Gambling and the Everyday Practices of Risk

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Project Aims and Background

- Research project entitled *Gambling and Households*, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council
- Draws on previous work looking at how women gamblers work to negotiate a respectable gambling identity
- Explores complex, interrelated themes of gambling and households
- Looks at ways that gambling fits with familial rituals and routines
- Addresses broader neglect within social sciences on studies of intimacy and everyday practices (Gabb, 2008)
The data is held at Mass Observation Archive in the special collections department at Sussex University Library.

MO launched in 1937 with aim of recording material about everyday life in Britain.

500 participants respond to regular mail outs or ‘directives’

Attracts writers over 40, more women than men, more middle than lower class (Sheridan, 1994).

Excellent way of enabling participants to produce their own detailed narratives of gambling.

Excellent response rate and great value for money.
Sense of Ownership of the Archive and its Data

‘I am proud to be one of your writers ... knowing that in just a small way, I am contributing to the Archives that will help students now and in the future from the ideas and views we send in. Otherwise, there might not be any comparison stored of what our life was like in the past, now and in the future.’

(Spring, 1996)
Early lives and childhoods were often interwoven with stories about gambling

Often very vivid and detailed accounts of gambling describing smells, sights and sounds of betting shops for example

Part of the rhythms of everyday family life

Childhood recollections of gambling were that it was sometimes integrated into family leisure life, and sometimes kept as an ‘adult only’ activity which nonetheless defined many of the participants’ recollections of gambling.
My earliest memories of gambling are my Grandad going to the betting shop, my uncle also being very into horse racing, my dad doing the football pools and events like the Grand National. Whenever my Grandad came to visit we would always go and visit ‘Uncle Len’ as we used to call it, which just meant going to the betting shop. We would walk down to the high street and wait outside this slightly mysterious place that we couldn’t see into and I was never quite sure what went on in there.
When I was a child my dad always had a gamble on the horses. He couldn’t afford much as his earnings were low and there were three of us children. I remember he would have a sixpence each way bet twice a week, also he used to do 8 from 10 on the football pools. Every Saturday we had to keep quiet whilst the football results were read out on the wireless.
Fear of normalising gambling if it becomes an integral part of everyday life

One thing I’m very strict about is not letting my daughter see my lottery ticket. I wouldn’t pin it up on the wall in case she thought it was ‘normal’ and started gambling herself. One thing could lead to another.
Collectivity / uniformity / social life of gambling as a safety measure

The thing that I find saddest about betting these days is the amount which is done online. In my experience of betting in the bookies or at the track with friends, the fact that you have people around you acts as a safety measure – your mates will normally stop you from doing something really stupid or from misjudging what you’re doing. But when you’re betting at home, alone, in front of a computer, there is no such safety measure.
3) The Future: Guilt and Moral Decision Making

- Dreams and their limitations
- The imagined ‘pay-off’ of gambling

We often daydream about winning the lottery – we talk about it lots – almost as if the fact we’ve made lots of plans makes it more likely to happen. Of course this is rubbish but it’s nice to dream. Our plan is that we’d buy a house. We’d also buy one for my sister and make sure our parents were looked after. The house would have a studio, a pool, a gym, probably a small cinema cos we love films. We’d both give up work. “A” would buy a local pub and pay someone to run a restaurant out of it. I would set up a refuge for trafficked women and women wishing to escape from prostitution. It would mean that we could also have children now, which is what I’d like to do, rather than waiting till the time’s right. So yes– we talk about it a lot!
‘Decent’ and ‘Indecent’ Ways of Making Money

My husband’s niece is currently in a relationship with a young man whose family made their money from gambling: in an amusement arcade in a seaside resort. This family have branched out into a fish bar and a restaurant since then, but it’s perfectly clear where the money has come from. Their arcade is stuffed with fruit machines and other tacky paraphernalia, all pre-programmed to separate punters from their cash, for not very much in return. Talk about getting your money for nothing.
Supports recent work on the Internet as a form of problem gambling (Valentine and Hughes, 2010) particularly for women (Corney and Davis, 2010) and also Downs and Woolwych (2010) that more research is needed into the impact of gambling on families

Here, I have asked how gambling identities are structured within experiences of past, present and future

Inconspicuous consumption (O’Sullivan and Gershuny, 2004)

Risk as part of the fabric of everyday life (Reith, 2004)

Consumer culture and emotional capital (Silva, 2007)
Opportunities for the Future

- An archive on gambling experience held at Sussex University
- More scope for understanding the relationships between gambling and domestic life and targeting interventions accordingly
- Contact me about the project: e.casey@kingston.ac.uk