed (9)
Researchers from universities and institutes	- Stockholm University / 2 - Karolinska Institute / 2	- Helsinki University / 2 - Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare / 3
Private research companies	- Sustainable Interaction Sweden / 1	
Industry interest groups	- Swedish Trade Association for Online Gambling (Branschföreningen för Onlinespel, BOS) / 1	
Gambling monopoly operators		- Finnish government-owned betting agency (Veikkaus) / 1
Gambling licensing authorities	- Swedish Gambling Authority (Spelinspektionen) / 1	
Public health and well-being agencies / non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	- Swedish Public Health Agency (Folkhälsomyndigheten) / 1	- Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention (Ehkäisevä päihdetyö) / 1
Government ministries		- Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö) / 1
Consumer protection agencies		- Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority (Kilpailu- ja kuluttajavirasto) / 1
Law firms specializing in gambling	- Nordic Gambling / 1	

Table 2. Distribution of influence by experts to change the state online gambling monopoly in Sweden to a licensing system in 2019 and to weaken the state online gambling monopoly in Finland.

Level of governance	Sweden	Finland	European Union (EU)
Parliamentary groups against the state online gambling monopolies	The left-wing parties: - Social Democratic Party (SDP) (Socialdemokratiska arbetareparti) - Centre Party (CP) (Centerpartiet) - Moderate Party (MP) (Moderata samlingspartiet) - Christian Democrats (CD) (Kristdemokraterna) - Green Party (GP) (Miljöpartiet de gröna) - Liberal Party (LP) (Liberalerna)	The right-wing parties; for example: - National Coalition Party (NCP) (Kansallinen Kokoomus)	- European Commission (EU Law)
Trade associations, and lobby and interest groups against the state online gambling monopolies	Swedish Trade Association for Online Gambling (Branschföreningen för Onlinespel, BOS): - Kindred Group - Mr Green - LeoVegas	Finnish Gambling Association (FGA) (Suomalainen Rahapeliyhdistys ry): - Betsson - ComeOn Group - LeoVegas - Kindred Group - William Hill - Entain - Flutter Entertainment	International gambling companies in Malta and Gibraltar; for example: - LeoVegas - ComeOn Group

Table 3. Strategies and tactics used by the gambling industry to influence the change from the state online monopoly in Sweden to a licensing system in 2019 and to weaken the state online monopoly in Finland.

Strategy	Tactics (Sweden)	Tactics (Finland)
Information	- Direct lobbying of Members of Parliament from left-wing parties (e.g., SDP) - Economic benefit for the state (e.g., generate tax revenue) - Media (social and traditional media) - Commissioned or disseminated research reports (shaping the evidence base)	- Indirect lobbying of Members of Parliament from right-wing parties (e.g., NCP) - Economic benefit for the state (e.g., generate tax revenue) - Media (social media)
Constituency Building	Forming an alliance with interest groups in the GI (Swedish Trade Association for Online Gambling / Branschföreningen för Onlinespel, BOS): - Kindred Group - Mr Green - LeoVegas	Forming an alliance with interest groups in the GI (Finnish Gambling Association, FGA / Suomalainen Rahapeliyhdistys ry): - Betsson - ComeOn Group - LeoVegas - Kindred Group - William Hill - Entain - Flutter Entertainment
Policy substitution	- Promoting alternative policies - Promoting self-regulation	- Promoting alternative policies - Promoting self-regulation
Legal infringements	- Using European Commission (EU Law) (e.g., regulation is discriminatory)	N/A
Regulatory redundancy	- The monopoly was redundant	- The monopoly is redundant

Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions in Sweden

1) Why was the state online gambling monopoly in Sweden changed into a licensing system in 2019?
2) When did discussions to change the online gambling monopoly in Sweden begin?
3) Who were the actors who began the discussions to change the online gambling monopoly in Sweden and why?
4) Which kinds of arguments were used by the actors who wanted change of the online gambling monopoly in Sweden?
5) What kind of change did the actors who wanted change of the online gambling monopoly in Sweden propose?
6) Was there some pressure from international gambling companies to change the online gambling monopoly in Sweden into a licensing system and which were the international gambling companies?
7) What is your opinion on the current licensing system of the gambling industry in Sweden compared to the state monopoly system which existed before 2019?
8) Do you think social media played an important role in the change of the online gambling monopoly in Sweden into the current licensing system and how?
9) Who were the actors discussing on social media to change the gambling monopoly in Sweden?
10) Which kinds of arguments were used on social media to change the gambling monopoly in Sweden to a licensing system in 2019?
11) When was the bill to change the gambling monopoly in Sweden to a licensing system tabled in the Parliament and by who?
12) When the bill to change the gambling monopoly in Sweden was tabled in the Parliament, which parties supported the licensing of the monopoly and why?
13) When the bill to change the gambling monopoly in Sweden was tabled in the Parliament, which parties opposed the licensing of the monopoly and why?
14) What has changed since the online gambling monopoly in Sweden was changed into a licensing system in 2019?
15) Can you give me some contacts of gambling researchers or experts in Sweden?
16) What is your final word?

Appendix 2. Interview questions in Finland

1) What is your opinion on the current gambling monopoly in Finland when a neighbouring EU country like Sweden has changed her gambling monopoly into a licensing system and since Finland is one of the EU countries that has maintained a gambling monopoly under Veikkaus?
2) Why is the gambling monopoly in Finland heavily criticized on social media by actors who want change (such as on Twitter with hashtag #veikkauskratia)?
3) What role do you think Veikkaus is playing to reform the gambling monopoly in Finland due to external pressure or criticisms of the monopoly such as on social media?
4) How has the social media criticisms of the gambling monopoly in Finland affected Veikkaus?
5) What is Veikkaus's reaction to the social media criticisms against the monopoly in Finland?
6) Who are the main actors on social media such as gambling companies advocating for a change in the gambling monopoly in Finland?
7) What are the arguments by the actors advocating for change in the gambling monopoly in Finland on social media?
8) Is there some pressure from international gambling companies to change the gambling monopoly in Finland and how?
9) Which are the international gambling companies advocating for a change in the gambling monopoly in Finland?
10) Where do you see the future of the gambling monopoly in Finland?
11) Which political parties in Finland are in favour of changing the gambling monopoly in Finland and why?
12) Which political parties in Finland oppose changing the gambling monopoly and why?
13) What will change if the gambling monopoly in Finland is changed?
14) Can you give me some contacts of gambling researchers or experts in Finland?
15) What is your final word?

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Characteristics and Experiences of Employees who Gamble at Work: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Characteristics and Experiences of Employees who Gamble at Work: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract: Given that little is currently known about gambling in the workplace, we conducted a mixed-methods study to describe the characteristics and experiences of people who gamble at work. We administered a Canada-wide online survey (n = 2,000) of adults who 1) gamble, 2) are currently employed full-time, and 3) have internet access at work. A descriptive analysis of quantitative survey data showed that individuals who gamble at work had lower job satisfaction and higher rates of problem gambling compared to those who do not. Among those who gamble at work, we quantitatively described the types of gambling, the consequences experienced, and the motivations for gambling. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 18 individuals who met the criteria for problem gambling and who gamble at work. Data were integrated to provide a richer description of the experiences of those who gamble at work, including their motivations, the role of work–life satisfaction, and the dynamic influence of work as a social context. Motivations for workplace gambling included excitement, social connection, avoidance, and coping with stress or emotions. The results highlight the importance of understanding the varied motivations of individuals who gamble at work, and the role of work experiences in shaping meaning regarding gambling behaviours.

Keywords: Gambling, gambling research, mixed-methods, work

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Introduction

Harmful gambling has been associated with a range of consequences for individuals and communities, including financial burdens, work / study harms, relationship disruption, emotional and psychological harm, as well as detriments to physical health (Hilbrecht et al., 2020; Hodgins et al., 2011; Langham et al., 2016; Li et al., 2017). Harmful gambling can be understood as "any type of repetitive gambling that a person engages in that leads to (or aggravates) recurring negative consequences" (Abbott et al., 2018, p. 4). Such negative consequences can be experienced not only by individuals engaged in gambling, but also family members, friends, co-workers, and communities (Langham et al., 2016; Li et al., 2017). The Conceptual Framework for Harmful Gambling Factors (CFHGF, Hilbrecht et al., 2020) highlights risks and contributing factors to harmful gambling, which are both gambling specific (such as gambling exposure, environment, and types of gambling) and general (including social, cultural, psychological, and biological factors).

The CFHGF is helpful for understanding the workplace as a social location where individuals could encounter and engage in gambling, and where gambling-related risks and harms might be experienced (Hilbrecht et al., 2020). This understanding is useful both in contextualizing harmful gambling and in expanding the understanding of gambling disorder. As defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental*

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Disorders (DSM-5), gambling disorder is diagnosed when there is "persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behavior leading to clinically significant impairment or distress," and when four or more behavioural indicators are present, such as preoccupation with gambling and having jeopardized or lost important relationships, work, or educational opportunities (APA, 2013).

Gambling Specific Considerations: Workplace as a Gambling Space

In an era of radical technological changes, access to gambling has become ubiquitous and gambling spaces exist anywhere with smartphone and internet access (Hing et al., 2022). The increased availability of gambling opportunities has generally been linked to increased levels of problem gambling (e.g., Gainsbury et al., 2012; Hing et al., 2022). In Canada, online gambling is now legal in every province (Joannou, 2020; Provost, 2023; Williams et al., 2021). Numerous features of internet gambling potentially undermine an individual's ability to control their gambling (Wood et al., 2012), including a sense of unreality connected to digital money (Hing et al., 2015). Greater loss of control while internet gambling was also attributed to fast, easy access to large amounts of credit online, the privacy afforded by the online environment, and the ease of access to online gambling (Hing et al., 2015).

Wood and Williams (2007) reported that 15% of adult gamblers who are employed full-time report gambling in the workplace. For individuals who engage in internet gambling, 16.3% gamble in the workplace at least occasionally (Wood & Williams, 2011). While gambling in some contexts might enhance camaraderie and engagement in the workplace environment (for example, joint office pools with the intent to share winnings), for individuals with a vulnerability to problem gambling, there are multiple potential consequences of workplace gambling (Griffiths, 2009). Issues of internet abuse and gambling in the workplace have been identified as serious occupational issues (Griffiths, 2009; Griffiths, 2010). Despite the identification of workplace gambling as a potential issue, and the fact that the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for gambling disorder describes the occupational and interpersonal consequences of gambling (APA, 2013), there continues to be very little research on the actual experiences of workplace gambling.

An understanding of work-related risk factors is important to conceptualize the experiences of workplace gambling because the workplace environment itself might facilitate or hinder gambling behaviour (Binde & Romild, 2020; Nicoll, 2019). For example, increased access to gambling through internet connectivity and mobile phones can lead to a greater frequency of workplace gambling (Griffiths, 2009; Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2021). Workplace gambling can also be more common among employees whose jobs involve unsupervised time, such as those that work from home (Griffiths, 2009; Revheim & Buvik, 2009). While attention has been given to the issues of "time theft" (e.g., taking longer breaks, using work time for non-work activities) as concerns for employers (Henle et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2023), this focus obscures the harms to individual employees and how these behaviours can be shaped by work environments that include exposure to gambling. Employees who work in the gambling industry are also more likely to develop gambling disorder, in part because of their high exposure to gambling opportunities (Guttentag et al., 2012; Hing & Gainsbury, 2013).

Understanding experiences of workplace gambling is important, as the risks and harms experienced can impact not only individuals engaged in gambling, but also co-workers, employers, and family members (Hilbrecht et al., 2020; Li et al., 2017). One particularly consequential aspect can be a failure to meet important work obligations as a result of gambling behaviours (Eby et al., 2016; Hodgins et al., 2011; Langham et al., 2016; Latvala et al., 2019), including absenteeism from work and poor job performance due to distraction or tiredness,

which could result in involuntary job loss (Langham et al., 2016; Latvala et al., 2019). In severe cases, gambling disorder can lead to criminal acts at work, such as embezzlement or theft, to address the financial demands of gambling (Binde, 2016; Langham et al., 2016; Latvala et al., 2019). Given that negative impacts to employment are considered a symptom of gambling disorder by definition, it is unsurprising that gambling in the workplace is a significant predictor for the development of gambling disorder, with individuals who gambled at work or instead of studying having greater risk of being newly classified as at-risk for gambling disorder one year later (Binde, 2016). Workplace gambling is also relatively common among people seeking help for gambling disorders, with 34% having reported using their work or study time to gamble (Salonen et al., 2018). While gambling in the workplace has been identified as an important issue that warrants greater attention (Griffiths, 2009; Nower, 2003), very few studies have examined experiences of workplace gambling specifically, or identified factors that can contribute to workplace gambling (Revheim & Buvik, 2009).

Workplace Gambling: Sociocultural and Individual Factors

While one way that problem gambling is defined is through the negative impacts of gambling behaviours on work, it is also important to examine the role of work, workplace relationships, and work satisfaction in shaping gambling behaviours. Work is integral in people's lives as a potential source of meaning, identity, connection, and livelihood. Further, the concept of decent work highlights the importance of recognizing the rights of employees to basic conditions of work being met, such as adequate pay, safety, and opportunity to enjoy non-working time (Duffy et al., 2016; International Labor Organization, 2008). Meaningful work can be seen as aspirational, though no less important (Blustein et al., 2023). There is a dynamic influence between work and mental health, and there is a strong correlation between work satisfaction and overall well-being (Blustein et al., 2019; Robertson, 2013a, 2013b). Despite this understanding of the important role of work in people's lives, there are continued calls within the discipline to address more directly the issues of work and career as they relate to mental health and well-being (Blustein et al., 2019; Hudson Breen & Lawrence, 2021). Attention to this interplay between experiences of work and mental health is important to understanding factors that might contribute to gambling-related harms.

Socioeconomic conditions can also shape gambling behaviour, including gambling in the workplace (Binde & Romild, 2020; Hahmann et al., 2021). Gambling and gambling disorder tend to be higher among working-class occupational groups, such as people with transportation jobs, shop salespersons, and work that may be less likely to have properties of decent or meaningful work (Binde & Romild, 2020; Hahmann et al., 2021; Revheim & Buvik, 2009). Even when the probability of financial gains is low (e.g., lotteries), gambling can provide individuals with an opportunity to fantasize about what could be done with the prize money, and how it could allow them to improve their quality of life (Beckert & Lutter, 2013). Other potential explanations for why some individuals might be more likely to gamble in the workplace than others include a stress-coping model, which holds that individuals gamble in an effort to cope with stressful working conditions (Buchanan et al., 2020; Cowlishaw et al., 2020; Hing & Breen, 2008). Gambling as a form of escape might be especially attractive for individuals who experience monotony or feelings of meaninglessness in their work lives, with studies showing that job satisfaction and perceived meaningfulness are associated with lower rates of gambling and gambling problems (Beckert & Lutter, 2013; Wu & Wong, 2008).

Finally, some workplaces might have a culture of gambling together in lotteries, sports, or other

events through office sweepstakes that encourage participation (Binde & Romild, 2020; Griffiths, 2009; Nicoll, 2019). Gambling in groups can have positive social consequences, such as cementing and expanding relationships, and providing a way to participate in a shared group identity, rather than simply an economic opportunity (Guillén et al., 2012). In addition to participating in office pools, individuals can be influenced to gamble by their coworkers' general gambling habits (Beckert & Lutter, 2013; Nicoll, 2019) and a sense of the normalization of gambling through social relationships with colleagues (Russell et al., 2018). When gambling is normalized, encouraged, or hidden within the workplace, it can obscure the issue of missing work to gamble—a "reliable early warning sign" of risk of gambling harms experienced both by those who gamble and others in their relational context (Li et al., 2017, p. 239).

A critical, social constructionist approach is helpful when exploring the phenomenon of workplace gambling, locating gambling behaviour within social contexts and processes that shape meaning, and taking a critical stance towards accepted knowledge (Burr, 1995). A social constructionist understanding of work offers a critical lens to examine the relationship between work and gambling, inviting consideration of how the experience of work is embedded in relational and cultural contexts that shape individuals' meaning-making processes (Schultheiss, 2007), recognizing work as a context through which individuals construct their lives (Richardson, 2012). A social constructionist approach to understanding career lives problematizes traditional understandings of career, which tend to be individualistic and devoid of considerations of culture, gender, and interactions between individuals and their environments (Richardson, 2012; Young & Collin, 2004). In addition, as Richardson (2012) notes, a critical social constructionist perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding work—both paid and unpaid—"as contexts through which people construct lives" (p. 202). In this study, we focus mainly on the context of paid employment, or "market work" as Richardson (2012) defines it, and in turn, market-work relationships as possible social contexts of gambling.

The current lack of knowledge about workplace gambling in Canada is problematic because workplace gambling has the potential for harm to both employees and employers (Griffiths, 2009; Nower, 2003). While the impacts of problem gambling on work responsibilities are well established, less is known specifically about individual experiences of gambling in relation to work. Given the expanded accessibility and complexity of gambling, understanding the nature and implications of workplace gambling is important. Accordingly, this research had three main objectives:

1.0 The first research objective was to understand the nature and consequences of workplace gambling in Canada, including a description of

  1.1 Rates of problem gambling and gambling expenditures among those who gamble at work.

  1.2 Preferred gambling activities and methods (i.e., online vs. in-person gambling, office pools) of workplace gambling.

  1.3 The work-related consequences of workplace gambling.

2.0 Our second research objective was to identify the risk factors associated with workplace gambling, including the potential individual-level socio-demographic variables, as well as work-related factors such as income, access to internet gambling, job satisfaction, and field of occupation.

3.0 The third research objective was to better understand individuals' motivations for gambling in the workplace.

Methods

Given the paucity of literature on workplace gambling and the complexity of the issue, we opted to use a fully integrated mixed-methods design to allow a more holistic approach to this phenomenon, where there is an interdependence between different data sources throughout the research process (Creamer, 2017, 2020; Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019; Poth, 2018). Mixed-methods research is well suited to examining the complexity of gambling experiences, moments, and spaces, and how these overlap with work. Gambling-related harms, such as relationship difficulties and job loss, are difficult to measure (Hilbrecht et al., 2020), therefore the integrated mixed-methods approach offers further opportunity to explore the experiences of individuals who gamble at work through the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative data sources.

We conducted an initial cross-sectional survey through Leger, which hosts Canada's largest online panel. While this approach has limited generalizability in terms of population prevalence, online panels are advantageous when conducting research with special sub-populations for whom there is an expectation of low base rate (Mellis & Bickel, 2020). Quantitative survey data were collected over a period of 15 days, with Leger reporting that 15.7% of overall panel participants were eligible to complete the survey (endorsed gambling in the past year). Leger participants received a minimum guaranteed incentive of $1.00 per survey, increasing based on overall survey length, as well as eligibility for additional monthly draw incentives. Initial quantitative analysis was conducted to support purposive sampling for in-depth interviews to elaborate on the quantitative results.

Figure 1 presents a visual of the dynamic, integrated design (Creamer, 2020). Fully integrated analysis includes the use of crossover mixed analysis, where both qualitative and quantitative data are recognized as socially constructed information derived from experiences, and analysis and interpretation techniques from one tradition can thus inform and enhance interpretations of other forms of information (Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019). This includes attention to integration from conceptualization and planning through implementation and dissemination (Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2019; Poth, 2018). Integration of findings is represented here through the use of joint displays of findings (Guetterman et al., 2021; McCrudden et al., 2021).

A subset of survey participants who reported gambling at work and who met criteria for a DSM-5 diagnosis of gambling disorder were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews about their experiences of workplace gambling. While gambling-related harms can be experienced by those who do not meet the criteria for gambling disorder (Hilbrecht et al., 2020), this purposive sampling was in line with the integrated mixed-methods approach, allowing for the selection of interview participants who would be able to speak more extensively about their experiences of workplace gambling and gambling-related harms, given the particular focus in the survey questions on work and relationship harms. Interviews were conducted in English by telephone or video call and lasted between 35–55 minutes. The interviewers provided the informed consent information and interview questions ahead of time, and participants were offered a thirty dollar honorarium. Institutional ethics approval was obtained prior to beginning data collection.

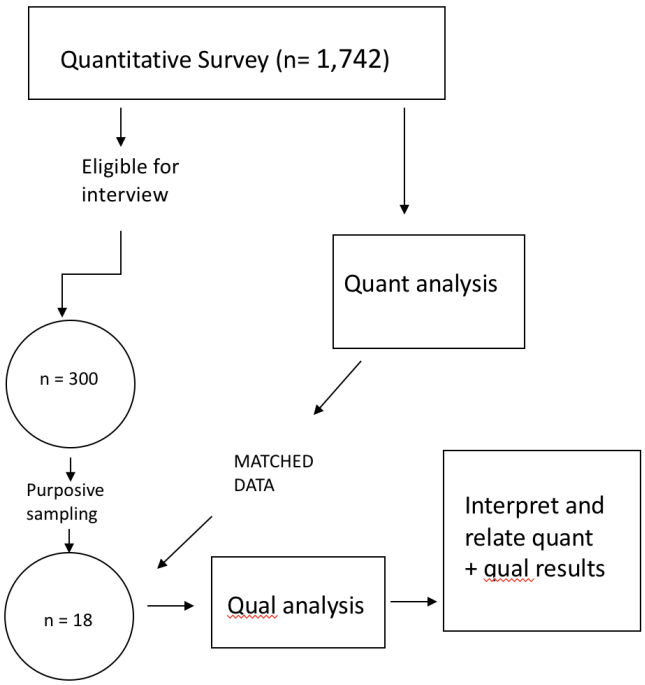


Figure 1. Mixed-methods design.

Participants

Adults aged 18 and older were invited to participate in the survey if they were employed full-time, had access to the internet while working, and participated in non-lottery gambling activities at least once per month. A total sample of n = 1,742 participants responded to the survey, with 38.0% from Quebec, 30.7% Ontario, 9.8% Alberta, 7.6% British Columbia, 4.3% Manitoba, 2.4% New Brunswick, 2.4% Newfoundland, 2.5% Nova Scotia, 1.8% Saskatchewan, and 0.5% Prince Edward Island. This distribution is broadly proportional to the population of Canada. The survey was available in French or English, Canada's official languages. Other sociodemographic information about the survey sample is shown in Table 1.

For qualitative interviews, we sampled n = 18 participants who reported gambling in the workplace and endorsed the DSM-5 criteria for gambling disorder, as we expected that they would be best able to deepen our understanding of both the overall experience of workplace gambling as well as potential risks and harms. Among the 18 participants, 83% were male (15 individuals), with a mean age of 42.5 years. Fifty percent were from Ontario (9 individuals), with 22% from Quebec (4), and with the remaining 28% (5) from Alberta, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia. In terms of occupations, 22% were employed in sales and services (4 individuals); 22% trades, transport, and equipment operators (4); 22% business, finance, and administration (4); 17% management (3); with the remaining 17% in other occupations including social, community, and government services (3). Interview participants provided a pseudonym, and all personal and employment identifiers were removed from the qualitative data to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

Survey Measures

All participants provided demographic information and workplace characteristics, including field of occupation, whether employed in the gambling industry, and computer and mobile phone access. Job satisfaction was

assessed using a single job satisfaction item that has good reliability and validity (Dolbier et al., 2005). Overall gambling was assessed, including gambling expenditures, online versus non-online gambling, and gambling disorder status. The severity of gambling behaviours was assessed using both the DSM-5 criteria (APA, 2013) and the Problem and Pathological Gambling Measure (PPGM) (Williams & Volberg, 2010, 2014). The PPGM is a newer instrument compared to other measures of problem gambling (Williams & Volberg, 2010, 2014). The PPGM demonstrates equivalent internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .76 – .81) and one month test–retest reliability (r = .78), but better overall classification accuracy (kappa = .96) compared to the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (kappa = .56), DSM-IV (kappa = .68), or South Oaks Gambling Screen (kappa = .62) (Williams & Volberg, 2014). DSM-5 criteria were used to identify clinical diagnosis and to establish inclusion criteria for the second stage of the project; whereas the PPGM was used to evaluate the linear nature of workplace gambling, if any, among recreational, at-risk, problem gamblers, and pathological gamblers. Gambling motives were assessed using an adaptation of the Gambling Motives Questionnaire (Stewart & Zack, 2008).

Participants reporting that they gambled with their own money while working completed an additional survey of workplace gambling behaviour, including whether gambling was part of an office pool with the intent to share winnings, methods of accessing gambling at work, and type of gambling activities. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate adverse consequences due to gambling at work (discipline or termination), and the main reason for engaging in gambling at work for each gambling activity. Participants could select from eight main reasons for each gambling activity, which were categorized into four motivations: 1) Social (to be social; to be a part of a group; 2) Avoidance (to avoid tasks; boredom); 3) Gambling-centric (it's exciting; I like the feeling); or 4) Coping (to target my worries; it helps when I am feeling nervous or depressed). Participants could select multiple motivations for workplace gambling.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview questions included elaboration on work satisfaction, experiences of gambling at work, and perceptions of the interplay between work and gambling experiences. Interviewers followed up participant responses with various prompts to clarify and expand on ideas. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed prior to analysis.

Analysis

Research Objective 1.0: Nature of Workplace Gambling

We used counts and percentages to describe the full sample of 1,742 survey participants, including their sociodemographic characteristics, workplace variables, and indicators of gambling severity (Table 1). The sample was stratified between workplace gamblers and non-workplace gamblers. To address Research Objective 1.1, we assessed the strength of the association between workplace gambling and the indicators of gambling (DSM gambling disorder, PPGM status, and gambling expenditures). For DSM-5 gambling disorder status, we used a binary logistic regression (unadjusted) with workplace gambling (yes/no) as the outcome and DSM-5 gambling disorder status (yes/no) as the independent variable. For PPGM status, we used a multinomial logistic regression (unadjusted) with workplace gambling (yes/no) and gambling severity level (recreational, at-risk, problem, pathological) as the independent variable. The recreational level was the reference category in the resulting odds ratios. Lastly, to assess the statistical significance of the difference in median gambling expenditures between workplace gamblers and non-workplace gamblers, we used a Mann–Whitney U test.

