



# Web Women: Online Narratives of Women's Relationships with Gambling in Contemporary Societies

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# Introduction

Exploration of English speaking women's accounts of their gambling behaviours: i.e.

- Forms of gambling engaged in
- Reasons for taking part
- Nature/extent of involvement
- Problem gambling development
- What works best for them in recovery



## Parameters and limitations

- Opportunistic study
- Sample - women who contacted [www.gamblingtherapy.org](http://www.gamblingtherapy.org) May 06/April 08
- Used emails and/or forum threads
- Self identification of gambling problems
- Not influenced by research process



## Forms of gambling engaged in

- Largely consistent with previous findings
- Most commonly 'fruit'/slot machines, bingo, 'pokies', VLT's, casino card games and/or roulette, lottery and scratch card play
- No evidence of engaging in betting activity
- Recent increase in problem online bingo play



## Reasons given for gambling

- Four main groups
- States of mind or 'being'
- Physical/physiological factors
- Intergenerational/family involvement
- Structural re-enforcers



## Boredom

- *“I’m a single mom of a 13 year old and have always done fine for us, we’ve gotten by, and I’ve always been able to provide everything for my daughter. Then we moved home. The town I moved from was a large town with plenty of things to do and places to go. My hometown now is a small town with nothing to do but the casino. Not good for when I get bored” (35 year old from the USA)*
- *“At first, like many, it all seemed so innocent. I enjoyed playing the machines and it just felt good to be out for a while. Away from the grind, the boredom etc” (43 year old from England)*



## Waiting out life

- *I am a 65 year old woman who has no family. They have all passed away, so I live alone. With nothing to look forward to now but just going to sleep forever... I've lived my life... been there ... done that. Life holds nothing for me .... My mother died a horrible death in a nursing home. I thought I'd rather end it all online gambling than having to be 'put away' in one of those warehouses labelled God's Waiting Room' (U.K.)*



## Escape and pain blocking

- *“I am a 52 year old grandmother and really feel I should know differently – but there you go, my vice of all things was online bingo. I think I used it as a form of escape from different family problems ....” (U.K.)*
- *“I am D. I am a compulsive gambler and need help. The gambling started 6 ½ yrs ago when my husband had a heart attack and died. I use gambling to forget my problems and as a relief from grief” (Canada)*



## Protest and rebellion

- *“I am 43, married with two daughters ... I am a medical secretary 4 long days a week and I hate it. I used to study archaeology but gave it up to bring up our daughters ... My husband works really long hours and goes away as well. I feel like I hate him too for making me give up everything I wanted to be ... I had always been a gambler but it became worse when I got so angry” (U.S.A)*



## Physical or physiological factors

- General physical health problems
- Mental health problems
- Attribution to medication
- Womanhood – pregnancy, childbirth, post-childbirth experiences, the menopause



## Inter-generational involvement

*“Grandfather, father, mother, brother, and self – poker machine addicts.*

*Grandmother, Grandfather, mother, father, brother – alcoholics. Not an excuse but a sorry example.”*

*27 year old American woman*



# Family or couple involvement

## ‘Partners in crime’

- Difficulties in disengagement
- Enabling, justifying, encouraging
- Transfer of problem ownership
- Blame shift – transference of guilt, shame



## Structural re-enforcers

- Action of particular gambling forms
- Excitement – the buzz or rush
- Winning experiences



## Crisis points

- Great variation in time frames
- Financial crisis
- Relationship issues
- Crime
- 'De-bunking the myth'



## Recovery routes

These were found to vary greatly, by:

- Nature
- Extent
- Type
- Availability and Accessibility
- Perceived barriers



## Online advantages (1)

### Image identification

*“This is a scared face because that’s what I am. I have read many of your stories and feel now that I can totally relate to all of you.” (‘L’ – 33 years old)*



## Online advantages (2)

Overcoming shame, guilt & difference

*I attempted GA meetings a few years ago, but found it wasn't the right environment for me. I have so much shame and guilt that I found myself pretty much unable to talk to other people at the meetings because I couldn't stop crying. It was quite embarrassing and humiliating.*

*('A-M' – 47 years old)*



## Online advantages (3)

Overcomes Care-taking responsibilities

*“I’m ashamed to report that I didn’t make it to my first GA meeting today. It is half an hour away and I couldn’t get away from the kids and had to baby sit ...*

*I will try again..” (‘J’ 57 years old)*



## On-line advantages (4)

Empathy, understanding and group support

*“Hi J, You have nothing to be ashamed about by not going to a GA meeting. I hardly ever get to go as I have a busy life as well. But you’re posting on the site and that’s great too ... GA is really good to actually meet people and get to know them as friends. It did help me greatly to meet a group of people that offered support in my time of need .. much like the people on this site.” (‘B’)*



## Online advantages (5)

Anonymity, Safety and Security

*“I feel trapped, isolated, but that’s no excuse.. I feel so ashamed for what I’m about to tell you I have done. It’s made me physically sick. I can’t stop crying. .... I feel so ashamed, gutted, lost, scared, alone, sad and miserable.” (‘CB’ – 28 years old)*



## Online advantages (6)

Equality and empowerment

Equality in numbers

Empowerment in dialogue between women  
'social stroking and sending hugs'

Empowerment through choice



## Online barriers

### Technical problems

*“I registered with your forum, but I can’t get the hang of it how to make use of your website. I am trying to get into your chat room I just don’t know how. Please help me to stop this insane behaviour”. (‘G’)*



## In summary

- Women's problem gambling is a global issue
- Although findings here show measures of consistency
- Also serve to suggest increase in problems with online bingo play
- Highlight the need to address problem gambling couples
- 'De-bunk' the myth about 'prostitution'
- Confirm the need for tiered treatment provision, whilst
- Emphasising the advantages of online help seeking