The Clinical and Social Construction of Pathological Gamblers in Macau

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Rationale for the present study

- **Background:** The state of research in Hong Kong and Macau
- Gambling and the psychology of gambling research did not receive much attention until the late 1990’s
- The majority of the research projects to date were quantitative studies
- First major prevalence study in 2002 (The Hong Polytechnic University, 2002). Follow-up in 2005 by the University of Hong Kong)
- Fong and Ozorio (2005) prevalence study in Macau
Numerous studies of a smaller scale, on the prevalence of gambling have been carried out social agencies. Examples are the series of studies by the Breakthrough and YMCA

Major findings:
- Rate for PG (1.8%, HKPU, 2002, 2.2%, HKU, 2005, 3.2%, YMCA study)

Problems:
- Issues of reliability and validity (high refusal rate, the majority of the studies collected data from telephone interviews and brief face-to-face interviews)
There is only one government-funded outcome study carried out by Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 2006 on the treatment centres in Hong Kong.

Often neglected areas of research:

- Culture and gambling (Ohtsuka & Chan, 2009, Chan & Ohtsuka, 2010, psychology of gambling characters as a reflection of Chinese culture)

- Qualitative studies on the psychology of Chinese pathological gamblers are very few.

- These studies mainly obtained their sample in the treatment. The interviews were taken in the quiet offices or treatment centers. The data are mostly retrospective data. Very few studies recruited active pathological gamblers from the casinos, interview and observe gamblers in the casinos.
- One study Lam (2005)-observation of baccarat players in Macao.
• The research was mainly an observation study of how gamblers play the game of baccarat in the casinos.
• The literature on the psychology of gamblers in Hong Kong lack in-depth analysis of the subjective world of active pathological gamblers, which include an understanding of their personality development, their lifestyles and simply their own constructed meanings of their world.
Thus, the present study is to understand the subjective world of the active pathological gamblers, using the ethnographic approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995)

The ethnographic approach is a common methodology in sociology. The purpose is to understand the lives of a particular group of people from their actual living or work environment through participant observation and repeated interviews.
• The researcher following this methodology carries no pre-conceived notion of how the data should go. Instead, he/she would let the participants tell their stories of gambling, their lives and simply their lives.

• The focus is not to take these active gamblers to treatment. Instead, it is to understand their subjective world of gambling.
Objective for this study:

The theoretical basis of the present study is based on Blaszczynski and Nower’s (2002) pathways development model of problem gambling. There are three types of problem gamblers, namely:

1. behaviourally-conditioned gamblers
2. emotionally-vulnerable
3. antisocial-impulsive
• In particular, the purpose of this project is to understand a special group of active pathological gamblers, commonly known as Paichais.

• In Macau, Paichais (扒仔), which literally means grabbing money from others, are an easily recognized group of problem gamblers in the casinos. Macanese identify a gambler as a Paichai when he or she possesses the following characteristics:
• Staying in the casinos all day and taking advantages of the facilities of the casinos.
• Constantly asking other gamblers for money.
• Being the most boisterous group at the casinos and cheering for the other gamblers at the gambling tables.
• Engaging in illegal activities such as stealing money from other gamblers and causing nuisances for the management.
Purposes and limitations

- We want to understand the lives and gambling of these individuals. In this regard, we intend to understand their purposes of gambling and their outcomes of gambling. We did almost all interviews in the casinos of Macau. We observed them repeatedly during their gambling. Taping was very difficult in the noisy casinos. Also, a lot of casinos are run by the Chinese mafia groups. It is dangerous to ask active gamblers sensitive questions.
In achieving these objectives, the current study aimed to test the following four research hypotheses:

- Paichais have a more intensive involvement of gambling. Their level of problem gambling should be more serious than non-Paichais.
- Paichais’ lives and worldview were narrowed on gambling only.
• The pathway development of the antisocial-impulsivist type of Blaszczynski and Nower (2002) model best describes the development of Paichais
• The Paichais, as a group of distinct problem gamblers, share common developmental pathways.
Fifteen adult participants, (9 males and 6 females) were recruited from the casinos in Macau. The mean age of participants was 39.4. Among the participants, 11 were married and 4 were single. The requirements for inclusion were that they had to be active gamblers and they should be over the legal age of 18 or over. There are 11 Paichais and 4 non-Paichais in this study.
Materials

- semi-structured interviews
- All participants in the current study were assessed by the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) (Ferris & Wayne, 2001)
Results

- Hypothesis 1 is supported
- Paichais have a more intensive involvement in gambling than non-Paichais
- All the participants can be classified as problem gamblers. There is significant differences in the CPGI scores of two sub-groups: Paichais (21.18, N=11) and non-Paichais (16.5, N=4)
• Hypothesis 2 is supported.
• Paichais’ world view focuses on gambling only.
• They are in the casino every day. Gambling occupies almost all of their leisure hours. Even when they are not gambling, they love to hang around the baccarat tables, discussing with others on the patterns of the outcomes, giving advice to others, and enjoying the lives in the casinos.
• Fu (52 years old male Paichai) told the researcher that he regarded casinos as his second home as he would go there every day.

