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BLACKSHAW, Siobhan

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**THE CHANGING FACE OF GAMBLING: AN  
INVESTIGATION OF SERIOUS LEISURE HORSERACE  
GAMBLERS**

**SIOBHAN BLACKSHAW**

**A submission in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University for the Degree of Doctor of  
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## **Abstract**

Gambling has received considerable academic attention from a range of disciplinary directions but to date has been dominated by a paradigm that places overriding emphasis on individuals and addiction and pathological studies. This thesis takes this area of study in another direction by focusing its attention on gambling as a leisure activity which is organized and formed through social relationships and shared knowledgeability. Using as its starting point the serious leisure perspective the thesis critically explores the leisure field of horserace gambling. Bringing attention to the pervasive societal influence of neoliberal ideology, the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism and major developments in digital technology, the thesis uncovers how serious leisure horserace gambling is constituted, reconfiguring the study of it in processual terms, beyond the limits of the serious leisure perspective, as a duality which involves a backstage 'work' side and a front stage 'leisure' side. These terms offer both broader and more precise ways of speaking about the specificity of serious leisure horserace gamblers' practices and experiences of occupying social space. With this in mind, the thesis uses a combination of research techniques grounded in an ethnographic investigation which include direct observation, participant observation and semi-structured interviews, with 9 participants from West Yorkshire in the UK, to explore the ways in which they situate themselves as serious leisure horserace gamblers. The thesis excavates how this serious leisure practice is produced and reproduced, reflecting the opportunities offered by consumer culture and digital technology. By adopting this nuanced perspective of serious leisure which is more complex than existing discussions suggest, and by proposing a new understanding of leisure gambling in the light of a recommodified betting market, this thesis offers challenging and instructive insights into the possibilities of freedom and self-expression in vocational leisure when it is shaped by consumerism.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction: Orientation and Aims**

#### **Introduction**

This thesis adds to the well-established and growing subject field examining serious leisure. It does so by exploring serious leisure in a very different way than has become commonplace in this subject field and develops an alternative theoretical framework for understanding serious leisure within the setting of horserace gambling. This thesis asserts that it is imperative that theoretical work on serious leisure horserace gambling and the subject field of serious leisure in general must develop a more flexible theoretical framework for understanding serious leisure which recognizes the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideology, the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism, and major developments in digital technology. It is argued in this thesis that there is currently a disparity between academic perceptions of serious leisure and many fields of leisure in contemporary society in which individuals choose to follow their passion as a vocation, and that these must be acknowledged and reflected upon in terms of how they legitimate some forms of leisure and not others as worthy of the designation 'serious' and complicate the ways in which these are interpreted. These points are investigated here by setting out four objectives, to discover (1) how leisure horserace gambling has been transformed under the auspices of consumer capitalism; (2) what the reasons are for these changes; (3) what these changes tell us about the production and reproduction of serious leisure gambling; (4) and the social interactions that constitute this unique leisure field.

As Gerda Reith (2013) has argued, over the course of the last fifty years, gambling has been transformed from a deviant, largely underground pastime to a globalized, multi-billion pound industry. Initially, this study aimed to describe and understand this revolution in gambling generally by researching a number of different kinds of



gambling. However, when the opportunity arose I chose to study serious leisure horserace gambling because it epitomizes the social, ideological, cultural and technological changes identified above. It is thus not typical of most other forms of leisure that have been explored through the serious leisure perspective (see Stebbins 1992; 1997; 1999; 2001; 2006). What also makes leisure gambling interesting is that most of the population – from lay people to many academics to media commentators to politicians – find it difficult to understand it other than something that is a consumptive pastime that can often lead to addiction. Indeed only a relatively small number of critical studies have demonstrated what gamblers experience privately is only a small part of a much larger story about gambling as a socio-cultural phenomenon (Newman 1972; Reith 1999; Herman 1967, 1976; Ashton 1898; Clapson 1992; Cassidy 1999, 2002). These studies – what I shall call critical gambling studies from this point – not only make what is familiar about gambling strange (Bauman 1990), but they also make us think differently about this enduring and enigmatic aspect of human culture and its intimate relation to social life.

In recent years critical gambling studies has outlined the ways in which gambling has been transformed from principally an underground leisure pastime to a globalized, multi-billion pound consumer industry which has seen the interests of neo-liberalism, consumer capitalism and the state converge around the expansion of gambling profits (Reith 2013). Reith's overarching thesis is that gambling has become an important aspect of consumerism through which generates huge profits and that this consumer gambling world is an important arena in which contemporary risk society is defined and policed. Yet in the UK there is a distinct lack of critical research which explores the everyday gambling worlds in which these phenomena take place. This is a surprising omission given the contemporary concern about these issues in critical gambling studies. Indeed, in recent years, there has emerged a tendency to focus on the commodification of gambling and the consequences of this for certain individuals. This is because for most commentators gambling is seen as an individualized, private affair, and so intensely isolating it all too often leads to addiction which will in some instances lead to an increase in gambling related harms. This has led to a situation in which our understanding of this socio-cultural practice has been somewhat dominated by psychological and medical perspectives, which have tended to not only divorce gambling from its social context and marginalize

what gambler's themselves have to say about what motivates them to gamble (Reith *et al* 2010), but also ignore the fact that if gambling is ultimately about different games of chance these might perhaps be best understood as a set of cultures with their own habits, dispositions and language, their own dress codes, landscapes and morality.

As a result the majority of research has been framed within a discourse which assumes that gambling is either a social pathology (Freud 1928; Bergler 1970; Herman 1967, 1976; Peterson 1951) and/ or merely provides compensation for the dysfunctional and unfulfilling aspects of society, foregrounding gambling as restorative leisure, an escape from the obligations of work, an integral element of 'working-class' culture that allows participants the opportunity to try to overcome both lack of success and security, an outlet to test chance and skill, or an effective opportunity for self-realization and flow lacking elsewhere (Herman 1976; Zola 1964; Oldman 1974; Goffman 1967; Bloch 1957; Smith and Preston 1984).

This thesis moves away from the propensity to focus on these trends and it instead focuses on those who choose to gamble as a vocation. Taking as its starting point the argument that gambling has the right to be recognized as a form of serious leisure practice this thesis explores the ways in which serious leisure horserace gamblers organize their activities and construct shared knowledgeability in social space. Gambling it is argued is for some individuals not a casual form of leisure (Stebbins 1992; 1997; 1999; 2001; 2006) – which is little more than an ephemeral pleasure seeking activity with barely any skill – but a serious one. This requires a critical response to the absence of serious leisure gamblers in the literature which recognizes that gambling is for some people a highly substantial, motivating and rewarding leisure activity, which recognizes not only that gambling is for some people a kind of devotional leisure practice (Blackshaw 2010), but it also needs one that recognizes that to fully understand this social phenomenon, we need to ask serious horserace gamblers who participate in gambling what their meanings and purposes are – they are, after all, the ones with the deepest insight into their own leisure interest and its attendant culture. This study seeks to address this gap by considering gambling from the perspectives of gamblers themselves, using participant observation and in-depth qualitative interviews.

By observing gambling in its social context and understanding gambling from the points of views of gamblers' themselves, examining its everyday worlds, it will be argued that in order to understand contemporary gambling we not only need to understand it as a source of personal problems but also as source of individual excitement, social pleasure and personal fulfilment. This thesis demonstrates that if serious leisure gambling expresses its own pattern of special skills, knowledge and experience, it also embodies industriousness, close attention to detail and the pursuit of a certain kind of freedom. To this end, the overarching focus of the study will be to explore and understand a changed world of gambling not so much as demarcated from but as an *integral* part of everyday life. By exploring gamblers' accounts of these issues, this thesis contributes to a greater understanding of the complexity of a recommodified world of gambling and which thrives in the midst of neoliberalism's mighty embrace.

### **Some working definitions: leisure and serious leisure**

This thesis is thus a case study of a specific kind of serious leisure – that of horserace gamblers, referred to in the data analysis chapters as SLHGs. It offers a characterization of this gambling world as a leisure field that 'calls forth and gives a life to a specific form of interest, a specific illusion as tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game and as practical mastery of its rules' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.117). My working definition of leisure adapted from Roberts (1983), is both broad and to the point: it refers in the first instance to time that is relatively free after social, cultural, economic and physiological requirements have been met; it is secondly a type of activity or practice in which play or re-creation is an important aspect, separated out from the rest of life by time and space and its own imperatives; and thirdly it is an experience with its own rewards and satisfactions, that is not something we engage with because we are required to or because we get paid. In particular I am interested in serious leisure gamblers' 'uses' of leisure (Blackshaw 2010). In this regard my working definition, following Rojek (1995, p. 2), also understands leisure in two distinct senses:

First, to suggest that in order to understand leisure accurately we should begin not with our central object – that which we take to be the thing-in-itself- but



rather with the context in which the thing-in-itself becomes an 'object', 'an issue', 'a problem' or what have you. For me, the object of leisure is subsumed by the subject of culture. The further we probe into the matter of what leisure is, the greater is our appreciation of the part played by cultural mores, distinctions and conflicts in establishing the parameters of debate and also what occurs in leisure time and leisure space. Second, I want to draw attention to the fact that specific cultures have centred specific meanings on leisure.

Specifically I am using the term leisure in a way that recognizes the importance of consumerism to our present day culture and the implications of this for understanding serious leisure in the specific context of the field of leisure gambling.

I am using 'serious leisure' in that way that is used by Elkington and Stebbins (2014) to refer to both an 'activity' and an 'experience'. In Elkington and Stebbins work, however, the idea of serious leisure suggests a far more elaborate definition. They, along with Stebbins (1992; 1997; 1999; 2001; 2006), suggest that we need to understand it within the parameters of the serious leisure perspective (SLP) which also includes project-based leisure and casual leisure. Project-based leisure is understood as short-term, moderately complex, but infrequent activity involved in planning one-off events, which can be creative and often involve considerable planning and effort, but for all that, is not intended to develop into serious leisure activity and experience. Serious leisure, on the other hand, 'promotes an understanding of people who choose to pursue an interest with increased levels of passion and intensity over an extended time frame' (Mackellar 2009, p.86), which can be differentiated from casual leisure which is 'immediately intrinsically rewarding, relatively short lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it' (Stebbins 1999, p.69). Stebbins suggests that serious leisure should not be understood as hedonistic and ephemeral, but 'based on a certain level of mastery of a core activity' (2009, p.21). What this tells us is that there is something about serious leisure which locks it more deeply than other leisure activities into the faculties of human experience associated with finding personal fulfilment over the long term.

More precisely, serious leisure is a term used synonymously with the 'systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience' (Stebbins 1992, p.3). Serious leisure activities and experience tend to exemplify qualities such as industriousness, importance and carefulness, leading their adherents to develop a career in their chosen field which leads to a deep sense of fulfilment. As Bauckham (2013, p.861) points out, developing the ideas of Levene and Morland (1995), serious leisure careers tend to be developed through five stages: pre-socialization, recruitment, socialization, acceptance and decline. A more exacting way of understanding serious leisure can be identified by what Stebbins terms the six key characteristics that are crucial not only to the validation of serious leisure but also are pivotal to its meaning in which he suggests that it needs to be recognized as 'a type of pursuit, wherein participants in it mentally or physically (often both) think or do something motivated by the hope of achieving a desired end' (Stebbins 2009, p.10). Let us look at each of these in turn.

Firstly, serious leisure is determined by an adherent's perseverance, which foregrounds continuity and sustainability which as Mackellar puts it enables them to 'overcome danger, fear, embarrassment' (2009, p.86). What this suggests is not only are individuals willing to invest time, commitment and hard work in the pursuit of a serious leisure practice to improve their skills, techniques and knowledge, but they are also prepared to dedicate their lives without any restraint or fear of shame.

Secondly, because the practice provides the individual with a personal career it enables them to progress and develop their own skill set. As Kane and Zink suggest this achievement is often presented as a 'memorable turning point' (2004, p.337), which not only highlights various stages of reward but also indicates high distinction.

Thirdly, the practice of serious leisure equips the individual with specialised information, qualities and tools to carry it out, in which serious leisure participants are prepared to undertake personal fastidiousness such as learning, reading and studying which marks it out as very different from casual leisure, which tends to feature self-gratifying activities such as play, relaxation, active entertainment and sociable conversation. Fourthly, the rewards provided by serious leisure have what Bauckham terms 'durable benefits' which are locked more deeply into the following

kinds of expression: 'self-actualization; personal enrichment; self-expression; personal regeneration or renewal; a sense of accomplishment; enhancement of self-regard; a sense of community; and lasting physical products' (2013, p.443). What this tells is not only are serious leisure activities and experiences personally rewarding for individuals but they are also socially important.

This last observation, notwithstanding, as the fifth facet illustrates, because serious leisure is intrinsically special and beneficial to the individual, the rewards will predominantly be for self-fulfilment and self-motivated reasons. Serious leisure as such generates its own ethos within its own conclave of purpose and meaning because it creates physical, psychological, social and cultural meanings unique to its participants. And finally, because of the importance these meanings, the practice of serious leisure allows a deep and lasting bond to be developed with the activity (Rojek 1999, p.81-82). This is what makes serious leisure incredibly social and often leads to the development of collective identities in which participants can identify and relate closely to their practice because they themselves become synonymous or are recognized by what they do. It is in this regard that serious leisure places considerable emphasis on participating and experiencing which can promote societal integration.

These six key characteristics have been recognized by a number of authors as the best reflection of serious leisure to demonstrate individual and group experiences implicit to a distinct social world. What can be understood from this is that serious leisure is a crucial indicator of human agency as well as significant aspect of social activity. It is with this crucial observation in mind that these six characteristics offer a starting point for exploring serious leisure horserace gambling. This observation notwithstanding the serious leisure perspective has been the target of a number of criticisms and we must address these before this thesis can be developed.



## **The limits of the serious leisure perspective**

The first and most obvious criticism of the serious leisure perspective is that for all its strengths it leaves us with a rather static understanding that to all intents and purposes reifies serious leisure activity and experience into a set of attributes. In this regard, Dilley and Scraton (2010) have noted that Stebbins fails to draw on a socio-psychological perspective which would be beneficial to understanding individuals' self-motivations for engaging in leisure, and rather prefers to begin with the serious leisure perspective. A good example with which to evidence this criticism is personal fulfilment, which we have seen Stebbins argues is an important aspect of serious leisure. As Thomas (2009) has suggested, a key ingredient of personal fulfilment is autonomy. Personal fulfilment results when individuals achieve objectives they have set themselves, rather than conforming to an inherited role or a prescribed code of behaviour, specified in some kind of model. What this suggests is that personal fulfilment in serious leisure does not necessarily follow the universal attributes set out in the serious leisure perspective and might be best understood as a process of expanding 'capabilities' (Sen 2009). This alternative approach suggests that we need to identify 'functioning' as an achievement of what individuals manage to become, rather than prescribing activities and experiences in advance. Such an understanding of serious leisure focuses attention on the 'capabilities' which reflect someone's ability to achieve a given functioning rather than the other way around.

This leads us on to a second criticism of the serious leisure perspective, which concerns its latent functionalism. For some it is Stebbins' own conservatism that is the main target of criticism in this regard. Chris Rojek, for example, comments that the serious leisure perspective fails to acknowledge the relevance of any ethical implications because its categorization of serious leisure has strong moralistic undertones which gives efficacy to its behavioural and integrative qualities. Although this redirects the idea of leisure in a new way because individuals can achieve moral and cultural confirmation of themselves, as well as a sense of belonging, it does however, reinforce the social order because it assumes that serious leisure is 'a good thing', while casual leisure is not.

Making a related argument Rojek goes on to point out that today's society is fluid, ever-changing and increasingly uncertain, it may be harder for individuals to persist in serious leisure activities. Rojek instead views leisure as 'approximate to a state of serious distraction as opposed to the careerist notion of serious leisure' (1999, p.82), concluding that serious leisure could be more widely applied to other kinds of leisure activities such as abnormal leisure (Rojek 2000).

This leads to a further criticism of the serious leisure perspective which is that despite its assertion that we must recognize that serious leisure pursuits 'are shaped by various psychological, social cultural and historical conditions' (Elkington and Stebbins 2014, p.1) it would appear to offer a theory of serious leisure without society. For example, it fails to take into consideration what different societies and cultures understand as normal or abnormal regarding leisure choices as they are affected by age, socio-economic status and gender. As Rainsborough (1999) has pointed out Stebbins' largely androcentric and apolitical views fail to acknowledge the power relations within his serious leisure perspective which might lead to substantial differences in the interpretation of individuals' experiences and participation depending on their social identity.

A related criticism is made by Blackshaw (2009) who argues that we must question the originality of the concept of serious leisure since its origins can be traced back to Plato's Republic and the Greek term for 'serious' leisure, *skholē*. Plato's critique of 'serious play' derived from his criticism of mimesis and its consequences for the search of knowledge and truth. To put it another way, Plato was of the view that 'play' interferes with the traditional and upstanding foundations of society and especially those that hold 'true' knowledge. What we can derive from Blackshaw's critique is his admonition that, in common with Plato, Stebbins evinces a propensity to look down on playful leisure (read: casual leisure), despite his assertion that just because the serious leisure perspective takes its name from serious leisure rather than casual leisure or project-based leisure we should not assume that 'it is to be regarded, in some abstract sense, as more important or superior than the other two' (Elkington and Stebbins 2014, p.14). In other words, much like Plato's account, the serious leisure perspective has built into its deep structure the 'necessary misrecognition' (Rancière 2004) of leisure practises that do not conform to the



serious leisure perspective. What we can conclude from this is that the most compelling criticism of the serious leisure perspective is that it is a reified one-size-fits-all model by which all serious leisure must fit a universal ideal. The main consequence of this is that it treats people's leisure practises as if they exist in a vacuum outside society and culture.

One of the consequences of treating serious leisure as if it exists in a vacuum is that the serious leisure perspective tends to dichotomize leisure into two distinct categories: serious leisure and casual leisure. In trying to overcome this weakness there is the option of charting the progress from casual leisure to the development of a serious leisure career (Patterson 2001). As Shen and Yarnal make clear 'serious and casual leisure pursuits can be found in practically any activity' (2010, p.165). What this tells us is that trying to understand casual leisure and serious leisure across a continuum we can learn more about the development of meaning and commitment. In doing this we not only learn about the relationships that serious leisure participants have not only with each other but also their relationship to the social milieu in which they find themselves and how this is conducive to a serious leisure career. What we also need to bear in mind is not only what kinds of leisure people are involved in but an individual's *attitude* to their *chosen* leisure practice and *why* it holds a special meaning for them. As Elkington (2014) has pointed out Stebbins lack of empirical research tends to miss this human dimension.

Another related criticism of the serious leisure perspective is that it appears to suggest that people have to be 'fundamental about their leisure or they approach it without any quantifiable passion' (Bauckham 2013, p.444). In response to this critique, Stebbins has suggested that a clear distinction must be made between 'serious leisure' and 'casual leisure' since more people are likely to engage in the latter and are able to do so freely. But for those engaging in serious leisure activities there can be a number of constraining factors. Serious leisure activities are, therefore, for Stebbins, less popular and remain subsidiary in society; this is why we need to distinguish them from other leisure activities.

This trend is compounded by the propensity to distinguish between fulfilment and satisfaction in exploring leisure. For Stebbins, 'satisfaction' epitomises causal leisure,

while 'fulfilment' embodies serious leisure, concluding that the development of a personal career is achieved through 'effort, skill, knowledge and experience' (2014, p.2). This distinction draws attention to the hedonistic nature of casual leisure and the benefits and rewards of serious leisure. What we can conclude from this is that, for Stebbins, serious leisure has meaning and purpose, while casual leisure is insubstantial and unproductive. But not only that. In his book *The Idea of Leisure*, Stebbins (2012, p.99) argues that leisure ultimately leads to progress since it fosters positive developmental outcomes for both the individual and society. What this statement would appear to suggest is that casual leisure cannot ever be properly understood as leisure in the truest sense of the word because it does not have any such developmental objectives.

It is evident from reading Elkington and Stebbins' (2014) important new book that they continue to seek some kind of conceptual clarity for the serious leisure perspective and they must be applauded for this. Their book is promoted as an introduction to this field of study but it is also an attempt to win over the critics of the serious leisure perspective. Yet there is no real engagement, no serious attempt to collapse this kind of dichotomous thinking. This is evidenced in no uncertain terms in their conclusions near the end of the chapter on consumption when they say that, 'the end of consumption is to *have* something, to possess it, whereas in the end of leisure is to *do* something, to engage in an activity' (2014, p.136). There is also still little attempt to link with empirical studies. Perhaps the strongest criticism of the book, however, is that when expectations are narrowly confined to one particular kind of conceptual structure succeeding in this regard is always going to be partial.