To address Research Objective 1.2, we graphically displayed the percentage of respondents who engaged in each gambling activity at work (Figure 2), the percentage of respondents who used each method of access to gambling at work (Figure 3), and the number and percentage of gambling activities that were part of office pools (Figure 4). To assess whether significant differences existed in the proportion of each gambling activity that were used in office pools, we used chi-squared tests.

To address Research Objective 1.3, we described the number and percentage of survey respondents who reported ever being disciplined at work for gambling, ever lost their job because of gambling, or who would face discipline if their employer were fully aware of their gambling in the workplace.

Research Objective 2.0: Risk Factors

We conducted bivariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses to identify potential risk factors for workplace gambling. We conducted preliminary bivariate analyses using a series of binary logistic regressions (unadjusted) that can be found in the Appendix. Next, we conducted a multivariate analysis to distinguish whether associations of some potential risk factors with workplace gambling were an artifact of their correlation with other variables that were primarily responsible for the relationship. If risk factors were found to have a robust association with workplace gambling, we interpreted this as strengthening the evidence for potential causal contribution. The potential risk factors selected for entry into the multivariate analysis included sociodemographic characteristics that have been previously associated with gambling disorder, such as male gender, age, non-married, and lower levels of education and income (Dowling et al., 2017). Potential work-related risk factors included being employed in the gambling industry (Guttentag et al., 2012; Hing & Gainsbury, 2013), as well as having computer and mobile device access at work due to the increased access to internet gambling they afford. We included job satisfaction, which has shown to be a protective factor against gambling disorder (Beckert & Lutter, 2013; Wu & Wong, 2008). Finally, we included the sector of occupation to investigate whether the conditions of certain job types might contribute to workplace gambling.

All regression analyses were conducted using Stata 17. The outcome (workplace gambling) was missing for 12 (0.7%) cases that were excluded from the analysis, leaving a total sample size of n = 1,730. Multiple imputation using chained equations was used to account for other missing data (Statacorp, 2021). All variables were used as predictor variables in the imputations, and 30 iterations were used. The variables with the highest proportion of missing data were PPGM status (5.8%), DSM-5 Gambling Disorder status (4.7%), income (3.9%), and percent of monthly gambling online (2.7%).

Research Objective 3.0: Understanding Motivations for Workplace Gambling

To describe participants' motivations for gambling at work, we graphically presented the percentage of respondents who endorsed each gambling motivation (social, avoidance, gambling-centric, or coping) for each of the 10 gambling activities (Figure 5). We used chi-squared tests to assess whether the differences in motivations for each gambling activity were statistically significant.

Integration of Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings were integrated to illuminate and expand on three topics identified from the quantitative survey data: 1) the consequences of workplace gambling (Research Objective 1.3); 2) the influence of job satisfaction on workplace gambling (related to Research Objective 2.0); and 3) the motivations for workplace gambling (Research Objective 3.0).

Qualitative analyses were conducted inductively using the six-step thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2021) with NVivo 12

software. When coding for the topic of gambling motivations, the coding was partially "top-down" because we initially grouped the participants' motivations for gambling at work into predetermined categories (social, avoidance, gambling-centric, coping). However, within each of these broad categories, we used an inductive approach to generate more detailed themes. The second author conducted the coding and generated a provisional hierarchy of themes and subthemes, which were reviewed by the first author for conceptual coherence and credibility. In line with our mixed-methods approach, qualitative findings were presented narratively alongside the quantitative findings. For the topic of gambling motivations only, we integrated the quantitative and qualitative finding using a joint display (Figure 5). In terms of qualitative data, we used the following descriptors: if 3–4 participants described a theme, we use "some" or "several"; if more than 4 but fewer than half participants have described a theme, we use the term "many"; if more than half of participants but fewer than 14 (<75% of participants) shared a theme, we use "majority"; and if the theme was shared by more than 75% of participants, we use "most."

Results

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics and workplace characteristics of survey participants.

Participant characteristics	Workplace gambling (n = 754)	Non-workplace gambling only (n = 976)	Total (n = 1,730)‡
Sociodemographic characteristics			
Age (n = 1,721)			
Mean (standard deviation)	37.5 (10.8)	42.8 (12.2)	39.0 (11.9)
Male gender (n = 1,729)	246 (32.6%)	400 (41.0%)	1,083 (62.6%)
Married / common-law	519 (68.8%)	595 (61.0%)	1,114 (64.4%)
Education (n = 1,725)			
Did not complete high school	9 (1.2%)	19 (2.0%)	28 (1.6%)
Completed high school	82 (10.9%)	189 (19.4%)	271 (15.7%)
Some university / college	119 (15.8%)	149 (15.3%)	268 (15.5%)
Completed university / college	424 (56.4%)	494 (50.8%)	918 (53.2%)
Professional or graduate degree↡	118 (15.7%)	122 (12.5%)	240 (13.9%)
Income (n = 1,662)			
$0–49,999	194 (26.1%)	285 (31.0%)	479 (28.8%)
$50,000–$89,000	320 (43.1%)	379 (41.2%)	699 (40.4%)
$90,000+	228 (30.7%)	256 (27.8%)	484 (28.0%)
Work-related factors			
Computer access at work	711 (94.3%)	863 (88.4%)	1,574 (91.0%)
Mobile device access at work (n = 1,728)	732 (97.2%)	900 (92.3%)	1,632 (94.3%)
Participant satisfied with job (n = 1,727)	491 (65.3%)	701 (71.9%)	1,192 (69.0%)
Gambling industry (n = 1,719)	54 (7.3%)	14 (1.4%)	68 (4.0%)

Occupation (n = 1,706)			
Art, culture, recreation, and sport	17 (2.3%)	20 (2.1%)	37 (2.2%)
Business, finance, and administration	122 (16.4%)	164 (17.0%)	286 (16.8%)
Education, law, and social and government services	103 (13.9%)	151 (15.7%)	254 (14.9%)
Health	62 (8.3%)	92 (9.6%)	154 (9.0%)
Management	115 (15.5%)	113 (11.7%)	228 (13.4%)
Manufacturing and utilities	63 (8.5%)	73 (7.6%)	136 (7.9%)
Natural resources, agriculture, and related production	28 (3.8%)	21 (2.2%)	49 (2.8%)
Sales and services	98 (13.2%)	165 (17.1%)	263 (15.4%)
Sciences	71 (9.6%)	65 (6.7%)	136 (8.0%)
Trades, transport, and equipment operators	64 (8.6%)	99 (10.3%)	163 (9.6%)
Indicators of gambling severity			
Gambling expense per month			
Median (interquartile range)	$150 ($70–$330)	$105 ($50–$230)	$120 ($60–$276)
Range	$0–$43,400	$0–$5,150	$0–$43,400
DSM-5 Gambling Disorder (n=1,649)	254 (36.1%)	73 (7.7%)	327 (19.8%)
PPGM classification (n = 1,630)			
Recreational gambler	183 (26.4%)	531 (56.6%)	714 (43.8%)
At-risk gambler	213 (30.8%)	284 (30.3%)	497 (30.5%)
Problem gambler	52 (7.5%)	56 (6.0%)	108 (6.6%)
Pathological gambler	224 (35.3%)	67 (7.1%)	311 (19.1%)

‡ n = 1,730 is the total for each variable unless otherwise specified. The total for each variable may change due to missing data.
↡ Includes law, medicine, dentistry, Master's, or PhD

1.1 Problem Gambling and Gambling Expenditures

Research Objective 1.1 was to describe the rates of gambling disorder and gambling expenditures among workplace gamblers. Among all the survey respondents included for the analysis (n = 1,730), 754 (43.5%) reported gambling in the workplace in the past 12 months. People who reported workplace gambling were more likely to endorse items related to gambling problems and report higher monthly gambling expenditures. In the binary logistic regression analysis of DSM-5 gambling disorder, people who gambled in the workplace had 6.7 times higher odds of meeting criteria for DSM-5 gambling disorder compared to those who did not gamble in the workplace (Odds Ratio (OR): 6.72; 95% Confidence Interval: [5.07, 8.92]; P<0.001). Similarly, in our multinomial logistic regression analysis of PPGM, people who gambled in the workplace had 2.2 times higher odds of being at-risk gamblers compared to recreational gamblers (OR: 2.2; [1.70, 2.78]; P<0.001). The same analysis also showed that people who gamble in the workplace have 2.7 times the odds of being

problem gamblers (OR: 2.73; [1.78, 4.07]; P<0.001) and 10.6 times higher odds of being pathological gamblers (OR: 10.60; [7.69, 14.53]; P<0.001) compared to recreational gamblers. Finally, in terms of total gambling expenses, the median gambling expense for workplace gamblers ($150) was significantly greater than for non-workplace gamblers ($105) (P<0.001 from Mann–Whitney *U* test).

1.2 Gambling Activities and Access in the Workplace

Research Objective 1.2 was to describe workplace gamblers' preferred gambling activities and methods. Among people who gambled in the workplace (n = 754), the most common gambling activities reported were lottery (45%), sports betting (43%), and scratch and win (28%) (Figure 2). The most frequent method of access was the internet (76%), followed by mobile phone (28%), and in-person gambling (23%) (Figure 3). Participating in office pools was common among people who gamble in the workplace, with 56% reporting participation in any office pool (Figure 4.). Raffles and lotteries were significantly more likely to be played as part of an office pool, whereas Video Lottery Terminals were less likely to be played through an office pool (Figure 4).

1.3 Work-Related Consequences of Workplace Gambling

Research Objective 1.3 was to describe the consequences of workplace gambling. Among people who reported gambling during work (n = 742), 16% (117 individuals) reported being disciplined for gambling at work at least once in their life, and 13% (83 individuals) reported that they had lost their job at least once in their life as a result of gambling at work. Most of the 83 individuals who reported ever losing their job fell into the pathological gambler category (81%), compared to problem gamblers (6.0%), at-risk gamblers (9.6%), or recreational gamblers (3.6%). Forty-six percent reported that they would face discipline if their employer or supervisor were fully aware of their gambling in the workplace.

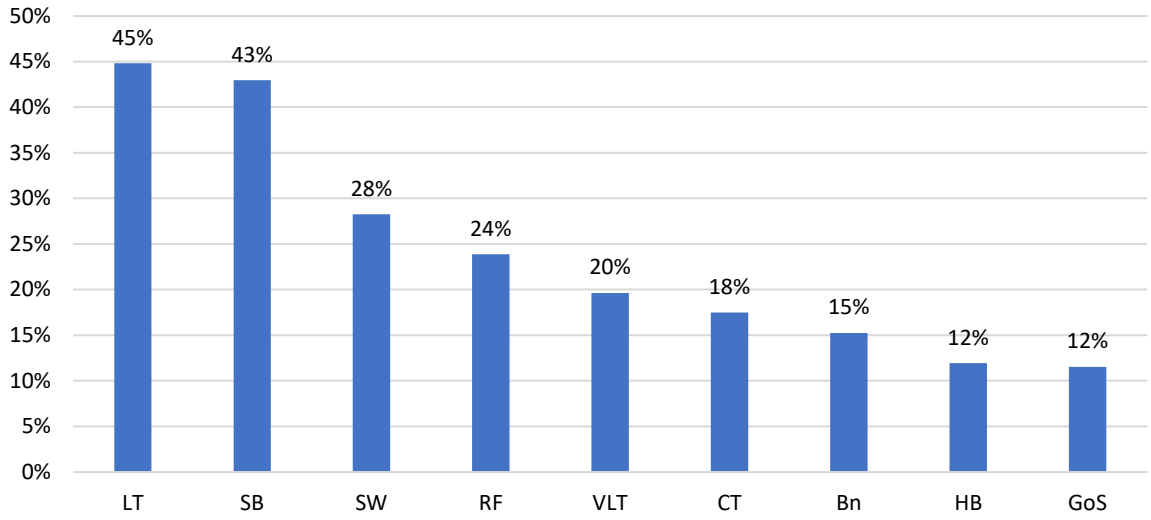


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents who engaged in each gambling activity among those that reported gambling during work in the past 12 months (n = 754).
LT= Lottery, SB= Sports Betting, SW= Scratch & Win, RF= Raffles & Fundraisers, VLT= Video Lottery Terminals, CT= Card & Table Games, Bn= Bingo, HB= Horse Betting, GoS= Betting on Games of Skill

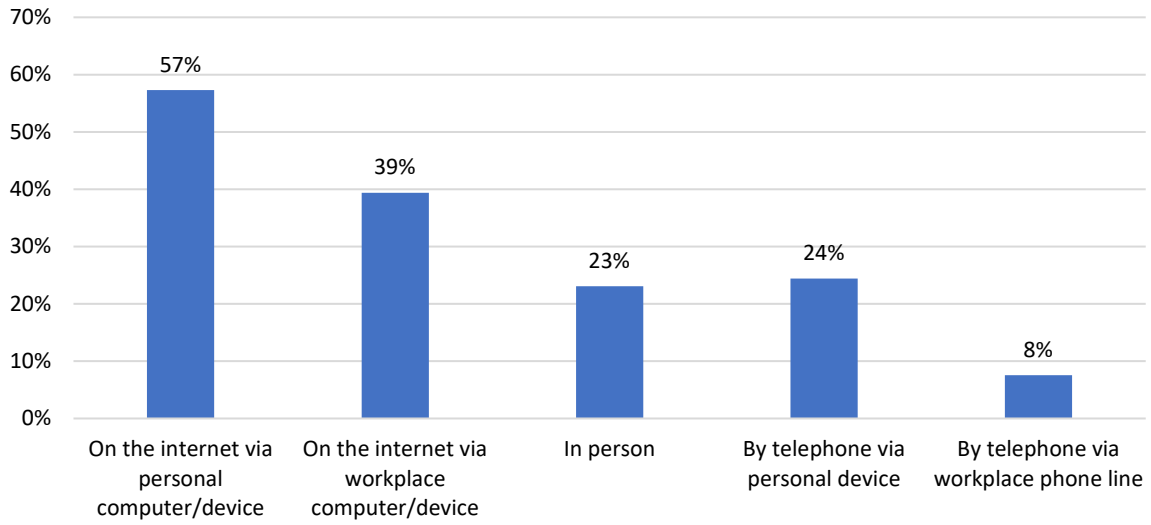
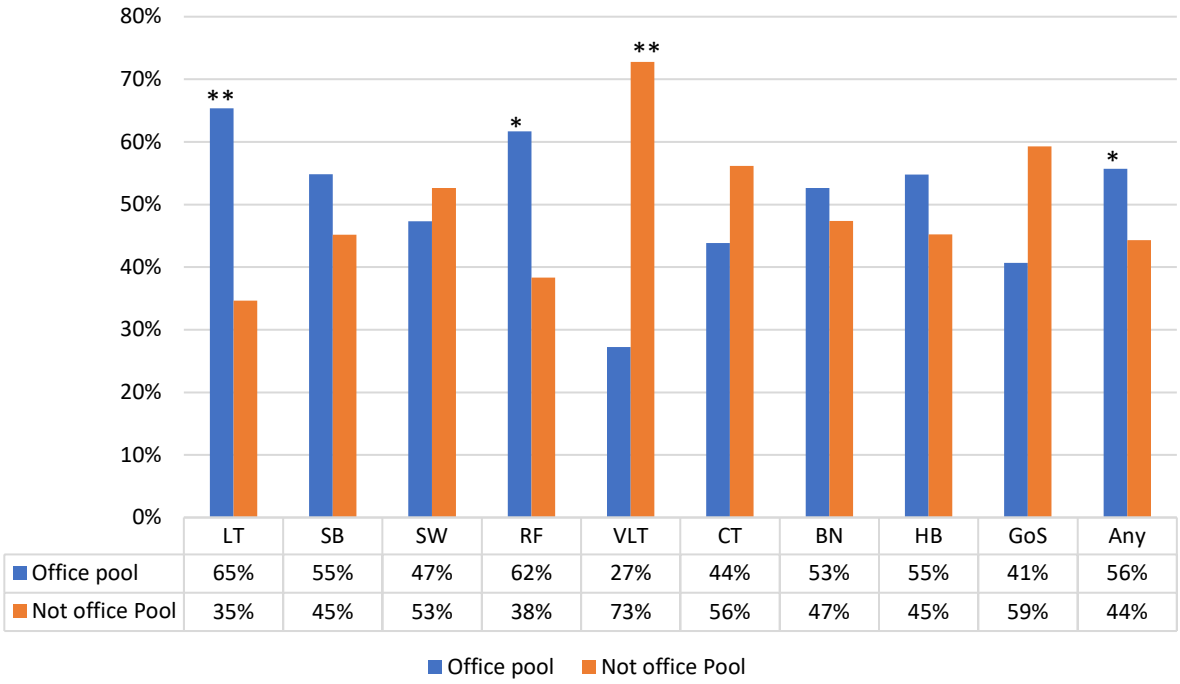


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents who used each method of access to gamble among those that reported gambling at work in the past 12 months (n = 754).



	LT	SB	SW	RF	VLT	CT	BN	HB	GoS	Any
Office pool	65%	55%	47%	62%	27%	44%	53%	55%	41%	56%
Not office Pool	35%	45%	53%	38%	73%	56%	47%	45%	59%	44%

Figure 4. Number and percentage of gambling activities that were part of office pools among those that reported gambling at work in the past 12 months (n = 754).

LT= Lottery, SB= Sports Betting, SW= Scratch & Win, RF= Raffles & Fundraisers, VLT= Video Lottery Terminals, CT= Card & Table Games, Bn= Bingo, HB= Horse Betting, GoS= Betting on Games of Skill, Any= Reported participating in an office pool for at least one gambling activity

*Chi-square test of equivalence significant at P <0.05

**Chi-square test of equivalence significant at P <0.001

In qualitative interviews, many participants described how gambling in the workplace can lead to reduced productivity due to distractions and lost work time. For example, participants described being frequently distracted by checking scores of games they had bet on, while others were preoccupied with online gambling and experienced frequent thoughts or urges to return to gambling websites. This preoccupation was experienced by Jessica:

> *Well, I'm actually anxious because I'm edgy, cause I'm like "I want to keep playing," but I can't… But while I'm doing my work, I'm thinking of the game I just left. The game I just stopped playing, and I want to get back to it.* (Jessica)

The majority of participants also spoke about how gambling impacted their work time. For many, this was because they took a gambling break that extended for longer than intended, which left some of them feeling like they were stealing time from their employer by being off task. Many other participants stated that they were less efficient and took longer to complete tasks, their work was of poor quality because they were rushed, or they had to stay overtime to finish their work tasks because they spent too much time gambling. For example, Jordan felt he had not been contributing to the best of his ability due to gambling: "*I'm obviously not contributing to the best of my ability, right? … obviously, things take longer to get done; they may not get done to the best quality that they could be done at*" (Jordan).

The majority of participants also described various emotional consequences of workplace gambling, including stress, guilt, and shame. People felt guilty and ashamed for wasting time at work, neglecting their responsibilities, and taking advantage of their employer. Some participants were also worried about getting caught and gaining a negative reputation among their co-workers and supervisors. As a result, they tried to hide their gambling as much as possible. Several people also expressed fear of facing possible reprimands from their employer, including potential job loss. For example, Ron described feeling anxious, guilty, and ashamed of his workplace gambling:

> *You don't want to be, like, a dishonest employee or anything, right? So it feels, like, crappy and … you always feel nervous, cause you're doing something you're not supposed to be doing during work, and, I don't know. It lowers your self-esteem.* (Ron)

2.0 Risk Factors for Workplace Gambling

Our second overall research objective was to identify risk factors associated with workplace gambling. In the multivariate analysis, sociodemographic characteristics that were associated with workplace gambling included younger age (Adjusted Odds Ratio (AOR) per year older = 0.96; 95% Confidence Interval: [0.95, 0.97]), male gender (AOR = 1.37; [1.09, 1.72]), and married / common-law status (AOR = 1.48; [1.19, 1.85]) (Table 2). While education-level was found to contribute to the model significantly overall, none of the individual education levels were found to be significantly different from "did not complete high school" (Table 2). Income was also not significantly associated with the odds of workplace gambling (Table 2).

Work-related factors associated with workplace gambling included working in the gambling industry (AOR = 4.37; [2.35, 8.16]), having computer access at work (AOR = 2.15; [1.45, 3.19]), and having mobile device access at work (AOR = 2.48; [1.48, 4.17]) (Table 2). Although several fields of occupation were associated with workplace gambling in the bivariate analysis shown in the Appendix (i.e., management; sales and services; and trades, transport, and equipment operators), these associations became non-significant after controlling for confounding variables in the multivariate analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Multivariate analysis of sociodemographic characteristics and work-related factors associated with gambling in the workplace, with multiple imputation.

Sociodemographic characteristics	Adjusted Odds Ratio [95% Confidence Interval]	P-value
Age	0.96 [0.95, 0.97]	<0.001***
Male gender	1.37 [1.09, 1.72]	0.006**
Married / common-law	1.48 [1.19, 1.85]	0.001**
Education		Overall: 0.03*
Did not complete high school	Reference	
Completed high school	1.11 [0.46, 2.68]	0.81
Some university / college	1.94 [0.81, 4.69]	0.14
University / college	1.76 [0.75, 4.16]	0.20
Professional or graduate degree↡	1.83 [0.74, 4.50]	0.19
Income		Overall: 0.82
$0–49,999	Reference	
$50,000–$89,000	1.07 [0.82, 1.40]	0.62
$90,000+	1.10 [0.81, 1.50]	0.54
Gambling industry	4.37 [2.35, 8.16]	<0.001***
Computer access at work	2.15 [1.45, 3.19]	<0.001***
Mobile device access at work	2.48 [1.48, 4.17]	0.001***
Satisfied with job	0.72 [0.57, 0.89]	0.006**
Art, culture, recreation, and sport	0.86 [0.40, 1.86]	0.71
Business, finance, and administration	0.88 [0.57, 1.36]	0.56
Education, law, and social, and government services	0.80 [0.51, 1.26]	0.35
Health	0.72 [0.44, 1.20]	0.21
Management	1.09 [0.69, 1.71]	0.72
Manufacturing and utilities	1.20 [0.73, 1.97]	0.48
Natural resources, agriculture, and related production	1.23 [0.62, 2.45]	0.56
Sales and services	0.74 [0.48, 1.14]	0.18
Sciences	0.92 [0.55, 1.53]	0.75

* Statistically significant with P < 0.05
** Statistically significant with P < 0.01
*** Statistically significant with P < 0.001
↡ Includes law, medicine, dentistry, Master's, or PhD
Note: Trades, transport, and equipment operators omitted due to collinearity

The multivariate analysis showed that job satisfaction was associated with lower odds of gambling in the workplace (AOR = 0.72; [0.57, 0.89]) (Table 2). This association was consistent with the qualitative findings, in which some participants expressed that a lack of fulfillment can contribute to workplace gambling. Gambling was especially common for a majority of participants who felt there was not enough work to keep them busy. A majority also expressed that when they did not feel their work was challenging, interesting, or intrinsically rewarding, feelings of monotony could lead them to gamble during work to seek money or excitement. As Ron described:

> *If you don't feel satisfied in a job, that—for myself, anyway—could lead to more gambling. And I think, personally, if I was in some job that I felt kind of a high at every day, you know, and I had good income? … [For example], if I was dedicated and working at NASA all day, you know, the hell with gambling! … So, I think gamblers, we're always seeking kind of excitement and reward and that's, if we're not getting that in our job, we could go back into gambling.* (Ron)

Additionally, a lack of recognition at work, such as a lack of career advancement or pay raises, left some individuals feeling unmotivated and uninvested in their job. These participants felt like there was no reason not to gamble during work time, given that their hard work was not rewarded anyway:

> *[In] my mind—it's not like I'm sacrificing or negatively affecting my job prospects [by gambling at work], right? Or my ability to advance at the company… when I was more invested at work in the position, those prospects or opportunities weren't presented either.* (Jordan)

This sense that lack of work satisfaction can feed into motivations for gambling is important, as it highlights the interconnected nature of work and mental health and the importance of understanding the mutually influencing and co-constructed nature of experiences of work and gambling.

3.0 Gambling Motivations

Research Objective 3.0 was to better understand individuals' motivations for gambling in the workplace. Survey respondents were able to select multiple motivations for each of the nine gambling activities. The most frequently reported motivation for gambling during work was gambling-centric motivations (52%), followed by social (44%), avoidance (34%), and coping (12%) (Figure 5). The mean number of different motivations endorsed was 1.9 (mode = 2). Gambling-centric was the most commonly reported motivation across all gambling activities, except for raffle and lottery, for which social motivations were highest (Figure 5). Motivations described by participants in the qualitative interview helped to expand some of the responses from the survey. Within the avoidance motivation, participants described how they gambled to avoid work tasks because they wanted to take a mental break from work or to give themselves a reward for working hard. This was often done opportunistically, such as choosing to delay work that wasn't urgent anyway.