“There is free food in the casino. Once you sit down and pretend you are gambling, you can ask the waitress for food. Nobody knows how much you gamble or whether you are betting or not in the casino. (Fu, 52 year old male Paichai).”
• None cares. Free snacks like meat bread and tea will be available around the clock. Restrooms are clean. Hey, you can sleep on the couch. Sometimes I like to take short naps, here or in the park outside. I don’t care what other people say about us. I love to be in here. Life is good here.”

• They have no jobs and they will live on the complimentary food and drinks provided by the casinos. With the tips they received, they re-invest all that into gambling
• Paichais’ daily work:
  ◦ They perceived themselves as teachers or masters in the games. But actually they are tip hustlers pestering others for change.
  ◦ Acting as cheer-leaders for other gamblers
  ◦ Serving as a middle person for loan sharks
Jenny: “I told you that the next round of cards would flavor the Banker. you should have listened to me. That’s why you lost. Listen, I have been here long before you were born. I tell you the route of cards now favours the “Banker” according to the usual “ways” (patterns) of the game” (Jenny, 52 years old female Paichai).

Female gambler: “go away, you’re annoying me.”
Hypothesis 3 and 4
Both hypotheses are supported
Their background: six of them are locals. Three were from Hong Kong. These gamblers lost everything and currently are stranded in the casinos.
Even though they might come from a diverse background, they shared similar pathway. They can best fit into the antisocial-impulsivist type of Blaszczynski and Nower (2002)
1. Probable biological dysfunctions, either neurological or neurochemical
2. Early exposure to gambling
3. Gambling parents
4. Community that encourage gambling
5. Early demonstration of sensation seeking behavior
6. Truancy in school
7. Low tolerance for boredom
8. Socially irresponsible behavior
9. Poor relationship skills
10. Gambling as a favourite pastime since adolescents
11. Conduct disorders

1. Early wins
2. Associate with friends who gamble
3. more time and money devoted to gambling
4. decreased interests in career and family
5. preoccupation with gambling
6. development of individualized gambling behavioral patterns
7. increases endorsement of superstition
8. gambling alone
9. suffer severe loss
10. chasing losses
11. borrowed extensively from friends and relatives
12. borrowing from illegal loan sharks
13. bailout by family
14. manipulate others for personal gains

1. Prolonged stay in casino
2. Dissociation from the outside world
3. Extensive preoccupation of gambling over other issues in life
4. Loss of interests in career and family
5. Guilty feelings masked by increased involvement in gambling
6. Increase in impulsive and reckless behavior
7. Development of more antisocial behavior
8. Pathological lying
9. Begging others for money
10. Commit illegal acts
11. Significant loss of control over gambling
12. Significant loss time in sleep and work
• Some peculiar observation of the lives and work of Paichais
• Extensive use of superstitions
• Obsessed on the exploration of the patterns or “ways” of the card outcomes
• Peculiar betting strategy: the maxi-mini method
• Stereotypic behavioral pattern of the Paichais
Why being a Paichai in the casino?
- for monetary gains
- for dissociation for failures and frustrations in life (Brown, 2002)
- finding meaning in one’s life
- “in the midst of the absence of ontological security (Neistche), Paichais find solace and security in the noisy and crowded casino.”
Carvion, Wong & Zangeneh (2008), *In the pursuit of winning*, “This suggests that gambling maybe one of a general constellation of coping behaviors employed by marginalized groups, or, less pejoratively, is one of a cluster of historically condemned behaviors more easily or openly adopted by groups with weaker affiliation to the dominant power Structure (112-113)”
“Gambling, as an institution, has its own social rewards, including membership in a gambling subculture, whether as a veteran casino patron, swapping tips with new players; as an audience member for a lotto broadcast, sitting around a television with fellow hopefuls; or as a regular poker-player, hanging out with a friendly group. Gambling provides new peers, a social purpose, an identity, and a private language (Bloch, 1951; Ocean & Smith, 1993). In some contexts, particularly in the popular casino environments, gambling may allow the player to take on an exciting new social role, that of the adventuresome “high roller,” who is accorded respect by others within the gambling environment. As mounting financial and time commitments increase the gambler’s investment in the gambling milieu, it becomes increasingly difficult to redirect effort toward the world outside the gambling context – a world in which their gambling will probably serve as a source of stigma in addition to whatever self-concept difficulties they held before beginning to gamble.”
People are constantly meaning in their lives (Frankl, 1962) and, for the Paichais, who have lost their money, precious time of their lives and dignity in their lives, gambling and staying in the casinos is where they can achieve meanings. Gambling daily provides a hope and a work for them.
• What’s next for them?
• They would continue to gamble every day. Treatment is impossible.