So in this thesis I shall attempt to examine serious leisure horserace gambling, in all its variety, while explicitly recognizing the impact of important social, ideological, cultural and technological changes. In so doing the hope is to expose the degree to which the serious leisure perspective necessarily – or perhaps only accidentally – precludes a thoroughgoing understanding of serious leisure horseracing gambling and the various ways in which it is produced and reproduced. But much more importantly my overriding aim is to build on the important foundations established in the serious leisure perspective. However, before this can be achieved the first part of this thesis must offer its readers an understanding of the fundamental dimensions of

gambling in order to grasp what motivates some people to pursue gambling as serious leisure.

### **The framework of the thesis: an overview of chapters**

It should now be clear what I mean when I say I intend to critically explore leisure horserace gambling through the conceptual lens of serious leisure. What remains to be done is outline the framework of the thesis itself. As its title suggests Chapter 2 critically explores the fundamental concepts and theoretical perspectives associated with leisure gambling. This chapter is made of a longer first part and a shorter second part. The first may appear a little abstract in places but this is necessary because it is important that the reader has a grasp of gambling and crucially what motivates people to gamble. Although gambling is a universal activity it must also be located within broader societal shifts, which is often missing from the literature. It is crucial to note that the world has changed. At the heart of this thesis lies the contention that neoliberal ideology and the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism has fundamentally altered the social, cultural economic and political landscape of the UK, and gambling specifically. Without these radical changes, this study would not have taken place because serious leisure horserace gambling would have not emerged in the way documented and analysed in this thesis. It is with this observation in mind that the second part of this chapter offers the thesis's first contribution knowledge when it argues that the idea of gambling in the twenty-first century is transformed in tandem with the emergence of the play ethic (Kane 2004) as Freud's 'reality principle' and the 'pleasure principle' strike a new deal (Bauman 1998).

Chapter 3 identifies and discusses the key literature which attempts to understand gambling as leisure. It argues that a good deal of research, what is usually labelled 'gambling studies', has been conducted on gambling. However, as it seeks to show, this has been dominated by an epistemic which implicitly or explicitly entails two distinct yet interrelated methodological trends: the agency-focused perspective of the 'psy sciences' (Collins 2006) and functionalism. The central argument developed here will be that the dominance of the 'psy sciences' has led much academic research to probe inward into the emotional aspects of gamblers minds, while



simultaneously ignoring the wider social, cultural, economic and political contexts of the social worlds they inhabit. Drawing on the arguments developed in Chapter 2, the discussion in the second part of the chapter will demonstrate that rather than being seen as either a problem of addicted individuals or a homogenous phenomenon gambling must be understood both historically and sociologically. This discussion will demonstrate that the principal approaches to explaining gambling focus their attention on either functionalist conceptions or typologies of gamblers which ironically have their roots in the tacit assumptions of the 'psy sciences'. Attention here will be given to the problems associated with such approaches.

Building on these arguments and those outlined in the second part of Chapter 2, Chapter 4 argues that in attempting to understand gambling in contemporary society we must consider the ineradicable relationship between individualization, consumerism and risk as this is pivotal in getting to grips with the ideological, political, economic and technological forces that shape contemporary gambling. It is subsequently argued that if gambling has become an important aspect of consumerism through neoliberal capitalism, it is this ideology that has incrementally and decisively come to dominate state control of gambling which has been subject to deregulation and the shift from institutional to individual responsibility. One of the consequences of these changes is that not only is it gambling as a discrete activity that is driven by the 'dice-life' (Baudrillard 2001) or 'casino culture' (Bauman 2000) but wider society. What this indicates in turn is that gambling is no longer a distinct and discrete activity engaged in by (rational) leisure gamblers and (irrational) gambling addicts but it is the way that we *all* have to live today. The conclusions emerging from the discussion developed in this chapter foreground the empirical chapters of the thesis which argue that it is through their awareness of and in their ability to exploit these conditions for their own advantage that serious leisure gamblers are able to 'gain an edge' and in so doing find their vocation.

Chapter 5 is the methodology which begins by problematizing and making a case for the interpretivist paradigm. Before making the ontological and epistemological case for its own approach the chapter outlines and discusses the methodological weaknesses found in existing gambling studies. Thereafter outlines the case for developing a phenomenological framework before detailing how the methods used in

the study were selected. The resulting methodology used – a combination of research techniques grounded in an ethnographic investigation which included direct observation, participant observation and semi-structured interviews – is documented and the means of access to the field of research is discussed. There is also a discussion of the limitations of the methodology, the ethical implications of the study and the approach used for the data analysis. The chapter closes with some reflections on how I attempted to insinuate myself in the field and the implications for the study.

The aim of Chapter 6 is to demonstrate how and in what ways Stebbins' classic model of serious leisure found in the serious leisure perspective can be applied to leisure horserace gambling. This discussion is prefigured by applying Becker's (1953) classic career contingencies formulation to move attention away from ascribing the development of serious leisure to 'antecedent predispositions' towards individual 'motives and experiences' that emerge in the course of experience. The analysis is supplemented with field theory borrowed from Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), which enables me to theorize SLHG as an autonomous field of serious leisure practice driven by its own unique ethos and social world. It is demonstrated at numerous points in this chapter utilizing Stebbins' model that my participants unequivocally engage in serious leisure.

In the next two chapters the aim will be to build on these insights to demonstrate that for all its strengths this application of Stebbins' model leaves us with a rather static understanding of serious leisure horserace gambling that to all intents and purposes reifies its unique ethos and social world into a set of attributes. The argument developed in Chapter 7 is that serious leisure horserace gambling is in fact a historically constituted field of serious leisure practice, structured around wider societal changes – especially but not exclusively the shift from producer to consumer capitalism – and inextricably linked to changes in technology. After fleshing out what these changes surrounding gambling are and how they have radically impacted on wider society and gambling over the last ten years this chapter demonstrates how serious leisure horserace gambling has been transformed in no uncertain terms by the recommodification of gambling. This is illustrated by focusing specifically on the gambling activities of one of my participants, whose biography (and subsequent

career) happened to coincide with the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism that was accompanied in no uncertain terms by the emergence of neoliberalism which served to change the fabric of society (Harvey 2005), and with it both work and leisure experience, by placing value first and foremost on competition and individualization.

The final chapter from the empirical findings, Chapter 8, explores the consequences of these radical changes for the social world of serious leisure horserace gambling. In so doing it will focus its attention particularly on the radical shift in the practice of serious leisure that emerged as result. As this chapter shows, gambling has in no uncertain terms been transformed by digital technology. This not only enables enormous amounts of information to be compressed on small storage devices that can be easily conserved and transported, but it also speeds up data transmission transforming how serious leisure horserace gamblers communicate and practice their craft. It is argued that serious leisure horserace gamblers fall into two categories: those who understand the recommodification of gambling as an opportunity to extend their existing gambling skills set and those who see it as a radical shift in how they gamble. This chapter focuses its attention on the second category of SLHGs. Drawing on the framework underpinning Goffman's (1969) classic dramaturgical study, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, the field work here is analysed by exploring the changed economy of the 'backstage' 'work' that goes on when gambling has been 'recommodified', on the one hand, and by revealing the leisure aspects of SLHG in aesthetic space which frame 'front stage' performativity at the racecourse, on the other.

The concluding chapter summarizes the thesis focusing on what has been accomplished in the study. This is broken down into two sections. The first part of Chapter 9 discusses the methodological conclusions and the implications of the empirical study for further research. The second part closes the discussion by explaining how and in what ways the thesis contributes to original knowledge.



## Chapter 2

### Understanding Gambling as Leisure: Some Fundamental Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives

#### Introduction

Whilst the focus of this thesis is gambling as a form of serious leisure, this first chapter of the literature review examines gambling in a more general sense. This approach allows us to understand the fundamental dimensions of gambling and what motivates some people to subsequently pursue gambling as *serious* leisure.

Gambling will also be located within broader societal shifts, addressing something vital missing from the literature, which, as Clapson points out, makes 'little or no attempt to relate changes in the organisation and extent of betting and gambling to broader economic and cultural developments' (1992, p.2).

Indeed, developments in contemporary gambling have to be understood in the context of wider changes that have transformed society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We live in an age of substantial social, economic, cultural and technological transformation. In the space of less than two decades a sweeping set of changes have not only speeded up social life but also dissolved the forms of social organization associated with twentieth century class society replacing these with new structures of power located in individualization, risk and consumerism. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, the core of these is to be found in the ideology of neoliberalism which is fundamental to understanding gambling in the twenty-first century.

In the first part of this chapter the main focus of the discussion will be on defining gambling and the key concepts associated with it in more abstract terms. This is important to the thesis for two reasons. Firstly, gambling is an extraordinarily universal human activity. As we will see, and as McMillen has perceptively written, despite this universality, 'the concept of gambling has no intrinsic meaning; rather, its meaning always depends on the socio-historical context in which it occurs. The perception and experience of gambling vary significantly – in its history, its organisation and its meanings – according to different types of gambling, the various

groups involved, and the particular society within which the gambling takes place' (1996, p.6).

Secondly, and just as importantly, as we will see below, few if any studies have to date attempted to strip gambling back, so to speak, in order to grasp the essential aspects that are the basis of this universal phenomenon, and which demonstrate that it is much more than just an activity played for economic gain. This discussion will involve examining in turn a number of different concepts, starting with play, which is fundamental to understanding gambling as a leisure activity (Plato in Jowett 1953; Aristotle in Ross 1915; Huizinga 1955; Pieper 1948), continuing with a discussion of games and chance, while also looking at related concepts such as flow, mimesis, liminality and edgework. In so short a space it will be necessary to concentrate only on these concepts as they relate to gambling.

The second, shorter part of the chapter will attempt to demonstrate in schematic terms how these fundamental aspects of gambling have been transformed in the light of changes in wider society; this is a theme that will be considered in more depth in the discussion of individualization, consumerism and risk and how these have transformed gambling in Chapter 4. Consideration of the existing gambling studies literature which accounts for why people gamble and the place of gambling in society will be delayed until the next chapter.

### **The idea of gambling**

Gambling might be universal but it is not a homogenous phenomenon. The idea of gambling has changed its meaning since pre-modern times when it was primarily associated with the happiness and delight that come from partaking in certain sports (Ashton 1898). As Ashton explains the modern idea of gambling stems from the Saxon word 'gamen' which is derived from the modern word gaming. The verb 'to gamble' as we know it today developed later and came to mean 'the betting or staking of something of value, with consciousness of risk and hope of gain, on the outcome of a game' (Herman 1976, p.6). Herman's understanding has strong connotations with the dictionary classification which defines gambling as an activity involving 'games of chance to win money, etc., or to risk or bet (money, etc.) on the outcome of an event, sport etc. or to act with the expectation of or to lose by or as if



betting' (Collins English Dictionary 2005, p.635). Ashton offers his own definition in universal terms, suggesting gambling is 'to take an indulgence, in which chance assumes a most important character. The money motive increases, as chance predominates over skill. The winner is not revered and the loser is not pitied. Of the universality of gambling there is no doubt, and it seems to be inherent in human nature' (1898, p.2). As Reith suggests 'for hundreds of years, individuals have gambled for excitement and escapism, to win money, to gain status, to be sociable — the list is almost as diverse as the variety of games' (2007, p.3).

It is commonplace in modern societies to define gambling merely in terms of financial transactions which involve a bet, usually staking of money, or some other item of economic value, on the uncertain outcome of an event. What we also learn from such definitions is that gambling is not only as old as games themselves but at its most basic level involves the activity of predicting results on such contests and placing some kind of bet or wager on the outcome. What these bring to our attention is the importance of uncertainty and risk that accompanies gambling; that is the excitement of chance or the unknown and unpredictable element that causes the result of a gamble to swing one way rather than another. But not much else. Filby (1983) argues that in order to overcome this limitation we need to identify the distinctive characteristics of different forms of gambling in order to explain the space each provides for different kinds of rewards. In this regard he offers five essential factors which ultimately determine the ways in which we gamble.

First, there is the frequency of opportunities to gamble or 'the speed of the action' (Goffman 1967). At the macro level this feature is determined by the state and at the meso level directly related to the logistical properties of the activity on which the gamble depends. Second, the pay-out interval, or the time elapsing between determination and settlement, is key to 'the speed of the action'. In other words, fast pay-outs will influence the extent to which winnings can be re-bet. Third, different gambling forms offer different ranges of odds and stakes. Fourth, there is the relationship between the probability of winning by striking a bet and the pay-out ratio; these are rarely the same. Fifth, there is the degree of indeterminacy involved in the outcome of placing a bet; these range on a continuum from completely chance outcomes to those with a substantial possibility of success.

Despite the importance of identifying these five essential factors Filby glosses over the extent to which gambling also involves the pursuit of social as well as economic gain (Geertz 1972). As Sallaz points out, 'Geertz portrayed the act of gambling not as a solitary individual confronting an impersonal statistical risk, but as an occasion of social intercourse in which participants create, reify and internalize a shared web of meaning' (2008, p.13). What is also important to take into account when we attempt to understand the purposes and meanings of gambling is the place it has in society across different historical periods. According to Clapson (1992), gambling might have long history but the word 'gambler' as a verb was not apparent in the English language until the late eighteenth century. The expression 'to game' from this time onwards came to mean simply playing for money. Since the end of the eighteenth century gambling has been disparaged. Gambling as we know it today is clearly linked to the pervasive moralistic attitudes of this historical period when it came to be associated with the character of the 'gamester' or 'fraudster'. It is clear that this kind of labelling of gamblers and gambling and its perceived relationship with other risky economic activities has been frowned upon at least since this period (Downes 1976). This perception of gambling endured until at least the second half of the twentieth century and nowhere was it better reflected than in the state's attitude to gambling which for over two hundred years has been consistently moralistic and disapproving — if also legislatively inconsistent (Runciman 2014, p.23).

Clearly the core assumptions underlying such views are deeply ingrained in the common-sense inherited from the legacy of the puritan conscience established in the Victorian era (Weber 1930) when gambling came to be understood as a particular, unforgiving kind of immorality. For the puritan gambling like other dark pleasures is the source of vice. As Clapson explains, 'gambling then was a newer pejorative term for gaming and wagering' (1992, p.1). Such a view is a reminder that the expression and understanding of gambling varies not just between different centuries but between different societies and cultures. Gambling may also be interpreted differently depending on the class position or the gender of the gambler. The meanings and purposes associated with gambling are socially constructed. For this reason they are potentially limitless.

One such interpretation can be found in Erving Goffman's (1967) famous symbolic interactionist analysis of gambling as a sub-type of 'action'. Clapson (1992, p.1) also

differentiates types of gamblers, separating 'gamblers' from 'punters' (as the reader will also see in the next chapter, this is a recurring theme in the gambling literature). As his research reveals from the eighteenth century onwards the expression 'punter' is used 'to refer to people who bet, which came to mean an outsider betting on horses in a small way' (*ibid*). What Clapson perhaps should also have said is that if at this time 'gamblers' were for the first time distinguished from 'punters', what was also signified for the first time is that if the former rely on their expertise and insider knowledge to gamble, the latter simply rely on their instinct and enjoy the excitement of proving it – or not, as is often the case. Implicit to such an understanding is that we need to distinguish between gambling as work and gambling as leisure. Can gambling experiences be so simply classified? It is doubtful whether such a clear distinction can be drawn. Indeed, one of the central aims of the present thesis is to challenge this dichotomy.

What is clear from the foregoing interpretations of gambling, however, is that in order to understand gambling as leisure we also need to take into account the meaning and significance of a number of other related concepts. As was pointed out above few if any studies to date have attempted to strip gambling back in order to grasp the essential aspects that are the basis of this universal phenomenon. It is to these that the discussion must now turn.

### **The fundamental dimensions of gambling: play, games and chance**

In all the definitions identified above we saw that the idea of gambling presupposes the activity of play. Play is an integral part of everyday life. Plato suggested that play is inextricably bound to life. He advised us to live life as play, not take ourselves too seriously, and above all be free to change our minds from base materialism to a higher aesthetic plane, to live the good life...' (Shivers and de Lisle 2007, p.40). For Plato, it was in play that people could be happy. Strong and redeeming qualities would develop from a life that included leisure. For Plato's successor, Aristotle, who suggested that 'happiness as the highest good is synonymous with leisure' (Shivers and de Lisle 1997, p.41), epitomized what the Greek life symbolized which was made through leisure, founded on play, enjoyment, learning, imagination and most importantly freedom.



Huizinga traces the Latin route of the word play as 'Ludus' which incorporates 'child's play, recreation, contests, and games of chance' (1955, p.35). Pat Kane traces the etymology of the word play and highlights that it comes from the old English word 'Plegian' or 'Dlegh' which means to 'engage oneself' (2004, p.4); therefore to play is to fully commit oneself in an activity. Huizinga also traces the meaning of the word to 'Plegian' which is 'to vouch or stand guarantee for, to take a risk, to expose oneself to danger for someone or something' (1955, p.39). Play therefore, becomes synonymous with taking chances; it not only signifies something is taking place but also that there is something to be gained.

Play was historically associated with childish behaviour because of its separation from work and its non-serious appeal. Derivative from this, play essentially becomes synonymous with a free, fun and joyful experience that has its own meanings and conventions that can be viewed as the alternative to the rational, serious nature of everyday life (Borsay 2006). In this view, play has become a necessary component of life because of the fun element it symbolizes. Play can take place anywhere and at any time; it permeates life in a variety of forms. Play and the pleasures it brings are an important function of all societies and cultures as they epitomise freedom and offer a means of escapism from the constrictions of everyday life.

In modern societies play is ubiquitous, as Pat Kane suggests, 'we are always in play or at play' (2004, p.8). He further suggests that play does, however, need its spaces that are 'someplace else' and that exist within their own time frame. There are spaces that have capitalized on the nature of play that have become inextricably bound up in society. It is where play has become accepted as the norm: it is ultimately a reflection of the society they emerge from. Kane (2004) highlights six stages of play that can be split into two phenomena: one from the modern world and one from the ancient world. The modern world sees 'play as progress which is part of social development, play as imagination which is part of wider cultural developments, and play as selfhood which is what play produces freedom, fulfilment, and joy. The ancient world saw play as power which was part of contests and competitions. Play was also part of an overarching identity that was bound up in carnivals and rituals and finally play as fate which was bound up in chance and risk' (2004, p.15). The term that bounds both of these together, suggests Kane, is 'frivolity' because this abandons all connotations of control and emphasizes freedom.

'Players' symbolize freedom. The play world symbolizes a place of little constraint where people can play, enjoy themselves and be who they want to be. It is a place of opportunity and potentiality. The ancient world viewed play as something that was pre-determined, held by the hands of god and was left in the hands of fate (Reith 1999). It is in between these two opposites of freedom and chance that the player is situated. Play is a natural composition of the human make-up. Play can help with progression and development where there are always opportunities. Play is also about fulfilling deep rooted desires in an active and communal space.

Huizinga (1955) suggests that all play has its own 'playground'. This can be either a separate structural space or can be symbolized as some kind of mental separation. These areas of play are spaces within the everyday world which are just for the act of playing. It brings with it an ideal of a world where much joy can be gained. It is this aesthetic quality that gives play its form. It creates something unique and it brings play to life; any departure from this devalues play and renders it empty of significance. The cheat or the spoilsport endangers the play world as it goes against everything the play world symbolizes; this is also what signifies the play world's instability.

Yet commentators on play suggest that it is functional; that it must provide some kind of a service to society. However, it has been little investigated as to *why* people play and *where* people play. Most researchers look at the different types of play and question the developments of play as well as how this affects the players. As Huizinga (1955) highlighted, and what is pivotal to the thesis developed here, is that most commentators fail to acknowledge or address the aesthetic aspects found in play which appeal to the unknown and the anticipation of the possibilities of winning, that is found in the intensity and the consuming delight of the thrill found in the absorption of play.

This idea of play is reflected in the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1988) which explores the way that play contains a level of uncertainty of outcome that allows for individual creativity. The idea is that play allows individuals to enter a world of flow or a stream of higher consciousness – a relationship with time, space and experience that is far removed from everyday experience. As we will see in the next chapter, this is clearly what happens to individuals in gambling situations. According to Csikszentmihalyi

such flow activities have as their prime purpose the pursuit of pleasure. Barthes identifies two kinds of pleasure that motivate us to gamble: *plaisir* and *jouissance* (Harris 1995). While *plaisir* refers to the pleasure we gain from our passive engagement with gambling, *jouissance*, which alludes to the idea of sexual pleasure, refers to the more ecstatic pleasures that accompany gambling success.

It is in these different ways that play represents life, and life is found in play. Individuals can live their life as play as well as consuming themselves in play whereby it no longer is a game but it represents life itself. In this sense, it is important to note that play is not just about contests and tensions but is about joy and happiness. Play has its roots in childlike behaviour therefore this is what shines through during play as it moves from seriousness to jubilation. Like Bauman after him, Simmel refers to the real 'heavy' society and the playful 'light' society which are reconcilably linked. The playful world also has an important function in the 'real' world because it educates individuals on how to participate in society as well as been a crucial aspect to the functioning of people's lives where arguably now the play world has now become the 'real' world (Bauman 2000).