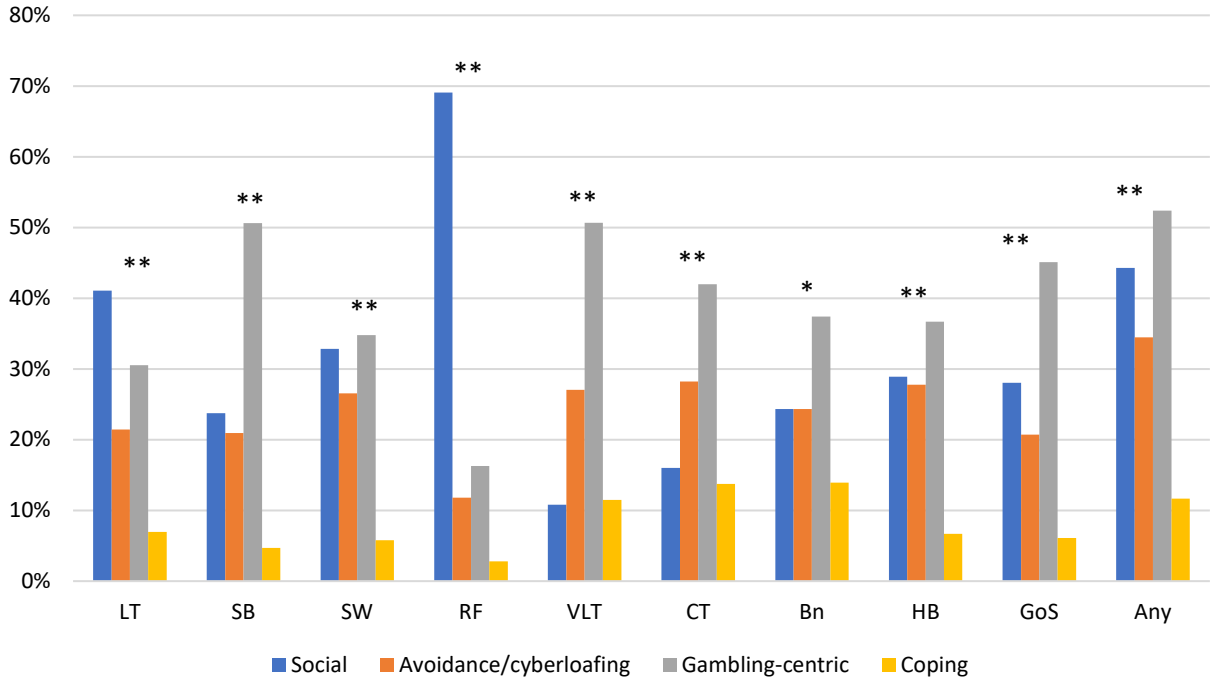


Figure 5. Number and percentage of the main motivations for gambling activities that respondents engaged in during work (n = 754), with qualitative data presented for elaboration.

RF= Raffles & Fundraisers, SW= Scratch & Win, LT= Lottery, SB= Sports Betting, HB= Horse Betting, Bn= Bingo, CT= Card & Table Games, VLT= Video Lottery Terminals, GoS= Betting on Games of Skill, Any= Reported this motivation for at least one gambling activity

* Chi-square test of equivalence among motivations within each significant at P <0.05

** Chi-square test of equivalence among motivations within each activity significant at P <0.001

Social	**Choices on survey:** a) To be social b) To be part of a group									
	LT 41%	**SB** 24%	**SW** 33%	**RF** 69%	**VLT** 11%	**CT** 16%	**Bn** 24%	**HB** 29%	**GoS** 28%	**Any** 44%
Qualitative analysis **Building social connections at work** • For many, gambling at work can help build connections between co-workers who might not otherwise have much in common. Gambling together can also help build a sense of group cohesion. A majority gamble to be a part of an office pool.					**Exemplar quote** • *"There's camaraderie... If one of the guys is betting ... we sit down and say 'Hey, do you like this game, do you like that game? Oh I don't like that, oh I think this game might be good,' and then we'll go in together... Chances are, we'll go have brunch, watch the game before or after work, we'll go watch the game."* (James)					

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">Peer pressure
• Some participants felt they needed to gamble to be a part of the group, which can be challenging if they are trying to cut down or stop gambling.</td><td colspan="5">Exemplar quote
• "It's very hard to control. Like, you have someone come up and ask you if you wanted to bet on this. I've never said no… You know, [I want to] be part of the group, part of the guy thing." (Bernie)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Avoidance</td><td colspan="9">Choices on survey:
a) To avoid tasks
b) Boredom</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>LT
21%</td><td>SB
21%</td><td>SW
27%</td><td>RF
12%</td><td>VLT
27%</td><td>CT
28%</td><td>Bn
24%</td><td>HB
28%</td><td>GoS
21%</td><td>Any
34%</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Qualitative analysis
Gambling to escape boredom
• Gambling at work can be a way to alleviate boredom and help pass the time for a majority, especially during slow periods when there is little work to be done anyway.</td><td colspan="5">Exemplar quote
• "It's mostly when I have dead time, when I'm up to date with my work and I'm waiting for the second batch of my work to come in, because that's how it is. I gotta wait for something to finish before it gets to me. So, I'm waiting, and I'm waiting, so I'm like—okay, might as well [gamble]." (Jessica)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Taking a break
• A majority conceptualized gambling as a way to avoid doing work temporarily in order to give themselves a needed mental break or a reward after working hard. Participants gambled during scheduled breaks (e.g., lunch time), but also took unscheduled breaks throughout the day. The unscheduled mental breaks were often taken opportunistically, such as when work did not need to be done right away.
• For many, gambling breaks can become a habit that is initiated automatically. These gambling breaks may be difficult to control and may extend longer than intended, which can cut into work time.</td><td colspan="5">Exemplar quotes
• "Yeah, exactly like a break… Like I do find because now there's just so many meetings; especially when I'm in Canada for weeks on end, I find there's a lot of meetings. So, to break it up … let's say I have 45 minutes—I don't really want to invest that into a presentation or something—maybe I'll just close my office door and go on one of my [gambling] websites." (Harry)
• "I kind of started by just sitting there and just getting bored one day and doodling around with the cell phone. And one thing led to the next—next thing I knew, I was on an online gambling site, and I basically played that for a few minutes, and then it kind of just escalated from there. I went from minutes to like a good hour." (Peter)</td></tr>
</table>

Gambling-Centric	**Choices on survey:** a) Because it's exciting b) Because I like the feeling									
	LT 31%	**SB** 51%	**SW** 35%	**RF** 16%	**VLT** 51%	**CT** 42%	**Bn** 37%	**HB** 37%	**GoS** 45%	**Any** 52%

Qualitative analysis	
Excitement • Gambling to achieve a thrill or adrenaline rush, especially when the stakes are very high.	**Exemplar quote** • "*There was always—I don't know if it's really adrenaline or what the chemical is in your body, but … it was always fun … It was exciting, in a negative way, there was a danger element if you lost.*" (Eric)
Making money • Making money was cited as a primary motivation for the majority of participants, including some individuals who conceptualized gambling as their "second job" that enabled them to earn extra money while at work. Many others experienced a negative feedback loop, in which they were motivated to win back their losses (i.e., chasing losses).	**Exemplar quote** • *"So basically, I work … it's a job. It's my second job. And on the weekends, that's my job."* (James)
Satisfy gambling urge • Individuals can develop a preoccupation with gambling such that they are motivated to gamble to satisfy a craving or an urge.	**Exemplar quote** • "*It [gambling] could be just sort of a 'got [an] urge, you know, and better scratch the itch' sorta thing.*" (Ron)
Gambling as an enjoyable activity • Many participants thought of gambling as an enjoyable hobby. As long as it is under control, it is like other forms of entertainment or pastime. Among people who bet on sports, using their analytic skills to predict game outcomes offered a sense of achievement.	**Exemplar quote** • "*It was fun… some people like to see movies, they are movie fans, okay? I was a gambling fan.*" (Beth)

Coping	Choices on survey: a) To forget my worries b) Because it helps when I am feeling nervous or depressed									
	LT 7%	**SB** 5%	**SW** 6%	**RF** 3%	**VLT** 11%	**CT** 14%	**Bn** 14%	**HB** 7%	**GoS** 6%	**Any** 12%
Qualitative analysis **Managing stress** • Many individuals may gamble to help escape their work-related stress. Others may gamble to help them relax after a particularly busy or stressful period of work.					**Exemplar quote** • "*It was a big stress-buster for me… for a moment, I'm happy or relieved because it was helping me to forget the reasons why I am stressed. So during work times, it was helping me.*" (Michael)					

Additionally, participants gave much more detailed and nuanced descriptions of gambling-centric motivations than had been asked in the survey (e.g., "because it's exciting" or "because I like the feeling"). Most participants described how gambling was motivated by making money, with several describing that it was like a second job for them. Among some people who bet on sports, gambling was gratifying because they could use their analytical skills and knowledge to predict games. The majority described feeling that gambling was similar to any other pastime or hobby, such as movies or sports, as long as it was under control. For some who had developed more of a preoccupation with gambling, they were often motivated by the need to satisfy urges or cravings.

Discussion

Given the lack of prior research on experiences of workplace gambling, the role of work-related harms in the DSM diagnosis of gambling disorder (APA, 2013), and the role of both gambling-specific and more general risks and contributing factors to harmful gambling (Hilbrecht et al., 2020), this study explored the nature and characteristics of the issue of work and gambling within a broader population sample. We sought to illuminate individual experiences within the nexus of work and gambling spaces, and to explore how work experiences and gambling experiences are intertwined within the larger socioeconomic context, with a range of potential gambling-related harms. We employed fully integrated mixed methods to gain a broad understanding of both the nature of workplace gambling in Canada and the experiences of individuals who gamble during their working hours, including the types of workplace gambling (Objective 1) as well as the risk factors (Objective 2) and motivations (Objective 3) for workplace gambling. Further, we employed a critical social constructionist lens to explore the co-constructed nature of gambling in the workplace. The integrated findings offer a deeper understanding of the nuanced experiences of workplace gambling, including the ways relational contexts and work environments shape gambling behaviours, the dynamic interplay between job satisfaction and gambling, and how experiences of workplace gambling include both perceived harms and benefits.

Workplace Gambling in Context

Overall, our findings highlight the importance of examining how workplace gambling is shaped by environment and social context. Consistent with the framework for harmful gambling factors, this includes an understanding of how workplaces expose individuals to gambling risk and harms, as

well as considering how specific gambling activities can play a role in the production of workplace gambling and its attendant harms (Hilbrecht et al., 2020). Several environmental factors, including working in the gambling industry and having access to online gambling through computer or mobile device, were significantly associated with workplace gambling. Additionally, the main route of access was through personal devices. This is consistent with previous research, which highlighted the erosion of non-gambling spaces by smartphone use (Hing et al., 2022; Hing et al., 2023; Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2021). The ubiquity of online gambling means that there is greater overlap between work spaces and gambling spaces, as the workplace becomes a gambling space that contributes to engagement in gambling for both gambling-centric and social motives.

Our findings also highlight the important role of social context in shaping workplace gambling. For many participants, gambling at work was described as a social activity—a way to connect and be included in workplace groups. As Nicoll (2019) notes, gambling may offer a "valuable and reliable joining function" (p. 137) that facilitates social cohesion. Raffles and fundraising and lottery were the most common gambling activities associated with social motivations, and they were often accessed through office pools. Additionally, even though participants tended to name more gambling-centric motives for sports betting, the social influence of sports betting was also clear in the qualitative data. Specifically, participants described sports betting as a common topic of conversation that led to social bonds, such as watching games together and sharing knowledge that informed the placement of bets. For many, sports betting was seen as a normalized part of workplace conversations about and enjoyment of sports, highlighting the role of workplace environment and relationships in shaping workplace gambling and the potential role of colleagues in influencing participation in gambling (McGee, 2020).

In addition to social influences on gambling, working conditions and job satisfaction can also shape engagement with gambling. Several participants described how gambling might serve as a means of avoidance or a way of coping with challenging aspects of work. This was consistent with stress-coping models of gambling, in which gambling is conceptualized as a strategy to escape stress (Buchanan et al., 2020). For example, in one grounded theory study of gambling involvement during stressful life events, Holdsworth et al. (2015) found that individuals who were already experiencing gambling problems were more apt to turn to gambling as a coping method during times of adversity.

While prior studies have shown that job dissatisfaction and lack of perceived meaning are associated with greater gambling problems (Beckert & Lutter, 2013; Wu & Wong, 2008), our finding that job satisfaction is linked to gambling within the workplace is novel. Given the cross-sectional design of this study, it is difficult to determine the directionality of the relationship between job satisfaction and workplace gambling. It is possible that workplace gambling contributes to job dissatisfaction, and vice versa. However, the qualitative findings suggested that, when participants lacked work that was challenging, interesting, or intrinsically rewarding, many chose to gamble during work to seek money or excitement. For these participants, the workplace could become a site productive of gambling behaviour, as they sought to cope with a lack of purpose or meaning in their work. In some cases, workplace gambling was seen as a form of resistance within a work situation that lacked the qualities of decent or meaningful work (Blustein et al., 2023). For instance, one participant felt justified in gambling at work because their prior attempts at being more engaged had gone unrecognized and unrewarded.

It is important to note that not all participants explicitly connected their workplace gambling with working conditions or job satisfaction. Within the gambling-centric category of

motivation for workplace gambling, some participants explained that they gambled at work for a sense of thrill or excitement. Others likened gambling to a hobby or pastime, or described enjoying sports betting because it involved sophisticated analytic skills in which they could predict outcomes. This was similar to previous qualitative research on motivations for sports betting, in which participants' motivations for gambling included increasing excitement and enjoyment of games, and the perception of control through exercising skills and knowledge about the sport (Killick & Griffiths, 2021). Nevertheless, in the context of a lack of fulfillment or meaning in work, gambling offered many participants a way to escape the monotony of their workplace.

Gambling-Related Risks and Harms

While social motivations for gambling in the workplace represent an opportunity for joining, it is also important to note that gambling in the workplace is not without harm. Similar to Nicoll (2019) and Russell et al. (2018), several participants noted that the social aspects of workplace gambling were not always positive. In some cases, there was a sense of pressure to participate that exacerbated experiences of gambling harms for participants who endorsed problematic gambling behaviours. These participants described gambling primarily to avoid social exclusion. Further, experiencing normalization of gambling in the workplace can also serve to hide the development of gambling problems from family, potentially increasing the harmful impacts on others (Li et al., 2017).

Gambling in the workplace is itself an indication of risk, with those engaging in workplace gambling more likely to endorse items related to harmful gambling and to report higher monthly gambling expenditures. While gambling at work does not necessarily cause gambling disorder, it is a site of interaction with many forms of gambling for which participation can become problematic (Williams et al., 2021). In particular, performance reduction has also been identified as a key consequence of gambling problems and a reliable predictor of work-related harms such as conflict and job loss (Li et al., 2017). The risk of discipline and job loss is significant, as it can contribute to emotional experiences of fear and shame. As well, the potential harms of job loss are felt beyond the individual, to the family members who depend on them financially (Li et al., 2017).

Similar to previous research, participants in this study tended to construct workplace gambling more as an issue of productivity loss, rather than as a threat to their own well-being (Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2021). From a social constructionist perspective, this focus on productivity revealed a neoliberal understanding of workers, with several participants framing workplace gambling as an issue of time theft from an employer perspective. This finding highlights how moralizing narratives about gambling contribute to feelings of guilt and shame about time spent gambling at work. For instance, several participants attributed their workplace gambling to personal or moral failings, such as being a "dishonest employee" or "taking advantage" of their employer. These narratives can serve to obscure the influence of systemic factors that negatively affect employees, such as the erosion of decent work in society, which deprives many individuals of the opportunity to contribute to work that is dignified, productive, and secure (Blustein et al., 2023).

Overall, this research highlights the importance of expanding the focus on gambling harms beyond the individual, and conceptualizing risks and potential harms from a public health perspective that acknowledges the role of gambling-specific factors (such as gambling environment and exposure) and the overall social, cultural, and individual factors (Hilbrecht et al., 2020). Workplaces are relational-cultural contexts where gambling can be normalized or encouraged through social connections, increasing the risk of harmful gambling for those already at risk. In turn, workplace gambling might

heighten the risk of work-related harms, the impacts of which are often experienced beyond the individual, to include family, friends, and colleagues (Li et al., 2017). Similar to Russell et al. (2018), our findings highlight the importance of challenging the normalization of gambling and gambling-related harm within society, as well as the limitations of individualized approaches to problem gambling. In this case, working to address potential gambling-related harm within workplace social groups could include harm-reduction education about the risks of normalizing gambling culture in the workplace and the potential work-related gambling harms.

Additionally, given the importance of job satisfaction for workplace gambling, supporting individuals who might struggle with the harms of gambling within their work-lives must involve a critical examination of the conditions of market work, as Richardson (2012) describes, directing attention "to what is good for people beyond what is adaptive" (p. 194) That is, rather than solely focusing on ways to reduce gambling behaviour to maximize productivity, service providers might help their clients to consider how their current work environment might be productive of harmful gambling. This might include increasing awareness of how their current work exposes them to physical or social contexts that encourage gambling, or how their gambling functions as an escape from job dissatisfaction and monotony.

Limitations, Strengths, and Future Directions

One important limitation is that the data for this study was collected prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, when remote work became the norm for many workers whose jobs could be accomplished online, and access to in-person gambling was frequently limited due to public-health restrictions. Although many employers have emphasized a return to in-person work in more recent months, COVID-19 exacerbated and increased awareness of existing issues in the workforce, including differing access to decent work, precarity, and inequity, shifting in many ways both attitudes towards and ways of working (Kniffen et al., 2021). Future research could specifically examine the role of remote work in experiences of gambling, given that online spaces are major sources of gambling. A further limitation is the use of self-reported estimates of time spent gambling and gambling expenditures. Future research could integrate more objective data, such as records of gambling transactions and smartphone time-use data. A major strength of the study, however, is the use of innovative, integrated mixed methods, which included integration at multiple phases of the study to shed light on the issue of workplace gambling, which, despite being identified as an indication of risk (e.g., Griffiths, 2009; Li et al., 2017, has remained relatively understudied.

It is important that future research continue to address the nexus of gambling and work in order to examine how political and social structures shape individual experiences and to examine how individuals exercise agency within these systems. Future research could also more thoroughly explore the differences between social gambling in the workplace, which might serve positive functions, and the risk of potential harms through the normalization of gambling in the workplace. A study of the gendered nature of gambling, particularly as it relates to individuals already experiencing problematic gambling behaviours, would also be interesting. Finally, a social constructionist approach to understanding work and gambling offers insights for advocacy regarding workers rights, including enhancing qualities of decent and meaningful work (Blustein et al., 2023). A fuller understanding of individual motivations and experiences of workplace gambling, including the role of access to gambling through smartphones, the role of work satisfaction, and the influence of social connections at work, might also help service providers such as counselors and psychologists to better support individuals who struggle with

gambling, addressing both harms of gambling and issues of work–life satisfaction.

Conclusions

Gambling at work is a major indicator of risk for gambling disorder, as individuals who gamble at work are significantly more likely to meet the DSM-5 criteria for gambling disorder and have higher gambling expenditures. Workplace gambling can have significant consequences for individuals, including loss of productivity and risk of discipline or job loss. The most common forms of workplace gambling are lottery and sports betting, and gambling in the workplace is commonly accessed through office pools. Workplace gambling is highly shaped by social context, as certain forms of gambling such as lottery and sports betting can be a highly normalized aspect of workplace culture. While participating in these gambling activities can present opportunities for social bonding and cohesion, some employees might feel pressured to gamble to avoid social exclusion. Our findings also highlight how the risk of gambling-related harms can be heightened by boredom and lack of satisfaction or meaning in work, coupled with ease of access to gambling through smartphones or working in the gambling industry.

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Appendix. Bivariate analysis of sociodemographic characteristics and workplace characteristics, with multiple imputation.

Participant characteristics (n = 1,730)	**Unadjusted Odds Ratio (OR) [95% Confidence Interval]**
Sociodemographic characteristics	
Age	
Mean	0.96 [0.95, 0.97]***
Male gender	1.44 [1.18, 1.75]***
Married / common-law	1.41 [1.16,1.73]***
Education	Overall sig.***
Did not complete high school	Reference
Completed high school	0.91 [0.40, 2.10]
Some university / college	1.68 [0.73, 3.85]
Completed university / college	1.80 [0.81, 4.03]
Professional or graduate degree↡	2.04 [0.89, 4.68]
Income	Overall not sig.
$0–49,999	Reference
$50,000–$89,000	1.25 [0.99,1.59]
$90,000+	1.33 [1.03,1.71]*
Work-related factors	
Computer access at work	2.17 [1.50, 3.12]***
Mobile device access at work	2.91 [1.78, 4.77]***
Participant satisfied with job (n = 1,727)	0.73 [0.60,0.90]**
Gambling industry (n = 1,719)	5.37 [2.96, 9.76]***
Occupation (n = 1,706)	
Art, culture, recreation, and sport	1.10 [0.57, 2.12]
Business, finance, and administration	0.96 [0.74, 1.24]
Education, law, and social and government services	0.87 [0.66, 1.13]
Health	0.86 [0.62, 1.21]

Management	1.38 [1.04, 1.82]*
Manufacturing and utilities	1.13 [0.79, 1.61]
Natural resources, agriculture, and related production	1.76 [0.99, 3.12]
Sales and services	0.73 [0.56, 0.96]*
Sciences	1.46 [1.03, 2.07]*
Trades, transport, and equipment operators	0.82 [0.59, 1.14]

* Statistically significant with P <0.05
** Statistically significant with P <0.01
*** Statistically significant with P <0.001
↡ Includes law, medicine, dentistry, Master's, or PhD

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

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"All you've got to do is stop": A Qualitative Examination of Gambling Stigma and Discrimination from the Perspective of Lived Experience

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Abstract: People with lived experience have drawn attention to gambling stigma as a harm in itself, justifying discrimination and exacerbating other harms. The *gambling establishment*'s response has reproduced *individual responsibility* by reducing stigma to a barrier to help-seeking. More recently, adapting to critiques of individual responsibility, the gambling establishment has expanded the issue to one of *services* and *society*. This paper identifies the structural dynamics that drive gambling stigma and discrimination from the perspective of lived experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with adults in Great Britain who had experienced gambling harm (n = 40). Several key themes were identified: (1) Harmless fun and individual responsibility; (2) Comparison with substance use; (3) The role of money; (4) Lack of parity in government policy; (5) Stereotypes of "typical" gamblers. The findings show the fundamental driver of stigma is the way commercial gambling functions and is enabled to function by the state, thus perpetuating the very conditions producing stigma in the first place. Stigma-reduction strategies that focus on changing individual behaviour or public information campaigns that tell people to get help early are insufficient: they are just another version of "responsible gambling," where the individual is expected to do everything. Change requires addressing the unique features of gambling harm, stigma and discrimination, and the position the U.K. government allows commercial gambling to occupy.

Keywords: Lived experience, gambling stigma, gambling harm, gambling regulation

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Background

Commercial gambling has grown substantially over the past few decades and is increasingly understood as a public health issue (Abbott, 2020; Wardle et al., 2021). Multi-national gambling organizations, powered by data, digital, and financial technologies, design and promote products that are intensive, accessible, addictive, and immensely profitable (Cassidy, 2020; Hing et al., 2022). The United Kingdom currently has one of the world's largest regulated online gambling markets. Gamblers lose over £15.1 billion per annum to the gambling industry (Gambling Commission, 2024). This gross gambling yield of the industry is based on consumer losses, generated disproportionately from the more impoverished in society (Hahmann et al., 2021). Gambling causes significant harm to substantial numbers of people who participate in gambling, their families, friends, broader social networks, and wider society. This includes financial harm, harms to health, relationships, social connectedness and inclusion, and employment (Browne et al., 2016; Canale et al., 2016; Cowlishaw et al., 2019), and lifelong and intergenerational disadvantage (Langham et al., 2015).

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Stigma, Responsible Gambling, and Evolving Discourses of Responsibility

There has been increasing research attention to the stigma associated with gambling harm (Gambling Research Exchange (GREO), 2019; Hing et al., 2015; Quigley, 2022). Stigma involves negative evaluations and attitudes about a condition and begins with the labelling of differences, which are then associated with negative stereotypes through cultural beliefs, leading to the separation of individuals into *us* versus *them* categories (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). This process culminates in status loss and discrimination for the affected individuals, and can result in a range of other outcomes such as social isolation and economic disadvantage (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Gambling stigma and discrimination are themselves significant harms that damage people's self-worth, health, and life opportunities while exacerbating other harms (Langham et al., 2015). Real and perceived negative judgments from others, along with internalized or self-stigma, produce feelings of guilt, shame, and worthlessness, resulting in deteriorated self-esteem, mental health, and self-efficacy; the concealment of problems; and social withdrawal (Hing et al., 2015; Hing et al., 2016; Quigley, 2022; Rolando et al., 2023). Stigma lessens social value and justifies disadvantage and discrimination against individuals and structurally in policies and societal institutions (Quigley, 2022), including regulation, financial services, health and social care, and the justice system, among others. This results in additional harms such as social rejection, exclusion, barriers to accessing housing and employment, and loss of social status and relationships (Hing et al., 2014; Hing et al., 2016; Hing & Russell, 2017; Miller & Thomas, 2017). The way people harmed by gambling are treated in policy and institutions, in turn, justifies negative public attitudes, so stigma and discrimination are mutually reinforcing.

A significant theme in the literature is that *personal responsibility* narratives generate gambling stigma. Gambling has been framed as an issue of personal responsibility by the gambling industry, government, and media. *Responsible gambling* discourses present gambling as recreation and entertainment, shifting the responsibility for gambling harm to consumers and disregarding the harm caused by gambling products, practices, and environments (Livingstone & Rintoul, 2020; Livingstone et al., 2019; van Schalkwyk et al., 2021). Consequently, those harmed by gambling are constituted as "flawed consumers of a mostly harmless recreational pastime" (Rintoul et al., 2023, p. 2), are stereotyped as "irresponsible" and "greedy" (Hing et al., 2015, p. 17), and are blamed for the harm they experience. These narratives create barriers to understanding the true extent of gambling harm and justify ineffective regulation of harmful commercial activities and normalization. This creates addiction and harm, as well as hindering access to help (Rintoul et al., 2023).

The discourse of personal responsibility is fundamental to gambling harm, stigma, and discrimination. As this analysis of "responsible gambling" has gained prominence, the *gambling establishment*'s response has largely been to co-opt such critiques to protect commercial gambling and linked state interests. By "gambling establishment," we mean the conglomeration of organizations—commercial, state, and providers of education and treatment—that depend on continuing the gambling industry (Orford, 2019).

In some cases, there is a find-and-replace approach, as if changing the term *problem gambler* to *problematic*, *disordered*, or even *person experiencing gambling disorder* is enough without changing the underlying assumptions of individual responsibility, as evidenced in a recent review of gambling harms training materials for healthcare professionals (Wyllie et al., 2023). Alternately, mental health or public health

approaches are deployed to reconstitute individual responsibility in a more palatable form.