### ***Play and games***

Play is more or less evident in all games. Play usually symbolizes some form of contest or gain. There are certain play games that people cannot control and account for and therefore have to be left to chance. Games can vary from relaxed and informal fixtures with no prescribed structures to highly complex skilled, competitive games and competitions. Games derived their origins from either cards or dice. As Herman states, 'the card pack lends itself extremely well to expressing a variety of human conflicts and problems, and to all sorts of interactions between the variables that can symbolize many different styles of human interaction' (1967, p.136).

Games can be altered and played to match individual's personalities and cultural preferences. The intrinsic qualities of games were determined historically by the 'casting of lots' (Reith 1999). The waiting of fate to determine the outcome of the games was altered by the introduction of a wager or bet. This altered the structure of the games and crucially placed more emphasis on the individual. Even so, historically individuals' fates have been entwined by societal structures of society.



Games differ in their structural characteristics and their relevance for different individual players. But in terms of understanding the development of gambling games, the historical forces which are particular to their social and cultural development have seldom been given serious consideration. Researchers have rarely asked, for example, 'how the interplay of socio-cultural interests have combined, historically and materially, to produce discrimination, sexism and racism in gambling, or why questions of power, profit and government capacity in gambling are (or are not) seen as social issues' (McMillen 1996, p.21). We will return to these issues in the next chapter, but for the moment we must continue with the task of unpacking the relationship between play and games.

Caillois (1962) identifies four types of play: competition (*Agon*), chance (*Alea*), simulation (*Mimicry*) and vertigo (*Ilinx*). Competition is a contest between individuals where each one tries to overcome the other to gain victory. *Agon* tries to level the margins and therefore make the contest a level playing field; a good example of this is handicapping in horseracing. In *Agon*, players are self-reliant, and it is up to the individuals to control how much chance plays a part in the contest. The game is reliant on the individual's skill and knowledge to try and control the outcome. In contrast, in games of *Alea*, the individuals are unable to control the outcome of a game: that is left to chance. The amount of profit that is staked in a game depends on how much risk is involved making it an unlevel playing field for most participants. Chance is the most appealing feature of games of *Alea*. Whereas individuals are active participants in games of *Agon*, they are inactive subjects and unable to control the outcome of what might happen in games of *Alea*.

What this tells us is that games can be divided into either ones of skill or chance. Various skills and knowledge can be applied to all games. Skill implies that there is some kind of possibility of success in the game, because some form of knowledge may be put to the test, enforcing the individual's superiority over the game. Chance, however, is based on 'pot luck': what will happen, will happen. Games of chance are random number producers. 'There are literally hundreds of different gambling activities each with its own set of rules, odds of winning and payout schedule' (Currie and Casey 2007, p.168). Skill is less likely to appear in games of chance because nothing can be utilized to predict the outcome. The gambler here is an irrelevant part of the game. As Reith points out, 'chance is an ontological feature of the world: its

influence is pervasive and the outcome of a gamble is always a contingent event' (1999, p.94).

Games of chance would seem to offer an easier route for gambling because they require little skill and individuals don't have to possess any previous information or knowledge. Certain traits and superstitions can also become crucial to the individual as it further increases their beliefs of winning and it also enforces some kind of superiority amongst competing participants (for a discussion see Reith 1999). It is perhaps because of this view that to date little if any research has been developed to look at gambling as a serious leisure activity. Indeed, games of chance also present a challenge, a way to test skills and theories, they enforce some kind of rules, but they can also test initiatives and create moral principles. These arguments are clearly evidenced in the work of Erving Goffman.

### **Theorizing games of chance**

Historically chance was bound up with religious connotations and myths. It would be through the design of gods that determined individual's path which would be decided through luck or chance. This would include all aspects of life and nowhere is this clearer than through wagering and betting. As Jones suggests recognizing the meaning of chance was crucial to the historical development of gambling 'once [the gambler] was aware that the factor of chance existed and that he possessed the power to influence it to a certain degree, he may have begun to grasp the idea of a gamble' (1973, p.13).

Although chance has been allowed to flourish in the modern world, it still retains an air of mysticism; it holds no definitive limits and exists in a space that holds no time value. 'Not only are games of chance a product of consumer culture, they also express some of its most fundamental characteristics, such as the values of instant gratification, self-fulfilment and conspicuous consumption' (Reith 2007, p.6).

Games are defined by their intensity which is a crucial aspect to any form of play. Tension keeps people guessing and therefore creates the appeal of the unknown and adds the dimension of risk. This all depends on the duration of the game, how much is at stake, and the level of participation from the individual (Goffman 1990). Certain games that have more intensity are more likely to be shorter and therefore



promote continuous play. Games of chance are normally over as soon as they have begun. The gamblers skills and character will be shown during this period of high tension. Even though the player plays to win, he still has boundaries and rules that are part of the game and these must be adhered to. This forces repetition of play and it therefore prolongs the excitement (Schüll 2012).

Profit is the object through which games of chance take place and allow them to prosper. Money helps to define gamblers in terms of their identity and self-worth. The amount of money that is dispensed on a bet determines the gamblers fate but also the tenacity of their character as well. Money is what play needs to create the thrills and the excitement. To place a bet ensures chance will appear and it therefore signifies commitment. Money determines how long a game will last and how intense the game will be. Studies have also shown that even when gamblers have won large amounts of money, they still continue to gamble (Orford 2003). In some gambling situations, such as in a casino or on online play, money becomes something that doesn't appear to hold any economic value which can encourage higher stakes. The casino can be viewed as emblematic of conspicuous consumption. There are endless ways to gamble, there is no sense of time, daylight is limited and other forms of entertainment prevail in order to create a particular kind of ambience. As Miles and Miles suggest 'it presents the consumption of the imaginary as an entirely natural state of affairs' (2004, p.109). In other words, gambling situations tend to embody mimetic, liminal and edgework qualities.

### ***Mimesis, liminality, edgework and chance***

According to some interpreters games are important because they allow a break from everyday life. This is what Caillois calls simulation, which derives from the Greek word *mimeisthai*, meaning 'to imitate' (Blackshaw and Crawford 2009). Games are mimetic in the sense that they present a way for individuals to adopt new characteristics and take on new identities. This interpretation tells us something important about the contingency of gambling as it has been traditionally understood. 'Mimetic activities operate as a theatre for the expression and relatively unrestrained flow of emotions, and a sphere for the elicitation of pleasurable excitement imitating real life experiences without the associated risks' (Malcolm *et al* 2013, p.123). Elias and Dunning's (1969) call this the 'quest for excitement' which they argue arose as a

result of the closing up of areas of stimulation, often violent, which in former ages had been sources of pleasurable gratification. This set humans on a search for substitute, mimetic activities in their leisure which didn't carry the same risks and dangers. It is in such liminal situations that individuals can form social relationships and can come to terms with their own self-actualization – albeit temporarily.

As the work of Victor Turner (1973) demonstrates, liminal situations are those indefinable social and spiritual locations in which the 'real' world is reflected upside down. According to Turner, the most common modality of social organization that takes place in liminal situations is *communitas*. As opposed to *societas*, defined by inequality and structure, *communitas* is characterized by equality and anti-structure, and the dissipation of social hierarchies and status. A levelling process brings about the breakdown of social class differences and other assumed borders and barriers. It is in such situations that individuals can come to terms with their own self-actualization. Gambling locations are a good example of liminal situations. Here mimesis is allowed to flow, as is the potential for self-fulfilment and the achievement of personal desires. Liminal situations give individuals freedom and autonomy where they have 'the guarantee of not being disturbed or interrupted' (Bégout 2003, p.37). As Bégout suggests 'the more intense the pleasures brought by the game, the stronger the subordination to it becomes' (2003, p.39). The gambling world sustains its existence because it doesn't try to be anything other than what it is. Its appeal is found in its uncertainty, in which it utilizes this in its alluring nature, it has as what Bégout suggests 'commercial seductiveness and technological appeal' (2003, p.85).

It is in this sense that gambling spheres can be understood as spaces of freedom; it is significant that they can exist as a kind of liminal utopia which gives individuals the feeling that they have already achieved something but it also gives them the hope that they will. As Bégout argues, when the gambler 'places his bet and throws the dice, it is so that, for the space of an all too brief moment that he wants endlessly to prolong, he can feel the troubling sense of pure possibility' (2003, p.97). The individual here is on a quest for the 'maybe' or 'what could happen'. It doesn't matter if the gambler loses because it allows for a repetition of play, which is essential to the gambler. The individual is in some way trying to combine the everyday and this

liminal world together. 'The boundary between serious and the amusing, the everyday and the recreational, becomes muddled here' (Bégout 2003, p.114). At this time work, order and routine commingle with play, consumption and enjoyment.

As will be demonstrated later in the thesis, edgework is also useful concept for understanding chance and risk taking. Edgework provides individuals with a heightened sensory experience in liminal situations, it creates feelings of pleasure and a satisfying tension that in Freud's terms is both pleasurable and unpleasurable. 'Edgework sensations help to produce a sense of transcendent reality. Participants often describe the experience of negotiating the edge as 'more real' than the experience of everyday institutional routines' (Lyng 2005, p.24). Edgework is formed in locations where the everyday world borders with a liminal one. Such situations allow individuals to move from rationality and routine to irrationality and uncertainty. However, what takes place in edgework situations is very 'real'; these are spaces not so much grounded by illusion but intense feelings of the experience of social reality.

'Edgework is alluring because it gives individuals a feeling of control over their lives and environment while they push themselves to their physical and mental limits' (Lois 2005, p.120). In doing this, individuals become preoccupied with the task in front of them leaving little else to be desired. Individuals feel that they have some kind of control over their situation where they can realize and be who they want to be as well as making the situation feel an instantaneous rush of feeling and action. In terms of this thesis it can be argued that gambling offers edgework tendencies. There are two types of emotional direction associated with edgework: hedonism, which generates heightened feelings of emotion that are individually sought out; and eudaemonism, which is the regulator or the moral guide that controls individual conduct.

As Bégout argues, in edgework situations 'nothing relates to life outside, thereby creating the conditions of utopia. Sometimes the illusion swallows up reality, the jovial collective share becomes solidity and matter, because the attractions really do exist' (2003, p.21). However, what is crucial to the functioning of mimetic, liminal and edgework activities is that they are seen as permissible within certain boundaries. In other words, these situations might permit the 'impermissible' but they are



nonetheless functional to the smooth running of society. What this suggests is, and as we will see in the discussion chapters, that we should remember that games of chance are social affairs that will be accompanied by their own social rules.

### ***Goffman and chance***

Goffman (2006) illustrates that in all games of chance there are four stages of development. The first can be called the squaring off, which highlights some kind of contest either between individuals, or between the individual and another object. The next stage is determination, which is essential to winning; this is where it becomes necessary to try and overcome other individuals or other impediments. The third stage is disclosure, this can either happen through the amount of money that is staked, or a repeat of a bet. The final stage is settlement, which involves a winner or a loser. The essential components of a game, Goffman suggests, are quite simple: once a bet is made, the outcome is decided, and then payment is received. This all occurs within the same game. Games for Goffman are generally, short, intense and are an unbroken chain of events – all of which makes them highly appealing. For Goffman, games must take place somewhere separate from everyday life. This helps to keep things balanced and people know the boundaries. This can be seriously challenged by the amount of money an individual is willing to bet with that is epitomised in the size of the stake. It is the difference between success and failure. The greater the stake, the bigger the risk and potentially and therefore, the bigger the consequences. As reiterated by Currie and Casey the most relevant features available for describing gambling activities are 'participation status, frequency, expenditure, duration and type of game played' (2007, p.163). It can be said, however, that it is gambling in itself and its underlying features of appeal are what matter the most.

As Goffman (2006) suggests, an individual's disposition as much as the game itself can be won or lost. However, in the face of adversity the true character of an individual can become known. In the gambling world, the moral make-up of an individual shines through, the individual's identity can be acquired or as Goffman (2006) puts it 'gambled away'. This can also be re-gained, even in times of losses, when a true test of character is displayed. What Goffman's research suggests is that the main motivation to gamble is for most people not the desire to win money, nor is

action a determining factor of whim and recklessness. Gamblers find ways of dealing with the heightened pressure and tension of a game. For most gamblers, this tension is part of the appeal of gambling games; it is not stressful but something that can be controlled by rational application and self-control.

Goffman wanted to make clear that 'the social world is such that any individual who is strongly oriented to action, as some gamblers are, can perceive the potentialities for chance. Chance is not merely sought out but carved out. Chance lies in the attitude of the individual himself. Action is at once vicarious and real' (2006, p.269). However, for chance in itself to appear, the individual needs to be prepared to surrender themselves to the game, to take a risk and commit.

There have been a number of other theories that have become significant in the development of our understanding of play and games. These include probability theory (Gemelli and Alberoni 1961) and the idea of randomness (Epstein 1967); each proving that that luck is the ultimate benefactor. Perhaps the most significant theory of them all is 'Pascal's Wager' written over three hundred years ago. Pascal was more concerned with the complexities of game playing. Games to him were something that were incomplete, never dictated by previous play; the future of the game is always not known and never influenced by the current situation at hand. Wins and losses are intrinsic to any game, which means that there will always be a reason for people to keep an interest in the game and therefore maintain their belief in the game. As Pascal (1660) himself put it in *The Pensées*: 'Belief is a wise wager. Granted that faith cannot be proved, what harm will come to you if you gamble on its truth and it proves false? If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation, that He exists'. That is one reason Pascal is important to this thesis. He is concerned why the wager is important to the meaning of life.

### ***Chance and pleasure***

One essential component of placing a wager is the anticipation of the pleasure of winning. To wager on a particular event, game or race, involves the individual into the thick of the action; they feel the excitement, the anticipation and are eager to participate in the experience that is unfolding in front of them. But of equal importance is repetition. Recognizing this crucial aspect of play, Epstein argues that

'games are distinguished by the number of contending interests, by the value of the winning payment, by the number of moves required, and by the amount of information available to the interests' (1967, p.37). Most games are based on the capacities of the players and the possibility of what might happen.

Indeed, chance is the generator of pleasure. As Bauman puts it 'pleasure is drawn precisely from mutual estrangement, that is from the absence of responsibility and the assurance that, whatever may happen between the strangers, it will not burden them with lasting obligations, will not leave in its wake consequences likely to outlast the enjoyment of the moment' (1995, p.132). Individuals are drawn to play or gambling because they are free to do so, they are not obligated or morally expected to. It is also the aesthetic qualities that gives gambling its enjoyment, where individuals choose to partake. As Bauman continues:

No determination, no chance; just a soft, pliable game without set or predictable denouement, a game which exhausts itself fully in the aggregate of players and their moves. The player cannot determine the outcome; but the player's moves are not devoid of consequence either. As there is no Law that unambiguously links action to its outcome, there is no clear prescription of what one should do in order to attain the result one wishes. This world promises no security but no impotence either; it offers neither certainty nor despair; only the joy of a right move and the grief of a failed one (Bauman 1992, p.187).

What this quotation suggests is that games must be understood as 'more than 'models' of social existence; they are microcosms of the fundamental nature of social life' (Giulianotti 2004, p.147). Drawing on the idea of the figuration, Elias argued that a game is an open contest, which means that the individuals who comprise its formation must take into consideration its fluid nature. This is useful, because as Giulianotti points out, 'game models help to illustrate the falsity of dichotomizing 'individuals' and 'society' (2004, p.147-48). In this sense, they are useful in elucidating the intricate nature of all social relationships and especially their fluid nature and inherent power ties. To this end, as Giulianotti puts it, 'all social relations are games' (2004, p.148). And such games are a crucially part of leisure experience. 'Whatever the precise character of these emotional experiences in leisure, the quest for exciting significance prevails, and that excitement is centrally connected to a



rewarding experience that becomes habitual and that serves to produce and reproduce a sense of self' (Malcolm *et al*, 2013, p.127). In other words, games of chance are not just fundamental to social identity, they are fundamental to the nature of social life (Giulianotti 2004).

### **Interim summary**

The point of the first part of this chapter has been to identify and explain the key concepts that account for the meaning and purposes of gambling. The first part of the discussion unpacked the idea of gambling and argued that, because the meanings and purposes associated with it are social constructed, definitions are potentially limitless. It was subsequently argued that fundamental to understanding gambling is the concept of play. We also saw that games are a fundamental feature of play and that chance tells us a great deal about how and why people find pleasure in gambling. We also explored a number of theoretical explanations which attempt to account for the role of the purpose of gambling in society. In this regard we saw that games of chance must be understood as important to social identity individually and the nature of social life generally. The overriding feature that emerged from the discussion of the concepts of mimesis, liminality and edgework was that gambling has traditionally been seen as taking place on the borders of society and can be seen in this sense as functional to the smooth running of society.

In all these senses, it has been demonstrated that gambling is much more than an activity played for economic gain. What this tells us is that gambling fits squarely into the category of a leisure activity. As Avery concludes it is 'a recreational activity, a valued pastime, a source of fun and entertainment, it is deeply interwoven into the fabric of everyday lives, and a good deal of time is devoted to play', which he adds is of major significance for people since 'it shapes their daily schedule, their home life, as well as friend and occupational choices, it is a central activity, a hub, which directs and organizes their way of going through the world' (2009, p.470). Indeed, when most people gamble, they are not only engaging in societal activity, but also consciously trying to endow their lives with some kind of meaning. The second part of the chapter will now attempt to demonstrate in brief but critical terms how these fundamental aspects of gambling have been transformed in the light of changes in wider society.

## **The transformation of pleasure in play: the 'reality principle' and the 'pleasure principle' strike a new deal**

In the first part of this chapter we saw that understanding play is fundamental to understanding gambling. We also saw that in most interpretations play is understood as a universal phenomenon which is functional to the smooth running of society. Nowhere is this view more apparent than in the work of Sigmund Freud. As we have seen, it is through play that individuals experience pleasurable feelings that cannot be achieved in other areas of life. Pleasure as it is used in this sense might be best described as a feeling of high intensity that is experienced both physically and mentally that gives the individual not only happiness and enjoyment but also self-fulfilment. In trying to understand how pleasure works, Freud was concerned with the mental and physical capacities of human behaviours in everyday life and these connect with 'the most obscure and inaccessible region of the mind' (1950, p.2). One of his later works was the short book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* which was significant in situating the corresponding link between the inside and the outside, the mental and the physical and pleasure and unpleasure.

Freud first states in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that there is a tension that occurs between the suppression of unpleasure and the endorsement of pleasure. For Freud, 'unpleasure corresponds to an increase in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a diminution' (1950, p.2). However, where there is unpleasure, there is always the potential for pleasure. Pleasure is to be found in the consciousness of individuals as a constant thread and unpleasure occurs when it departs from this continuity. This is what Freud describes as 'the thresholds of pleasure and unpleasure' (1950, p.3). This continuum allows the pleasure principle in everyday life to be kept at a minimum or in situ. If this is extended or increased then unpleasure will be experienced. The pleasure principle is very much a dominant force in the mind of every individual, however, as Freud suggests that tendency is always 'opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure' (1950, p.5). According to Freud, the 'reality principle' is necessary to the maintenance of society as it temporarily suspends pleasure and the means of attaining this and allows unpleasure to ensue in the quest for pleasure. There are, however, cases or some

instances where the 'pleasure principle' overrides the 'reality principle'; it is in activities such as gambling that this can be found.

Freud states that 'most of the unpleasure that we experience is perceptual unpleasure: either by unsatisfied instincts or external perception' (1950, p.7). This can be overcome by the pleasure principle or even the reality principle. For many people, gambling is an enjoyable and pleasurable pursuit. The enjoyment derived from gambling stems from the actual gambling experience, not the outcome; that is, the placing of a bet and waiting for the outcome are more important than the actual winning (that is an added bonus). As Freud puts it, it is 'in a passive situation - he was overpowered by the experience, but by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an active part' (Freud 1950, p.15). For Freud, the act of repetition signifies not only a need for domination and self-control, but also pleasure. However, he was also quick to link repetition to compulsion. His studies indicated that in the end certain repetitive acts are carried out just for the sake of it. In terms of gambling, this is experienced in the minority; for the majority of gamblers, repetition means continuing the play, to prolong enjoyment and prolong the pleasure principle. However, Freud warned that should the 'pleasure principle' be allowed to dominate, individual life would become problematic, unresourceful and could be potentially damaging; instead it is important that 'the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle' (1950, p.5).

Building on Freud's ideas, Bauman argues that in today's liquid modern society we have witnessed a significant change in which the 'solid' structures that held back the notions of pleasure and self-fulfilment through the 'reality principle', which has been radically undermined (Bauman 2002, p.185). Bauman suggests that this change can be illustrated through the substitution of 'wish' for those of 'desire' and 'need'. In Bauman's view, this 'completes the liberation of the 'pleasure principle', purging the last residues of any 'reality principle' (ibid). In Freud's terms, the function of the 'reality principle' was to keep the 'pleasure principle' in check, as too much pleasure would lead to unpleasure. However, in today's consumer society we have witnessed a change that has seen the 'pleasure principle' override the 'reality principle', whereby individuals have been turned 'into faithful and reliable (hired) guards of rational order' (Bauman 2002, p.187). In a telling metaphor for gambling studies, Bauman argues that the triumph of liquid modernity is that it has freed the pleasure



principle from the perimeter fence beyond which pleasure seekers once could venture only at their peril. As he puts it, the 'consumer society has achieved a previously unimaginable feat: it reconciled the reality and pleasure principles by putting, so to speak, the thief in charge of the treasure box' (2001, p.16). In a nutshell, our society has been transformed and as a result it is today 'built out of the irrationality of its individualized actors' (Bauman 2002, p.188).

This has major implications for understanding the place of gambling in society. Drawing on what Bauman's argues we can argue that the centrality of gambling in neoliberal Britain embodies this switch between the 'reality principle' and the 'pleasure principle'. To paraphrase, Abt *et al.* (1985, p.22): 'gambling exemplifies a reversal of [societal] values: the ethic of saving, of self-denial and capital accumulation, has been replaced by an ideology of hedonistic consumerism'. What this tells us is that gambling has become a vital function of life not just for gamblers but for society as whole too. But not in the sense that Freud understood it.

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In Bauman's view, liquid modernity presupposes a world underpinned by play and the 'pleasure principle' rather than work and the 'reality principle'. Bauman's claim is that this reversal, with all its ramifications, was not formulated in society until the advent of liquid modernity and the emergence of individualization, consumerism and risk. Bauman's point for the purposes of the present study is that our distinctively 'solid modern' conception of play as a mimetic or liminal activity which takes place on the edge of society no longer holds good. Play (and by default gambling) today is not only at the centre of society but also fundamental to the functioning of society — as Bauman (2000) points out liquid modernity is also a world in which uncertainty and risk (i.e. chance) predominate.

### **Reassessing play: infinite games and the emergence of the play ethic**

This idea is also taken up by Pat Kane (2004) who argues that the assumption of the Protestant ethic that leisure (and by default play) is secondary to and earned through work no longer holds good. Building on the work of the philosopher of James Carse, Kane argues that liquid modernity is the time of the play ethic. The starting point of Kane's thesis is that there is a tacit assumption that underpins most if not all understandings of games (and by default gambling) and this is that they are finite or



played for the purpose of winning. This suggests that a game must reach a conclusion and come to an end, which deems someone the overall victor. However, there is an alternative way of understanding how games operate when 'it is simply the case that if the players do not agree on a winner, the game has not come to a decisive conclusion - and the players have not satisfied the original purpose of playing' (Carse 1986, p.3). Unlike the finite game, an infinite game has different considerations.

Carse argues that 'infinite players cannot say when their game began, nor do they care. They do not care for the reason that their game is not bounded by time. Indeed, the only purpose of the game is to prevent it from coming to an end, to keep everyone in play' (1986, p.6-7). For the infinite game, play is a continuous process that can occur at any time or place, where time means little. What is also significant with infinite games, as Carse adds, are that the rules of the game are altered 'to prevent anyone from winning the game and to bring as many persons as possible into play' (1986, p.9). Having said that, the rubrics underpinning infinite games are not rules per se. The significance of the infinite game is that it is not bound by any rules or boundaries; its attention is on play itself. Anyone can play an infinite game, they have a choice or freedom to play and then also to continue the play. It is this kind of uncertainty that makes infinite games appealing. As Carse suggests, for that reason infinite players 'do not play for their own life, they live for their own play' (1986, p.24-25). Carse is onto something very important here which adds significantly to our understanding of gambling as a serious leisure activity. The point of playing is not really to win but to continue the play. This crucial component of infinite play is summed up neatly by Carse himself: 'a finite player puts play into time. An infinite player puts time into play' (1986, p.95).

Kane argues we need to recognize that our society is bound not by a work ethic but by a play ethic since 'we need to become fully conscious of the players that we already are, and understand the forms of play that we already use and inhabit' (2004, p.12). The play ethic is significant because it not only 'puts time into play' but allows individuals fluidity, choice and self-growth. As Kane puts it 'if your actions are adaptive, imaginative and passionate, but if you also accept that the results of your actions won't be predictable or retractable, then you will be able to make the most of

your networks of modern life, wherever they pertain' (2004, p.62). Kane's assertion is important if we are to understand gambling as a serious leisure activity.

If Bauman and Kane are correct then we need a much more radical understanding of gambling than is found in most existing studies. However, before we put this thesis about the transformation of play to the test by considering how gambling in the twenty-first century has been transformed, we need to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies of gambling which on the one hand attempt to explain why people gamble and on the other account for the place of gambling in society. It is to this task that the next chapter is devoted.

## Chapter 3

# Situating Gambling as Leisure in the Literature: A Critical Discussion of Existing Research

### Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to critically discuss the literature which attempts to understand gambling as leisure. A good deal of research, what is usually labelled 'gambling studies', has been conducted on gambling. However, as this chapter will seek to show, this has been dominated by an epistemic which implicitly or explicitly entails two distinct yet interrelated methodological trends: the agency-focused perspective of the 'psy sciences' (Collins 2006) and functionalism. This can be seen as an attempt to balance the individual and the social, the irrational and the rational, or what might be called the gambling dialectic. As we will see, however, this dialectic has a tendency to favour research evidence that is characteristic of a positivist orientation on the one hand and liberalism on the other at the expense of critical forms of inquiry. As the chapter will demonstrate the result is that much research has been framed within a discourse that assumes two essential views: either that gambling is a social pathology or that gambling is a form of leisure that merely provides compensation for the dysfunctional and unfulfilling aspects of society.

The discussion developed below will involve in the first instance a review of theories of gambling behaviour emerging from the 'psy sciences' (psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis) which 'invented new ways of talking about the person and new means of inspecting the population and the individual' (Collins cited in Cosgrave 2006, p.18). As we will see the 'psy sciences' have not only dominated gambling research but also had by far the most influence on how society sees and understands gambling. This discussion, which will be developed in general terms, will begin by considering the historical emergence of gambling as a pathological problem. From this it will turn its attention to an analysis of addiction-focused studies which continue to form the majority of research into gambling. In this context it will also be necessary to examine briefly the development of the social control of

gambling which will be expressed through the application of the concept of governmentality. This section is important since it demonstrates in no uncertain terms the omnipotent power of pathological understandings of gambling and how these have influenced academic and societal assumptions about gambling.

The central argument developed here will be that the dominance of the 'psy sciences' has led much academic research to probe inward into the emotional aspects of gamblers minds, while simultaneously ignoring the wider social, cultural, economic and political contexts of the social worlds they inhabit. One of the upshots of this is that considerable misunderstanding exists about the nature of both gambling generally and leisure gambling. In order to overcome this limit this chapter will endeavour to frame the place of gambling in society and unpack what this means socially, culturally, economically and politically. This will also help foreground the discussion of the major societal changes that have had a major impact on the place of gambling in society at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which will be the focus of the next chapter. It is important to stress at this point that there is not the space here to discuss all the studies of gambling as an addiction which continue to dominate the field of study—that would be a thesis in itself. The main thrust of this first part of the critique will be to identify the limits of the 'psy sciences' for understanding gambling and highlight some of the methodological, theoretical and ethical issues that emerge as a result of the limited scope of much conventional research emerging from the social sciences.

Drawing on the arguments developed in the last chapter, the discussion in the second part of the chapter will demonstrate that rather than being seen as either a problem of addicted individuals or a homogenous phenomenon gambling must be understood both historically and sociologically. It is important to emphasize that it is not the intention here to add to the already voluminous literature on the sociology of gambling and the social history of gambling. However it will be possible to abstract some general observations from this literature which help build the critique of hegemonic conceptions of gambling. From this it will be possible to explore gambling as leisure. This discussion will show that the principal approaches to explaining gambling focus their attention on either functionalist conceptions or typologies of



gamblers which have their roots in the tacit assumptions of the 'psy sciences'. Attention will also be given to the problems associated with such approaches.

### **The roots of the negative view of gambling: the addiction paradigm and gambling without society**

'When social scientists have investigated gambling', McMillen (1996, p.8) argues, 'the emphasis in most studies has been on the empirical observation of individual behaviour rather than a broader understanding of the changing gambling phenomenon'. Why is this the case? The straightforward answer to this question is that the issue of why *individuals* gamble has been the core focus of gambling studies. One of the upshots of this is that the majority of studies that have been carried out have been predominantly concerned with addiction and its cure. In order to understand why this is the case it is important very briefly to consider the historical roots of contemporary understandings of problem gambling.

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Society today would find it socially acceptable that gambling is a leisure activity that takes place in a range of different environments which allow an individual, group or some kind of syndicate to extract a profit from placing some kind of wager. Yet historically gambling has been subjected to considerable social and political disapproval with strong moral undertones. These have often had their roots in medical practice and can be traced back to the Victorian era, where religion and medical practice were heavily intertwined.

In medical discourse, gambling has historically been defined as an illness or at least something considered 'irrational' and therefore deviant. This view has its roots in the Puritan or Protestant Ethic which assumed that gambling was the anti-thesis of a normal, logical, sensible activity that ultimately went against divine principle and the rule of God. In his famous and important study, Weber (1930) explained the reasons underpinning this by exploring the relationship between Protestantism and of the emergence of modern capitalism, which was the precondition for a distinctive set of social norms that evolved during the Reformation. Weber argued that the Protestant ethic encouraged rationalization which in his words 'destroyed the authority of magical powers' and encouraged asceticism, through self-discipline and abstinence,

which in turn provided the incentives necessary for capitalism to overcome the constraints traditionalism had imposed on the development of society.

The Protestant Ethic did not discourage leisure, but it did insist on leisure of a very particular kind. Amusement or pleasure seeking for its own sake was not to be tolerated. Leisure should be rejuvenating of the body and soul. In other words, leisure was to be both rejuvenating and ascetic rather than wasteful and hedonistic (Weber 1930; Rosecrance 1988; Miers 1980). The watchword here was 'reinvestment' through hard work which was the key constituent of the development of modern capitalism.

In this view, it wasn't just the question of the wastefulness of gambling that was the issue, but also the issue of why certain individuals could be prepared to partake in certain activities where they could gain money from other people whilst at the same time offer nothing in return. The crux of the matter was the potential danger of any individual taking gambling too far, too excessively by spending most of their time and money on it (Downes *et al* 1976). This would be not only harmful to the individual but to society as well.

This perspective furnishes the view that gambling is a problem of individuals. Gamblers are understood as those individuals who possess extreme, irrational personalities located at the other end of the bourgeois ideal type of what is considered a 'normal' rational identity. In the view of the Puritan, gamblers supposedly are a threat to society because they embody the potential for social transgressions and destitution (Collins 1996; Orford 2003; Valentine 2008). To discard both time and money so precariously is viewed as irrational and individuals who act in this way must have some inherent disease or illness. Though it has to be said the consensus was that gambling was still ultimately viewed as a problem that had more to do with moral deviancy rather than mental illness.

### ***The medicalization of gambling: addictive gambling as a mental illness***

The work of Clouston (1883) was one of the first to try and highlight the ways in which gambling could be viewed as an illness or pathology. There were not many other writings at this time which sought to explain this perspective. Clouston's ideas drew attention to the potential causes of brain dysfunction that hindered the working

of a physically well capacity brain to function properly. To be mad means that there is no power left to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong, or what is clear and what is unclear. There is also no apparent sense of rationality.

It was in the early twentieth century that psychological understandings of gambling began to develop in earnest. As Collins (2006) points out, most references to the emergence of gambling as a mental illness refer to the psychoanalytical literature (Fenichel 1945; von Hattingberg 1914; Simmel 1920). The theoretical basis of many of these studies was located in the work of Freud. As we saw in the last chapter, underpinning Freud's work was the idea that a greater part of the human mind is unconscious. Much of our conscious mind consists of more or less sublimated versions of elements in the unconscious. This applies not only to our emotions, passions, desires but also to our beliefs and thoughts. Freud attempted to account for extreme gambling behaviour by focusing on childhood experiences and identifying it as a battle royal between the id and ego and the super-ego. Through these concepts Freud directly addressed the relationship between biology and socialization, and the dynamic between them. In other words, Freud presented a theory of the human personality. Drawing on this view, Freud (1950) argued that gambling addiction is best understood as a pathology or a narcissistic disorder that can be understood as an experience of satisfaction through substitution. In other words, excessive gambling is one way of working out frustrating sexual desires in a way which is socially acceptable.

Gambling was likened to alcohol addiction because of the similarity in the symptoms such as longing, increased tensions when the ability to gamble is taken away, were 'proved' to cause weaker self-control and a greater vulnerability to the problem. It was also likened to sex. Freud highlighted the common traits of gamblers as 'the handling of money, relationships to value and time, attitudes to giving and taking, stubborn optimism and obsessive ritual, all of which are invariably of great importance to those who gamble and are related to sexual factors' (1928, p.19). Freud also argued that the contentment individual's gain from engaging in addictions overwrites the problems that occur as a result.

The method that was used clinically in order to try to overcome this problem was to quantify and assess the amount of time addictive behaviour that consumed



individuals. The key treatment suggested by psychoanalysis was basically withdrawal from the problem and trying to work on individual behaviours and personalities in order to control their impulses so that self-discipline would emerge as the norm. However, the problems were far harder to anticipate as the physiology and consuming to excess were not so easily noticeable in gambling as with other addictions. Research also now began to demonstrate that addictions could also have negative implications within the society from which they emerge.

One of the consequences of Freud's intervention was that the gambler ultimately came to be viewed as a disturbed individual, invariably a man, who could not control what was happening to his mind and therefore could not account for his actions, resulting in him becoming bound to the effects of gambling. As we saw in the previous chapter, Freud saw repetitive acts as a form of compulsion which in psychoanalytic terms, this meant the gambler was testing out repressed feelings of guilt and aggression. This came to be known as an addiction.

Moran is identified by Halliday and Fuller (1974) as a key figure in the medicalization of gambling. Moran was a British psychiatrist who offered five different forms of pathological gambling. These can be summarized in the following ways: firstly, the subcultural variety - even though individuals are bound to the social context they are part of and are likely to be heavily influenced by these, the source of the pathology is to a large extent down to their inner traits. Secondly, the neurotic variety - gambling is a release from stress through money rather than a mechanism to accumulate it. Thirdly, the impulsive variety - this alludes to the individual who is no longer in control over their gambling. They still craved it but it also had an impending doom over it because it had become too hard to resist. Fourthly, the psychopathic variety - gambling is related to a wider disorder that created the illness. Finally, the symptomatic variety - which suggests that gambling is very much linked to mental illness and just one of more other pressing symptoms, suggesting that in 'rejecting, empirical, symptomatic classifications, they emphasize that the gambler is motivated by his repressed oedipal conflicts, and regard cultural analysis as secondary' (1974, p.14).

No doubt also influenced by Freud, Bergler (1970) focused his attention on the intrinsic nature of the gamblers mind. For him, the underlying nature of gamblers was



the continuation in the willingness to lose and the enjoyment that stems from doing this. His typologies are as follows: firstly, the classic gambler - who is driven by the idea that losing has an important significance. Secondly, the aggressive gambler - through his gambling facade is trying to cover his feminine recognitions. Thirdly, the fictitious practitioner - who can control his emotions by disguising his problems on the outside. There are also some traits that the gambler portrays that are a result of 'psychic masochism'. These are 'a regular need for risk taking, the disregard of all other pursuits, the necessity of optimism, the link to early childhood, the continuation of play even when winning, the disregard of amount staked to means, and the enjoyment of feeling both pain and pleasure from gambling' (1974, p.27-28). For Bergler (1970), the gambler is ultimately trying to control the situation that derives his motivations from sexual and aggressive factors linked from a predetermined need to lose that are founded on the notions of guilt. It is a way to tackle authority, by either releasing oneself to it or overcoming it. However, what Bergler failed to acknowledge, in common with most other theorists from the 'psy sciences', is that gamblers do not ultimately play to win. It is the effects of gambling that people enjoy the most, if they win it is an added bonus but not the most signifying factor of play (see for example Goffman 1967).

### ***The emergence of the pathological gambler and governmental control***

It was in the early part of the twentieth century that the 'psy sciences' began to flourish in new areas that would allow them to assess gamblers in terms of problems that had previously been hidden or at least put to one side. The 'psy sciences' would now be brought to bear to examine individuals to make their problems known, allowing the 'dark sides' of gambling – addiction, criminality, lawbreaking – to become more apparent. This was a trend that would make gambling more subject to governmental rule. With the focus specifically on the imperfections, differences and aberrant characteristics of those individuals outside the realms of the 'normal', the 'psy sciences helped make gamblers part of the governmental calculability of populations and as such a group administered as part of governmental control' (Collins 2006).

The 'psy sciences' tried to differentiate between the compulsive gambler and the pathological gambler. The difference was that the pathological gambler from the

outset already suggests that there is some form of mental illness apparent. Gamblers were made to be aware that they should exert some self-control in gambling situations because gambling not only uses abundant amounts of money and time but it can be very dangerous if taken to the excess and it can lead to people becoming dangerously ill. Therefore, it was crucial that legislation was introduced to educate people. However, legislation was not just about education; it was also concerned with social control.

Gerda Reith suggests that in the transition from the medical to the pathological, 'for the first time, the problem of gambling was given a legitimated name, quantified and separated from normal gambling and legitimated within the domain of medicine' (2007, p.38). The need to observe and calculate individuals is one of the ways in which, Foucault suggests, governments and authorities are able to identify and manage individuals and therefore make them visible. In labelling a gambler pathological there is also a reason to explain certain types of behaviours. As Reith goes on further to add, 'all behaviour defined as problematic is socially constituted in some way - 'made up' through a process of comparison, separation and exclusion on the basis of dominant values and beliefs' (2007, p.39).

The development of the pathological gambler is made more significant because of the 'effects' that pathology brings to everyday society. Pathology and susceptibility to risk is the relationship at stake. As Reith suggests, 'problem gamblers are revealed as a heterogeneous group whose behaviour is influenced by a variety of factors, including the type of game played as well as the psychological and social characteristics of players themselves' (2007, p.46). The pathological subject is made explicit through identifying them in comparison to their surroundings, their relationship to others and how their characteristics alter in the face of risk and chance.

As Foucault (1991) suggested, one of the techniques of government is to try and control behaviours. In terms of the 'psy sciences' this was to be found in behavioural impulses. The 'psy sciences' highlighted the effects of the impulse response model, which in turn focuses the attention on the dramatic effects of gambling, such as heightened tensions, pleasure and liberation – which are hard to ignore. Research into compulsions typically suggested that these symptoms can often lead to

addiction as reliance on gambling for these traits is precarious as they are commonly sought after and can quickly lead to the production of withdrawal symptoms (for an overview see Raylu and Oei 2002). Once diagnosis has ensued, the 'psy sciences' can produce a file on the individual which means that behaviour can be classified and managed through expert systems – a tool that is beneficial to the government rationale (Foucault 1991). The development of finding new ways to assess and measure addicts against one another is to be found in numbers and calculations. This data in turn generates quantitative measures such as surveys to gain valuable information. This is significant in highlighting problems by making them quantifiable and known. The focus is less on the subject in question but instead on the notion of risk and chance and how this infiltrates and persuades certain types of behaviour.

Psychologically it was found that the effects of addiction on the self and others are what are of the utmost importance. This not only allows information to be gained about the individual but allows this information to be placed in a greater scheme of things in terms of classifying problem populations. This process was given further weight by the emergence of addiction based groups, such as GA (Gamblers Anonymous) which came to Britain in 1964. These not only fed the consensus that gambling addiction is an individual problem but crucially also helped it become 'professionalized'. This in turn helped areas of expert opinion to flourish. These help to make the 'excessive' gambler a societal issue and his or her problems more discernible. From now on gamblers could be said to be part of their own creation. To fashion this new means of perceiving, individuals and populations were charged with helping governments control and regulate new spheres of rule, even though there was and still is little firm evidence of the detrimental effects of problem gambling (McMillen 1996).

The crux of the issue is that gambling to excess can lead to 'a feeling of loss of control and harms thought to be caused by gambling in economic, social and psychological spheres of life' (Orford 2003, p.53-54). The problems that arise for some people are money troubles, isolation, housing and work issues, health problems and deviant behaviour. One of the methods to try and combat problem gambling and help people overcome their problems was educating them through the introduction of GA and other help groups. This would force the individual to face up to their problems and therefore become responsible in creating their own



individualized paths (Toneatto and Ladoceur 2003 and Toneatto and Miller 2004). As we will see in the next chapter, what Rose (1999) calls these 'practices of government' became imposed through the idea of freedom in which individuals assume responsibility for themselves. In this way freedom in effect is technically enveloped within relations of power whereby the individual is expected to act for the self. Support groups are there to remind people of the devastation gambling can bring to the individual's life 'when the fun stops'. However, the choice and responsibility ultimately lies with the individual. They have to exhibit self-control, awareness and regulation and show they can 'enjoy' gambling responsibly (Reith 2008). What this suggests is that with freedom comes constraint. Individuals are instructed to gamble carefully and responsibly and are to impose restrictions on themselves if they feel they are beginning to lose control. As we will see in the next chapter with the emergence of the neoliberalism of gambling this view is reinforced in no uncertain terms.