Instead of *problem gambling*, it is asserted that *harmful gambling behaviour* is a "mental health condition" or "clinical addiction." In this way, those harmed are less responsible and more protection is justified, but the focus remains on a defined group whose vulnerability means they gamble harmfully. This is evident in the U.K. government's review of the *Gambling Act 2005*. The resultant White Paper begins: "We recognise that people should be free to spend their money as they choose, but when gambling poses the risk of becoming a clinical addiction the government needs to ensure there are proper protections" (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2023, p. 3). Throughout and in associated consultations, the government maintains that people with harmful gambling behaviour are susceptible to advertising and high-risk products. Consequently, the measures are additional rules to target "vulnerable" people while not affecting the "majority of gamblers who do not suffer harm" (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2024)—leaving dark nudges (ambiguous or misleading design features in gambling machines, website, and mobile applications; Newall, 2019), marketing and advertising, and availability and accessibility almost untouched.

To date, the U.K. government has tended to adopt prevention measures that ostensibly preserve consumer choice, such as public information campaigns, rather than attempt to make changes to the social and economic context, such as taxes and restrictions on availability (adopting individual-level intervention over population-based intervention) (Bhattacharya, 2023). This is true for the regulation of the gambling industry, where harm-reduction efforts are typically aimed at the individual level, relying on industry measures directed at high-risk individuals, such as voluntary limit setting and the use of algorithms to detect harmful levels of play. This stands in contrast to recognizing the wider environmental and commercial determinants of harm, such as ineffective regulatory systems, permissive advertising policies and the widespread availability of gambling opportunities (Wardle et al., 2019).

The public-health language of "structural factors" and "inequalities" is used by organizations within the long-standing state-sanctioned system of gambling research, education, and treatment provision through voluntary donations from gambling companies (Cassidy et al., 2013). The most striking instance is GambleAware, the primary commissioner and provider in this system. GambleAware's *Organisational Strategy 2021–26* explains that:

> Trustees have sought a closer alignment between the charity's research and evaluation commissioning activity and investment, and the delivery of the organisation's charitable objectives. This has resulted in GambleAware moving away from new research, data and evaluation commissioning that informs industry regulation and policy, and towards the creation of data, knowledge and learning to understand the diversity and current inequalities in the experience of gambling harms; and to inform policy which increases equity and supports improved information, advice, support and treatment services to prevent and reduce gambling harms across the whole population. (p. 44)

This passes "responsibility for reducing gambling harms to individuals and healthcare professionals" and removes attention from the fundamental issue, "the way in which gambling is allowed to exist" (McCartney, 2023). It allows GambleAware to assert concern with structural factors, while saying nothing about the gambling industry that funds it or the regulator whose goodwill their position in the system relies on. Here we have a new progressive-sounding narrative to replace "responsible" and "problem"

gambling, which blames society and structural inequalities, comorbidities, and the prejudice of services and charities, but serves the same function—namely, hiding the primary role of gambling companies and regulation in harm.

Current Approaches to Addressing Gambling-Related Stigma

Stigma interventions are an important way such discourses reach the public as they frequently involve public awareness campaigns. However, there are critical gaps in how gambling harm, stigma, and discrimination are conceptualized and acted on. The literature tends to reduce stigma to an individual-level issue of maladaptive, avoidant coping and negative self-image, which the problematic person must overcome so they take up the treatment on offer. Alternately, stigma is the consequence of an uneducated public and the negative responses of family, friends, and professionals. The solutions become behaviour change and public awareness campaigns (Keane, 2019; Thomas et al., 2016), or, according to GambleAware, it is the collective responsibility of all helping agencies. This places the responsibility for stigma on the people harmed by gambling, affected others, and professionals, rather than addressing the position and regulation of the gambling industry.

There is a lack of research, particularly in the United Kingdom, that provides in-depth qualitative insight from the perspective of lived experience into the structural factors that drive gambling-related stigma. Specifically, the role of policy, regulation, and the gambling industry. As a result, structural stigma has been argued to be a critical area for future gambling research (Quigley, 2022). This understanding can then inform policy reform that addresses stigma reduction at the population level. Accordingly, this research sought to address this gap. Our research was guided by one specific research question: What are the structural drivers influencing gambling-related stigma and discrimination from the perspective of people with lived experience?

Methods

Procedure

Individuals who had experienced gambling harm were recruited from Great Britain using purposive and snowball techniques, including promoting the study on social media sites and contacting people in gambling-related services, initiatives, and networks.

Participant interviews lasted for an average of 70 minutes (with interview times ranging from 40–150 minutes) and were conducted online on Zoom or Skype between January 2021 and May 2023. To be eligible to take part, participants had to be older than 18 years of age and live in Great Britain. Additionally, they had to have experienced gambling harm related to their own gambling, a criterion outlined in the recruitment material and participant information sheet. Information about the harm that they had experienced was discussed during the interview, rather than formally measured using a screening instrument.

Participants were given written and oral information about the study's purpose, the voluntariness of participation, and the right not to answer specific questions and to withdraw their consent at any time without consequence. Participants were also provided the contact details of support services if they felt they needed to talk confidentially to someone about anything that arose from the interview. Written or video-recorded consent was received from participants before each interview.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide, inviting participants to share their experiences as they wished, with some follow-up questions and prompts. Examples of follow-up questions included: *"How did the gambling develop over time*?"; "*Could you tell me about when gambling started causing difficulties for you?*"; "*Can you tell*

me about the things that made the gambling difficulties worse?"; "*Things that helped*?" Additional prompts included exploring individual aspects within the wider context, such as asking about participant perceptions of community, culture, gambling industry practices, regulation, financial institutions, and support services.

Theoretical Approach

We used a critical studies approach to inquiry that acknowledges the role of power, social position, inequality, and injustice in health-related phenomena (Charmaz, 2017; Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Within this approach, we seek to critique powerful institutions and the injustices that occur, and to identify areas to advocate for change (Denzin, 2017).

There are many different types of stigma. We focused on interactions with institutions, policies, and regulations related to gambling and gambling-industry practices. In order to address gambling stigma and discrimination, it was necessary to shift from problematic and irresponsible individuals towards problematic, harmful industries (Brown & Russell, 2020; Thomas et al., 2016) and state policy.

In this, we recognise that lived experience is itself constituted within discourse. However, people's negotiation of and interaction with various discourses and practices concerning their own experiences provide important insight into how power plays out and is challenged (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This approach was chosen as it provided flexibility, acknowledging the researchers' own perspectives and biases when interpreting the data. An inductive approach was taken to capture the full range of perspectives in relation to gambling harm and stigma, and to encompass all aspects of the data relevant to the research question.

Interviews were transcribed using the NVivo Transcription online service and reviewed for accuracy by EK. The transcriptions were uploaded to QSR NVivo 13 (Lumivero, 2020), which was used to analyze the material. Initial codes were developed by two of the study investigators (EK and CW), who assigned labels to sections of text.

From these initial codes, EK and CW developed candidate themes, which were named and further refined. Inter-coding reliability was not assessed in this study because an RTA approach was used (Braun & Clarke, 2021). EK and CW held regular meetings to review and discuss the developing themes and to reach a consensus for the final themes.

This analysis was conducted using a ground-up approach, allowing the data to lead to the formulation of themes, rather than predefining themes or using a specific theoretical approach. However, EK and CW paid particular attention to identifying themes that addressed the research questions and examined interactions between people with lived experience and institutions, policies, and regulations related to gambling and gambling-industry practices.

Relevant data extracts are presented to convey theme interpretations and to ensure participants' voices were represented, thus enhancing the integrity of the data (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

Sample Description

Forty participants shared experiences of their gambling. Four were female (10%), the remainder were male (90%). Some provided their age, while others did not. As a result, participants were assigned to one of three broad age categories (18–34 years, 35–60 years, and 60+ years), and we used our best judgment to assign individuals to one of these groups. The most common age category for participants was 35–60 years (n = 26; 65%), followed by 18–24 years (n = 8; 20%), then 60+ years (n = 6; 15%). Participants were recruited from numerous regions across Great Britain, including London, North East England, North West England, West Midlands, South East

England, Yorkshire and the Humber, Scotland, and Wales. All participants were of white ethnicity, apart from one who was South Asian. Participants came from the full range of socio-economic groups, from low income (including those on benefits) to high income, and they worked in a variety of fields including construction, finance, delivery, and law. The full range of gambling participation was covered, including lotteries, betting, casino games, slots, bingo, spread betting, and investment platforms; "land-based" and online.

Results

Five key themes were identified: (i) harmless fun and individual responsibility; (ii) comparison with substance use; (iii) the role of money; (iv) lack of parity in government and policy; and (v) stereotypes of "typical" gamblers.

Harmless Fun and Individual Responsibility

The first theme concerned the functioning of the gambling industry, with participants' insights emerging from their direct experience of interacting with both online gambling companies and high-street bookmakers. Participants described how the gambling industry promotes the view that gambling is harmless fun, a matter of individual choice, responsibility, and self-control. They pointed to how, at the same time, the industry uses many practices to push people to gamble more, such as advertising, promotions, and the design of venues, websites, and products.

Almost all participants discussed how gambling companies can advertise so freely, the positive ways gambling is portrayed in advertising, and how gambling is made a "*natural*" part of many leisure and social spaces. They explained that this made them and those around them think gambling is just part of life, something everyone does, and harmless fun: "*They've got the football on a live screen; it could be in a local pub or restaurant. These gambling companies advertise: 'Why don't you put on a bet? Your friend might do it'*" (Participant 26, male).

Some participants commented that there is little to no warning that gambling is harmful or addictive, so the experience of addiction took them by surprise. They described how they felt they were the odd one out, that something was wrong with them, while "*everyone else was okay*" with gambling: "*You think, 'Why has it chosen me?' You feel isolated. I'm on my own. I've got a problem here, and nobody else seems to have it; only me*" (Participant 24, male).

Many participants spoke about how responsible gambling messages, slogans, and tools telling them to "*control themselves*" were not just ineffective, they were insulting and hurtful and contributed to the public perception that gambling "*addiction*" is a "*lifestyle choice*." A few participants were told by friends or family members that "*all you need to do is stop*":

> *I know I felt like I deserved it… And this comes back down to that industry narrative of putting all the onus upon the person who is addicted. You play responsibly, you set these limits, you self-exclude.* (Participant 6, male)

Many participants spoke of how gambling companies did not intervene when people showed clear signs of harm, and instead encouraged them to gamble more:

> *I did not get one call from that company…. Instead, they gave me more free bets, to keep me going. It was like a drug. They were like the pushers of an addict, keeping you going, keeping you spending.* (Participant 37, male)

Some participants were explicit about stigma benefiting the gambling industry:

> *A lot of the stigma around gambling is generated by the bookmakers because whenever you hear people confronting them about responsible gambling and things like that, they always put it down to, "Oh, it's almost like the dirty few, the small percentage of stupid people that go*

> *too far. The majority of our players are good, but you've got these bad people that go too far and make us look bad."* (Participant 4, male)

Comparison with Substance Use

Participants made comparisons with other addictions to explain gambling harm stigma, both that it is not recognised as an addiction and that it has features that make it different from substance use:

> *I said, "I've just come out of rehab and I don't want to go back to [city], and I suffer from a gambling addiction." She responded, "Like, you gamble loads?" I think it's just looked at so differently… I feel like sometimes people just don't understand. You say you've got a drink problem or a drug problem, it's like, "Ohhh." You say gambling problem, "What, he gambles too much?" But it's like, it's not really seen, I don't think.* (Participant 8, male)

Participants often referred to gambling as affecting brain circuitry, their "*brain was hijacked*" or "*rewired*" like it can be from substance use, and they wanted gambling to be understood as an addiction like any other that "*took over*." One participant described how "*you feel like a passenger in your own body*." Another described how gambling made them feel "*separated from myself*."

Some explain that when they had seen documentaries about how gambling affects the brain, they felt a huge sense of relief as they could finally understand why they had gambled as they had:

> *In the third episode, the one about gambling, he talks to a psychologist who explains the physical reasons why your brain becomes addicted to gambling … It was like she'd opened up my head. It upset me more than anything else has done for the last four or five years, but it made me realize the truth in a way that I hadn't done before.* (Participant 36, male)

However, a common theme among participants was the distinction between gambling and substance use, and how this contributed to the stigma surrounding gambling-related harm. Unlike substances, gambling did not involve consuming something tangible or producing easily identifiable physical changes, making it hard to understand as an addiction:

> *When people say addiction, you automatically go to drugs or alcohol; gambling's not spoke about in the same way. The question I got was, "Why couldn't you just stop?" Now, you wouldn't ask that to a drug addict, you wouldn't ask that to an alcoholic.* (Participant 32, male)

There were no bodily limits to gambling, as with the amount of alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs that could be consumed in a time. Gambling was limited only by money, time, and opportunity:

> *There's only so much drugs you can put into your system before your body goes "that's enough," and it shuts down. There's only so much alcohol you can drink. Gambling you can lose absolutely everything in the space of a night, in the space of an hour* (Participant 9, male)

Participants explained this meant both that they themselves did not realize they were "*intoxicated*" and becoming "*addicted*," and that they felt no one else could see their gambling difficulties. Gambling was described as the "*invisible*" addiction, and participants felt this added to the stigma:

> *It's really easy to hide it because if you gamble during the night, no one's going to know. I think it gets to the point where it's gone too far before you realize that it's gone too far because it doesn't affect your body as such. It doesn't show to other*

> *people. You're still the same person, but you've got so much going on in your head when you're thinking about gambling and knowing that you should stop.* (Participant 31, female)

Some participants were explicit about the importance of understanding how gambling products, commercial practices, and regulations should be considered when addressing stigma:

> *We need to understand a lot more about the products and how they're designed and how they're addictive. That insight that will add into the fact that we're now looking at it's not just more personal responsibility; it's not just you to blame. That would start tackling stigma … The responsibility comes from everybody, comes from government, comes from the regulator.* (Participant 16, male)

The Role of Money

Participants felt that gambling is about money, which added a unique dimension to stigma. To those around them, gambling looked like it was about winning money, hence greed or laziness. At the same time, it involved financial damage to the person who gambled and to those around them, hence irresponsibility, in an area where people are particularly supposed to exercise rational decision-making:

> *There's an attitude of, "Oh, it's hidden, we'll sweep it under the carpet, these people are just irresponsible people that can't control themselves. Surely you wouldn't be that stupid just to lose all your money on gambling?"* (Participant 10, male)

Participants described how they and the people around them could not understand how they could behave recklessly with money. They said it needed to be understood that gambling was designed so that people became addicted to the activity of gambling and the experience they get from it, so gambling became an alternate world separate from the everyday value of money:

> *I know a lot of people don't understand. Basically, they think it's just because of the money. It's literally not the money. It started off being the money, wanting a big win. A bit of fun wanting a big win, but then when you get addicted to it, it's not even about the money. Money's irrelevant; it's just a tool you need to gamble. When I got to the point where, yes, it's not about the money… They said, "Oh, you can just stop gambling," but it's literally not like that.* (Participant 27, male)

Participants explained that, eventually, money was merely the means to continue to gamble; they would gamble to "extinction," with any bonuses or winnings going back into gambling, which benefited the gambling companies:

> *I had no relationship with money towards the end. So for me, money didn't mean anything. Even when I was winning in casinos and things, it would go straight back on. I wouldn't be able to leave, or I wouldn't be able to log off online until that money had gone.* (Participant 11, male)

But the loss of money has very real consequences. Participants described shame and self-hatred at "not paying their way," "ruining their lives," taking resources from people close to them, or committing crimes. Some participants felt especially stigmatized because they had not lived up to social expectations of being prudent with money:

> *I felt absolute shame. I mean, what I could have done with £30,000. I could have took the kids on holiday. I could have bought stuff, you know. It was the thought of all that money that I had just wasted on me.* (Participant 3, male)

Participants often give up control of their finances to stop gambling. Many described relief

and accepted the need to do this, but it also involved humiliation:

> *I'm not really responsible for my money anymore because I can't be responsible for it. And that's a hard, hard thing to come to terms with yourself is that actually, for me personally, I'm not a responsible person, especially with money.* (Participant 10, male)

Lack of Parity in Government Policy

Repeatedly, participants questioned why gambling was not treated comparably to alcohol and smoking in government policy. Most commented how there were much fewer restrictions on gambling, as well as lower levels of education, treatment, and provision of resources in the areas of criminal justice, social care, or benefits. The fact that the government seemed not to acknowledge gambling as a harmful activity and treated gambling differently from other harmful activities made participants feel they did not matter and were to blame.

Participants were perplexed as to why the government subjected gambling to fewer restrictions in advertising and sponsorship, availability, product controls, and product warnings:

> *You'd never see the person who's in [the pub] every day, drinking six, seven pints in the evening; you'd never see that pub landlord putting offers on just for that one person… It's never the case, but with gambling, it seems to be the normal thing to do.* (Participant 33, male)

Participants were deeply anxious about disclosing gambling to services because they believed they would not be understood or would face negative consequences, and often they felt this is what happened when they did:

> *I went to the hospital emergency department… I say to my doctor, "I am facing this type of problem." So, they totally ignore me: "Why you are here? It is for [an] emergency? You cannot come here." I cannot sleep. I cannot eat. A lot of things in my head. They don't give me any treatment; they just print one paper. There are some addresses there like, Gamblers Anonymous meeting, GamCare number… it's not enough… They hate me, or they hate this type of people."* (Participant 5, male)

Participants wanted to know why sources of help were not given a high profile, so that knowing what to do would be common knowledge if you needed help; instead, gambling advertising was everywhere. They reflected that it was normal to be asked about alcohol, smoking, or mental health in many settings, but not gambling. Some stated there was public information and education about the harms associated with alcohol and drugs but not gambling: "*You do see stigma attached to it … it never used to be a question that was on your health check. How many fags do you smoke, you drink how many? Nothing about gambling*" (Participant 8, male).

Stereotypes of "Typical" Gamblers

Participants referred to negative views about gamblers as stupid, weak, greedy, lazy, untrustworthy, irresponsible, and ruining lives. Some of this was the persistence of earlier discourses of gambling as "morally degenerate" and looked down on through association with working-class or risk-taking masculinity: "*From my perspective, the stigma that sticks with gambling sits around dysfunction and being unreliable, and it impacts everything you could do, and people just don't trust you*" (Participant 35, male).

Some participants described how there is an image of a "*typical*" gambler. The person is white, male, and working class in a bookies (betting shop). Or they might think of a man gambling large amounts of money and wanting to live

extravagantly. They did not want to be associated with this "*type of person*" in their minds or by others. Some participants spoke about how family or community members warned them about gambling or hated and despised it:

> *I can't see a day where I can sit down with my dad and talk to him about what I've done. I can't because he's of a generation as well where gamblers are thought of even worse. The sort of stereotypical gambler from his generation is the guy that spends all day in a smoky bookie, just getting his salary in an envelope, taking it straight down there and losing it all.* (Participant 4, male)

Participants wanted it to be known that someone suffering gambling harm looks just like everyone else and could be any person, including someone you know: "*Most people would look at me and go, 'You, of all people but no, not you,' and half an hour later they were going, 'I still can't believe that you did that'*" (Participant 30, female).

Some participants pointed out that when gambling difficulties are made visible—for example, in the news, documentaries, or dramas—they depict the extreme end of harm, often with large amounts of money involved. The news tends to be driven by court proceedings and reported on gambling-related crime in terms of "fuelling a lavish lifestyle," losses to a business, or families left penniless:

> *They're not going to look into the history of how I got to that point of the gambling addiction. They're not going to look in the malpractice that happened through the gambling companies, through the lack of the safer gambling of internal processes. They're not going to look at other aspects involved in the case, mitigating factors such as what could the company have done better… It will just be "Man defrauds £150,000 for gambling addiction."* (Participant 11, male)

The idea of a "typical" gambler being white and male results in additional stigma for other groups. Women described how their gambling was seen as contrary to the social norms for women, that they should be "*sensible and caring*" and, by experiencing gambling difficulties, they have "*broken the rules*" and "they shouldn't behave like that." One participant also described how information, services, and interventions were not tailored for them:

> *I get frustrated, but I know that the majority of people that come for support are males, but they will, like, say 75% of the people that come forward are males and then nothing is said about the 25% that are women. You're just making women feel like they have no place, and I just always feel like we're pushed off the table. There's targeted marketing of gambling products to women, so why is there not targeted [support] marketing for women?* (Participant 30, female)

Some participants experienced additional stigma because their culture or religion prohibits gambling. This could also intersect with views of gambling as for the poor and uneducated.

> *I'm from Muslim town, and my family members [my mother, my father, my brother, and I] we are educated. So, for me, gambling is impossible, impossible for me, because we hate this type of thing. Gambling, drunken.* (Participant 5, male)

A few men from social groups who were "*expected to gamble*" explained that they experienced stigma and shame as gambling addiction was at odds with masculine ideals because it involved "*losing control*" and being "*weak*":

> *It does sometimes feel a little bit like your middle-aged guy is the one that has the least ability to sort of go, "Yeah, I feel shame, I feel stigma." Because it might not be anything to do with my gender, my*

> *beliefs, my culture, my background. I'm just your average bloke without anything that I can attribute that shame and stigma to other than the fact that I'm a gambling addict, and I am a recovering gambling addict. That is enough for me.* (Participant 9, male)

The themes highlighted in this study are interrelated and collectively reinforce the stigma surrounding gambling. For example, the industry narratives of individual control and responsibility feed into the stereotypes of "typical" gamblers, exacerbating both self and public stigma by portraying individuals as lazy or irresponsible. The disparity in government policy, where participants questioned why gambling is not regulated as stringently as other harmful activities, coupled with pervasive advertising portraying gambling as harmless, reinforces the perception that only a small minority experience harm and that they are to blame for their predicament. This means that the different drivers of stigma reinforce each other, exacerbating gambling harms.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to qualitatively examine the structural dynamics driving gambling stigma and discrimination from the perspective of lived experience. Based on the thematic analysis, five themes were identified from the data.

Harmless fun and individual responsibility describes how, from all sides, participants felt they were made to bear the blame for the harm gambling caused them and those around them. Unsurprisingly, the role of narratives of individual responsibility featured heavily in the data. This supports the existing evidence of the gambling industry's impact and government discourses on individual responsibility (Marko et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2016; Rintoul et al., 2023). However, importantly, this is not only a *narrative*, as it is often described, but it is realized in the practices of commercial gambling and its regulation (Alexius, 2017), which participants pointed to because of their direct experience with the actions of gambling companies.

Additionally, people with lived experience (PLE) felt a driver of stigma was that gambling did not involve taking in a substance with evident physical effects (*comparison with substance use* theme) and, consequently, was not understood as addictive. PLE made use of the discourses of addiction but in a way that challenged its use by the gambling establishment as a new iteration of "problem gambler" to place attention on harmful commercial practices. Participants' relationship with the term *addiction* varied. However, many described themselves as having experienced gambling addiction or used phrases such as "*separated from myself*," "*a passenger in my own body*," "*my brain was hijacked*," or "*rewired*." They wanted recognition that commercial gambling products and practices, designed to be addictive, had caused them to behave in these ways. There are important social science accounts of the mechanisms by which gambling is habit forming and how this has been "turbo-charged" by data and digital technologies (e.g., Schüll, 2012; Yücel et al., 2018), which suggests that building on these and making them visible and comprehensive to the public and policymakers may be an important strategy.

Similarly, when participants spoke of the *stereotypes of the "typical" gambler*, they emphasized that "*people like them*" and anyone could become addicted to gambling because it is addictive, and anyone can experience a state of "*vulnerability*." The construction of addiction as "everywhere" has been critiqued as an expression of the cultural anxieties of consumer capitalism (Reith, 2014). The findings of this paper form a challenge to how vulnerability and high-risk groups are being used by the gambling establishment to justify individual-focused interventions and to protect commercial activity. At the same time, there was the tendency for participants to assert their respectability relative

to these classed, gendered, and race-based stereotypes to protect their self-worth and social standing (Marko et al., 2022; Miller & Thomas, 2017). In this context, inequalities are co-opted by the gambling establishment, and people harmed wish to distance themselves from other possible dimensions of stigma related to social position. This makes it a challenge to convey that poorly regulated gambling has the potential to harm anyone who participates, while showing how inequities contribute to and are exacerbated by gambling harm. In addition, women participants noted that the available support services and interventions were tailored to men, rather than to them, further driving the stigma and the feeling that they were not deserving of help.

A further driver of stigma is the *role of money*. Societal tropes about responsibility and control are particularly strong concerning expectations about how people should manage their money (Marko et al., 2022). Gambling itself violates these, but the primary harm is financial, which further contributes to stigmatization (Marko et al., 2023). Experiencing financial difficulties, in general, creates powerful feelings of shame, guilt, and personal responsibility (Sweet et al., 2018) and is stigmatized as it signals a deep personal failing in societies (Reith, 2018).

The theme *lack of parity in government policy* further outlined how participants identified that the government did not provide protections to stop gambling harm from happening in the first place, and there were significant gaps in how gambling was addressed via policy and services compared to other harmful activities. These identified structural factors (e.g., how gambling was addressed via policy and services compared to other harmful activities) are fundamental drivers of stigma, just as stigma—constructing a type of consumer to blame for gambling harm—is fundamental to the continuation of commercial gambling in its current form. This challenges organizations that take the position of destigmatizing gambling harm through behavioural change campaigns without addressing regulation and policy. It is also contrary to what has brought about change in areas such as mental health, HIV/AIDS, and disabilities (Thomas et al., 2016).

Basic processes drive all stigma and discrimination: othering to socially devalue; serving specific relationships of power. However, it has been argued that addiction should be conceived as "theoretically and practically multiple" (Fraser et al., 2014, p. 15), and the same should apply to stigma. The accounts of PLE show specific dynamics that drive gambling harm stigma. This includes, fundamentally, the position commercial gambling is afforded in society.