In summary, the governmentality of problem gambling sees the emphasis of responsibility shift from how to deal with those with a gambling illness to reminding individuals of their responsibility for their own welfare. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, most government legislation presumes that it is enough to provide individuals with sufficient knowledge and information of the potential risks of gambling to make a rational decision as to how far they should (individually) go. In other words, the dominant liberal discourse that has pervaded gambling control is that it is up to individuals themselves to learn how to become responsible gamblers.

### ***The limits of the 'psy sciences'***

The epistemic underpinning the 'psy sciences' and that what ostensibly gives them their authority over other approaches is that they are 'scientific'. This is seen as their key strength since it means that the findings of research they produce are not only objective but they are measurable and, crucially, can be repeated to test their reliability. This assumption feeds the argument that research informed theories developed as a result can be successfully applied to curing individual gambling problems. The evidence for this kind of assertion is rather sketchy, though (see Raylu and Oei 2002). As McMillen (1996) had suggested, evidence would seem to suggest that most studies emerging from the 'psy sciences' are, to use their own



language, 'unfalsifiable', or in other words, the theories that they develop cannot be scientifically measured to prove whether they are right or wrong. This is because there is a tendency to develop theories about addictive behaviours and generalize them to apply to all problem gamblers. In so doing the 'psy sciences' ignore both the personal circumstances of individual gamblers and importantly the situational factors that influence gambling behaviours.

Herman (1976) suggests that studies developed by the 'psy sciences' tend to explore the links between the progression of the gambler's downward path as well as situating gambling activity as a separate cultural activity. Acerbically, he contends that the primary objective of such research is to identify 'a series of episodes and conditions which generate intense desires or states of recklessness. Individuals comparisons are then drawn with 'normal' non-gambling folk, and the resulting contrasts are supposed to constitute an explanation of gambling' (1976, p.59). As Neal (2005, p.294) argues, though, when considering this negative view of gambling we really ought to reflect on the number of people who regularly gamble who do not become addicted to gambling. As he points out, the figures are actually very low, varying from between 0.8 to 1.2% of the regular betting population in some UK estimates (Sproston *et al* 2000). Drawing on Oldman (1978), Neal concludes that the problem gambler thus bears a close resemblance to the yeti: 'famous and much discussed, but rarely seen' (2005, p.294). The truth is that we actually have no compelling evidence about the true extent of problem gambling. As Runciman concludes with regard to the current situation in the UK:

Problem gambling *is* a difficult category to pin down. It probably does affect only a small proportion of the population. The overall volume of gambling has not greatly increased following liberalisation. There are now fewer betting shops than at any time since the 1960s (they have more or less disappeared from many rural areas). Many punters do see gambling as a harmless leisure activity that offers them value for money (twenty or thirty quid spent over an evening in a casino can look like a good investment when compared to the cost of going to a movie plus drinks and popcorn). Yes, there are some terrible personal stories about what happens when gambling has an individual in its grip, and it isn't just in books that gamblers are sometimes driven to suicide. But compared to

tobacco, or alcohol, or even sugar, very few punters die of their habit (2014, p.27).

What this quotation also alerts us to is the general awareness of the different things that motivate people to gamble. As Filby (1983) explains, the search for general motives is a fruitless exercise. The more general the theory for explaining what motivates gamblers, the less likely it is to appreciate the differences between different forms of gambling and the more likely it is to view gambling as a homogenous phenomenon. As Reith points out it is simply not viable to target gamblers as one broad category as they are diverse as gambling forms themselves. As she puts it 'rather, gamblers constitute a heterogeneous group whose behaviours are influenced by a variety of factors, including the type of game played and the psychological and social characteristics of the players themselves' (2007, p.22).

A further criticism that can be put forward is that the search for general motives is somewhat deterministic. The assumption underpinning 'psy science' studies is that this is their strength because it provides explanations about the *causes* of addictive behaviour and in turn increases the likelihood of being able to *treat* that behaviour. The rationale underpinning this idea is that research which improves our understanding of addictive behaviour is ultimately curative because it can be used to get people's lives back on track. However, this is also a major weakness because not only does it suggest that addictive behaviour is somehow pre-determined but it also underestimates the influence of both individual agency and the impact of factors such as social class and gender.

What the argument developed so far has suggested is that despite the long standing place of gambling in society understandings of it are ultimately determined more by one theoretical standpoint – the addiction paradigm – than by the essential nature of the subject. As McMillen explains, 'commentaries on gambling, even the most determinedly 'objective', proceed from a particular historically and socially determined point of view' (1996, p.7). This is the view embedded in the Protestant Ethic that only when honest industry and work are thwarted will individuals turn to gambling. This in turn helped shape the liberal view that gambling is governed primarily by the 'irrational' actions of individuals rather than a consequence of the social worlds they inhabit. As we have also seen, with the emergence of the 'psy

sciences' in the first part of the twentieth century, the positivistic idea took hold that the only true knowledge is scientific knowledge and that the specific problem of addictive gambling should be understood as a pathology, or in other words a problem of individuals. As we will see in the next part of this discussion the power of this point of view was to have a major impact on sociological understandings of gambling which evidenced and continue to evidence a strong tendency towards a dialectic in which the contradictions between positivism (gambling as an irrational individual pathology) and functionalism (gambling as a reflection of the functions and dysfunctions it performs in society) are magically resolved.

### **Gambling and society 1: the negative view or gambling as a social pathology**

The majority of studies undertaken on gambling as a social pathology have drawn their theoretical impetus from the 'psy sciences'. Many studies begin with the assumption there are basically three types of gambler (Neal 1998; Cassidy 2002). Firstly, the normal leisure gambler who gambles for fun or to escape the constraints of everyday life. This type of gambler can put an end to the activity at any time and perhaps represents the majority of people who enjoy the proverbial flutter. Secondly, the professional gambler who uses gambling as a form of work to earn a living. Thirdly, the neurotic gambler, who gambles because of deep, irrational impulses. Having said that, Halliday and Fuller (1974, p.204) suggest that some of the same motivations are found in all three of these ideal types. 'The neurotic gambler caricatures the normal and the professional gambler and the psychopathology is most vivid in him'.

These observations aside Halliday and Fuller argue that there are two key components in the psychological makeup of the neurotic gambler. Firstly, this type of gambler (invariably a man) is certain that each time he gambles he will win and secondly, that he or she has an inbuilt need to play with chance and test their luck. The normal and the professional gambler may also have these feelings but they are not as forceful and lack the power to control the individual. 'The neurotic gambler dares to gamble since he wants to convince himself that he is lucky i.e. omnipotent, and needs constant reassurance from fate to calm his grave doubts' (Halliday and Fuller 1974, p.207). The neurotic gambler is also considered to be someone who



suffers from a personality disorder and may be on the edge of depression. He thinks he is lucky enough to win which is a way of trying to gratify his urges. The two extremes of winning and losing provide two poles of pleasure and depression and are both fuelled by inner tensions and anxieties, which necessitate the increase and the continuity of play. To play for the neurotic gambler is to be consumed by guilt therefore full gratification can never be experienced. As Halliday and Fuller argue 'the gambler likes his gambling – he feels forced to like it. The impulse to gamble is felt in the same way as normal people feel their instincts' (1974, p.214).

In a similar vein, Ochoa and Labrador (1994) identify gamblers as social, professional and problem or pathological. Building on these typologies Ladouceur (2002) splits his gamblers into the amount of risk each category is subjected to. The occasional gambler would be considered low-risk, betting in small amounts for pleasure, while the regular gambler would be considered medium risk betting more frequently but it is controlled and is undertaken as part of their leisure. The professional gambler is considered somewhere in between medium and high risk; they bet for work in usually high stakes, but the risk is controlled and undertaken with discipline. The high risk gambler can be considered as a non-professional who has a problem with gambling and who spends time and money gambling as a way to escape other problems in their life. The pathological gambler is someone for whom gambling is essential to their very being; these are individuals who cannot control their gambling as it dominates every aspect of their life.

Herman (1967) similarly highlights the steps that make a regular gambler and what often lead to a gambling problem. To paraphrase Herman: 'gambling becomes a repetitive, continuous cycle, gambling becomes the bedrock and consumes everything, the gambler is always sure he will win and is not deterred by losing, the gambler cannot stop gambling even if he has won, more is risked than the gambler owns, the tension drives the gambler through part pain and part pleasure' (1967, p.118).

Herman suggests that there is a possibility all people could become gamblers. As he puts it, 'in certain personalities this dormant tendency can be awakened, so that the latent gambler becomes the actual gambler' (1967, p.113). Herman identifies several traits that illustrate this change: the gambler regularly gambles, no other activities are



important, the gambler is hopeful and never is put off by defeat, he will continue to bet even when he has won and pleasures and thrills are always an important aspect of the gamble. Individuals offer a variety of reasons as to why they gamble, however, the most significant is the thrill or the tension that is experienced during any type of gambling game. This sensation is unique and gains its emphasis from trying to discover the unknown outcome. This unknown is what the gambler finds so appealing. The waiting for the outcome fuels the tension and this overrides the need to win. The battle between not knowing if you are going to win or lose is the battleground for the thrill to flourish. Anybody or anything can cause addiction if taken to excess. As Schüll makes clear 'anyone can become addicted. Susceptibility to addiction [is] a constitutive part of normalcy' (2012, p.244).

Gerda Reith (2007) has highlighted several traits that commentators have identified which are significant in the pathological gambler. The common threads are recklessness and lack of rationality. The pathological gambler is consumed by gambling and cannot comprehend anything other than seeking out the thrills and the sensations; they are more focused on what is happening in front of them, and are less likely to be bothered by winning or losing. Money is useful because it allows gambling to occur, however, it doesn't hold any significance. The individual is ultimately seeking enjoyment and satisfaction. However, these traits hold a fine line between what is considered a normal, regular gambler and one who is considered to have an addiction. Both consider gambling to be valuable, not in terms of gaining money, but in terms of the significance it means to them and the place it has in their everyday lives. It is this ambiguity of gambling and trying to locate the significance of it as an activity that is important (Scott 1968).

Invariably this has meant understanding gambling symbolically as a kind of narcotic. It is an experience that is over pretty quickly and is short-lived. That moment of intensity has to be repeated to continue with the same feelings allowing the continuing of play. The thrill is an abstract feeling that cannot be stored away; it therefore has to be repeated. Each gambling game is different to what happened previously and what may happen in the future. Gamblers can become unaware of their surroundings, time stands still and is meaningless and money holds no value. The focus on the action is the only concern of the gambler. It is where the excitement and anticipation are, which is what the gambler wants to experience the most. To

continue to play, enforces some kind of stability and order on the game. This order, however, is subject to chance as the longing to know the outcome forces repeated play. Gamblers are conditioned by what games they are playing, the amount of money they have to gamble, the gambling site, who they are playing with and the amount of risk involved. This is why it is not the winning that is important but the continuing of play. As Reith suggests 'the quest for excitement is the thrill of the game, it is an end in itself' (2002, p.145). Within each gambling game, the same conventions are applicable. Gambling is a routine activity where each time play occurs repeated actions ensue. For some people, the pleasure gained from gambling resides in the time between placing a bet and waiting for the outcome. It is an area of impending ecstasy.

### ***The functionalist view of gambling and its limits***

Most of these gambling studies have either implicitly or explicitly entailed a functionalist perspective (Newman 1972; McMillen 1996). With an emphasis on societal order and social control, functionalism concentrates on the consequences of gambling for society as a whole. There has been a tendency to focus on the role of gambling in undermining social values and the ways that gambling has evolved or adapted to wider changes in the nature of other societal institutions such as leisure. The other tendency is to see gambling as a social problem or pathology. The idea of social pathology has its roots in Durkheim's (1895) distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal' states of society. It is in the shadow of this distinction that pathological social conditions can be identified. In Durkheim's view, if we can identify gambling as a normal feature of society, we can also identify excessive gambling as an abnormal, or pathological feature.

This positivist-functionalist idea of gambling presupposes a negative conception which contains three tacit assumptions (McMillen 1996). First of all, there is the supposition that the major determinant of gambling participation is individual freedom of choice, which gives weight to the view that the institutions and government policies that frame gambling patterns have little to do with the social environment in which they occur. The fundamental reason for this is that the general societal view of

gambling is that it is an individual choice and essentially an aspect of casual leisure (Stebbins 1999), which leads to the second reason underpinning this negative conception.

The second assumption is that gambling can be separated from other forms of leisure in moral terms. Or in other words, gambling is presumed to be, potentially, if not inevitably, a social 'problem' which needs to be socially controlled (Dielman 1979; Newman 1972). As we have seen this negative way of looking at gambling as a harmful activity associated with idleness or an ephemeral pleasure seeking activity with little or no skill has its antecedents in the historical development of modern capitalism (Weber 1930). This conception has been and continues to be reinforced by a priori assumptions of economic studies which understand gambling as irrational behaviour leading to personal and social problems; positivist science which consider gambling as a dangerous pathology (Freud 1928; Bergler 1970) and functionalist sociological studies which see gambling as a kind of social pathology and as such a threat to society (Herman 1967, 1976; Peterson 1951).

The third assumption operates with the view that gambling and its consequences must be examined within an ethical framework which reflects the prevailing legal definitions and discriminations in society. As McMillen points out this has led to a situation where 'political and legal interpretations of gambling and its supposedly disruptive social effects have permeated the analysis of gambling at every level' and the upshot of this is that the 'conceptual connection between social science, rationalization and social control in contemporary policy has produced a 'social engineering' approach which conceptualises gambling in terms of predetermined notions of legality and illegality, deviance and 'normal' behaviour' (1996, p.12).

Writing about gambling from the perspective of the sociology of deviance Downes *et al.* (1976) assert that society itself (rather than the individual) must be considered the main determining factor of influence on gambling practices and institutions. These same authors established the view that the social construction of gambling as a social problem has unfailingly circled around the presence in society of opposing values, on the one hand, of leisure and consumption, and, on the other, work and production (p.42). Following in the footsteps of Downes *et al.* other sociologists have



argued in no uncertain terms that the 'freedom' to gamble is not universal or evenly distributed across society. Not only is gambling activity by some minority groups frowned upon but normalizing judgements are embedded in many gambling institutions and routinized across many gambling activities. Yet to date there have been few studies of the gambling activities of minority groups. For example, there have been few studies of women's experiences of gambling as leisure. The ones that do exist demonstrate how the structuration of gambling experience is rather less about the freedom to choose but rather down to a combination of their subordinate position in society and limited leisure choices (Dixey 1984; Dixey and Talbot 1982). Just as they do in other aspects of leisure, the economic, social, temporal and ideological conditions of capitalism constrain women's gambling activities in ways that are significantly more constricting than is the situation of men.

Part of the problem for this lack is that the majority of studies continue to develop their research by understanding gambling as a psychological, individual, social and moral problem. In sociology this has led to a tendency to see gambling as a deviant, or at least exotic activity, outside and in opposition to dominant societal values (Downes and Rock 1982; Rosecrance 1988), which has as a result reinforced this negative conception. This is the paradox of the sociology of deviance since although it was to offer the exemplary insight that 'deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions' (Becker 1963, p.5), which offered gambling studies a way of side-stepping the view that gambling is primarily a problem and a problem of individuals, it has had little impact on gambling studies (McMillen 1996). As Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) suggest this is perhaps because in modern societies there are few activities left that are considered to be deviant anymore, so it becomes even more desirable for sociologists to maintain the view that gambling is a form of social deviance. A much bigger problem has been that a good deal of sociological research on gambling has proceeded from the same particular historically and socially determined point of view that informs the 'psy sciences' evidencing a strong tendency towards positivism and functionalism which see gambling as an 'irrational' social problem.

Neal (2005) offers a fresh analysis and critique of rationality as a defining feature of conventional gambling studies understandings of leisure gambling. Exploring what



he calls 'situated rationales' that attract gamblers of horseracing to leisure spaces, notably the betting shop and the racecourse, and which motivate them to develop gambling activities as enduring, sustainable features of their lives, Neal observes that, for the vast majority of gamblers, having a bet is neither 'addictive' nor is it 'irrational', except when understood in very narrow rationalistic terms.

The starting point of Neal's thesis is that conventional gambling studies has a tendency to understand leisure gambling in a very narrow way which leads to '*zweckirrational*' characterizations that fail to grasp the meanings and purposes it has for gamblers. In other words the starting point of conventional gambling studies is that gambling must be understood 'in terms of rational orientation to a system of discrete individual ends, that is, through expectations as to the behaviour of objects in the external situation and of other human individuals, making use of these expectations as 'conditions' or 'means' for the successful attainment of the actor's own rationally chosen ends' (Weber 1964, p.115). As a way of demonstrating the limits of this prevailing understanding of leisure gambling, when asking his research respondents about their gambling activities, Neal would make off the cuff comments such as: 'Gambling is totally irrational. We try to make money, but actually lose it'. This type of comment usually elicited a response, and the response was invariably similar to the following: 'Yes (I agree). But that's not the point is it?' (Neal 2005, p.293).

In the light of his research Neal argues for a paradigm shift in gambling research, away from the negative paradigm with its overwhelming preoccupation with pathological gambling towards a more extensive consideration of the socio-economically significant activities that exemplify gambling as leisure. Before we consider gambling as leisure, though, we must first of all discuss the methodological limitations of social pathological studies of gambling and what these imply for the gambling research agenda and importantly my own study.

### **The methodological limits of the negative view**

As we have seen most approaches to the study of the social and cultural dimensions of gambling have traditionally evidenced two distinct yet interrelated methodological

trends: positivism and functionalism. This is reflected in the dominance of quantitative research and especially the development of large social surveys that tend to rely on the self-reported experiences of gamblers (Runciman 2014).

There has been various surveys carried out to determine how often people gamble. Some of the larger studies sponsored by the government have typically been administered in a format which seeks to measure gambling occurrence. The British Gambling Prevalence Survey (2007) which appeared after the 2005 Gambling Act but before the election of the Coalition was conducted to assess the amount of people who undertake gambling activities, how often, and to assess how many of these can be accounted for as problem gamblers. Empirically, these large quantitative surveys have as a result typically focused their attention on questions designed to obtain evidence of addictive behaviour, asking the following types of questions: How often do you gamble? Have you ever lied about how much you gamble? Have you ever borrowed money to support your gambling? Have you ever thought of stopping gambling but felt you couldn't stop? The analytical gains brought about by the self-reported surveys based on these types of questions have been far from instructive, offering a general observation: we know that problem gambling is a problem for perhaps one or two percent of the population. This has led to a situation where it is assumed that problem gamblers need to be treated as a 'discrete class of person', while the gambling habits of everybody else should be treated 'without cause for concern' (Schüll 2012, p.14).

This type of weakness has been addressed to some extent by studies which focus their attention on the relationship between gambling addiction and the development of new technology. In an important study, Schüll argues that addiction needs to be understood as a relationship that develops through 'repeated interaction' between subject and object, rather than a property that belongs exclusively to one or the other. As a result it becomes clear that objects matter as much as subjects (2012, p.17), suggesting that it can't be the subjects themselves who develop addictive tendencies. In Schüll's topic of machine gaming, up-to-date technology offers quicker routes to addiction through ease of accessibility; the animations involved capture the gambler in terms of their bodies and minds, and more importantly their senses. It is the relationship between the machine and the individual combined where the

problem lays not in one or the other. 'Addiction is a condition that develops out of sustained interaction between a subject and an object; both sides of the interaction matter, each in their own way' (Schüll 2012, p.167). Many gamblers appear oblivious to the level of technology that appears in front of them, they just want, as Schüll puts it, to be in the zone: 'The machine anticipates, measures and responds to every motion she makes, tightly managing gaming possibilities and channelling motion in one set direction' (Schüll 2012, p.179).

This argument is also supported by research by Griffiths and Park (2002) into internet gambling which found that the market has more than tripled since 1997. Internet gambling has broadened its appeal and has increased its products making gambling opportunities easier to obtain as they are often available 24 hours a day. However, do the positives outweigh the negatives or vice versa? The internet is unable to protect those who are the most susceptible to problem gambling or those who could be more susceptible i.e. the vulnerable. More people are able to gamble in any circumstances via mobile phone apps and the internet, money is easier to spend in its virtual form. Griffiths and Park discovered that of 2098 people surveyed only 495 (24%) had gambled on the internet and virtually none that regularly gambled had or were unlikely to do so (2002, p.315). It must be said, however, that with developments in technology in the gambling industry this research does look rather dated.

On the other hand it is important to recognize that gambling environments are important to the sociability of individuals. The internet has tried to recreate this by revealing to gamblers others who are playing, and where, as well as making known the winners. While some commentators (Phillips *et al* 2012) have suggested this type of internet betting is potentially highly addictive causing panic in some quarters the evidence to back this up is rather slim. What is crucial to note is that one valid difference can be made between the virtual gambler and the traditional gambler, 'people who want to gamble with money aren't going to waste their money on virtual items and people who spend money on virtual items aren't gamblers. That's why they are spending on virtual items. They have a different dopamine effect than those who want to gamble' (Roberts 2013, p.86).



One of the main weaknesses of these types of study, however, is that they concentrate their attention on the motivations of the gambler at the expense of the question of what opportunities to gamble are available in society. As current studies show the opportunities to gamble today have never been so wide ranging (Newman 1972; Archontakis and Osborne 2007; Reith 1999, 2013; Neal 1998, 2005; Cassidy 2002; Runciman 2014). The proliferation of gambling opportunities has seen the arrival of faster, up-to-date, easier accessibility and more widely available products. People can bet *proximally* (gamble at the scene of the event), *remotely* (gamble away from the event) and *virtually* (in virtual reality) (Neal 2005). 'Ambient gambling' (Runciman 2014) is the new normal, there are multiple ways to place a bet, or buy a ticket or play on a machine. As well as a variety in bets and odds and pay outs the individual is increasingly involved in all aspects of play. For example, betting shops now provide the opportunity for gamblers to bet in-play or even cash winning accumulator bets before they have been completed. As Runciman points out, today 'in-play betting – the opportunity to gamble on events as they are happening, and to adjust your bets accordingly – is big business' (2014, p.25). Most gambling activities require little knowledge and even if it does this is now widely available. People can also seemingly play parting with little money and there are more opportunities to win. There is seldom time for individuals to dwell on their losses and if losses do occur these can sometimes be as exhilarating as winning due to the drama and tension of 'I nearly won' and therefore encouraging repeated play.

What we conclude from this part of the discussion is that in conventional gambling studies there is a status quo consisting of two types of research. As Runciman concludes this serves the gambling industry's interests in two ways:

First, by making it easier to stick to the mantra that the difficulties of the few should not be used to justify restrictions on the many; and second, by making sure the question of definition remains unresolved. The gambling industry has an incentive to keep any research open-ended, because so long as nothing is settled there is always a reason for delaying a decision until more studies are done. Doubt is the currency in which these people are trading (2014, p.27).

Where addiction and gambling to excess was once seen as restricted to a small portion of society, notably older working class males, the consensus emerging from



this research suggests that it has extended to the ostensibly increasing problem of the number of younger vulnerable adults and women addicts (Forrest and McHale 2011). This observation aside the view that the central issue concerning gambling is addiction begins to lose its force when the traditional views of the destructive nature of gambling on people lives is increasingly replaced by the normalized view of gambling as a rational, everyday activity that is now undertaken with little restriction as possible. And for all the limits of conventional gambling studies identified above these continue unabated at the expense of other perspectives. Evidence for this assertion can be found in a range of recent publications (see for example Castellani 2000; Grun and McKeigue 2000; Collins 2006; Orford 2003, 2011; Reith 2007, 2010; Valentine *et al* 2008; Blaszczynski and Nower 2002; Johansson, Grant and Kim 2009). Though sufficient for some policy purposes, this research continues to offer only a very limited understanding of gambling in modern societies.

This overriding focus on the (irrational) individual and scientific objectivity diverts attention away from the social structure and system of power relations in modern societies which produces and reproduces gambling in a way that feeds the interests of capitalism. Indeed, as McMillen (1996) points out, there is evidence of a general tendency in gambling studies to ignore on the one hand the heterogeneous or ambivalent nature of state responses to gambling and on the other the lack of socio-cultural homogeneity that accompanies people's gambling activities. One of the upshots of this set of circumstances is what we are often presented with are either deterministic or overgeneralized explanations of gambling. What we should add, however, is that analysis of the nature and extent of gambling in neoliberal consumer societies, not only requires closer examination of the inconsistencies in government policy but also its profoundly ideological content. The fact is that 'gambling is not governed primarily by the actions of individuals, but is conditioned by capitalist social relations and political-economic forces, of which individuals are an integral part' (McMillen 1996, p.8).

In the event, an explicitly critical conception of gambling continues to elude conventional gambling studies. Ultimately all that the majority of studies offer is a narrow body of jaundiced research findings on problem gambling disguised as the objective facts. The implications of this situation for gambling studies are summed up neatly by McMillen, who is worth quoting at length:

The focus on individuals, in theoretical assumptions and in the neglect of collectivities, avoids conceptions of power and structure. Studies which insulate gambling from society and the state do not examine or explain why certain forms of gambling are more prevalent at certain times than others; nor do they explicate the structural factors and power relationships which influence, and are influenced by, the nature and direction of gambling development. They therefore underestimate the sources and nature of control over the gamblers and institutions they study. Contextual factors, such as the emergence of transnational gambling corporations and the state's varied and contradictory role in the transition of gambling from illegality to legality, are rarely brought into the discussion. Inevitably, the explanations which result provide no more than descriptive and normative accounts of the prevalence of gambling and its latent social 'functions'. They neglect to convey the dynamic and contested interdependence between gambling relations and the sociocultural context, thus preventing a systematic examination of shifting relationships and broader historical processes which are major mechanisms of change (1996, p.20).

We are now in a position to advance some conclusions about conventional gambling studies, all of which have implications for my own study. The first thing to say is that they paint a very negative picture of gambling which has led much if not all research to focus its attention on addictive gambling. In the light of this general observation there are several other general and interrelated criticisms that can be made of conventional gambling studies. Drawing on the insights of McMillen (1996 p.11) these can be summarized in the following way. First, they treat gambling as a universal constant but without recognizing the differences between various gambling forms or being prepared to consider the shifting moral and political forces underlying their social construction. Second, these studies also have a tendency to reflect rather than critique neoliberal ideology and specifically recent developments in the historical development of capitalism, notably individualization, consumerism and risk. Third, these studies have as a rule seen gambling implicitly or explicitly as a 'problem' of social control in need of social administration or governmentality (Collins 2006). Fourth, and especially pertinent to the present study, these studies have tacitly adopted an economic perspective which suggests that there is an analytical

separation of the economic, social and political which reduces culture to the economic base. As McMillen points out, and as we will see in the next section, this is most clearly the case in conceptualizations of gambling as leisure, which distinguish it from the realm of work and production. Fifth, these studies essentially operate with an ahistorical or reified conception of gambling which does not account for the dynamics of structure and agency. Sixth, these studies have a tendency to implicitly adopt a positivistic approach to gambling research which 'naturalizes' gambling phenomena as irrational. Seventh, and related to this last criticism, these studies suffer from empirical ethnocentrism, which is encouraged by the absence of an explicitly comparative perspective of different gambling contexts and cultures. Eighth, and finally, these studies are for the most part unable to accommodate a dialectical conception of power that accompanies gambling relations—between social classes or genders, for example.

## **Gambling and society 2: the positive view or gambling as leisure**

The emergence in the last fifty or so years of understandings of gambling as leisure, rather than simply as social pathology or social deviance, appears at first glance to be 'a triumph of liberalism and humanity' (McMillen 1996, p.16) However, to date, evidence for the positive effects of gambling as leisure for individuals and society has by and large been restricted to functionalist interpretations and understandings.

From the functionalist understanding, gambling need not necessarily be viewed solely in negative terms. It might also be understood to have at least two positive functions. In the post-war period, opportunities to participate in gambling increased considerably as a consequence of changes in legislation. With increased respectability given by the state, gambling was no longer seen simply as a social pathology on the edge of criminal activity. As a result, it began to be investigated on the one hand as an instrumental activity directed to economic gain and on the other as a leisure activity enjoyed as an end in itself. Seeing gambling as a positive leisure activity with intrinsic personal and social as well as economic rewards was not a new phenomenon. As McMillen (1996) points out, in his classic study *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen had many years earlier demonstrated how affluent social groups in the nineteenth century were able to assert their social superiority



and wealth through conspicuous consumption of leisure activities such as gambling. What was new in the post-war period, however, was that research showed that this activity had now also become the domain of affluent workers (Goldthorpe *et al* 1969), some research showing that gambling participation remained more typical of Veblen's 'leisure class', other than gambling was now for the most part a working-class leisure activity (Pryor 1976).

From the mid-1960s a new body of research on working class gambling emerged. Much of this was ethnographic in orientation. In sociology, Zola's (1964) study of working class gambling in the USA is generally identified as one of the key studies in this trend demonstrating that gambling not only often played a positive role in people's lives, but what also motivated most of them to gamble was the social dimension. Since Zola, researchers have investigated various aspects of working class gambling using ethnography. This has taken place in bingo halls (Dixey and Talbot 1982), fruit machine arcades (Fisher 1993), betting shops (Filby and Harvey 1988; Neal 1998, 2005; Newman 1972; Saunders 1981, 1983; Saunders and Turner 1987). As Neal (2005) points out these studies collectively not only challenged the addiction paradigm, but also the assumption that gambling is an 'irrational' activity.

Zola's study is crucial to highlighting the constructive aspects that emerge in leisure gambling. The researcher described by Zola as 'the observer' would frequent various social places to understand gambling, his identity was never revealed. The main arena of investigation was Hoff's place, a tavern where off-course bets could be made. This gambling arena was disassociated from everyday life, money making wasn't the driving force behind bets and emotion and competition held little value. There was no evidence of a cautious gambler and gambling was shared and enjoyed by the group. Zola's study emphasizes the positive aspects of gambling and what can be 'achieved or gained' (In Cosgrave 2006, p.159). He points out the positives rather than the negatives, as well as illustrating the winners rather than the losers. He also alludes to the common everyday occurrences of gambling and points out it is where individuals can feel like they have a place in the world.

Arguably the most illuminating research on leisure gambling emerged from ethnographic studies guided by the symbolic interactionist perspective. These

studies were radical in that they foregrounded the positive consequences and meanings of gambling from the gambler's viewpoint. As we saw in the last chapter, the most famous amongst these is Erving Goffman's (1967) symbolic interactionist analysis of gambling as a sub-type of 'action'. Goffman's study was the first to develop a *verstehende* (Weber 1964) research agenda that defined gambling in the same way as the majority of gamblers do: 'as an enjoyable and sustainable leisure pursuit' (Neal 2005, p.295). As Downes and his colleagues argued it was also Goffman who lifted 'gambling out of the moral abyss into which successive generations of commentators and reformers [had] consigned it and render[ed] possible a consideration of its meaning which is freed from *a priori* associations of a negative kind' (cited in McMillen 1996, p.15). Rather than seeing gambling as a deviant leisure activity, Goffman showed that gambling provides participants with an opportunity to demonstrate individual strength of character and collective commitment to valued social codes such as risk-taking, daring and honour. Similarly to Geertz (1972), his analysis also recognized that gambling contributes to the moral regulation of society by reaffirming shared values. While gambling provides a symbolic representation of challenges at a remove from ordinary life, it also is given an added civilizing function (Elias 1994) as an important agency of socialization and social control.

From this perspective, participation in gambling is nonetheless regarded as an institutionalized leisure activity compensating for the dysfunctional and unfulfilling aspects of contemporary society. Gambling as leisure in this way is thus defined as free time activity, opposite to work or other obligations. As McMillen suggests, as a result gambling is:

considered to be an essential component in the maintenance and equilibrium of the social structure, an issue only because of the debilitating nature of modern work, which, it is argued, stifles creativity (Parker 1976; Goldthorpe *et al* 1969). From this view, gambling, although often distinguished from other legitimate leisure activities by its illegality and social stigma, is normal and thoroughly integrated with other practices and institutions of the society within which it occurs (1996, p.15).

Here gambling is observed to have a number of key societal functions: as both restorative leisure and an escape from the obligations of work (Herman 1967; Devereux 1968); as an integral element of working-class culture that allows participants the opportunity to try to overcome lack of success and security (Herman 1976; Zola 1964); as an outlet for to test chance and skill (Oldman 1974); and as an effective opportunity for self-realization, flow and creativity lacking in the workplace (Goffman 1967; Bloch 1957; Smith and Preston 1984). As McMillen asserts behind all this lies much more than the economic rewards, namely the social interaction and group association that accompany it (see, for example, studies by Martinez 1983; Rosecrance 1986, 1988), even when participants are faced with consistent losses.

### **Taxonomies of gamblers from the positive view**

There are a number of studies that offer ideal-type categories into which we may classify gamblers. As we will see, explicitly, the main criterion for classifying gamblers would appear to relate to particular kinds of betting activities; implicitly, however, the criteria more often than not also relate to degrees of rationality and irrationality, reinforcing the status quo evidenced in conventional gambling studies.

Drawing on his research with betting shop punters in East London, Newman (1972) argues that different people gamble due to a variety of reasons. His primary aim was to uncover the types of people who gamble; what they gamble on; how often they gamble; how much money is staked; what differences exist between gender, class and age; the relationship of gamblers to non-gamblers; and the relationship between habitual and regular gamblers.

Newman found that the betting shop is embedded in the locale in which it is situated: it is a place where individuals go regularly, they are known on first name terms and are remembered in terms of their highs and lows. Newman's study offers a typology of the types of gamblers who bet at different times of the day. The morning is taken up by women and pensioners and the afternoons are where the serious betting occurs - dominated by the habitués. The afternoon in the betting shop is one of both action and meaning, embodied in the following ideal types: the 'tycoons'- the major investors; the 'minor entrepreneurs'; the 'artisans' (the modest bettors but who



can on occasion bet excessively); the 'schnorrers', who Newman defines as 'the pauperized mob, able to bet only meagrely and intermittently'; and the 'non-competitors', who encompass the occasional bettors, young people and veterans (1972, p.148). Newman argues that most betting shop punters 'are likely to display awareness of the interactional processes and functions of their favourite betting shop in which, when resources, leisure time sneaked-off from work will allow, they will spend their time' (*ibid* p.80). Nevertheless, the betting shop for Newman has undergone a significant change, which now has the aim of 'fulfilling a manifold variety of functions and providing a multitude of needs' (*ibid*, p.159).

Neal (1998, 2005) builds on earlier key ethnographic work carried out by Newman (1972), Saunders and Turner (1983, 1987), Filby and Harvey (1988) and Bruce and Johnson (1996, 1995, 1994, 1992) to uncover and elaborate on the typologies of gamblers in betting shops, to investigate the types of bets people place, how bets were reflected by the times of day and why people ultimately gamble. Neal had already formulated some initial preconceptions from earlier studies and his research set out to test already established hypotheses. This allowed for certain patterns to emerge, locating how people gambled, how long they gambled for, what they gambled on and how much they gambled. In this regard, Neal identifies the 'regulars', which is by far the most common group who place bets in bookmakers' shops. This is a group of leisure punters who bet casually without seriousness and place small stakes in the interests of fun. The second category are the 'compulsives' who are the smallest category of gamblers, who can be said have a problem with gambling, but by and large are the least discernible. The third category is described as the 'professionals' who make a living from gambling.

This group, as a contrast to the 'regulars', bet with commitment and are ultimately only interested in the financial outcome as they invest a significant amount of time, money and effort - for them gambling is work not leisure. For both these groups, the ultimate aim is to try and make some kind of profit. For the professionals, however, they invest gambling with research and analysis on a variety of considerations that enable them to get to the bottom of the outcome of the event. They also attempt to try and manage risk to ensure in order to reap some rewards.

To become a professional horserace gambler takes much thought, capital, hard work and persistence (Kusyszen 1972; Bird and Manners 1985). The professional gambler (once again, invariably a man) has many factors to consider: garnering as much information as possible and then ultimately deciding whether the wager is worth placing. Rosecrance argues that 'only a select few horse players are able to perform the work of gambling for profit with sufficient facility to sustain themselves financially' (1988, p.224). He further comments that although the professional gambler can move from cautious low staked bets to risky large scale bets their actions are ultimately guided by three similar traits. Firstly, commitment, secondly, the ability to deal with uncertainty, and thirdly the facility to plan and prepare - they spend most of their time scouring results, absorbing information, and developing analysing techniques including looking at future events (1988, p.225). The professional gambler at some point in his time will lose, it is inevitable, but how long the drought lasts is unknown. He must continue what he is doing and hope it will soon come right again. The professional gambler is caught in the dilemma of uncertainty and insecurity. As Rosecrance suggests professionals do not consider their activities deviant, nor do they believe that the larger society regards their activities as deviant (1988, p.227).

Neal wanted to highlight the similarities between bettors but also the differences. These were categorized by the 'morning punter', the 'lunchtime punter' and the 'afternoon punter'. Also, what is significant are 'Saturday gamblers', where there is a variety of bettors and where more bets are usually made, with higher stakes because the betting is 'better on a Saturday'. Neal also found that least betting was made on a Sunday, where the racing is weaker and people are reluctant to break their traditional Sunday routines. The 'morning punter' is perhaps best symbolized by the pensioner who is merely betting in tandem with carrying out other routine tasks. Gambling is nonetheless a key part of the social time of the 'morning punter'. The 'lunchtime punter' is usually a worker who gambles in the hope of winning to release him or herself from the routines of work. The afternoon, Neal suggests, is when the betting shop is the busiest. It is the time when the racing normally begins. In the afternoon the shop is populated by a variety of people: ordinary punters, mostly men; a number of the unemployed punters, and a small section of deviants, such as criminals and the homeless to go. Neal concludes vis-vis functionalists leisure

studies: 'In discussing the different types of people who gamble in betting shops, this study has recognised the positive function betting shops play in punters' lives' (Neal 1998, p.597). For Neal, the betting shop might appear at first sight a den of irrationality but it is ultimately a symbolic place of structure, control and companionship; for many it is also an important place of leisure.

In Neal's (2005) study the focus of attention also turns to betting on the racecourse. The core of his research involved becoming a 'regular' at Ascot, Newbury and Lingfield. Neal's research demonstrates how racecourse gambling is different to betting shop gambling in terms of both spatial considerations and the 'embedded rationalities' of gamblers:

Because it involves travel, it is planned in advance. People thus consciously budget for the day before they enter the racecourse – they have to because cash point facilities are a rarity at many racecourses. Most budget for a bet on all six races plus the jackpot and placepot. They also typically budget for alcohol and food. The amount punters budget for the trip depends upon how they define the trip. Most punters define the visit primarily as leisure-time: an enjoyable time away from their work or domestic responsibilities. Because of this they commonly take what they consider to be *more* than enough money for the session. Taking more than enough provides a sense of hedonistic freedom, an experience unrestricted by financial constraints: 'There's nothing worse than running out of money. If you can't bet or can't drink and there are still two races to go...what's the point?' In order to ensure a session of 'unbridled' afternoon revelry, punters thus commonly bring an extra amount of 'slack' funds to the track (2005, p.305).

Neal argues that the difference between the racecourse and the betting shop has an important influence on how people go about gambling. As he concludes:

Perhaps the greatest difference between the two leisure spaces, however, lies in their emergent properties. Unlike the trip to the betting shop, which is integrated into numerous, competing, domestic/work tasks and priorities; the 'day at the races' has a discrete, ritualized, dynamic to it, from the placing of Jackpot bets before the racing begins, to the feverish getting-out stakes, where



the majority of punters chase losses in highly '*zweck-irrational*' ways. The day at the races can thus be seen as a 'trip', a 'ride', a 'journey' with a ritualized beginning and end (p.308).

In other words, the 'day at the races' is characterized by liminality, *communitas* and anti-structure (Turner 1973), and the dissipation of everyday social structures which guide gambling in betting shops.

The focus of Cassidy's (2002) research is also based for a large part at horserace meetings, but her interpretation sees betting in much less sanguine terms. Cassidy identifies the regular punters who are by far the most common group who bet. For most people, betting is a normalized, routine activity, and cannot really be classed as a risk taking exercise. For many bettors the most pleasure is gained from not only trying to win some money but by also making a selection based on some form of knowledge to predict the outcome of an event. In other words, some people bet to just take an interest in the event and others bet to make it more exciting.

Cassidy (2002) splits her gamblers into two categories. The first category are the 'mugs' who ultimately don't really know what they are betting on. There are a variety of reasons as to why people bet on a certain horse. However, 'mugs' will go through a period of possibility and decision making, hope for anything, and finally will endure sadness in defeat. But it is not this process that is important, it is what betting ultimately generates for individuals: the assertion of a particular identity and a sense of camaraderie with others. For the 'mugs' betting activity might only be hopeful, but it is an experience that produces fun, creates thrills, as well as a sense of bonding. The second category of gambler identified by Cassidy is the 'professionals'. Like Neal's counterparts they study form extensively in order to control the outcome of any wager. However, this type of activity empties gambling of its thrills and excitement. Knowledge is seen as the key to controlling risk and uncertainty, but it blunts the anticipation of triumphs and losses.

Kate Fox's (1999) anthropological research somewhat surprisingly found that gambling is not really the forefront of what racegoers want from the sport of horse-racing. Racegoers can be split into two broad groups: the 'Enthusiasts' and 'Socials'. 'Enthusiasts' (about 70% of the racing world) are racegoers with a genuine interest in

and understanding of horseracing' (1999, p.3), while 'Socials (about 30% of the racing world) attend race meetings mainly to establish and reinforce social bonds' (1999, p.3). These two broad categories can each be sub-divided further. In distinguishing between the various types of racegoers, Fox argues it allows her to better understand the identity, actions, behaviours and mannerisms of typical racegoers and how each ultimately feels about horseracing in general.