Limitations

This study was limited to those fluent in English and from Great Britain, and used a self-selecting sample. The research benefited from the perspectives of adults across all ages, education, occupations, and socioeconomic positions, with varied gambling experience. There is a need for a better understanding of how different social contexts might influence the development and consequences of stigma and discrimination, and how the unique dynamics of gambling stigma interact with gender, class, race, sexuality, or disability, among others (Jackson-Best & Edwards, 2018). However, those from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds and women made up only a small part of the sample—in itself potentially reflecting that gambling continues to be additionally stigmatized for these groups. Future research should incorporate engaging with "gatekeepers" (individuals or groups who influence research population access) to widen the inclusion of underrepresented groups in gambling harm research (Crowhurst & kennedy-macfoy, 2013). Further, culturally sensitive recruitment strategies and materials should be developed and used to facilitate greater participation and increase trust with participants and communities (Waheed et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Gambling has been conceptualized as an issue of individual responsibility, and those with gambling addictions are often blamed for the harm they and the people around them experience. Our paper challenged these discourses by examining the causes and consequences of stigma and discrimination, grounded in the experiences and views of PLE. This highlights the role that commercial practices, the lack of protective regulation, and discrimination in wider public policy and institutional practice play in contributing to stigma and harm. This paper has shown that change requires addressing the unique features of gambling harm stigma and discrimination, which differ from other stigmatized experiences, while drawing on what has successfully brought about meaningful change in other areas—long-term, multi-sectoral, and multi-level action derived from lived experience.

How we can (or cannot) understand gambling and gambling harm, and consequently how we act, lies with "whoever frames the debate" (Reith & Wardle, 2022, p. 71). How influential groups represent gambling impacts how gambling harm is understood, experienced, and addressed, and contributes to stigma and discrimination. It is not enough to tell people to get early help or to provide more information or product controls. Otherwise, it will be like another version of "responsible gambling," where the individual is expected to do everything. The individual should not be left alone to suffer this burden and shoulder all the responsibility. The findings of this study suggest that a multi-dimensional approach is needed to address the conditions that create stigma and discrimination. To address the wider commercial drivers of stigma, regulation of commercial practices must be extended beyond harm reduction or industry measures that are aimed at the individual level and directed at "high-risk" customers. This includes a new regulatory approach to gambling advertising that is insulated from commercial interests. This approach should draw upon lived experiences to inform key changes to the position the U.K. government allows commercial gambling to occupy.

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COMMENTARY

The Rise of Online and Sports Betting in Ghana: Observations, Driving Factors, and Societal Implications

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The Rise of Online and Sports Betting in Ghana: Observations, Driving Factors, and Societal Implications

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Preface

I am a PhD candidate in Political Science working on corruption and the impact of clientelism on political behaviour in Africa. Having been away from Ghana for some time, I was surprised upon my return to see the pervasive penetration of sports gambling into everyday life. Involvement in gambling now extends to unexpected places: individuals can even bet in places like public transport, roadsides, churches, and offices, challenging traditional views of gambling. Advertising for gambling is pervasive across various media in Ghana, from television and radio to online platforms. Even personal internet or normal Google searches can be redirected to betting sites; a phenomenon I have experienced several times in Ghana. This societal shift towards widespread participation in gambling, especially among the younger generation, prompted my curiosity about what is driving the phenomenon.

Background

The gambling industry is expanding globally, led by multinational companies who are venturing into new markets, particularly in developing countries. Most sub-Saharan African countries have legalized various forms of gambling, including casinos, lotteries, and sports betting (Schwartz, 2006; Vaillancourt and Ossa, 2011). Global trade and investment liberalization have enabled aggressive marketing, increased gambling-related harm (Glozah et al., 2023), and the rapid growth of the gambling industry in these countries.

Legal casinos are operational in multiple sub-Saharan African countries, including Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Kenya, Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and others. South Africa has the highest number of casinos on the continent, with 38 establishments (Ssewanyana & Bitanihirwe, 2018). Some registered betting entities in Ghana include Betway, Soccerbet, SportyBet, Safaribet, 1xBet, betPawa, and Powerbet. Approximately 54% of youth in sub-Saharan Africa have been involved in gambling activities (Wangari, 2017). A Statista survey (2021) revealed that 70.68% of Ghanaian youths engage in gambling, placing Ghana fourth in Africa after Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Additionally, around 80% of these youths spend six to eight hours daily on online sports betting during school hours (Statista, 2021).

The convergence of digital platforms and mobile money interoperability has revolutionized accessibility to gambling in Ghana. With the widespread adoption of mobile services and the ease of registering a mobile SIM card, individuals can swiftly deposit funds and transact without the intermediary of traditional banking services. Major mobile services like MTN Mobile Money, Telecel Cash, and AirtelTigo Money have

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streamlined the process, enabling users to transfer money effortlessly across platforms. This accessibility extends to individuals of all ages, including younger people, who can now conveniently participate in gambling activities. With a simple mobile device and an active SIM card, even the youngest users can engage in betting and make payments without encountering the barriers of traditional banking channels. This seamless integration of mobile money services means that winning bets result in instant fund transfers directly to users' accounts, eliminating the need for bank accounts or credit facilities. This further enhances the accessibility and appeal of gambling, contributing to its widespread popularity among diverse segments of the Ghanaian population.

The growing enthusiasm of Ghanaians for European football leagues like the English Premier League, Spanish La Liga, German Bundesliga, and the UEFA Champions League has played a significant role in the increasing popularity of sports betting in Ghana. While male sports are commonly the focus of betting, this practice also extends to female sports such as soccer. My curiosity about studying gambling came from first-hand observations, particularly during a recent visit to Ghana. It was striking to witness how sports betting, once considered taboo due to its perceived immorality, had undergone a significant shift. Ghana, known for its predominantly religious population, previously had many churches opposing gambling as a sinful activity. This stance reflected the widespread disapproval of gambling among religious individuals and highlighted the societal values at play. Although this opposition persists to some extent, there appears to have been a shift in attitudes in recent years. Some religious institutions have shown greater tolerance towards gambling, speaking out against it less frequently than before, while others continue to disapprove of it.

Between 2020 and 2023, I noticed an increase in the number of betting shops in both rural and urban areas, appearing in corners, markets, and transportation hubs, indicating their increasing accessibility and community presence. There was also a marked increase in the prevalence of advertising across various mediums. Drawing on the insights of Noble et al. (2022), I understand the heightened engagement of young people in online sports betting to be linked to the pervasive nature of these advertisements. The prominence of billboard advertisements promoting betting activities in major urban centres throughout Ghana—including Accra, Kumasi, Ho, and Hohoe, where I visited—as well as on major roads within the cities and highways, is particularly noteworthy. All these advertisements normalize the practice of sports betting, particularly among the younger demographic. For instance, as illustrated by the billboards below (Figure 1), the one on the left displays the message: "1XBET: Easy to use, many chances to win"; while the one on the right states: "Take control of your bets with Cash Out. We've paid the highest Cash Out in Ghana." Together, these billboards create the impression that betting is easy to engage in and win, and that the betting companies are reliable in paying out winnings. Therefore, individuals are indirectly encouraged to engage in these activities with the promise that they can win. Advertising indicates a concerted effort to propagate the visibility of betting activities.

Figure 1. Two examples of betting billboards on the streets of Accra. (Dogbevi, 2022; Yeroo Group, 2021)

Beyond traditional billboards, people are enticed to embrace gambling through television, radio, newspapers, and online platforms. Some betting companies have further entrenched themselves in Ghanaian society by sponsoring major events. For instance, in 2022, Kurt Edwin Simeon-Okraku, President of the Ghana Football Association, announced a significant partnership with the betting company betPawa. This agreement spans an initial three-year period, during which betPawa commits to investing a minimum of $6 million to sponsor the Ghana Premier League. This collaboration provides financial support to the league and enhances the visibility of betPawa's brand and services to a broad audience of football enthusiasts nationwide.

Further, surprisingly, in the past, betting was usually more prevalent among the male population in Ghana; however, there has been a notable shift recently, with many young people, regardless of gender, actively participating in sports betting. The rising popularity of sports betting in Ghana intrigued me, especially as it breaks away from past norms where gambling, particularly sports betting, was mainly linked with men or even older people. The TGM Global Gambling and Sports Betting Survey shows the incidence of betting in Ghana over the past 12 months (TGM Research, 2022). For instance, the data shows that 50% of respondents engage in any type of betting, and 42% specifically bet on sports. The breakdown of betting by gender and age groups also shows that men (57%), and the 18–24 (56%) and 25–34 (57%) age groups lead in betting activities (TGM Research, 2022, p. 13). An additional analysis of the TGM Survey results reveals insights into the frequency of sports betting in Ghana over the past 12 months, with a particular focus on gender and age demographics. According to the data, 6% of males and 7% of females reported betting on sports daily. Additionally, 20% of males and 11% of females indicated that they bet on sports once per week. The survey also reveals that 28% of females and 22% of males bet less than once per year. Age-related trends are also evident. Approximately a quarter of respondents aged 18–24 and 25–34 noted an increase in their sports betting frequency over the last 12 months compared to the previous year (TGM Research, 2022, p. 17).

The accessibility of online betting has further broadened participation, with significant

numbers of women joining the ranks of sports gamblers. Recently, the Student Representative Council President of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), Majesty E. K. Ofori, stated: "Some of the ladies engage in betting to some extent even though they may not know how to arrange the odds and other technicalities involved. They bet on the football teams and basketball" (The Ghana Report, 2023). This statement reflects a biased appraisal by implicitly questioning women's intelligence and mathematical abilities. It suggests that women participating in betting are doing so without a full understanding of the technical aspects, thereby perpetuating the stereotype that women are less capable in areas requiring numerical and analytical skills. Such comments are indicative of enduring gender stereotypes, even as women increasingly engage in activities traditionally dominated by men. Hence, by focusing on the supposed lack of technical knowledge among female bettors, this viewpoint undermines the significant shift in gender roles and overlooks the broader context of women's growing involvement in recreational and financial exchanges.

The Ghanaian government seized upon the opportunity to increase its revenue streams in light of the growing participation in gambling. To this end, they introduced a 10% tax on betting and lottery winnings. The Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) has outlined that this withholding tax will be applied automatically at the point of payout for all winnings from betting, gaming, and lottery activities. This tax is implemented despite the widespread opposition of many bettors. In 2021, the Ghana Statistical Services noted that youth, comprising 57% of the population, are heavily involved in online sports betting, with around two-thirds participating from senior high schools and higher education institutions (Acheampong et al., 2022). In this context, Richard Aguda, who leads a coalition of bettors contesting the new tax, informed *The Africa Report* that

> Many youth are unemployed and suffering and betting is the only way some of us survive. Betting doesn't mean we're lazy. Some go a whole year without winning ….
>
> The 10% is too much. A friend recently won GH¢5,000 ([US]$435) and the tax was applied. Some people will go back into crime if this continues. If the rate is reduced to 3%, that will be manageable because we pay other taxes including e-levy when we want to cash out our winnings from our mobile money accounts. (Nyabor, 2023)

The e-Levy is a 1% tax that is already imposed by the government of Ghana on all electronic money transfers that exceed GH¢100 (US$9.00). This means that, in addition to the 10% tax on betting winnings, any online transactions over this threshold, including cashing out winnings via mobile money, are further taxed at 1% of the total amount.

The Popular Discourse and Discontent

On the one hand, sports betting has been viewed as a positive activity in Ghana, especially considering its growth within the online market. This expansion is influenced by various macroeconomic factors, including the country's steady economic growth in recent years, which has led to increased disposable income among the population (Statista, 2024). According to Statista (2024), the revenue generated from online sports betting in Ghana is projected to reach US$36.49 million by 2027. Furthermore, some argue that high unemployment levels in the country drive individuals to engage in gambling activities as a means of financial support. Ghana grapples with significant unemployment rates, ranging from graduate unemployment to those without higher education qualifications. Given this challenge, Pierre Frank Laporte, the former World Bank Country Director for Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, remarked that "Ghana's youth

employment challenge is vast and requires an all-round, deliberate, and consistent response" (World Bank, 2020).

While the Ghanaian government has implemented several policy interventions to tackle graduate unemployment, such as the Nation Builders Corps (NABCO) and Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ), the effectiveness of these programs often seems more promising on paper than in reality. In practice, accessing these programs can be challenging for some ordinary citizens unless they have political connections. Even for those enrolled, the monthly payment of GH¢700 (approximately US$45) is meagre compared to the high cost of living, including food, housing, and transportation expenses. Compounding this issue, reports indicate that the government owes many program workers up to seven months of arrears, leading to widespread protests (Boakye, 2022). Protestors have voiced their despair, stating that they feel abandoned by the government, and they struggle to meet their basic needs. The dire situation has left many hopeless, with concerns about their survival amidst economic uncertainty. For instance, some protesters told *CitiNewsroom*: "We are dying of hunger and may not live to see the economy bounce back, due to non-payment of seven (7) months [sic] arrears" (Boakye, 2022). Even individuals with relatively well-paying jobs face challenges due to the increased cost of living, prompting many to seek additional sources of income. This leads many to engage in gambling or sports betting as a way to earn supplementary income.

The increase in sports betting among Ghana's youth, particularly for those with secondary and tertiary education, has raised widespread concern among various stakeholders, including opinion leaders, educators, and political figures. In response to this growing trend, prominent political leaders like Hassan Ayariga, the founder and leader of the All People's Congress (APC) political party, have taken a firm stance. Ayariga has publicly announced his intention to ban sports betting if elected president (Appiah, 2023b). He argues that the proliferation of sports betting could instill a culture of laziness among Ghanaian youth, posing a threat to the country's future workforce and development prospects (Appiah, 2023b). Joining the conversation, influential figures such as Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu (former majority leader in parliament) and Ato Forson (former Ranking Member of Parliament's Committee on Finance and current main opposition leader in parliament) have also voiced their opposition to sports betting or gambling (Akaho-Tay, 2023; Appiah, 2023a). Kennedy Ohene Agyapong, a well-known businessman and member of parliament, has similarly expressed concerns about the societal implications of widespread sports betting (Ayagama, 2023). In short, all of the above argue that, rather than promoting diligence and productivity, sports betting encourages idle pursuits that could potentially corrupt the younger generation.

There have also been reports of students gambling in risky ways, using their school and hostel fees in hopes of winning big through sports betting. In 2022, at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), over 6,000 students, around 8% of the total student population of 85,276, could not pay their fees and had to defer their courses. According to Dr. Daniel Norris Bekoe, the University Relations Officer, some of these students allegedly diverted their funds to online sports betting, resulting in significant financial losses (Frimpong, 2022). While some students have contested these claims, the perception that some students engage in sports betting with their tuition fees is not uncommon in Ghana. This notion sheds light on the influence of sports betting within academic circles and raises concerns about the potential risks students may face by prioritizing gambling over their education.

Regulatory Framework Development

Neoliberal policies, which include free trade, deregulation, and privatization, aim to reduce government intervention in the economy (Gumisiriza, 2019). For example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank mandate privatization for loan recipients. Proponents of the Washington Consensus claim privatization fosters growth, depoliticizes decisions, and curbs corruption. African countries have increasingly embraced neoliberal policies, including privatization, under pressure from institutions like the IMF and World Bank. This shift reflects a global trend toward market-oriented economic strategies (Konings, 2011). Within Africa's neoliberal context, gambling raises concerns among policymakers for its potential negative impacts on economic stability, exploitation, and limited social mobility (Amutabi, 2018). Sichali et al. (2023) found that, where gambling is legal in sub-Saharan Africa, regulations across 41 countries require bettors to be at least 18 years old. Gambling is prohibited due to Islamic law in 7 countries where Islam dominates (Burundi, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Somalia, and Sudan). However, members of Muslim communities in religiously diverse countries like Ethiopia, Senegal, and Nigeria still engage in gambling, despite its prohibition under Islamic law.

A strong regulatory framework[2] should ensure that operators and bettors adhere to a structured system. Gambling industry players are adapting to stricter regulations in parts of Europe and North America (Glozah et al., 2023). Other major players, including some media outlets, are involved in restricting advertising to safeguard consumers. For instance, *The Guardian* has globally banned gambling advertisements, citing ethical concerns regarding the promotion of services that could lead to addiction and financial ruin (Waterson, 2023). France established the Autorité nationale des Jeux in 2020 to independently regulate gambling activities, primarily focusing on player protection. In Spain, iGaming commercials can only air from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m., and promotions are restricted to verified customers active on the platform for at least 30 days (Jumio, 2024). Although gambling is permitted by U.S. federal law, strict regulations apply to interstate and online gambling, with individual states retaining the authority to govern or ban such activities within their borders. Recently, major sportsbooks like FanDuel, DraftKings, BetMGM, and others formed the Responsible Online Gaming Association to tackle problem gambling. The association aims to collaborate on education, responsible gaming practices, and ethical advertising (Brewer & Golden, 2024).

Effective regulation aims to promote genuine and credible platforms, safeguard users' funds, and promote responsible gaming practices. However, despite the "theoretical" regulatory measures in place, online gambling in Ghana has thrived, as highlighted by Sichali et al. (2023). This increase is attributed mainly to a lack of enforcement, which has resulted in alarming instances of minors participating in gambling activities, as noted by Amoah-Nuamah et al. (2023). Indiscriminate advertising targets viewers of all ages, including children, despite reminders to bet responsibly and legal restrictions for those under 18. While the official age requirement for owning a SIM card in Ghana is 15 years, some individuals below this age can still own a SIM card. For those younger than 15, an adult (usually a parent or guardian) must register the SIM card on their behalf. However, it's important to note that many parents do not impose strict restrictions on their children's phone usage. As a result, children often have unrestricted access to their devices,

[2] Under Ghanaian law, sports betting is regulated by the Gaming Commission of Ghana (GCG). Working alongside the Ghana Association of Sports Betting Operators, the GCG supervises the sports-betting market to uphold transparency, fairness, and consumer protection. The *Gaming Act 2006* (Act 721) mandates licensing for all gambling operators while also prohibiting individuals under 18 from participating in gambling activities.

allowing them to browse the internet and engage in betting without significant limitations.

In many parts of Africa, including Ghana, policymakers seem primarily focused on revenue generation through taxation. Although some might argue that taxation can deter gambling, it often fails to dissuade those who are addicted or reliant on gambling for survival. Without proper enforcement mechanisms, these laws and regulations remain largely ineffective.

The Way Forward

Instead of clinging to colonial-era neoliberal ideas that have failed to uplift Africa, policymakers in Ghana and across the continent should focus on protecting their citizens. Thus, by prioritizing strong regulation and enforcement in industries like gambling, they can better shield vulnerable groups, such as minors, from exploitation and ensure that economic policies truly benefit the people. While many African countries, including Ghana, have regulations aimed at reducing the prevalence of gambling, enforcement remains a significant challenge. Ghanaian law prohibits individuals under 18 from participating in sports betting or gambling. It is important for betting companies to adhere to this law by preventing underage entry into betting centres and use of betting machines. Additionally, bettors should provide verifiable identification that matches their age. Companies that violate regulatory laws should face strong penalties, including potential bans, to deter others from flouting the rules. Moreover, the Gaming Commission of Ghana should be deliberate in making regulations that safeguard consumers. For instance, advertisements on platforms such as television and radio should be limited to school hours when children are typically in class and are not exposed to TV and radio broadcasts. Additionally, billboards on the streets should be minimized, if not completely eliminated, to reduce the visibility of betting companies in the country.

Further, it is essential to acknowledge that the government's role in the gambling industry is complex, requiring a balance between minimizing negative impacts and generating revenue. In many cases, including Ghana, governments rely on the revenue generated from gambling taxes, including taxing companies and individual bettors. This creates a conflict of interest, as there is a financial incentive to maintain or even promote gambling activities, despite the potential social harm. The situation in Ghana can be compared to Australia, where commentary suggests that governments are "addicted" to gambling taxes (Davis, 2018). Generating significant revenue from gambling in Australia is a long-standing issue that can hinder efforts to address gambling-related problems and reduce social harm (Breen, 2021). Therefore, it is for the government to prioritize the welfare of its citizens, protecting them over the revenue generated from gambling.

One of the primary issues contributing to youth engagement in gambling is the lack of employment opportunities and low wages. Alternative approaches, such as effective government employment programs, are crucial to address this. These programs should provide stable, well-paying jobs to offer viable alternatives to gambling for income. As we approach the December 2024 elections in Ghana, understanding political candidates' proposals for job creation and economic stability is essential for long-term solutions that can serve as alternatives to youth gambling. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and their flagbearer John Dramani Mahama have introduced a policy proposal in their manifesto known as the "24-hour economy" (Agbenorsi, 2023). This initiative encourages and supports businesses and companies to operate 24/7, preferably using a three-shift system of 8 hours each. The goal is to create an enabling environment that promotes productivity, competitiveness, and well-paying jobs. The NDC party argues that this policy would benefit agro-processing, the pharmaceutical

industry, manufacturing, construction, extractive industries, sanitation, waste management, leisure, and transportation. Similarly, the current Vice President of Ghana and presidential candidate for the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP), Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, has proposed several policies to address unemployment and boost productivity:

> In collaboration with the private sector, we will train at least 200,000 youth per year for the next five years. This, along with other policies, will create jobs for the youth, including school dropouts.
>
> I also want to enhance the repositioning of the education system towards STEM, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and vocational skills to cope with the demands of the fourth Industrial Revolution and job creation.
>
> In collaboration with the private sector, we will aim to train at least 1,000,000 software developers in five years (200,000 per year). As software developers. They will have job opportunities worldwide. (MyjoyOnline, 2024)

While these policy proposals from political candidates appear promising, the track record of many African leaders suggests they often remain campaign rhetoric: promising "heaven" but delivering very little. After coming to power, political elites frequently lack the will to implement these ambitious promises. Instead, they create systems that funnel opportunities to their families and friends, giving ordinary citizens limited access. Therefore, it is essential for there to be genuine political will to implement these bold policies in a manner that benefits all citizens. Furthermore, the successful implementation and sustainability of these initiatives, even beyond the tenure of the introducing government, are crucial. Encouraging such interventions can empower citizens to be more productive and earn well-deserved wages and salaries.

Moreover, education is a vital strategy for the government and all stakeholders when tackling this issue. Addressing public stigma involves tackling the widespread misconception that problem gamblers are irresponsible failures. Research indicates that family and friends often reinforce these stigmatizing views, especially in qualitative studies with gamblers and counselors. Individuals grappling with behavioural addiction often confront negative public perceptions (Keane, 2019), which can impede their willingness to seek professional assistance. Rather than stigmatizing bettors, supporting and educating them is essential. Additionally, both online and print advertisements highlighting the dangers of gambling should be promoted, while those struggling with addiction should receive psychological support.

In light of the predominantly religious nature of the Ghanaian population, where Christians and Muslims constitute a significant majority, the church and mosque emerge as essential players in addressing the issue of gambling. These sacred spaces offer invaluable platforms for educating members about the dangers of gambling, while concurrently aiding them to pursue more promising employment prospects. In Ghana, both church and mosque have been known to facilitate career training initiatives for their congregants. Encouraging such endeavours can empower individuals to secure meaningful employment, steering them away from the lure of gambling. For example, the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC) collaborated with the Government of Ghana to establish a comprehensive skills training program within church communities. This initiative focused on vocational fields, including bead making, plasterboard installation, bio-digester technology, and 3D epoxy application (GPCC, n.d.). Similarly, Tamale's Presbyterian Lay Training Center provides training in agribusiness, fashion design, carpentry, hairdressing, and weaving (Ritchie, 2020). Organizations like Muslim Women in Teaching empower women through

information technology and skill development (Mustapha, 2024).

Moreover, neoliberalism emphasizes market-driven policies and individualism, often eroding traditional institutions and moral foundations, which can contribute to the persistence of gambling. This ideology promotes individual success and competition, fostering an environment where the concepts of "winners" and "losers" are prevalent, prioritizing economic growth over social welfare (Yaro, 2013). Gambling can reflect neoliberal values, where the allure of quick wealth and personal achievement aligns with the broader societal narrative of individual success. To address gambling, we need to consider the broader context of neoliberalism and its impact on individual behaviours and societal structures.

Final Thoughts

The widespread prevalence of online gambling in Ghana raises important questions about its potential impacts on the country's politics. As gambling becomes more ingrained in everyday life, it could influence political behaviour in several ways. For instance, economic hardships due to gambling losses might increase citizens' susceptibility to clientelism, where politicians exploit financial desperation in exchange for votes. Additionally, suppose citizens increasingly rely on gambling for economic survival due to a lack of adequate job opportunities provided by democratic governments. In that case, they may begin to question the value of democracy. In particular, the perceived inability of democracy to deliver tangible benefits might lead to frustration. Consequently, this could diminish political interest and willingness to participate in democratic processes. People might even start to favour alternative forms of government that promise immediate economic relief, even if those regimes are non-democratic.

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COMMENTARY

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(Un)Lucky Designs?: What Game Jams Can Contribute to Critical Gambling Studies

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Introduction

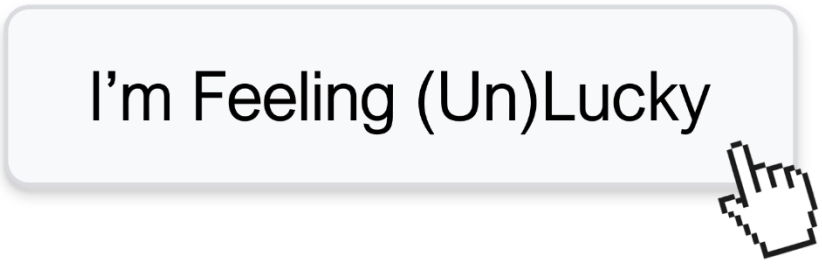
Walk into any casino today and luck, it would seem, is in the air. At least, that is the sense one would get from watching online videos of people playing gambling games, where losses are routinely edited out and where winning spins are front and centre (e.g., Hoebanx & French, 2023). Or, consider how gambling is routinely advertised: big wins, bonuses, free spins, and other incentives often feature heavily, while we struggle to think of a gambling advertisement that features someone's unlucky experiences.[2] Luck, in other words, seems to be a key, symbolic resource in gambling games, and within gambling cultures more generally.

In this brief commentary, we describe an emergent method for deconstructing the role of luck (and other design elements) in gambling games. We introduced this method—game jams—in a recent *Critical Gambling Studies Blog* (Hoebanx et al., 2023). Here, we build on our initial work to articulate different ways that game jams can be configured to operate as a method for critically exploring how games make symbolic resources, like luck, into tangible containers for experience. This opens a window into the affordances and constraints of game design; something that (along with the concept of luck) has not yet been much discussed in *Critical Gambling Studies*.[3] In what follows, we first touch on the theme of our 2023 game jam—(Un)Lucky. We next revisit our original game jam and, drawing from our 2023 blog post, offer a broader description of game jams. We then introduce *GameBling Game Jam 2.0*, the games that it produced, and four blog posts written by participants. We conclude our commentary with a reflection on game jams as a new methodology for critical gambling studies. In keeping with the thematic focus of this special issue, which features early career research, we end with some words of advice for those wishing to use game jams as a way to work through the wider implications of "gamblified" design.

I'm Feeling (Un)Lucky: Designing for Luck

In 2023, the Jeu responsable à l'ère numérique (JREN; Responsible Gambling in the Digital Era) research group at Concordia University partnered with colleagues from around the University, and the province of Quebec, to recruit students to answer the following question: "How might gambling game designers incorporate luck into contemporary games?" To explore this question, students participated in the second edition of the *GameBling Game Jam*: a two-day virtual event

[1] Corresponding author. Email: pauline.hoebanx@outlook.com
[2] In making this observation, we also need to be careful not to paint a too-simplistic picture of gambling ads. See recent work in *Critical Gambling Studies* that nuances the scholarly narrative on this subject (e.g., Kroon, 2023; Nicoll & Albarrán-Torres, 2022).
[3] A search of the journal's website for "game design" returns one result: Reynolds, 2021. A search of the journal's website for "luck" similarly returns only one result: Matilainen, 2021.



Graphic used on the recruitment poster

during which they spent 12 hours creating video games based on the theme: (Un)Lucky.

Game jams, as "sites of informal learning" (Meriläinen et al., 2020), are increasingly used as formal teaching tools in game-design curricula (Hrehovcsik et al., 2016; Preston et al., 2012). They encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, student engagement, and enable students to apply their knowledge in a very unconstrained way (Aurava et al., 2021; Gledhill & Novak, 2019; Hrehovcsik et al., 2016). Game jams are recognized as beneficial pedagogical tools and methods that encourage innovative game design (Cook et al., 2015). Reflecting on the *GameBling Game Jam* series, we argue that game jams also have the potential to create new knowledge about gambling while attracting students and early career researchers to this exploratory process.

The *GameBling Game Jams* are part of JREN's broader research initiative to study gambling from sociological perspectives, and to move away from the characterization of gambling-as-sin—a frame that has historically obscured gambling's manifold meanings and functions (e.g., Lears, 2003)—as well as the more recent characterization of gambling-as-pathology (see Johnson, 2021, for a critique of this characterization). Our game jams were, thus, less focused on the application of technical knowledge, as described by Hrehovcsik et al. (2016), and more focused on providing students with opportunities to think creatively, critically, and broadly about gambling-related themes and their intersection with game studies.

For the second edition of our game jam, we chose the theme (Un)Lucky, which conjured interesting oppositions, such as luck vs. skill, luck vs. control, and inherent luck vs. fabricated luck, amongst others. It also invoked broader ideas related to heterogeneous cultural interpretations of luck (like luck as fate, or luck as fallacy) and to embodied rituals of play (such as blowing on the dice or chasing wins on a "hot" slot machine).

In gambling studies, luck as been described as a magical–religious worldview (Reith, 1999/2005) that transforms gambling from a question of probabilities and, sometimes, some skill, into an event that can be controlled through ritualistic behaviours or through a property thought to be inherent in certain people, objects, and practices. According to Gerda Reith (1999/2005), "it is in this cognitive outlook that the tension of the gambling situation—the dynamic between uncertainty and order, chance and meaning—is to be found" (p. 156).

In his book *Something for Nothing: Luck in America*, Lears (2003) describes how American society historically embraced a culture of chance, welcoming luck, randomness, and fate as integral parts of life. However, Lears argues, contemporary American society has shifted toward a culture of control, characterized by the belief that reason, science, and technology allow individuals to manage their life outcomes. In such societies, uncertainties or unforeseen events often provoke feelings of anxiety and a sense of failure. For Lears (2003), gambling represents one of the few surviving elements of the previous culture of chance, now secularized and detached from its spiritual origins. Drawing insight into notions of luck from the writing of self-identified gamblers, Lears argues that these gamblers were,

perhaps, best positioned "to challenge the central dogma of our time: the idea that money is an indicator of fundamental value" (2003, p. 22). To illustrate, Lears drew from Jack Richardson's 1979 *Memoir of a Gambler*, observing that "the desire for something for nothing is more than mere laziness and greed; it often involves a longing to transcend the realm of money-worship altogether" (2003, p. 23). In search of this transcendence, and as a justification for his gambling practices, Richardson wrote: "I want to know…. I want to finally know…. Whether I am to have any grace in this life" (Richardson, 1979, p. 25).

More generally, the scholarship on luck notes that it is often conceptualized as a force that brings either good fortune or adversity. However, as Sauder (2020) argues, while this common-sense idea of luck as a force, as something magical, has been of interest for anthropologists, its sociological appeal is limited. In Sauder's view, a "useful sociological conception of luck has an existence independent from purposeful actions and cannot be reduced to them" (2020, p. 195). For Sauder, luck describes an occurrence "that involves chance, is consequential (either beneficial or harmful), and is at least partially outside the control of the person or people affected by it" (2020, p. 195).

Sauder's description—particularly its emphasis on 1) the consequential nature of luck in an experiential register, and 2) the uncertainty about whether it is partially in or out of the subject's control—seems to align well with how (gambling) game designers have mobilized this concept to incentivize continued play. Salen and Zimmerman's classic *Rules of Play* (2003), for instance, argues that, in addition to questions of probability when designing games with random elements, game designers should also consider the way that players will interpret or misinterpret these mechanisms (pp. 288–289). They suggest ways for games to take gamblers' common logical fallacies into account:

> For example, think about the long shot fallacy. If your game allows players a choice between a long short and a safe bet, you should expect most players to take the long shot and balance your formal system accordingly. Overemphasis on good outcomes and the lightning striking twice fallacies can help keep players optimistic in a game with a large chance element. Even if a player has seen a lot of bad luck, these fallacies keep hope for a turnaround alive. (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 186)

As this quotation illustrates, game designers might integrate luck into their odds-based games in a variety of ways, including by manipulating the chances of winning to give players "hope for a turnaround." Thinking about the iconography of gambling games, we can also see many other ways that notions of luck are incorporated, by, for example, adding cultural symbols of luck (such as four-leaf clovers or the number seven), or by using sonic and haptic elements designed to emote the experience of being lucky (Schüll, 2014). Our theme, (Un)Lucky, was chosen to explore these design practices.

GameBling Game Jam 1.0: Slot Machines

Slot Machines was the theme of the first edition of the *GameBling Game Jam*. The event was JREN's first venture into the use of game jams as an innovative research method to deconstruct gambling game designs (Hoebanx et al., 2023). Most of the games created during the first edition interpreted the theme literally and featured slot machines as physical objects in the games. We also found a tendency among these games to portray slot machines negatively, focusing on players' loss of control over gambling outcomes. Curious about the effects of a less concrete theme, we chose to focus on the abstract concept of luck for the second edition.

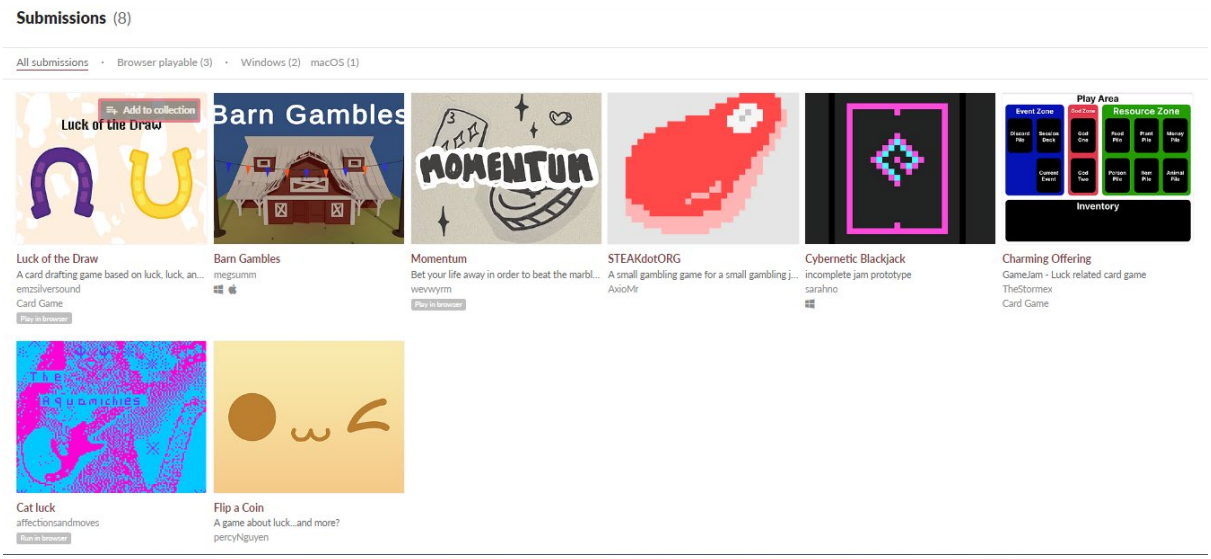
GameBling 2.0 event banner.

GameBling 2.0: (Un)Lucky

Supported by TAG (Technoculture, Art and Games Research Centre, housed within the Milieux Institute for Arts, Culture, and Technology at Concordia University), as well as HERMES and JREN (two research teams housed within the infrastructure of the Research Chair on Gambling at Concordia University), the game jam hosted sixteen students—the same number as the previous edition. They received a $300 bursary for their participation. Accompanied by four organizers and a floating mentor, six teams generated eight unique games, uploaded to the itch.io page (*GameBling Game Jam 2.0*, 2023). Participants had the option to present game ideas or working game-design documents without the requirement of a finished game on the itch.io page. The organizers emphasized the low-stakes, exploratory nature of the event, highlighting how the experimental space encouraged collaboration, diverse roles, and various interpretations of the theme. The games that were created included three card games, an adventure game, a coin-flipping game, and a horse-race betting game. All the games are available to play on the itch.io game platform.

Of the sixteen original participants, nine participated in the subsequent writing workshop. The primary goal was to encourage jam participants to reflect on and write about their experiences as game designers, aiming to gain insights into their thinking and design processes—something that the previous year's blog post was not able to achieve (Hoebanx et al., 2023). The outcome of the writing workshop was four blog posts about the following games: *Luck of the Draw*, *Charming Offering*, *Cat Luck*, and *Flip a Coin*.

Reflecting on the first edition (Hoebanx et al., 2023), we argued that game jams could be used as an innovative research method in critical gambling studies to generate new ideas and to explore common perceptions of gambling themes. Many of our conclusions were drawn from our own interpretations of the games and the short explanations provided by game jam participants when presenting their final products. What our conclusions were missing, though, was a reflection from our game designers in their own words. To remedy this situation, we proposed a second edition that would include data collection from past participants to further understand their design process. In Hoebanx et al. (2023), we proposed conducting interviews, but we ultimately decided to organize a writing workshop to offer participants the opportunity to write blog posts about their games.



Screenshot of the game submission page.
(Note: STEAKdotORG was not submitted by a participant in the game jam.)

Interpretations of the Theme

The games of the second edition portray luck in very different ways, resulting in seven games with unique dynamics. Three games are card games, a classic gambling game medium: *Luck of the Draw*, *Cybernetic Blackjack*, and *Charming Offering*. In *Luck of the Draw*, players attempt to influence their luck by choosing a series of cultural symbols of luck, such as a rabbit's foot or the number 13. *Cybernetic Blackjack* is a reinterpretation of the game of blackjack, in which the player can peek at their opponent's cards, giving them an edge in the game. Finally, *Charming Offering* is a resource-management game in which players must make offerings to two gods in the hopes of increasing their resources. Two other games are also based on widespread gambling mediums: *Flip a Coin* features a gruesome combination of coin flipping and Russian roulette, while *Barn Gambles* is a horse-betting game. The final two games are based on classic video game mechanics: *Momentum* is a tower-defense game that uses gambling iconography—the player must defend towers of cards against an onslaught of poker chips. *Cat Luck* is the only adventure game, where the player is a witch helping a cat in a punk band make its way onto a concert stage.

In the first edition of the *GameBling Game Jam*, most games interpreted the theme by integrating slot machines as objects in the game. In the second edition, most games also integrate gambling objects and mechanics (e.g., cards, horse betting, coin flipping). Most of the games' iconography is focused on representations of gambling, as several games reference playing cards (including in the tower-defense game, where their use is subverted), coins and poker chips, and horses (e.g., horse betting, lucky horseshoe). Surprisingly, both *Luck of the Draw* and *Cat Luck* feature cats prominently, another symbol associated with superstitions.[4]

Apart from *Cat Luck*, the games did not stray far from widely shared representations of gambling, showing that most participants associated games about luck with gambling games. However, despite remaining close to gambling representations, none of the games portrayed gambling in a negative way, with the exception of *Flip a Coin* (see blog post for further

[4] Nicoll and Albarrán-Torres (2022, p. 163) report the use of cat iconography, and iconography associated with cuteness and popular culture more generally, by gambling game designers to appeal to a female demographic and to depict a harmless image of gambling.

details). This is an interesting departure from the first game jam, where most participants' angle was to show the devious inner workings of slot machines. The academic setting in which these game jams take place might have played a role, as students perhaps associated our characterization of gambling studies as preoccupied with pathology and, therefore, felt the need to represent gambling negatively. Another explanation could be that luck, as a perceived magical property that might give players an edge over their odds of winning, is associated with success and, thus, positive representations of gambling. As a concept, luck is also more open to interpretation than a physical object like a slot machine. Finally, it is possible that slot machines, which have long-dominated casino floors (Schüll, 2014), have, because of their ubiquity and effects, become closely associated with their well-known addictiveness and, by extension, negative perceptions of gambling. The addictive and manipulative potential of slot machines might have overshadowed other lenses through which to analyze them, such as luck, but also cultures of chance (Lears, 2003) and play.

The central question of the game jam, "How do gambling games integrate luck?," was answered in different ways. Both *Momentum* and *Flip a Coin* integrate the concept through their iconography. Neither game integrates ways to boost players' odds, unlike *Luck of the Draw* or *Charming Offering*, where players might draw luckier or less lucky cards. In his blog post, the creator of *Flip a Coin* explains that the purely odds-based mechanic, where the only action that the player can take is to flip a coin, is intentional. It is meant to reduce gambling to its simplest chance element and to remove the gratifying feeling of winning through a monotonous, entirely random game in which luck plays no part.

In their blog post, the creators of *Charming Offering* explain that their intention was to include personifications of luck in the form of various gods that influence the outcome of the game. In this game, luck is integrated as the idea of fate, which can be influenced through offerings. The concept of fate is also explored in *Cat Luck*. In her blog post, the author explains that it is a reflection on the impact of luck on success in the art world. The obstacles encountered by the player to reach their final goal, the concert stage, are representative of the misfortune faced by the cat-artist. The *Luck of the Draw* game, on the other hand, quantifies luck by assigning positive or negative points to various lucky objects. In *Barn Gambles*, while the player cannot influence the luck of their horse, they can train their horse to perform better, showing an interesting integration of skill in influencing the outcome of the game. Skill also plays a role in *Cybernetic Blackjack*, where cheating is sanctioned by the game. By being able to peek at their opponent's cards, the player can gain an advantage over their opponent, but only if they can skillfully predict their adversary's moves. However, seeing the other player's hand does not entirely remove luck from the equation: the fate of the game, for instance, still rests on randomly drawn cards.

Most participants in *GameBling Game Jam 2.0* were not members of our gambling research teams and had no background in gambling studies. It is, therefore, interesting that their interpretations of luck are reminiscent of the literature we have briefly discussed. For example, *Luck of the Draw*, which relies on players' subjective interpretation of symbols of luck, is in line with Salen and Zimmerman's (2003) advice to take players' beliefs about luck and probability into account in the design of a game. Many games also contrasted skill and control, characteristic of cultures of control, with luck and randomness, associated with cultures of chance (Lears, 2003). For example, *Charming Offering*, *Barn Gambles*, and *Cybernetic Blackjack* each offer different amounts of control over the fate of the game, through choosing beneficial offerings, training your horse, or peeking at opponents' cards. And, in *Flip a Coin*, players' control is taken away entirely, as they are forced to gamble with their life. These games also featured uncertainty

about the amount of control exerted by the player in games of luck, as described by Sauder (2020).

The blog posts show how deeply the designers engaged with the game jam's theme when creating their games. By inviting students to create games from scratch, we do more than just participate in the practice of reverse-engineering games—as is seen in game-design studies, and, increasingly, in gambling studies (see, for example, Stange et al., 2017). Game jams also introduce a creative aspect to this reflection by allowing participants to explore the limits of game design. It is important to note that, while the games all reflect a deep engagement with the game jam's theme, the games are also fun to play. Participants demonstrated a remarkable attention to the enjoyment of the players. Designing gamblified games that are *fun* is an alternative approach to gambling studies that focuses less on gambling-as-sin (Lears, 2003) and gambling-as-pathology (Johnson, 2021), and more on gambling as entertainment and pleasure (Hoebanx & French, 2023).

Some Recommendations and Conclusion

We have some recommendations for those interested in organizing their own game jams. Firstly, if your participants are not from game studies or computer science backgrounds, consider involving students with some game design and technical know-how, and / or game-design experts, to assist with the technical aspects of game development. In our *GameBling Game Jams*, the technical knowledge gap was seen as an opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration, rather than a barrier to participation. Alternatively, use easily learnable programs, focus on creating analog games, or presenting game concepts. Unlike game jams focused on students applying their technical knowledge to a creative project (Hrehovcsik et al., 2016), the primary goal of our game jams was to encourage students to think critically about the theme and its relation to key questions at the intersection of game studies and gambling studies.

The culture of game jams, much like the "crunch culture" in the wider games industry, is often characterized by intense, non-stop work sessions. While some advocate for a high-intensity format, we opted for a more relaxed schedule, with fixed working hours to ensure participants could rest and take care of themselves. We also made sure to include "hydration checks" and "shrimp checks" to remind participants to drink some water and to fix their hunched and slouched posture every few hours. This approach was well received, although some students chose to work beyond the set hours. We also recommend incorporating critical reflection activities during or after the jam, such as writing workshops or interviews, to capture participants' motivations and thought processes. These insights are as valuable as the games themselves.

Game jams are an opportunity to bring future game designers and critical gambling scholars into conversation to reflect on design aspects such as the gamblification of games (Zanescu et al., 2021) and predatory retention mechanics (Schüll, 2014); but also to reflect on player enjoyment, introducing a nuance to the experience of games in a way that differs from the method of reverse-engineering gambling games. In conclusion, game jams are a powerful tool for fostering collaboration between coders and non-coders, encouraging interdisciplinary research, and creating a low-stress environment conducive to creativity and innovation. Future research should continue exploring the convergence between gaming and gambling, and we encourage other researchers to adopt and adapt our methods to further this exciting field of study.

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COMMENTARY

Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience: 16 Years On

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Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience: 16 Years On

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> At the age of thirty-seven,
> She realized she'd never ride
> Through Paris in a sports car,
> With the warm wind in her hair.
>
> Marianne Faithfull, "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan"

Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience, my first monograph, published in 2008, has gained a reputation over the years as being one of the primary studies of women's "everyday" domestic experiences of gambling. It explores the entanglements of class and gender among a group of working-class women as they used gambling as part of their attempt to navigate their way through a hostile and precarious society. In this commentary piece, I will reflect on the book and describe what it meant to me as a young woman early career scholar writing about gambling in the mid-2000s. I will explain something of the wider political and scholarly landscape that underpinned the book's conception, my experiences of its publication, and how the book fares within the contemporary field of gambling studies.

Publication of the book coincided almost exactly with the birth of my first son. I arrived home from hospital with my baby, aching, leaking, exhausted, and tearful on the very same day that a box containing copies of my book arrived from the publishers. My dad excitedly held up a copy. Sadly, I couldn't have been less interested. Birthing a baby is often used as a metaphor for writing a book: the pain of childbirth, the pride of holding your newborn—your own creation!—and the legacy that you have made are deemed comparable to the experience of bringing a book of your own into the world. Of course, this is nonsense. In February 2008, my book, the product of so much hard work, paled into insignificance, enveloped as I was with every sound and movement from my baby son.

My total distraction from my academic work at this point was ironic because the book gained a lot of interest very quickly, and it immediately became obvious that academia is not set up to accommodate motherhood. Mothers are expected to perform miracles and acts of superhuman resilience if they are to cling onto their careers—this is especially true for single mothers, and even more so in 2008, where the idea of Zoom meetings and virtual conference papers were still a fantasy somewhere in the distant future. Physical presence was expected and often demanded with no regard to whether your baby might require your presence too. Thus, the media interview requests and invitations to deliver conference keynotes all over the world came at the worst possible time. However, I tried my best to combine both. My partner waited with our baby outside the BBC's Broadcasting House

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during a radio interview, and again outside a conference hall at Cardiff University when the book was shortlisted for the prestigious BSA Philip Abrams Memorial Prize. But I never managed to shake off my guilt as I rushed off early from conferences and missed the dinners and socials that are often so vital for networking.

The book describes the gambling experiences of a group of working-class women surviving on very low wages and living at the sharp edge of capitalism. The qualitative methods used—small-scale, in-depth, unsystematically sampled—were unusual within gambling studies in the early 2000s and were not well received by everyone. My first experience of presenting the research to an academic audience was also my first trip to the United States at the *International Conference of Gambling and Risk Taking* held at the MGM Grand casino in Las Vegas. It is hard to imagine a more incongruous setting for a presentation about the everyday, ordinary, and mundane lives of a group of middle-aged working-class women living on the margins of society in a northern English post-industrial city. My PhD supervisor squeezed my hand before I went up in front of an audience, made up mostly of representatives from the North American gambling industry and European psychology researchers, to present my inaugural conference paper. In reality, my early gambling studies colleagues probably weren't as perplexed by my research as I imagined them to be, but I felt acutely that my research was glaringly out of place. Early submissions of the research to gambling journals and conferences were not sympathetic to the lived experience focus of the research and were often desk rejected, owing to the research being "too descriptive and unempirical." The research may not have been generalizable, but I am proud that it was honest and true to the women whose voices shine through its pages, breathing life into the often hopelessly abstract theories that are supposed to help us understand human experience.

Revisiting the book, re-reading the women's accounts, and remembering the hardships that they suffered but also their kindness and resilience has been an emotional experience. Often their decision to gamble was a choice between a lottery ticket and basic food shopping. I wanted the book to speak to some of the myriad burgeoning inequalities and prejudices that were and continue to be so omnipresent in British society, and to illuminate some of the experiences of people in what have often been described as "left behind" communities.

Today, we call this exploration of the details of human life, rather than simply counting events, "lived experience." Lived experience, as a research method, has become more established and respected within gambling studies, but it is also often erroneously used to describe any research that draws on personal experience and intimate life. In fact, meaningful lived experience research, in accordance with its roots in feminist epistemology and reflexive methods, ought to incorporate biography, narrative, feelings, emotions, and interpersonal relationships in a holistic sense. This type of lived experience research is still often missing from gambling scholarship.

This absence of poorer, working-class women from gambling research is perplexing, given, as Gerda Reith notes, U.K. Lottery tickets were disproportionately purchased by poorer people living in the north, while the proceeds tended to be spent on arts and heritage projects in the south. Moreover, at the time of writing the book, women were gambling in new ways, differently to men, many for the first time in their lives, notably on the National Lottery[2] which, unlike all other forms of gambling, was played in almost equal numbers by men and women.

[2] The U.K. National Lottery was launched in 1994. It was one of the last countries in Europe to launch a revenue-raising lottery for good causes.

In spite of these marked gender and class differences, so much of gambling studies has ignored the structural inequalities of gender, race, and class within which gambling is always situated, other than to note some of the quantitative differences in play. I think this is partly because it is easier to imagine solutions and policy interventions when the "problem" is personalized. The emphasis of policy intervention and the "responsible gambling" mantra has long been on managing the individual to make better, more informed choices; to shield them from gambling advertising; to signpost them to support services. And yet, gambling-related harms in the United Kingdom are as stubbornly persistent as ever. One of the critiques of the book in 2008 was that, by not focusing on the deviance, danger, and harms of gambling, I risked appeasing the gambling industry. In fact, the book shows how powerful institutions and industries—including the gambling industry—feed off and exploit the inequalities and vulnerabilities of players, and that the relentless focus of research on pathologized individuals ultimately lets those industries off the hook.

The women who participated in the research project that informed the book were living through the last days of New Labour: a rebranded Labour government that had espoused a narrative of corporate-friendly social reform with a firm emphasis on consumerism and personal responsibility. The vignettes from the interviews that are presented throughout the book describe the emotional and physical effects of a nagging, gnawing poverty. The women's voices also have a prophetic edge: times were hard, but they were about to get harder. The women's lives and experiences pre-date both the economic austerity politics of the proceeding British Conservative government and, later. the cataclysmic events that disproportionately impacted working-class and women of colour, notably the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown and the United Kingdoms's cost of living crisis.

From the outset, I felt a sense of deep loyalty and respect to the women who had so generously devoted their time to talking to me about their lives and gambling experiences. I didn't want to pathologize them, or present their choices as stupid and irrational, or their lives as a miserable Orwellian trudge with the futile hope of winning the lottery their only salvation. In part, I wanted to do this out of respect to them, but *also* because to do otherwise simply wouldn't be true. As a social scientist, my responsibility is to make sense of, understand, and critically reflect on the intersections of inequalities and experience. I have always felt that, too often, gambling research does the opposite, by turning explanations for gambling and gambling-related harms inwards towards the individual who is perpetually pathologized and held personally responsible for their risk taking. We see this reflected in the relentless contemporary policy discourses of "responsible gambling," with its firm emphasis on *individual* rather than corporate, industry, or state responsibility.