Fox found that the highest percentage of racegoers were the 'Enthusiasts' who have 'a genuine interest in and understanding of the sport, as well as an appreciation of its social atmosphere' (1999, p.5). The sub-divisions of this group are the 'fans, addicts, horseys and anoraks' (p.4). The 'Enthusiasts' are 'addicted to racing, not betting' (p.6), even though they attend a race meeting more than once a week they 'gamble only in fun bets of a fiver or a tenner' (1999, p.6). According to Fox, the 'Enthusiasts' represent the overall majority of racegoers who 'feel at home at their locale race-course as the rest of us do in our local pub' (p.10).

The 'Socials' can be sub-divided into the 'suits, pair-bonders, family day-outers and be-seens' (Fox 1999, p.4). For the 'Socials' racing is ultimately a social affair. Betting is obligatory but not a serious affair. As Fox suggests 'Socials are primarily concerned with the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, where racing provides conditions for this' (1999, p.13).

What all of these studies demonstrate is that most gambling activities take part in a social arena that is bound to a particular social and cultural environment. Gambling is sought out. It involves both participation and performance. It is, as Goffman stated, 'where the action is' and where chance resides. Gambling in most of these accounts is said to offer a break from everyday life, a way to escape the monotony and dullness to experience pleasure and thrills. In other words gambling performs an important function for individuals and society.

What this discussion also shows is that some researchers have sought to take into account factors such as age, social class, gender and ethnicity in accounting for gambling, but they seem to have been overly concerned with conjuring classifications that fit gamblers into ideal types. These ideal types are enduring ones. In a recent study conducted by Wenstock *et al* (2012) gamblers are divided into four familiar ideal types: the peripheral or the occasional gambler, who bets in small

amounts; the enthusiast, who bets frequently, not because they are compelled, but because gambling is everyday leisure pursuit where they perceive that they can test acquired knowledge, skills and initiatives; the business group, for whom gambling is a work rather than a leisure activity; and the compulsive, who has developed a gambling problem due to the influence of new technologies. Nothing ever changes – or so it would seem.

## **Conclusions**

We have seen in this chapter that generally speaking most research paints a very negative picture of gambling. We can also conclude that most analyses emerging from conventional gambling studies operate with some shared tacit assumptions about the relationship between gambling and society. We can also conclude that to date conventional gambling studies have been limited in three ways (McMillen 1996, p.10).

First, conservative moral forces have exerted a subtle but nonetheless deep influence over academic inquiry. The upshot of this is that assumptions about illegality and legality, irrationality and rationality, work and leisure, production and consumption, and so on, have combined to produce an approach to understanding gambling that has a tendency to legitimate the status quo. Second, most of these studies have been limited by the domination of the dialectic of positivism and functionalism which on the one hand foregrounds the (irrational) individual, choice and liberal society and on the other assumes objectivity of the 'facts' which has produced an uncritical paradigm that appears oblivious to socio-political factors underpinning gambling institutions and activities. Third, most theories and explanations of gambling behaviour have been produced in isolation from socio-historical developments which have their locus in the state and society. As McMillen (1996, p.10) suggests with regard to this third point, this is evidenced most clearly in changes in gambling legalisation, which 'are viewed merely as unproblematic signposts along the road to modern gambling practices'. Rarely has contemporary gambling been examined with the objective of providing an account of the socio-historical specificity of policy development or an adequate general explanation of the growing commercialisation of the industry' (Dessant 1976; Herman 1976, p.115) (*ibid*). The consequence of these three interrelated influences is the lack of a



critique, which has served to narrow the focus of gambling studies as well as limit the extent to which they effectively explain this enduring socio-cultural phenomenon.

Indeed, as we have seen most studies of gambling have been limited empirically and theoretically by methodologies which focus on developing large surveys of the motivations of individual gamblers rather than on gambling as a specific social, economic and culturally determined phenomenon. Sociological and leisure studies, often constructed within a positivist- functionalist framework, have offered some basic theoretical insights about the social as opposed to the purely psychological dimensions of gambling. But too often this has been done 'ahistorically and within a theoretical context which accepts the status quo and discourages development of a radical critique' (McMillen 1996, p.21). In the discussion of studies which identify taxonomies of gambling we saw a number of common ideal types tend to prevail and which never the twain (leisure and work) should meet. Ultimately the positivist- functionalist dialectic, although providing some valuable data on the motivations of different gamblers and social differences in gambling participation, has been limited because of its atheoretical methodological approaches which foreground the action of 'irrational' individuals and reify society, and therefore fail to provide adequate explanations of the creation and maintenance of such differences.

In particular, there has been little research on the subject of gamblers experiences, what motivates them to gamble and ultimately what it means to them. As Jacob Avery points out 'what many academic studies of gambling behaviour miss is how the processes involved change and evolve across situations and over time (2009, p.460). He further points out that, 'the body of research on gambling behaviour seldom even mentions the feelings, sounds, looks and emotions the being engrossed in gambling entails' (2009, p.460).

As with negative interpretations, many of these more positive ones also evidence a collective tendency to fail to identify the political and historical dimensions of gambling, and as a result produce a conception of leisure gambling which merely 'serves a *sui generis* function (leisure) for a society devoid of structural or cultural differences and conflicts....[ignoring the fact that]... gambling is open to subtle forms of social constraint and determination which contradict this definition' (McMillen 1996, p.20). As was pointed out above, there have been just few studies of women's

experiences of gambling as leisure, for example. There also exist just a small number that recognize that for some gambling constitutes work. These studies have examined the careers and subcultural worlds of professional gamblers whose approach to gambling embodies development of specialized skills in order to make economic gain (see, for example, Herman 1967 and Rosecrance 1988). But here there is a clear assumption that work and leisure are distinctly different entities.

What this last observation alerts us to is that not only is the positive view of gambling limited to functionalist conceptions of leisure but it also fails to acknowledge that there exists a critical tradition in leisure studies which collapses the dichotomies of leisure and work, freedom and constraint (Blackshaw 2003, 2010; Rojek 2005, 2009; Spracklen 2011), offering the opportunity to research leisure gambling in new ways.

As McMillen postulates, 'whenever gambling is being analysed, fundamental questions are raised about the actual and potential relationship between gambling, the state and civil society, both in general and in particular nation states' (1996, p.7). In general terms it might be argued that in Britain the analysis of gambling has shifted since the Second World War from negative deviance to positive leisure in the 1970s and 1980s, and from the 1990s to the present from positive leisure to negative consumerism. In light of this shift, and following the call from Neal (2005), we also need a paradigm shift in gambling research. At the moment we only get to hear about two sides of gambling: the negative view, the positive view. We need to move away from the overwhelming preoccupation with pathological gambling and the overriding focus on ideal types towards a more extensive consideration of what this shift from positive leisure to leisure gambling informed by consumerism entails. Before I offer my own contribution to towards helping facilitate this shift, though, we must first of all unpack the implications of consumerism and how these relate to the fundamental issues surrounding the concomitant emergence of risk and individualization in modern societies. This is the topic with which the next chapter is concerned.

## Chapter 4

# The Metamorphosis of Gambling: From a Deviant Leisure Activity to a Mainstream Consumer Industry

### Introduction

In the last chapter we saw that much research presupposes an idea of gambling based on the notion that it is a problematic activity of (irrational) individuals which can often lead to addiction. In this chapter we are confronted with the challenge of trying to understand the ways in which gambling is linked to risk, individualization and consumerism. If for the majority of the twentieth century the state's attitude to gambling was moralistic and disapproving, at the start of the twenty-first century it is the opposite. If we cannot be sure about the societal extent of problem gambling one thing we can be sure about is the exponential growth in that the range of things on which people bet. This has grown rapidly and with the blessing of the state. Perhaps where (proximal) betting takes place has not changed very much but *how* people bet and the *kinds* of bets they place has altered dramatically. These changes have been accompanied by two seemingly contradictory trends: the massive growth in virtual gambling through information technology and the internet (see, for example, Valentine *et al* 2008) and the large increase in opportunities to gamble on the high street: the increase of super-size casinos and bingo halls, but especially the growing number of betting shops in British cities and towns.

In developing the discussion in this chapter it is important to be aware of the argument that the best way to understand changes over the long haul is the inclination of gambling to periodization (Bolen 1976; Dixon 1984, 1987; Hill 1987; Lemon 1972; McCoy 1980; McKibbin 1979; Vamplew 1976). This argument is underpinned by the view that the characteristics, extent and intensity of gambling in any society always chimes with the swinging pendulum of state gambling policy.

In following this critical trend, one of the best critical interpreters of contemporary gambling, Gerda Reith (2013), recently argued that over the course of the last fifty years gambling has been transformed from a deviant, largely underground pastime to a globalized, multi-billion pound industry. As Reith points out, this dramatic shift can be located within the broader context of changes in patterns of leisure and consumption, as well as the connection of these with political, economic and



technological forces that have seen the interests of neoliberal capitalism and the state converge around the expansion of gambling profits. What this observation tells us that we have seen the emergence of gambling as a contemporary form of consumption, which Young (2010) describes as the 'state-sanctioned commodification of chance'.

In an earlier publication, Reith describes this new set of circumstances as a consequence of the emergence of a new risk society (Beck 1992) where gambling 'has become an irreducible aspect of daily life: risk, speculation, indeterminism and flux are our constant companions in social, economic and personal affairs: we have entered the Age of Chance' (Reith 1999, p.1). What this tells us is that gambling is perhaps best no longer understood as a distinct and discrete kind of leisure activity engaged solely in casinos, bingo halls and betting shops, but that it percolates our everyday lives through national lotteries, scratch cards, raffles, bingo, arcades, television, newspaper and radio competitions, the internet, apps and many other sources. The central message emanating from Reith's thesis is that gambling is the way that we *all* live now. This suggests that the idea that gambling is 'a ritual which is strictly demarcated from the everyday world around it within which chance is deliberately courted' (Reith 1999, p.1) no longer holds good. And not only that, but perhaps that the primary purpose of gambling today, to paraphrase the philosopher James P. Carse (1986), is not so much the winning as continuing the play.

The starting argument underpinning the analysis in this chapter is that Carse's conception of play so understood was not really possible in modern society until a particular set of ideas underpinning modern life had attained currency, and that those ideas were not established until the end of the twentieth century. In contemporary gambling studies, chief among these ideas are consumerism and risk. One major problem with much work emanating from conventional gambling studies, however, is that despite the importance it places on the relationship between consumerism, the increasing significance of risk and the expansion of gambling, and the implications this has for gamblers and their families, it continues to analyse gambling as a bounded category of practice and experience (Reith 1999). This flies in the face of important work emanating from sociologists of risk, such as Beck (1992, 2009), Giddens (1991) and Bauman (2000), which suggests that the principal force underpinning human life in neoliberal societies is not just consumerism but the

deregulation and the shifting of risk onto individual shoulders. Beck argues that as a consequence modern lives today are best seen as 'biographical solutions of systemic contradictions' (1992, p.133-37) - without the safety blanket of the 'nanny' state.

What this tells us is that in understanding gambling in contemporary society we must consider the ineradicable relationship between individualization, consumerism and risk as this is pivotal in getting to grips with the ideological, political, economic and technological forces that shape contemporary gambling. In other words, what do sociologists mean when they refer to 'individualization', 'consumerism', 'risk' – and 'neoliberalism'? Each of these ideas is crucial to understanding these contemporary developments in gambling, as well as to the thesis developed below. It is important, then, in the first part of this chapter to map out some working definitions in order that we can begin to understand the social, political, economic and cultural trends that led to the metamorphosis of gambling from leisure to consumerism which began in the 1990s and has accelerated in no uncertain terms in the twenty-first century. Once we have these working definitions we can then make some general observations about the current situation regarding state gambling policy and how this impacts on the place of gambling in society.

### ***Individualization***

The concept of individualization has been the subject of much critical debate in sociology. Any definition must recognize that individualization began with the Enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, otherwise known as the age of reason and justice when everything that is progressive about modernity began to emerge in earnest, and brought with it a rational commitment to independence from religion and the state. To this extent individualization is best understood as a 'concept which describes a structural, sociological transformation of social institutions and the relationship of the individual to society' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p.202). In other words, individualization is not just a way of illustrating how individuals adapt to changes in society, but it tells us something particularly important which is that the Enlightenment ushered in a unique modern period in history when 'life situations and biographical patterns are changed' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p.202).

In modern societies it is no longer plausible to suggest merely that an individual is only free in so much as society will allow. Today we live in an age when the individual must be responsible for their own welfare, lifestyle, and identity. Individuals might still live their lives in accordance with others; however, individualization forces the individual to be responsible not only for themselves but also the spaces they inhabit. In so much as individuals are free to choose what they become and engage in, they also need to flexible and innovative human beings.

As we saw in the example of the state's shifted approach to gambling in the last chapter (Reith 2008), new demands, controls and constraints are constantly imposed on individuals (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p.2). This relatively recent transition in the societal order of things places more emphasis on the individual in terms of how they look after themselves and how they direct their own actions. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim add further, 'by all these requirements individuals are not so much compelled as peremptorily invited to constitute themselves as individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves and act as individuals' (2002, p.3). The individual has to learn to manage not only themselves but also the conditions that make it possible and therefore have to learn to be adaptable to both. 'One of the decisive features of individualization processes, then, is that they not only permit but they also demand on the active contribution by individuals' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p.4). Individuals need to possess an array of characteristics to make themselves accommodating to the demands that may arise of them. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim conclude, human being in the modern world 'becomes a choice among possibilities' (2002, p.5). To this extent individuals constantly seek to fulfil their desires on their own terms, they engage in consuming, recreation and other practices that are explored not only for pleasure but also as a way for individuals to gain all they can out of life. As Elliot and Lemert suggest, 'in contemporary societies, individuals are first and foremost concerned with the 'issues of how to lead a meaningful and autonomous life' (2006, p.7).

If individualization emerged with modernity, it is only with the coming of reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994) that the individual has the potential to become an individual proper. With this trend there also re-emerges uncertainty, individual risk taking, experimentation and self-expression (Elliot and Lemert 2006, p.12). With reflexive modernization this means first and foremost 'the staging of the



self in processes of aesthetic lifestyle creation. Secondly, an internalised, practising consciousness of freedom. And, thirdly, 'self-organisation geared to action' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p.43). As we will see in the discussion of my own research in the findings chapters all three are pivotal to understanding gambling amongst serious leisure horserace gamblers.

Having said that, individuals not only become responsible for themselves and their actions which give them freedom, they are also constrained by norms and regulations, where power becomes institutionalized, and ultimately globalized. In today's neoliberal society (this concept will be unpacked shortly), individuals are encouraged to be both independent and innovative as a result of an increase in opportunities and possibilities. Individuals form a self-identity from interactions, experiences, culture and society. There are now wider choices and more availability which allows individuals to create their own lifestyle and they possess a flexibility to do so. However, with choice also comes responsibility. Under the illusion that everybody can choose to be whom they want to be, there are feelings of expectation, pressures and constraint as individuals are increasingly told to make sure they follow societal norms in order to make the right decisions (Bauman 2007).

As the work of Michel Foucault (1980) demonstrates, to follow societal norms came with modern thinking and it manifested itself through bodily actions and ways of behaving, which reflect governmental institutions, or what Foucault called 'techniques of self-management', which ensure that control is carried from within 'individuals involved in the constant monitoring of their own thoughts and behaviour' (Reith 2005, p.229). At the same time, and as will be demonstrated below, individualization has become subjected to the conditions of the neoliberal 'consumer driven marketplace', creating an independent individual caught between autonomy, society and capitalism (Basham and Luik 2011). What this tells us is that individualization is dependent on consumerism in neoliberal societies.

### ***Consumerism and individualization in a consumer society***

According to Zygmunt Bauman in contemporary modern societies individualization is sustained by consumerism. It is consumerism which:

makes my life into my individual affair; and it is the consumer activity which make me into the individual....It *privatizes*, so to speak, issues so that they are

not perceived as *public*; it *individualizes* tasks so that they are not seen as *social*. It now becomes my duty (and, as I am encouraged to hope, also a task I can perform) to improve myself and my life, to culture and refine, to overcome my own shortcomings and other vexing drawbacks to the way I live (Bauman 1990, p.204).

What this tells us is that consumerism and its attendant consumer culture are deeply embedded in modern society. Not only does society depend on consumerism to oil the wheels of the economy, but it has turned us all into consumers. As Bauman puts it 'we have moved from a production ethic to a consumption ethic, where individuals make decisions about who and what they want to be through the possession and display of a range of consumer goods and leisure activities' (Bauman in Reith 2005, p.228-29). It is through purchasing and consuming that individuals today form their self-identities because consumerism is what offers individuals a release where they can experience pleasure to create their desired lifestyle choices. In other words, we live in a society which involves consumers purchasing products to satisfy their individual needs and desires. As Bauman explains, 'consumption is a permanent and irremovable condition and aspect of life' (2007, p.25).

Bauman argues that consumerism has been allowed to flourish due to its separation from production. If production created individuals as producers with a Protestant, work ethic, consumerism creates individuals as consumers first and foremost. Consumerism has become more than just an important facet of everyday life; our modern society is now concerned with not what we produce but what we consume. Consumerism shapes individuals as well as groups. It constitutes and holds many redeeming features for the majority of people. It provides 'gratification of needs, as with an ever-rising volume and intensity of desires, which imply in turn prompt use and speedy replacement of the objects intended and hopes to gratify them' (Bauman 2007, p.31). For many, if not all, consumerism dictates lifestyle choices and shapes what they want to become or should become. As Bauman suggests 'as part of a particular lifestyle, so that the prospective customer can consciously purchase symbols of such self-identity as he or she would wish to possess' (1990, p.102). What this tells us is that not only does consuming have both economic value and symbolic value, but it guarantees the individual a sense of control over their purchases. In other words, consumerism is unique in the sense that it provides

individuals with a special kind of freedom of self-expression which goes unquestioned because the commodity itself ensures its approval. As will be demonstrated through the discussion of my own research in Chapter 6, this has become central to the operation and success of the gambling industry today.

Everyday life in a consumer society relies on consumerism to function. Consumers are manifested in society in different consumer forms. This is also true of gamblers. This is how consumer freedom is allowed to flourish. As Bauman argues 'the reality principle translates as fulfilment of the obligation to seek pleasure and happiness, so it is lived through as an exercise of freedom and an act of self-assertion' (2007, p.75). However, with freedom also comes constraint and responsibility. 'A life that is both pleasurable and acceptable, both personally unique and socially normal. Individuals shape a style of life for themselves through acts of choice in the world of goods' (Rose 1999, p.86). Individuals are at once free, that is to choose and to be who they want to be, but also, constrained not only to be responsible but to also live by their choices.

Yet consumer freedom is a particular kind of freedom which is circumscribed by the market. Clearly the way in which commodities guarantee consumer freedom is something that is taken into consideration by those who are in control of the marketing of consumer products. They have to make the products sellable and worth buying. As Bauman argues 'each advertising copy and commercial is meant to encourage us and prompt us to buy a specific product' (1990, p.203). To this end companies will also rely on the use of experts to further enhance their reasoning. As we will see, especially in Chapter 8, although gambling has long been an important aspect of life in all societies, it takes on an altogether different dimension once it is accompanied by marketing copy and expert systems.

Despite the use of marketing, the way that consumer products sustain themselves best is if individuals express their desire for them. 'Consumers are said to acquire not just the material products but also the associated meanings' (Roberts 1999, p.172). As Basham and Luik (2011) suggest, the consumer driven market place makes available through its consumer products the wants and needs of the individuals it targets. In other words, the aim of the market is to make consumer goods more accessible and more appealing to people. As Roberts adds, 'once consumer wants have been created, capitalist systems can operate with few overt



controls. The systems become 'hegemonized'. Capitalism is made to appear a natural response to people's wants' (1999, p.182). To this end, capitalism ensures that individuals are increasingly involved in the creation of their own wants and needs. The market is after all founded upon fulfilling individual desires.

For many individuals, everyday life has become one of consuming, where consuming is ultimately an individualized choice. If individuals live their day-to-day lives consuming and purchasing where pleasures and needs, need to be met by the market. Goods are expected to be continuously updated and adapted to everyday life to meet consumer demand. Capitalism must guarantee therefore that the market is a place where individuals can constantly update, alter, and adapt consumer goods to their own individual needs and lifestyle choices. It must also guarantee that individuals can share with other like-minded individuals the same tastes.

To consume is also to take a risk. Just like a gambler's, a consumer's life is one of weighing up options and taking chances. To this extent it might be said that consumerism is a liminal space of possibility and excitement, where individuals can enjoy a sense of freedom and the thrill of the moment, and where after the experience they return to their day-to-day lives. Basham and Luik suggest that gambling is both a pastime activity as well as providing leisure. They further point out that, 'adults find themselves of play, interacting and socializing in a safe environment amongst their peers. Gambling is a recreation that is part of the consumer driven marketplace' (2011, p.9). As Basham and Luik argue further, 'the extent to which a person has the ability to behave and to spend money as he or she pleases is an important determination of a truly free and liberal society' (2011, p.11). People who decide to engage in gambling pursuits are able to do so freely; they are also making rational and informed choices about how to spend their money. What this tells us is that gambling and consumerism are co-dependent. Both are highly rewarding, pleasurable, and provide a sociable environment that people find enjoyable.