The lyrics from the Marianne Faithfull song "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan," cited above, were reproduced on the opening page of my book. I remember thinking that the lyrics perfectly epitomized the women's lives that were limited not by stupidity, desperation, foolishness, or personal pathology, but by the intense economic disadvantage that permeated their lives. It was a creeping and pervasive type of poverty that seeped into their daily thoughts that, in turn, became impregnated with a constant sense of anxiety and dread about financial struggles and economic insecurity. In this sense, *Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience* is also a political book. By refusing to pathologize and medicalize the women's gambling practices, the book set itself apart from mainstream gambling scholarship, which at the time was dominated by discourses focusing on personal, individual blame and responsibility for what were in fact social problems. Yet the women's decision to gamble was inextricably linked to their lack of privilege

and their location within exploitative capitalist structures. Not only was their unpaid domestic labour and their low-paid care work unvalued, they were also virtually invisible within gambling studies. No one knew *why* they chose to spend unprecedented amounts of their small monthly income on gambling because nobody had thought to ask.

Today, we would recognize much of the above as analogous with neoliberal discourses but interestingly the book does not include a single mention of neoliberal or neoliberalism! Yet, re-reading the book today, it is clear that the women's experiences very much echoed the beginnings of what was to soon become an entrenched cultural neoliberalism. One of the cornerstones of the contemporary neoliberal experience is the endless personal search for a release and freedom from the everyday anxieties of late capitalism, and the offer of heavily personal and commodified solutions. Throughout the book, the quotes from the women depict, in often raw and poignant detail, their daily struggles for economic survival. Gambling weekly on the National Lottery came to symbolize hope for a better, less precarious future within the context of a society racked with inequalities that offered little in the way of meaningful social mobility.

The book describes how the women's lives were characterized by a felt need to take personal responsibility for navigating a careful balance between the various contradictory demands that permeated their lives. First and foremost, as working-class women living at the sharp end of late capitalism, their lives and experiences were underpinned by a constant search for the acquisition of "respectability." Respectability is a term coined by the sociologist Bev Skeggs in the late 1990s and is used to refer to the struggle for value and status for women who lack the cultural and economic capital to acquire this. Skeggs's work inspired so much of the book: the ways in which class and gender are formed and reformed in difficult circumstances where working-class women, in particular, are subjected to an extraordinarily vociferous level of judgment and surveillance for their actions. The women whose stories are told in my book performed the exhausting labour of respectability by endlessly seeking ways of getting by on a very limited budget while never asking for help, performing care and ensuring the well-being of the family, avoiding "waste," alleviating personal guilt and stress, and curating an image of respectable familial harmony and well-being.

Gambling as it is *morally* framed—as deviant, irrational, irresponsible, and unethical—stands directly opposed to the type of respectability and worthiness towards which the women strove. While gambling for men has long been excused as fun, camaraderie, and an accepted working-class, male leisure activity, this was not so for women whose consumption and household management were always held up for a very particular type of scrutiny and surveillance. Buying National Lottery tickets was a compromise for the women—a "tasteful and acceptable" (Office of the National Lottery, 1994, p. 20) gambling activity where participation could be interwoven into everyday life. Tickets could be bought at the supermarket, post office, and even online, avoiding the smoky, gloomy betting shops that had long been the preserve of men. Something that struck me from the very beginning of my research was the sheer mundanity of gambling for many of the women. The *ordinariness* of National Lottery play was a key part of its extraordinariness. The systematic and non-spontaneous nature of National Lottery play was palpable:

> It … comes out of the housekeeping … then we put (our winnings) in a jar and it buys the rest for the next few weeks. We have a jar for our winnings. (Casey, 2008, p. 68)

The reframing of gambling during this time, alongside the liberalization of gambling legislation that was formalized in the 2005

Gambling Act, coincided with the opening up of new sites for gambling. In particular, the women in the study embraced new ways of gambling alone at home and helped to illustrate the complete reframing of domestic space as sites for gambling during these years. It is worth noting that the women's accounts of gambling predate both the widespread use of the internet, particularly home Wi-Fi, and importantly also the entrenchment of social media into everyday life. In 2008, the idea of smartphones that would incorporate 24/7 internet access was only a distant possibility, and social media was still an almost science-fiction notion for a distant future. This is reflected in Tracey's account of her daydreams about how she would spend her winnings if she won the jackpot:

> If I'd won the Lottery, I'd have bought the 350-pound mobile that I saw. It's gorgeous. And it's got the internet. (Casey, 2008, p. 100)

Tracey, though, was unusual in her wonderfully unbridled account of her clearly well-thought through jackpot fantasy. Most of the women expressed a palpable fear of the jackpot: of winning "too much" and losing their place within their communities of friends and families. The emphasis was generally on winning enough to ease the struggles and anxieties that made everyday life so painful, while also not being thrust into a world in which they felt they would never "belong." The women talked about how the jackpot "scares the hell out of me," said that they "would hate it," that they'd "be scared" and that "it'd so much change yer" (Casey, 2008, p. 103). Discussions of the fear of the jackpot echoed Bourdieusian accounts of cultural capital and habitus. The women were acutely aware that, in the unique British class system, economic capital alone is not enough to project oneself into the echelons of middle- or upper-class society. Sandra beautifully articulated this when she remarked that money "can bring happiness but it can't bring love with it" (Casey, 2008, p. 103).

Future research could pull together some of the threads that hang tantalizingly from the final pages of the book. I would love to see research exploring contemporary narratives of meritocracy—the idea that anyone can make it, and that we alone must take responsibility for our own successes and failures—which were present in 2008 as the women went to extraordinary lengths to try to make their lives work against a hostile and precarious backdrop. But today, as I have explored in my more recent writing on gambling, social media has made these narratives impossible to resist. Social media offers a hyper-visual, compelling norm of aspiration, consumerism, and hyper-individualism, within which neoliberal accounts of "responsible gambling" and the "problem gambler" thrive. Social media also *appears* to celebrate "ordinary" people, with intimate, confessional, and "relatable" content the norm and increasingly expected. Looking back at the prime-time televised, mega media exposure of the freshly launched National Lottery in the early 2000s, we can see the beginnings of the popular entrenchment of gambling as a form of consumption that offers an individualized solution to economic and social problems. Adverts featuring the Scottish comedian Billy Connolly were replaced with adverts depicting "ordinary" players and their communities. And, of course, the popular slogan *It Could be You!* similarly echoed wider meritocratic fantasies of accessible egalitarianism that were becoming increasingly popular in the early 2000s and are entirely ubiquitous today.

Today, I have found my gambling studies allies in others who are also appalled by the gambling industry's grip on research and seek ways of avoiding the pathologizing of vulnerable communities of gamblers. I now have an academic home of sorts in Critical Gambling Studies. My next book, *The Return of the Housewife*, to be published in 2024 by Manchester University Press, is not about gambling at all but shares many of its themes with

those first developed in *Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience*. Capitalist societies have always sought out new ways of persuading women to accept their lot by offering glimmers of hope for pleasure, daydream, and temporal forms of "escape," but always in ways that ensure that the profits of highly lucrative commercial ventures are protected. The National Lottery went to extraordinary lengths to centre its promotional activities around altruistic discourses: of contributing towards "good causes" and of promising to make people's dreams come true. This is, of course, the perfect neoliberal strategy; one that offers a highly lucrative commercial solution to complex social problems, while at the same time offering the daydream of hope for a better future.

From the outset, I wanted my book to emphasize how much the women *matter*; to say plainly that their lives *matter*. My colleague Kate Bedford told me that the book made her cry. I can understand why. The emotional power of women's words is valuable to scholars everywhere and can be the first stage in provoking positive social change. As bell hooks so powerfully argued, listening, hearing, and recording life as it is lived on the margins, and recording the fear, anxiety, and precarity of everyday life on the edges of late capitalist society, can be the first stage in taking steps to change it.

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COMMENTARY

The Contextual Nature of Stigma and Gambling: What Difference Does It Make to Help-Seeking?

Catherine Hitch, Alice E. Hoon

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The Contextual Nature of Stigma and Gambling: What Difference Does It Make to Help-Seeking?

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Gambling disorder is a serious mental health condition that can have devastating consequences on a person's life (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Stigma is typically conceptualized as thoughts and feelings that are linked to disgrace, shame, or feeling less socially acceptable (Goffman, 1963). Stigma can present in a range of forms, including public stigma (broad societal shared stigma beliefs), perceived stigma (beliefs that other people hold stigmatizing opinions), and self-stigma (subjective, internalized negative beliefs about the self, based on what others think) (Keane, 2019). The stigma associated with experiencing harmful gambling is well documented in the literature, and it might carry more stigma than other mental health conditions (Quigley et al., 2020). Dąbrowska and Wieczorek (2020) reported that people with a diagnosed gambling disorder had a negative self-perception, particularly in relation to their trustworthiness and feelings of shame, as well as a fear of rejection by loved ones. Additionally, Keane (2019) described the public stigma associated with problem gambling as being particularly "intense."

The discourse around gambling harm can further exacerbate stigma. The term *problem gambler* has been extensively used within both academic literature and the media. This term puts the onus on the individual as the "problem" (Keane, 2019). Blaming the individual fails to account for the environmental conditions and risk factors that make developing a gambling addiction more likely (Rimal et al., 2023), such as the availability of gambling activities (e.g., Welte et al., 2004) or advertising (McGrane et al., 2023). The narrative of *responsible gambling* can further stigmatize individuals, as it implies that people with addiction-type difficulties are irresponsible and have no self-control. The responsible gambling mantra fails to account for the role of the industry in the development and maintenance of gambling harm (Livingstone & Rintoul, 2020), which in turn can influence the public view of gambling addiction. Hing et al. (2016) reported that people with gambling disorder and addiction felt stigmatized by the public's perception; that they were perceived to be untrustworthy and lacking intelligence. It is possible to see how discourses such as these create and maintain public stigma and self-stigma.

Complex Nuances of Cultural Aspects of Stigma

How gambling stigma manifests is complex. Fraser et al. (2017) suggested that stigma originates from a range of circumstances and is often used as a political tool for behaviour

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control. If stigma is created and maintained socially, then it follows that stigma needs to be understood as being culturally specific, which makes it somewhat nuanced. Some such cultural nuances relating to stigma are perhaps misunderstood or not yet known. The authors wish to draw upon military veteran–specific evidence to illustrate this critical point as there is extant literature relating to military veterans and stigma.

Stigma relating to veteran gambling is not as extensively researched compared to the stigma associated with other difficulties. However, it is undisputed that stigma is frequently associated with common mental health difficulties, with PTSD being particularly stigmatized for armed forces populations. For example, Rhidenour et al. (2019) explained that veterans are often given a dichotomous label of *hero* or *broken*; broken being associated with PTSD. It is thought that, for some veterans, having a mental health difficulty, such as PTSD, carries more stigma than having an addiction difficulty. For example, excessive alcohol use was generally normalized and thus carried less stigma, if any, compared to other mental health difficulties (Jones & Fear, 2011). This might also be true of gambling behaviour, given that gambling is normalized in certain contexts for armed forces populations. The U.K. Ministry of Defence historically provided alcohol for coping with work-related stress and to aid bonding (Jones & Fear, 2011), and the U.S. Department of Defence provided soldiers with gambling slot machines for "morale, welfare, and recreation" (Means, 2022). Perhaps, rather than gambling being stigmatized for U.S. veterans, it is encouraged and enabled for stress management and recreation. Furthermore, gambling might be financially lucrative for the Department of Defence, therefore it would not be in their interest to foster narratives that connect stigma to gambling in a U.S. military context (Means, 2022).

However, gambling stigma might affect veterans in other ways. If a U.S. veteran thinks their gambling has become excessive and they needed help, they face then a dilemma with a different stigma attached. If a veteran wishes to seek support, they must go through their internal chain of command, meaning their military record would likely be "marked." Workplace stigma associated with help-seeking often acts as a barrier, with fears of repercussions associated with one's career (Coleman et al., 2017). Soldiers do not want their records marked with anything that could identify them as unfit. This workplace stigma seems more specific to the U.S. veteran context than the U.K.

One consistent finding across nationalities is that military service is a predictor for developing serious gambling difficulties (Harris et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2016; Sharman et al., 2019). This might be due to elevated levels of trauma exposure, while simultaneously being exposed to stigmatized beliefs over pride and self-management (Clary et al., 2023). As the military is predominantly male, it is noteworthy that the majority of military research represents the male population. If female military veterans experience gambling-related stigma, perhaps they experience it differently? Clement et al. (2015) commented that female veterans were less likely to see stigma as a help-seeking barrier, perhaps because they were less bound by stigmatized attitudes of being mentally strong.

The Complexities Surrounding Stigma as a Help-Seeking Barrier

Whilst the stigma around experiencing gambling difficulties is acknowledged, the effect that stigma has on help-seeking in the general population is unclear. Gambling stigma can serve as a barrier to help-seeking, yet many do still reach out. In 2022, GamCare reported that the U.K. National Gambling Helpline received approximately 71,000 calls in 12 months, with over 38,000 treatment sessions being delivered to just under 10,000 people. However, approximately 203,000 people need gambling support in the United Kingdom (NHS England Digital, 2023), suggesting that less than 5% are

accessing treatment. This might partly be the result of stigmatizing beliefs. Nevertheless, it is surmisable that many who sought help did so while holding stigmatized beliefs. Hence, we need a better understanding of the nuances of how stigma can hinder or facilitate help-seeking in different individuals.

How stigma impacts help-seeking is complex. Horch and Hodgins (2015) report that self-stigma can actually increase treatment seeking, though it has a negative impact on coping due to increased shame. Whilst the causes of increased help-seeking were unclear, Horch & Hodgins (2015) proposed that it could be due to feelings of self-blame. However, in the same way that gambling stigma is likely context specific, the effects that stigma have on help-seeking might differ by context. Baxter et al. (2016) found that stigma was experienced differently between men and women, which in turn affected barriers to treatment seeking. Men were more likely to feel stigma around discussing the emotional aspects of their addiction difficulties, which was consequently a barrier to help-seeking. Women, however, felt shame for admitting they were enticed by the glamour of the casino and for holding irrational beliefs about their chance of winning. For women, the stigmatizing beliefs were less likely to act as a barrier to help-seeking.

Shame and secrecy are reported barriers to help-seeking (Gainsbury et al., 2014), with secrecy reducing the likelihood of using self-exclusion tools (Hing et al., 2016). Hing et al. (2016) commented that shame prevented self-exclusion from land-based gambling venues due to a fear of being recognized or judged. This effect was not seen with online gambling, in which self-exclusion felt more anonymous. With regards to accessing counselling, Hing et al. (2016) found that stigma affected people differently. Some avoided counselling because they thought they would find the experience stigmatizing, whereas others attended counselling in spite of stigma because the need for help was greater. The evidence surrounding secrecy and stigma could account for why some accessed the U.K. National Helpline (GamCare, 2022)—the use of telephone support enabled anonymity and reduced the sense of being negatively judged.

Referring back to the example of military populations, the paucity of existing evidence does suggest that a proportion of veterans do engage in help-seeking for gambling difficulties (Champion et al., 2022; Shirk et al., 2022). These findings are interesting because, as suggested above, this population has an increased likelihood of help-seeking being affected by stigma. Harris and colleagues (2021) studied the economic cost of gambling and found that veterans cost the U.K. economy more than non-veterans due to their public healthcare and social service use. Harris et al. (2021) reported that a higher percentage of veterans than non-veterans accessed gambling-related support services and other psychological support, suggesting that, in spite of stigma, they did help-seek. The nature of their help-seeking perhaps indicates that stigma was not a barrier, or that gambling stigma does not exist in all help-seeking contexts. For example, if a veteran visited their GP for something unrelated to gambling (e.g., insomnia or PTSD), they might have received support that provided relief for an issue that was directly or indirectly contributing to their gambling. Global veteran and military literature relating to stigma as a barrier for mental health help-seeking generally reports a common theme: stigma does exist, but it is frequently not an actual barrier for this population (Clement et al., 2015; Rafferty et al., 2017; Sharp et al., 2015). Clement and colleagues (2015) found that female veterans were less likely to see stigma as a barrier than males, contributing to the argument that whether stigma acts as a barrier is nuanced.

Intersectionality in Gambling Stigma

The words *gambling* and *stigma* are often linked, and this relationship is not disputed. However, it is perhaps a bit reductionist to simply state that gambling stigma always impedes help-seeking. Discussing the literature relating to 1)

military veterans and 2) gender differences in help-seeking for gambling addiction, general mental health, and stigma, highlights an intersection between these points. Essentially, where or how stigma affects help-seeking depends on the population and context. Additionally, *how* individuals feel stigmatized also differs by population and context, which in turn impacts help-seeking. For these reasons, it is necessary to understand the contextual nature of stigma, and how stigma can influence help-seeking.

It needs to be reiterated that stigma is not always a barrier even when it is present, which might be more a reflection of the complex needs of the person experiencing difficulties. This latter point indicates a further intersection: the role of a person's individual needs in the context of their wider life and how that interacts with contextual stigma. The points surrounding intersectionality highlight that the relationship between contextual stigma and the needs of those experiencing gambling difficulties warrant further exploration, to better inform evidence-based treatment interventions. There can be a temptation to tease these relationships apart, yet, critically, if they are intertwined, they ought to be investigated in that manner.

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Funding and Conflict of Interest Statements

Catherine Hitch

Career-Long Funding Disclosure

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- 2023: Research and Network for Gambling Early-career Scholars (RANGES), ECR travel grant, $1,000.
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- 2022: Society of the Study of Addiction, ECR travel grant, £300.

- 2019–2022: Royal British Legion (RBL), PhD research grant, £70,000.

Conflict of Interest Statement

I have never sought, nor received, gambling industry funding for the purposes of research, providing evidence or consultancy to any stakeholders including government agencies, or to create safer gambling information / campaigns and gambling-related interventions (e.g., safer gambling, reduced gambling, responsible gambling).

The RIWF grant was used to conduct a systematic review into the use of a specific therapy to support veterans with PTSD or gambling difficulties. The grant was received by the RIWF via the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

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The doctoral project funded by the RBL was unrelated to gambling; it explored help-seeking behaviours of veterans living in Northern Ireland. The RBL is sponsored by public donations.

Although the ICRG is associated with the gambling industry, the grant I received was for conference travel only. The ICRG provided partial funds for me to present at the 2023 International Conference on Behavioral Addictions, hosted in Incheon, South Korea.

Alice Hoon

Career-Long Funding Disclosure

- 2024: Academic Forum for the Study of Gambling (AFSG) honorarium for reviewing grant applications, £300.
- 2022: AFSG honorarium for reviewing grant applications, £500.
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- 2020–2022: GambleAware funding for *CONGAM: A scoping and feasibility study of adding contingency management to psychosocial interventions for disordered gambling*, £110,589.
- 2020–2021: Seed grant from the International Center for Responsible Gambling for *Identifying and modelling the schedules of reinforcement in live-odds betting*, $29,961.
- 2010: Wales Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience Program Grant Scheme for *Neural correlates of problem gambling: A combined MEG and fMRI investigation*, £37,342.50.
- 2008–2010: University of Wales PhD Studentship for *Emergent slot machine gambling: A relational frame theory approach*, £39,000.

Conflict of Interest Statement

GambleAware and the International Center for Responsible Gambling (ICRG) both receive money from the gambling industry through regulatory settlements. In the past, I have applied for and been awarded grants from both of these organizations, however neither organization nor the gambling industry had **any** part in the inception, design, conducting, analysis, or findings of the research, and the research therefore was not influenced or informed by the gambling industry. Both of these grants were administered independently of the gambling industry. I have never received any money personally as part of these grants. The research funded by ICRG involved using quantile regression models to analyze patterns of play in sports bettors using an existing publicly available data set. The research funded by GambleAware explored the use of Contingency Management as a treatment for gambling disorder. Neither

research produced any product or information which is of benefit to the gambling industry.

The present commentary has in no way been influenced by anyone from the gambling industry.

The Wales Institute for Cognitive Neuroscience and Swansea University have no links to the gambling industry.

Additional disclosures

I am a member of the Academic Forum for the Study of Gambling (AFSG), which distributes research funding derived from regulatory settlements in the United Kingdom. The gambling industry has no role in funding calls or decisions. I have not sought, nor received, research funding from AFSG. I have received honorarium payments for reviewing grant applications from AFSG.

I am a Review Editor for the Addictive Behaviors section of *Frontiers in Psychology*. I do not receive any payment for this work and there are no links with the gambling industry.

Author Details

Dr. Catherine Hitch's research mainly focuses on military veteran help-seeking behaviour for a range of mental health difficulties. Her work includes examining how they self-manage their mental health experiences, which often includes the use of addictive behaviours (such as alcohol and gambling) as a coping strategy. Catherine has taken a particular interest in hidden and hard-to-reach veteran populations who tend to experience poorer mental health and worse addiction outcomes as a result of help-seeking barriers. Such barriers often present as self-perceived stigma or accessibility.

Dr. Alice Hoon is an Associate Professor in Medical Psychology at Swansea University Medical School. Her research interests include gambling behaviour, structural characteristics of slot machines, gambling treatment, and third wave therapies. Alice's teaching interests include addiction, mental health, and medical psychology. She has been conducting gambling research for over 18 years and is a co-founder and co-director of the Grambling Research, Education and Treatment (GREAT) Network Wales.

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COMMENTARY

Interview: So, What *Is* Wrong with Addiction?: A Conversation with Helen Keane

Helen Keane

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Interview: So, What *Is* Wrong with Addiction?: A Conversation with Helen Keane

Helen Keane is a feminist sociologist and author of numerous academic publications in the fields of gender studies, cultural studies, and critical addiction studies. The author of the influential study *What's Wrong with Addiction?* (Melbourne University Press, 2002) and a member of the CGS Editorial Board, she shared some of her recent reflections on the problem of stigma in a blog post. Below, Dr Keane responds to a series of questions from the early career editors of this special issue and from the core editorial team at CGS.

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Introduction question: Tell us a bit about yourself (career trajectory, expertise).

My career doesn't fit the trajectory model. I was an unhappy and mediocre journalist before returning to university to do an MA in Women's Studies, driven by my interest in feminist theory rather than a career goal. This was followed by a PhD in Women's Studies. I knew the chances of an academic career were low, but after a few years of casual teaching, I was fortunate to get a post-doctoral fellowship at the National Centre for HIV Social Research at the University of New South Wales (now the Centre for Social Research in Health). There, I learnt an enormous amount about sexuality, queer lives, and the regulation of non-normative desires and practices. I was then hired into the gender studies program in the School of Humanities at the Australian National University (ANU). I usually say I became a sociologist in 2009 when an institutional restructure formed new disciplinary schools in my college. Sociology is a porous discipline! This move from humanities into the social sciences did reflect a change in my research interests and approach, but my training in gender and cultural studies has been absolutely formative in my work.

Reflect on any specific or significant contributions, work, events, and people that influenced your career trajectory in your early career years. Talk to us about your own Early Career Research (ECR) experience; for example, challenges, enablers, pushing boundaries in this field (specific to being a woman / man, if relevant)

There are so many people who have influenced and inspired me, but a long list of names would be dull reading. So, instead, I'll pick two undergraduate courses that I audited during my PhD: *Theories of Postmodernism* and *Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity*. They sound very of the 90s, and they were! In fact, I saw *Pulp Fiction* during my *Theories of Postmodernism* semester, and coming out of the cinema, I felt that my way of relating to the world had been transformed but also somehow vindicated. Those courses modelled a practice of reading and a reflexive feminist sensibility that I have tried to carry with me—I can credit Jill Bennett, Penne Deutscher, Rosanne Kennedy, and Liz Wilson for those formative experiences.

I have an ulterior motive in mentioning these courses and that is to stress the significance of teaching in our careers, at least in my career. I feel that my impact on the world comes as much from my teaching as from my research. Many of the students I teach will have careers in government,

and I also teach quite a lot of students in the health sciences, including those planning to go to medical school. If I can prompt students to think more reflectively and critically about drug use and addiction, my (perhaps optimistic) hope is that this might have some long-term influence.

My own "ECR" experience was shaped by the fact that I was regarded primarily as a teacher in a devalued and marginalized discipline (gender studies) within a male-dominated research-intensive university. It took me a long time to get promoted. I could have been more strategic, but I also had young children, so I was mainly focused on getting through each week. Later on, administrative and management roles were fundamental to my career progression. But I worry about a gendered "leadership" pattern in which women and other minoritized academics are enabled to succeed through institutional service rather than through support and recognition of their intellectual and creative work.

Before I was promoted to Associate Professor, a senior academic advised me that I was doing too many small jobs and should instead do one big job. In one way, this is sound advice. But it assumes that size and significance are objective qualities of tasks. There's a lot of evidence that women do a disproportionate amount of "academic housekeeping" (i.e., small jobs), but I would add that the work women do is readily classified as "housekeeping" precisely because women do it. To turn this into a practical insight: Be wary of devaluations of your skills and labour.

Your early research in sociology focused on the politics of addiction, and you published a monograph with the provocative title *What's Wrong with Addiction?* Why was this question so formative for you around the turn of last century, and what kinds of research studies did it open up for you in subsequent research projects?

I came to addiction as a topic from a broader interest in health as an "unassailable value," as Kirsten Bell has put it. As an enthusiastic Foucauldian, I wanted to investigate the subjects and objects produced by discourses of health and ideals of self-control and freedom. Addiction was going to be one of my "case studies," but it took over the whole project. I had a longstanding interest in psychoactive drugs and excess, some of it from fiction, film, and music, and some of it from more personal experiences. At the time, the 12-step self-help recovery movement was booming, as were related concepts such as co-dependency and the inner child. As Eve Sedgwick observed, it was a period of expansion for addiction. Popular books on food addiction, sex and love addiction, shopping addiction, and so forth were easy to come by and were low-hanging fruit for a feminist scholar. I wanted to juxtapose the popular with the medical and show the connections between different genres of addiction discourse.

I've continued with an interest in questioning what makes good things good and bad things bad, although habitual contrarianism can be a trap.

What does the study of addiction contribute to academic and lay knowledges about enjoyment and pleasure?

I'm struck by the two terms in your question, as enjoyment is not nearly as common a theme in drugs and addiction research as pleasure now is. But in gambling research, it seems that enjoyment is more prominent (as is entertainment). Is this because medical and pharmacological accounts of drug use talk about pleasure, albeit in the highly reduced form of neurotransmitters and brain rewards, while the gambling industry invokes enjoyment / entertainment as its beneficial product? Have we inadvertently adopted the concepts most resonant in the fields we critique?

To answer the actual question you pose, I'm firstly thinking about Fiona Nicoll's exploration of enjoyment in *Gambling in Everyday Life*. She shows that addiction and enjoyment (and other elements, such as community) coexist and can't

be neatly separated. Pleasure and harm aren't mutually exclusive, and focusing entirely on harm produces a thin understanding of human practices. When I started working in the field, the pleasures of drug use and the pleasure of states such as intoxication were marginalized topics. In medicalized academic contexts, merely acknowledging drugged pleasures seemed innovative and subversive. Pleasure is now a more familiar theme, and the interesting work is in examining the emergence and effects of pleasure in different situations, as Fay Dennis and Adrian Farrugia put it.

You have mobilized the concept of stigma, not just in relation to gambling but also in relation to alcohol and other substances and practices where addiction is in play. What can you tell us about the origins of the concept of stigma and its capacity to highlight what is at stake, both in understanding what it means to be an addict and the role of academic research on addiction?

Accounts of stigma usually start with Erving Goffman's notion of spoiled or discredited identities linked to social exclusion. He was clear that stigma was about a socially produced relationship between an attribute and a negative stereotype, rather than the attribute itself. However, in its popularization the concept has lost some of its sociological bite; it's often used as a slightly fancy synonym for social disapproval. More specifically, as many have argued, stigma has tended to be discussed in an individual framing, which masks social and political processes. You can see this in gambling research in which stigma usually refers to the negative beliefs that "the public" have about people with gambling problems. The solution is education and awareness so that people abandon these misguided stereotypes.

As most famously argued by Link and Phelan, what's missing is an understanding of stigma as a form of power. It is social, economic, and political power, not disapproval, which enables rejection, exclusion, and discrimination. Recent sociological work has built on this insight to produce accounts of stigma as a foundational political process rather than disapproval based on mistaken beliefs. For example, Imogen Tyler's work highlights the U.K.'s state-sanctioned "welfare-stigma production" as a strategy of neoliberal governance. In relation to addiction, Suzanne Fraser and colleagues have examined how stigma serves an essential political purpose by reproducing the "other" of addiction—a regulatory ideal of the productive, autonomous, and rational individual.

Thinking about the current moment in addiction research or critical addiction and consumption studies compared to when you entered the field two decades ago, what are some of the most important trends, themes, or new directions?

An important change is the increasing involvement of people with lived and living experience in formally recognized knowledge production. I should be clear that people who use drugs have been producing invaluable knowledge in diverse forms *forever*, but now their expertise is being acknowledged in more mainstream spaces (although not without limits and costs, as Annie Madden et al. have observed). I like Nancy Campbell's term "biopolitical expertise by experience" because it moves away from a soft understanding of experience as something that is most at home in a personal and easily digestible story. I'm also struck by Judy Chang's account of the "struggle to be seen as complex subjects versus inferior bodies" (p. 284). There's exciting feminist work being done by women who use drugs—examples are found in the recent collection *Narcofeminisms: Revisioning Drug Use*. To circle back to a previous question, lived expertise tends to reveal the inadequacy of conceptualizations of stigma, which focus on stereotypes and beliefs.

How can we make sense of the absence of studies of gambling in feminist scholarship and vice versa? How can we understand the absence of feminist accounts in gambling scholarship?

It seems there's something quite singular about gambling as a topic, at least in the way it is constructed in academic literature. I'm speculating, but perhaps feminist researchers think of it as either something very specific, which they don't have expertise in, or something so enmeshed with huge themes of political economy and capitalism that it's hard to imagine how to carve it out and address it.

Your question has prompted me to ask myself why I didn't write about gambling in my 2002 book, when I did dedicate chapters to sex addiction and food addiction. I remember thinking that gambling was "different" and feeling ill-equipped to tackle it. One technical point is that in the DSM-IV, pathological gambling (as it was then called) was not in the substance-use chapter—it was grouped with impulse-control disorders such as kleptomania. A more theoretical point is that, at the time, feminism was very focused on *the body* and gambling didn't seem as obviously embodied or corporeal as drug taking, eating, and sex. I now think that disembodied view of gambling is mistaken, by the way, in large part due to feminist gambling scholarship. I'm thinking of the work of Natasha Dow Schull, Fiona Nicoll, and Gerda Reith, for example. Here, I also want to mention Kate Bedford's fantastic work on bingo capitalism, which I've only just become familiar with. Her account of bingo brilliantly highlights the importance of feminized "self-effacing political economies" and how they tend to be ignored or trivialized. Bedford's analysis has so much to contribute to feminist political economy, but I feel like the topic of bingo is assumed to be niche and / or banal. As Bedford observes, McClintock was not a scholar of soap, and nor is Enloe a theorist of bananas, and more attention should be paid to what gambling can tell us about regulation, labour, and the everyday.

How do you think women's experiences of gambling have changed following the meteoric rise of social and digital media?

I can't provide a useful answer to this question as I don't have an informed view. The topic of social media tends to provoke people of my generation into armchair social commentary and this temptation should be resisted. I think critical gambling studies has a strong tradition of socio-technological analysis, so I look forward to reading more about this important issue in the pages of this journal.

It is very common to read headlines warning about some public health concern as "the new tobacco"—referring to a variety of practices and substances, from video gaming and smartphone use to junk food, binge-drinking, vaping, and online gambling. What do you think are the most important lessons from the story of big tobacco, and where do you think the comparison reaches its limits and prevents us from understanding the unique aspects of our own moment?

Tobacco has been generally understood to be a product like no other, distinctive in its harmfulness. Moderate drinking and responsible / sensible gambling sound reasonable as goals (setting aside the question of their validity and political effects), while moderate smoking sounds oxymoronic. Tobacco exceptionalism has been central to the victories of tobacco control, but as your question suggests, this exceptionalism is complicated by the increasing comparison of other activities and substances (and industries) to the established and incontrovertible negative pole of tobacco. For instance, the public-health position on alcohol is now that there is no safe level of consumption of this carcinogenic substance. While drinking norms are changing, especially among young people, I think a wholesale denormalization of

alcohol is unlikely, given the existence of so many diverse forms and practices of socially endorsed consumption, from date nights to conference dinners (including health-related conferences). That being said, the denormalization of smoking would have seemed fantastical in the 1950s.

As someone outside of tobacco research, one important lesson from its history is about the challenges of separating the denormalization of a harmful practice from the stigmatization of already marginalized and disadvantaged people. I find the smoking analogies you mention rhetorically interesting in this regard. Recently, the media has been reporting that using a gas stove is as bad as living with an (indoor) smoker in terms of indoor pollution. The aim of these stories is to get us to realize that a common domestic technology we use every day is in fact dangerous. But there's something unsettling about this comparison because we're accustomed to seeing smoking as a moral issue: Only terrible parents would smoke around children. But it turns out that prudential middle-class parents in the nicest homes have been doing something just as harmful.

How have things changed since you were an ECR (1) in the field, and (2) in your career / way of doing research? How do you think ECR experiences are different today?

Critical drug studies didn't really exist as a field when I started out. In some ways this was intellectually generative because it forced those of us interested in drugs to read widely and randomly, and there was more citational and authorial freedom. At least it felt that way. On the other hand, it is amazing to see the quality, depth, and diversity of work now being published in journals such as *International Journal of Drug Policy* and *Contemporary Drug Problems*. And there's a new generation of critical drug scholars who are doing wonderful work. I'd like to acknowledge the central role played by pioneers such as Suzanne Fraser and David Moore, whose hard work and vision developed the field into a sustainable enterprise.

In terms of research practices, I miss the amount and type of reading I used to do. This is in part a function of career and life stage, but it's also to do with increased demands for productivity and measurable outputs. I feel like academics read less and publish more than they used to do, which is of course paradoxical if you think that the purpose of publishing is to be read. There's pressure towards extractive reading practices, in which you race through the text to find the bits that are useful for you—either for your research or your teaching. This is a structural problem, not an individual failing, but it unfortunately becomes habitual. To end with something positive, there's now more emphasis on collaborative research and writing, which I find a helpful balance to the isolation and self-obsession that traditional scholarship can foster.

I'm not keen to comment too much on contemporary ECR experiences as there has been plenty written by current ECRs on the challenges of precarity, "hope labour", and punishing workload expectations. One observation I will make is that there has been a proliferation of university-provided academic, professional, and personal support services that didn't exist when I was an ECR. It's important that universities recognize their obligations to student and staff welfare, and these services can be very beneficial. However, they are also part of the same demanding ecosystem of individual performance.

What do you wish you'd known as an ECR that you know today?

- Being an academic encompasses many different tasks and skills, and there are different ways of being good at this job (which is a job: an exchange of labour for compensation).
- Being "good at school" tends to produce adults with an orientation towards external validation and a comfort with hierarchical classifications. These (often disavowed)

characteristics fit seamlessly with academic life but can be a limit to creativity and effectiveness in both research and teaching.
- Giving a less than stellar conference paper is not the end of the world.

What advice would you have for ECRs today?

Giving advice is pleasurable because it allows one to feel simultaneously knowledgeable and generous. But I'm skeptical about the value of generic advice from those of us who began their academic careers in a different time. The conditions of academic employment and the nature of universities have changed quite dramatically over the past 20 years, most obviously with increased precarity, intensified competition, and growing expectations of measurable productivity. I've noticed a proliferation in the academic career advice genre, in books, on social media, and in workshops and conference panels. To me, this is a symptom of the problems with higher education and education, masquerading as a solution. I hope this doesn't sound churlish. Perhaps I could say that, rather than advice, I think senior academics should try to provide practical support to the ECRs around them as best they can. For example, giving feedback on an actual job application seems to me more useful than generic job advice. So, I guess my advice is to find, maintain, and value relationships with people who will support and help you in tangible and genuinely useful ways.

What are some of your hopes for the future of addiction studies?

Phenomena and concepts wax and wane in their salience, so it may be that addiction becomes less significant as a site of critical inquiry. I'm not so attached to "addiction studies" as I am to the maintenance of a space that fosters thoughtful and critical work on health, consumption, regulation, subjectivity, and embodiment.

More specifically, I look forward to addiction studies and related areas being reshaped by more robust engagement with questions of racialization and colonialism. In a settler colony such as Australia, insights from Critical Indigenous Studies reveal how concepts like addiction are part of a continuing colonial system of power (I'm thinking particularly here of Aileen Moreton-Robinson's work, recently discussed by Kev Dertadian).

How do you have a critical public health conversation about gambling harm that can also be critical of public health?

Some people would say that you don't, or you shouldn't. If you see public health as the defender of the public good against the power and malfeasance of the gambling industry, then criticizing public health is at best a naive waste of energy, at worst unethical assistance to a predatory harm-producing enterprise. My work has certainly been subject to this kind of challenge. My response is that I don't think the only laudable research on health is that which is aimed at reducing harm.

Why should we expect sociology and anthropology to conform to the mission and priorities of public health? And to return to a previous thought, I want to resist the assumption that health is (or should be) the measure of everything humans do.

Having said this, I know there are probably unique challenges in gambling research, compared to similar fields that I am more familiar with. The establishment of *Critical Gambling Studies* was a response to a generally impoverished intellectual landscape saturated with industry influence. In this context, the role and value of critique should probably be part of an ongoing discussion rather than decided in advance.

Mykhalovskiy et al. have recently published a thoughtful response to these kinds of questions. They distinguish between critical social science *in* public health, critical social science *of* public

health, and critical social science *with* public health, endorsing the latter as a productive orientation that can actually transform public health rather than simply reiterating its weaknesses. I'm still attached to the *of* orientation, although I agree with them about excessive attention to the low-hanging fruit of "healthy lifestyle." My hesitation about the *with* model is that the two elements do not start with equal epistemological or political authority. Public health discourse is naturalized, as is the kind of evidence it relies on. For example, statements such as "more than x% of Australian women drink at risky levels" tend to be read as neutral accounts of reality rather than a particular kind of knowledge reliant on technologies and concepts of population, prevalence, and individual behaviour. Sociological analysis, or indeed any account which adopts a less familiar theoretical worldview, then becomes a supplementary approach to issues and problems that have already been framed. To me, a critical perspective encourages us to ask questions about the taken-for-granted, whether this be the reification of "responsible gambling" or the assumption that health is, or should be, the organizing principle in everyone's lives.

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Helen Keane was a Chief Investigator on an Australian Research Council–funded project analyzing gender in research and policy on alcohol-related violence among young people. She is currently a Chief Investigator on an Australian Research Council–funded project on the role of trauma in alcohol and other drug-related problems.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Book Review: Simpson, Tim. (2023). *Betting on Macau: Casino Capitalism and China's Consumer Revolution*. University of Minnesota Press. 388 pp. ISBN 9781517900304

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Book Review

Simpson, Tim. (2023). *Betting on Macau: Casino Capitalism and China's Consumer Revolution*. University of Minnesota Press. 388 pp. ISBN 9781517900304

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I first visited Macau in 2010, somewhat unsure where my doctoral research on Singapore's casino development was heading. By then, Macau had undergone a decade of urban transformation brought about by the liberalization of the casino industry as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC). What I witnessed can only be described as a bewildering sense of history-in-the-making, as if the dramatic language Marx used to describe the Industrial Revolution had sprung to life in another form. This surely was a frontier of capitalism. Macau hijacked my research and, indeed, career: a short trip became a three-month-long stint of fieldwork, and ten years later, I am still studying casinos.

Reading Timothy Simpson's book *Betting on Macau* brings me back to this initial moment of bewilderment. Having lived in Macau for two decades, Simpson, an associate professor of communication at the University of Macau, no doubt experienced this far more deeply and intimately than I did. Yet, this is not a book about Macau's post-handover transformation. His objective is to convince us of Macau's world-historic significance in the long history of capitalism. A tiny archipelago ignored for much of its history, constantly overshadowed by its neighbour Hong Kong, Macau's story is far larger than it is.

Simpson's thesis is that Macau stands at the centre of the next stage of global capitalism, one that is led by the PRC. Over nine chapters, he develops this thesis by showing the *function* of Macau and its casino industry in this transformation. There is a scalar sequence in his analysis—at the territorial scale, he examines the central role Macau plays in the geo-economic reconfiguration of the Greater Bay Area. He contends that Macau's ambiguous sovereignty under colonial Portuguese rule and its non-signatory status under the Bretton Woods Agreement allowed it to flourish in the shadows of the global economic order. If this argument is well-established, he goes further by positing that, after the collapse of the Agreement, and as the first Special Economic Zones emerged in the PRC, it is precisely these qualities of Macau that turned it into an experimental ground for market-reform policies in a larger socialist context. He underpins these experiments in moments of crises (triad violence, the Asian financial crisis, and the outbreak of SARS) that saw Macau soar to become one of the wealthiest cities in the world.

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I find the discussion on the enabling role of the junket operators—informal networks of middlemen responsible for moving money across borders and circumventing capital controls—to be especially valuable as it captures the specificity of Macau's casino industry in driving this territorial and geoeconomic transformation.

At the architectural and corporeal scales (Chapters 5, 7, 8), Simpson turns his attention to the Integrated Resorts—massive casino–resort complexes created by linking up several (already large) properties with enclosed walkways—and their interiorized environments. Rather than delving into the politics of representation like many critical analyses of casino architecture before him, Simpson continues his functional and materialist analysis by treating the Integrated Resort as "a spatial machine that produces postsocialist consumer subjects" (p. 167). There is, he argues, a civilizing effect in tourist spaces and practices that recalls the role of the Crystal Palace in 19th century London in cultivating consumers for an industrial society. Indeed, if Chinese youths were once sent to labour in rural areas in Communist China, a reverse direction is taking place here. The objective is not to engender a collectivist subjectivity amongst Chinese citizens, but to fashion the *homo-economicus* of neoliberal ideology.

How does the Integrated Resort produce a new kind of calculating market-oriented subject? First, it does so by introducing stratification based on the consumers' market worth as gamblers—from VIPs to "premium mass" to mass / grinders. Second, the Integrated Resort provides a full suite of products and facilities to the discerning consumer: from child care to clothing, cosmetic dental surgery, hair salons, spas, and even a Mayo clinic. As such, it is not just gambling, but the entirety of quotidian life that is commodified. Furthermore, there is, within this cluster of facilities, a regime of self-improvement, which connects with the state's agenda of producing "quality citizens" (suzhi) who are responsibilized in taking care of themselves. Finally, the interiorization of consumption (and life in general) tames the inherent political risks of urbanization. Recalling Weber's aphorism that "city air makes you free," such enclosures deny urbanity and help to explain the peaceful transition of Macau from Portuguese to Chinese rule (in contrast to the more belligerent street politics of the Hong Kong SAR). Taken as a whole, Simpson argues that the Integrated Resort "constitutes a model environment whose imperceptible influence explicitly promotes and inculcates a form of normative moral education concerning the proper uses of urban space" (p. 181).

At the corporeal scale, Simpson channels theories of new materialism to look at how specific objects around the gambling table shape consumer subjectivity. In a detailed discussion spanning game psychology and casino finance, he attempts to show how an atmosphere of volatility envelopes the activity of play and the very economic foundations of the Macau SAR. Baccarat is the most popular game amongst Chinese gamblers, especially in the VIP salons. Yet, as a game of pure chance and when millions are wagered, animalistic passions rather than calculative faculties are stoked, as evidenced by outbursts of violence around the gambling table, as well as certain practices such as "card-squeezing," where players slowly peel open their cards while shouting for the desired numbers to appear. Indeed, given how central baccarat is to the casino industry, the volatility of the table aggregates into dramatic swings in the public coffers of the Macau SAR. From this interpretation, Simpson proceeds to show how new game mechanics have been introduced to transform a game of pure chance into one that cultivates calculative decision-making and risk-taking. His analysis focuses on the LIVE Baccarat machine designed to draw Chinese gamblers away from table games. Two specific examples are given: First, unlike a simple game of baccarat, gamblers on this machine can participate in a side jackpot with every wager. This makes the game

more investment-like. Second, the maximum bet a player may wager is determined collectively (amongst other players) rather than individually, thus introducing an element of player competition and sociality. Such game mechanics, Simpson argues, replace the volatility of VIP baccarat with steady and predictable profits characteristic of slot machines and change the psychology of play. Both the Integrated Resort and the LIVE Baccarat machine thus actively cultivate the desired subjectivity of consumers in post-reform China.

In laying out the substantive arguments, the depth and scope of Simpson's book should be obvious. If one asks: What can we learn about China's "consumer revolution" (echoing the subtitle of the book) from the vantage point of Macau? Simpson's arguments would be this: First, at the territorial and urban scale, we can see a logic of enclavization wherein new and old techniques of governance are assembled within prescribed boundaries to spur market reform. Second, from the interior spaces and the casino floor, we can see how the mental life and physical comportment of the Chinese consumer of the 21st century is produced. Simpson is not alone in making his first argument. What he adds to the discussion are the layers of historical legacies, political ambiguities, and spatial forms that make Macau's spectacular transformation possible. While these specificities, particularly those related to the casino industry, help us appreciate the theoretical significance of Macau as a concrete amalgam of market-socialist experimentation, I hesitate to embrace the claim that Macau functions as the "*very inspiration* for the spatial logic of China's reform economy" (p. 99, emphasis added).

I find the second substantive argument innovative. His analysis of the VIP rooms and the LIVE Baccarat machine magnifies the logic of capitalism at work in the smallest of spaces and most innocuous of games. Much like those before him who saw socioeconomic structures in cockfighting, slot machines, and public lotteries, Simpson's empirical work here is refreshing, even if parts of the theorization are speculative. The casino is surely one of the most enduring institutions of urban modernity, alongside factories, libraries, markets, hotels, and shopping malls, and we can learn much by studying it as a pedagogical site where certain social norms and mentalities are produced. There are moments in the analysis when I entertained a Bakhtinian interpretation—are these games and spaces molding the norms of a new consumerist subjectivity, or are they allowing the *inverse* of what is socially acceptable to be released? Nevertheless, taking the "casino" in "casino capitalism" seriously is important—it should be an actual site of analysis and theorization rather than a mere metaphor for how late capitalism works (see also Cassidy, 2009).

A point of disagreement stems from my own research on casino development. If the Integrated Resort represents the enclosure and commodification of life, how is it analytically and typologically different from other forms, like shopping malls, theme parks, and gated communities? How is it an "ideal type" (p. 161), and not just one of many variations of the same type? I suspect Simpson is aware of this categorical slipperiness when he says that the Integrated Resort "*complements* other elements of an emergent urban landscape of consumption" (p. 178, emphasis added). Simpson places much emphasis on the first foreign-owned casino, *Sands Macau*, as an architectural machine that drove Macau's ascendance to the world stage of global capitalism. While the success of this property undoubtedly opened the gates to capital investment, I am disinclined to pedestalize this building. Simpson wishes to see in the building and the professional discourses on casino design some emergent technique / rationality in the shaping of human subjectivity. Yet, as I have shown (Lee, 2019, pp. 178–212), casino designers and architects have, since the 1980s, strategically adopted a mantle of scientificity to step into a lucrative industry that is

increasingly dominated by corporations and regulated by state bodies. Remove this mantle and one would realize that many claims of "architectural reasons to gamble" are hyperbolic and flawed. The long-running debate about whether casino floor design should be legible or labyrinthine (initiated by a casino consultant and a professor of English in the late 1990s) is as unrigorous as the observation by the architect of the *Sands Macau* that gambling is like a sport for the Chinese, which inspired his "stadium" design. The same can be said about the industry's recent attempt to explain feng shui in scientific parlance.

Is the *Sands Macau* (and the other Integrated Resorts after it) a building where we can see the contours of the "Chinese gambler"? From the perspective of professional competition and corporatization, one would see instead the rigidity of the design of Las Vegas–based casinos, burdened by trademarked "principles" and inflated claims, and how clumsy they are as a "political machine" when targeting and moulding the so-called "Chinese gambler." I would be less dismissive of the *Hotel Lisboa*, the flagship casino hotel built in 1970 during Stanley Ho's monopoly in Macau. Despite being eclipsed by larger and newer casinos, this building is a rich archive of spatial techniques that can be unpacked to locate the Chinese gambler of pre- and post-market reform.

This might appear to be a disagreement limited to the Integrated Resort. Yet, it points to the need to understand the larger theoretical ambition of the book, which is to locate Macau in the four-century-long history of capitalist development as laid out by historian Fernand Braudel and his successor Giovanni Arrighi. Simpson adopts Braudel's conceptualization of capitalism as the highest realm of economic activity where financial speculation predominates, and weaves Macau's history into the historical arc of capitalism that stretches from Venice to England to the United States, and finally China as the new global hegemon. But his objective is not merely to insert Macau into a pre-given framework of world-system theorization. Rather, he pulls specific objects from this history that encapsulate the speculative ethos of capitalism and juxtaposes them with their contemporary equivalents in Macau. This method is consistently applied across all chapters, urging us to see a cyclical pattern linking "armillary spheres to ashtrays, Portuguese carracks to integrated casino resorts, translucent porcelain to plastic dead chips, junket loans to baccarat machines" (p. 295). Simpson tested this method in an earlier paper where he traced its inspiration to "Walter Benjamin's dialectical analysis of the obsolete commodities of mass culture" (Simpson, 2008, p. 1053).

Having clarified the book's theoretical ambition and method, it should be clear where the disagreement arises. Because Simpson's horizons are pegged to moments of world history unfolding in the longue durée, there is a tendency to skip over histories and geographies either closer to home or deemed insignificant in the development of capitalism. For Simpson, Braudel's and Arrighi's works function like a time machine with limited stops. While this provides a massive canvas of possibilities, it also narrows Simpson's historical sources, and some liberties have been taken when interpreting / using them. I suggested earlier that the corporatization of the casino industry and its influence on architectural form in the United States can speak more directly to what has been built in Macau. This "near history" will also help one recognize the side-jackpot in the LIVE Baccarat machine as an evolution of the "wide-area progressives" that emerged in the 1980s, when digitization gripped the gaming technology industry in the United States (Lee, 2019, pp. 164–165; Turdean, 2011). Should this side-jackpot be read as a technology that nurtures the calculative faculty of gamblers in balancing risk and gain, or as something that preys on the gambler's irrational impulse with the promise of winning a massive life-changing prize *as a bonus*? Such disagreements are ultimately borne out of different optical fields generated by near and far histories.

Writing a world history of capitalism (with Macau in it) is of course not Simpson's task, but this history is not something that can be detached without destroying the tenor and substance of the book. With this backdrop of deep time and space, Simpson is able to evoke that sense of bewilderment I experienced in my initial encounter with Macau. This is history-in-the-making! Such a readerly affect is not unimportant—if we understand the politico-aesthetic project of Walter Benajmin's dialectical images, the experience of being jolted out of the orthodoxies of the present is central to critical historiography. Simpson has certainly elevated the theoretical significance of Macau as a frontier of capitalist development more than any other scholar, urging us to look beyond its hackneyed characterization as peculiar and secondary. For scholars in the social sciences, the book demonstrates how gambling in its elemental, spatial, historical, and cultural forms is an effective vehicle for cutting through disciplinary silos and forcing us to contemplate the Big Picture in all its variations and fragments. For the field of gambling studies, the book is an important step away from its narrow professional interests and dysfunctional affair with the psy-sciences.

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