However, Basham and Luik's assessment is limited in a number of ways. First, it fails to recognize the all-pervasive nature of gambling in contemporary consumer societies, which suggests that it is no longer possible to accept that gambling is simply a contingent or liminal activity. Second, their assessment of gambling underestimates the extent to which gambling and consumerism are co-extensive with one another in, perhaps, an even more important way: each is ultimately

sustained by the thrill of the chase. Gamblers and consumers convince themselves it is the winning or the purchase of some consumer item or another that they desire, but both delude themselves. 'What they really crave is to chase the hare, not to catch it. The pleasure is in hunting, not in catching the prey' (Bauman 2001, p.9-10). What this observation suggests, and what is of major significance for the thesis developed below, is that it is no longer acceptable (if it ever was) to understand gambling (or consuming) as a leisure activity which is merely about the thrill of gaining instant gratification. On the contrary, in consumer societies gambling is no longer a finite game played just for the purpose of winning, it is an infinite game played for the purpose of continuing the play (Carse 1986).

What Carse's thesis suggests is that consumerism has not only played a key role in making risk highly appealing but also normalizing thrill seeking. As we will see below, this has contributed in no uncertain terms to the popularity and growth of the betting industry. Gambling has become big business and now sees itself as an important provider of a key service to consumers. With the blessing of the state, it tries to meet consumer demands by providing increases in choice and more opportunities to gamble. Gambling games have proliferated on the high street and as a result have become increasingly integrated into everyday life. In other words, gambling is reflective of the society that produces it. In consumer societies, gambling and the games that gamblers play have been adapted as products to be consumed.

### ***Risk***

In consumer societies, individualization is inseparable from 'risk' (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). With the emergence of reflexive modernization we have seen the re-emergence of uncertainty; risks have developed with individuals and societies, as individuals try and prevent risk in their life, new risks are created. As Møller explains security 'fades after a while, and this then stimulates the desire to take new risks' (2007, p.193). Risk is bound to society and therefore culture, which means that it is ambivalent in nature. Risk is not just about what may happen in the future or trying to deal with the uncertainties that life can create but it is also found in the day-to-day aspects of everyday life – marriage, work, buying a house, and so on. As McGuigan suggests 'hazards and risks are brought on by individualisation, which is both liberating and disconcerting, combining personal freedom and high anxiety' (2010,

p.108). Risk forces a juxtaposition to occur between the individual and the relationship they have to the social world around them.

What this tells us is that risk has become an important and familiar facet of the everyday social world. Risk is experienced through time and context. Risks are also always dependent on culture and what a specific culture means to each individual. As we have seen, individuals today live in a world of increasing choice and freedom and have the capacity to choose and to try and control their own environments. Yet life has become increasingly contradictory for individuals because as much as they try and deter risk occurring in their daily life, in other ways they engage and endorse it. For example, as was explored in Chapter 2 the concept of edgework illustrates how individuals endorse risk; its ultimate aim is to experience heightened feelings of emotion and feel as though you are living for the moment. This has a direct impact on the way individuals conduct themselves and how they both try to prevent and seek risk through certain actions. Risk holds the possibility of another kind of reality and is a reflection of the society and the people that create risks. To gain knowledge about risks is both to try to understand and to control risk. This has led to changes in the way society shapes itself, how individuals conduct themselves and how political rule resides in society.

These changes in the understanding of risk are not new, however, since they emerged with modernity. A modern society is ubiquitously consumed by risks which it has to try to not only manage but has also try to prevent, or at least manage or contain. Individuals are seen as one of the many generators of risk, as they both cause risk but at the same time are responsible for the curtailing of risk. The potentialities of risks differ depending on the political and moral values of that modern society. The gambler can be described as a risk taker who is ultimately seeking pleasurable and thrilling experiences. However, the gambler might also be seen as an individual who applies careful and considered thought-out options and doesn't risk take recklessly. The risks that are prevalent in today's society are widespread and global such as the potential of natural disasters or health scares. This has also lead to a proliferation of 'experts' who offer advice on what risks are present in today's society and how we should be dealing with them (Bauman 1990).



A good example of societal risk control is, of course, gambling. The modern state has always formed the basis of gambling control through the idea of risk. However, with the emergence of individualization and consumerism, the basis of this control has shifted. As Bramham and Wagg suggest 'governments promote conditions of consensus through an individual's capacity for self-control on the basis of accepting responsibility' (2011, p.108). Governments have in other words transferred responsibility for risk from the state to individuals. Individuals now have to learn how to conduct and regulate themselves. This also transfers risk onto the individual from society at large. In today's society, this has become increasingly normalized as people are now free to make choices that suit their needs. What this tells us is that risk has become very much part of today's society; individuals engage in risk out of choice and do so for a variety of reasons and pleasures.

In a neoliberal society, individuals are treated as consumers who are forced to be responsible for their own interests and welfare as well as trying to manage risks. The risks are a result of uncertainties and chances of the global market. What this tells us is that gambling has become increasingly normalized. As McMillen (1996, p.26-7) wrote somewhat presciently almost 20 years ago:

while there is increased awareness of the dissensus and instabilities in gambling policies and the extended role of the state in seeking to deal with social turbulence...[research continues to suffer]...from a common deficiency: despite the state regulated gambling systems, there is little consideration of the political or ideological implications of state involvement in what is essentially a profitable economic enterprise...[The consequence of this is] the increasing involvement in gambling of large, transnational corporations, often operating through government bureaucracies, has turned private interests into policy objectives.

In the process gambling has become another form of consumption that symbolizes all of what capitalist risk embodies with its inherent gains and its failings. It offers an increasingly normalized way of accumulating wealth that is subject to risk and losses where individuals are encouraged to be entrepreneurial and innovative by committing themselves to the 'dice-life' (Baudrillard 2001) and its 'casino culture'

(Bauman 2000). Yet what this ignores is that gambling is filled with its own contradictions and inconsistencies very much like the capitalist system itself.

### ***Neoliberalism***

Neoliberalism is the ideological term coined to define Western societies held under the thrall of market fundamentalism (Harvey 2005). As its name suggests this concept has its antecedents in the political philosophy of liberalism. In common with individualization, liberalism emerged out of the Enlightenment and the massive social, political and economic changes that developed in Europe from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The basic principles of liberalism are important to map out before developing a working definition of neoliberalism. Liberalism is 'a philosophy based on 'the rule of law' and the protection of individual rights and freedom against the unnecessary encroachments of the state' (Dean 2010, p.61-62). This includes the realm of the governable, not only of individuals, but also societal structures which establish freedom as the ultimate signifier of rule.

From a liberal perspective government cannot merely be understood as the authority of the state over the population but it is how we govern ourselves as individuals and how we ultimately become implicated in a complex but detached relationship with the state. In the liberal view, if someone is governed then it is suggested that they embody freedom; 'while government gives shape to freedom, it is not constitutive of freedom' (Dean 1999, p.13). Freedom thus becomes implicated in the art of government and thus becomes a technical means of securing governance. As Dean points out, 'government presupposes and even creates forms of unfreedom and equality as it seeks to create various kinds of equality and to foster the exercise of certain types of liberty' (1999, p.34). Individuals are equipped with rights and it is the role of government to show them that they know how to use these rights properly.

In its infancy, liberalism was considered as a rationality of rule for the production of government and the grounds for free citizens (Gray 1986). Individuals had to be guided by the direction of experts in order to carry out their freedom responsibly. In the modern liberal state, the notion of freedom came to mean not only freedom from interference but also from dependence and domination. The role of experts in this process is to provide government, but government at a distance (Dean 2010).

Freedom therefore becomes a way of governing people, but individuals must be aware that this freedom is always incomplete. However, what develops with this kind of freedom are not only rights but responsibilities too, and it is the state's responsibility to enforce this coercion and not only use individuals to its own advantage to enforce a self-autonomy on the part of individuals.

As we have seen, liberalism is an extension of government, it is the reasoning of the polity, the state and its justification. The *raison d'être* of the liberal state is to ensure that individuals exercise 'freedom responsibly and in a disciplined fashion' (Dean 2010, p.144-45). Liberalism gives endorsement for the functioning of government; it produces the acumen that gives it its justification. In the negative view, the individual becomes a pawn in its power which enables it to achieve its rationality. It is through the individual's freedom that government is able to exercise its control and where the individual has to learn to regulate her or his freedom and exercise her or his rights responsibly. In the positive view, liberalism presumes the self-realization to act and make the best of one's life.

However, the consequence of this view was that its version of individual autonomy suggests 'obedience to conventional norms and subscriptions to inherited forms of rule' (Gray 1986, p.59). As Gray goes on to say 'a free man (*sic*) is one who possesses the rights and privileges needed for him to think and act autonomously - to rule himself, and not be ruled by another' (*ibid* p.60-61). From its inception the liberal state was wrought by the ideals of freedom as it tried to reproduce free individuals. Individuals in this sense were either acted upon or act upon others in order to produce some kind of 'freedom' effect. As Rose suggests, from the offset, 'civility was also instituted through strategies which attempted to construct well-regulated liberty through creating practices of normality, rationality and sensibility' (1999, p.72). What Rose calls 'practices of government' became imposed through the idea of freedom in which individuals would assume their responsibility, and to act accordingly. Freedom in effect was technically enveloped with relations of power whereby the individual had to act for the self.

An expanded definition of neoliberalism can now be developed. As its name suggests neoliberalism comes after liberalism. Neoliberalism can be defined as 'a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within



institutional framework characterised by strong property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey 2005, p.2). In this sense neoliberalism has come to be defined as 'a range of programmatic rationalities of government' (Dean 2010, p.10).

What this discussion tells us is that the functioning of government in the early liberal state was embedded in the concept of risk but also how individuals (through self-government) help to direct the shape of government practices and modes of rule. Yet the duty of the neoliberal state is nothing more (and nothing less either) than to oversee that this is carried out through entrepreneurial freedoms and competences. This newer version of liberalism has manifested itself into everyday life in modern western societies. It has become engrained as a rationality that it is now seen as natural and is complicit in our understanding of the everyday world. As Runciman (2014, p.25) explains nowhere is this hegemony more apparent than in the virtual world of ambient gambling presented to us by gambling advertisements:

Ambience is everywhere. The current raft of TV ads promoting online gambling services make full play of this: they show punters in pubs or supermarkets, pulling out their phones to place bets whenever the urge strikes. The tone of the ads is relentlessly jolly: gambling can inject a spark of excitement into even the most routine part of your day. One that has been doing the rounds recently shows a chubby, bald bloke standing with his shopping trolley in the baked beans aisle. He glances at his phone, and suddenly a salsa band springs out from behind the tins to get him jigging in rhythm: he's seen a special offer on the in-play football betting. The excitement is infectious. Seeing her man start to dance, his wife can only smile encouragingly: anything to put a spring in his step.

Freedom is the underpinning that makes all this possible; but it is the state that brings all of this together through the control of the market. In neoliberal societies the state thus is merely charged with expanding and opening up new markets to generate capital. 'The state's role is to ensure individual freedoms. The sanctity of contracts and the individual right to freedom of action, expression and choice must be protected' (Harvey 2005, p.64).

Yet although the state is responsible for ensuring individual liberty, in neoliberal states individuals have a responsibility for their own welfare and actions. It can be

argued that gamblers are responsible, rational individuals who undergo careful thought out options and don't make decisions recklessly as they try and impart some knowledge and test their skills and applications.

The neoliberal state carries out its governance, but at a distance, and ultimately through market institutions and individuals as economic actors. The role of government is to ensure individual rights and freedoms are executed in a way that ensures that generation of capital. As Rose suggests, it is 'incumbent on government to conduct a policy towards society that it is possible for a market to exist and function' (1999, p.138). However, as he goes on to point out, this is only when 'individual economic actors possess the information to enable them to make the best judgements on risks and potentials in order to guide their conduct; they must be freed to choose according to the natural laws of the free market on the one hand and human nature on the other' (Rose 1999, p.139). The market is the principle concern of the state and its role is to ensure that it sustains and expands. As Rose further adds 'all aspects of social behaviour are now reconceptualised along economic lines - as calculative actions undertaken through the universal human faculty of choice' (1999, p.141). Individuals are thus able to construct their own self-identity through choice and consuming. It is through the market that makes possible and directs individuals to consumerism. It is a way for them to assert their rights and it is where they have freedom to fulfil their self-actualization. The state endorses and encourages consumer culture but at the same time encourages individuals to self-regulate and consume (and by default gamble) responsibly.

Liberal government has always been carried out on the basis of reducing state involvement in the lives of its citizens. In neoliberal times it is also about promoting free enterprise and increasing consumer choice. This has resulted in individuals becoming more responsible for their own welfare and their own interests. As we will see below, the upshot of this shift has seen gambling transformed into yet another kind of consumerism and with it the relaxation legal restrictions. For the gambling industry, this has meant providers could now promote their commodities and expand their business interests. Runciman (2014, p.25) is once again obliging in his assessment of this new expanded market for gambling:

An enormous array of choices is now available to punters when it comes to placing bets, and bookmakers have to work very hard these days to stay in

business at all. Many people continue to believe that bookmaking is a licence to print money....The online revolution has driven down entry costs, so that all sorts of new players have been making a name for themselves (BetOnline, BetonSports, Betstar, Bwin, Sportingbet, Unibet: you can see their slogans all over the electronic advertising hoardings of every major football ground in the country). It has also become much easier for punters to compare the value that different services offer. If you'd like to place a bet it is now very easy to find out which of the many betting services out there will give you the best odds (the current market leader in supplying this information, [www.oddschecker.com](http://www.oddschecker.com), has itself become a big business).

As for responsibility for gambling, as Reith argues, this is now 'demonstrated through responsible behaviour and responsible behaviour is evidence of responsibility' (2008, p.149). Responsibility locates the idea of power not in the sense of domination, but in the form of 'accountability, as well as it also possesses a moralising element to be accountable for one's own actions' (2008, p.149). The idea of responsibility has become harder to establish. However, the more freedoms people enjoy in neoliberal societies, the more that responsibility lies with them. Individuals are required to look after their own welfare and engage in activities responsibly. In terms of gambling, even though individuals have more choices and opportunities, they are required to take responsibility for their own actions and well-being - physically, socially, psychologically and morally. As Reith puts it; today 'gamblers and the industry come together in responsible self-regulation. It is hoped informed choice will result in rational, and therefore responsible behaviour' (2008, p.152). The ultimate decisions about whether or not to engage in gambling are placed squarely on the shoulders of individuals.

What the foregoing discussion tells us is that understanding the complex relationship between individualization, consumerism, risk and neoliberalism is key to understanding contemporary gambling. However, before we put some empirical flesh on the implications emanating from the consequences of this relationship in Part Three of this thesis, it is necessary to conclude Part Two by placing the implications of recent changes in gambling in the context of the new freedoms and opportunities for leisure that began to emerge from the 1960s.



## Contemporary developments in gambling

One way of outlining the key developments in contemporary gambling is to consider these in the context of their place in the rise of the leisure industries and the concomitant growth of consumer spending on leisure that emerged in the 1960s. As Ken Roberts demonstrates, 'between 1971 and 1996 the total consumer spending in Britain rose by roughly 75%, but spending on leisure goods and services increased by approximately 100%' (2004, p.1-2).

Featherstone argues that the 1960s was a significant period of transition, when 'the expansion of capitalist production, especially after the boost received from scientific management and 'Fordism' around the turn of the century, it is held, necessitated the construction of new markets and the 'education' of publics to become consumers through advertising and other media' (1991, p.14). Featherstone's assessment dovetails nicely with the assessments provided by the sociologists discussed above. In this transition 'from production to consumption', Featherstone argues, leisure time becomes the dominant force and key contributor of consumption. It is also a time when the state now has to respond to not only the demands of the market but also the demands of the people.

As Featherstone adds further, 'in contrast to the designation of the 1950s as an era of grey conformism, a time of mass consumption, changes in production techniques, market segmentation and consumer demand for a wider range of products, are often regarded as making possible greater choice' (1991, p.83). Peter Borsay argues that this significant change was a result of the increase in individual wealth and credit and the realignment of these into a burgeoning market, where individuals and social groups had not had this luxury before. As Borsay goes on to argue, five factors were important to this growth in consumptive leisure: technology, capital, entrepreneurship, cartelization and professionalization (2006, p.27), coupled with improved transport and technology systems, advances in production and communication, and increases in leisure time and disposable income – which would all contribute to major social, political and cultural changes in UK society.

As Featherstone and Borsay both demonstrate, the 1960s signified a period of great change in the UK. The expansion of consumerism and commercialization and the opening up of new markets placed a greater emphasis on individuals and what they

could now spend their money on. The state had to re-situate itself in this realignment and especially in its attitude to gambling, finding that instead of suppressing gambling, it would have to embrace it. It would not only give the people what they wanted but it would also have to find new ways of opening up the gambling market

The 1960 Betting and Gaming Act was the first significant piece of legislation that saw gambling removed from the forbidden to the acceptable as the state legalized betting shops. However, this legalisation also came with some restrictions. No advertising was permitted to encourage gambling behaviour; betting shops were not allowed to provide any forms of comfort via chairs or tables, or other amenities, such as refreshments – these didn't emerge until 1984. Notwithstanding these observations the ultimate aim of the Act was to address the fact that there still existed in UK society different opportunities to gamble for the rich and for the poor. The Act embodied the ideas that it was unfair that the rich were allowed to gamble freely in gaming houses and clubs without prosecution and the poor still suffered severe punishments because they frequently gambled in illegal betting houses and on the street. The Act also relieved the pressure on the police who had to frequently clamp down on illegal gambling.

Not too long after the government also passed the 1968 Gaming Act. This Act was seen as an improvement on the 1960 Betting and Gaming Act. It acknowledged that if there was a growing demand for gambling it should not be asserted so easily. To this end the Act established the Gaming Board to keep gambling in check.

Regulation rather than suppression would now be the tool of the state, which would be enforced through gaming boards and various commissions. Bookmakers' shops should remain uninviting, seipia environments. The point was to stop gamblers lingering around in betting shops for long periods of time. The legislation did, however, allow the continuation of play and the placing of bets; previously people had only been permitted to have one bet a day. The 1968 Gaming Act effectively removed the illegal aspects of gambling and allowed a new burgeoning betting industry to utilize and profit from the latent demand that was clearly already there.

Herman states that 'the vote for the Bill in the House of Commons was 311 to 49. The decisiveness of the vote is an indication of the public acceptance of gambling in England' (1967, p.242). The 1968 Gaming Act also offered a distinction between gaming clubs and bingo related activities. Bingo was licensed to allow several

competitors the opportunity for play to be undertaken at the same time. The liberalization of gambling laws permitted gambling to take place but it would be controlled and supervised by the police and taxed by the government. The result of these changes was twofold. First, they recognized that many people liked to gamble and for most this was an unproblematic and enjoyable pursuit. Second, they identified the increasing influence of the state in everyday lives - if at a distance.

By the 1970s and through to the 1980s, the regulations on gambling were thought to have been successful and the Royal Commission suggested that some relaxations in the law could now be proposed. Crucially this period saw the removal of restrictions on betting shops. However, we would now have to wait until the 1990s until the next major form of legislation was introduced. The key year was 1993 which saw the introduction of the National Lottery Act.

The impact of this Act was to be unlike any other that had preceded it and would significantly alter the course of gambling for the future. The National Lottery would be controlled by a minimum age limit, there would be no immediate encouragement to play and there would be no virtual play. It was touted as a harmless form of entertainment that would be able to accumulate funds for a variety of 'good causes'. The growth of the National Lottery was significant, because it saw the introduction of gambling advertisements which had previously not been permitted. The government played a massive part in its promotion and success. The National Lottery provided a necessary boost of wealth into the gambling economy as well as encouraging new forms of gambling consumption. The state was now a major player in the gambling economy – if at a remove; it was a provider as well as a beneficiary.

There were some minor restrictions that were imposed on the National Lottery at first but these were soon to be lifted. Crucially three things happened. First, the state extended the opening hours of local shops and convenience stores and allowed individuals to collect winnings there. Second, it reduced the age of play to 16. Thirdly, it introduced increased jackpots. However, due to the success of the National Lottery and its promotion, other gambling firms insisted on the same relaxed authority. This was granted. To this extent, the 1993 Act not merely signalled a break from the past but the emergence of a new form of consumer gambling undergirded by individualized responsibility.



To once again draw on some insights from Featherstone, this liberalization in gambling laws was significant in that it opened up a market to a 'commodity' valued by individuals. This kind of knowledge is pivotal to help formulate consumer demand, production and power. This works in two ways. First, through production. Goods are not just produced for their practicality but for the ways in which they allow a relationship to be formed between the market, the state and the population. Second, to promote 'the economy of cultural goods, the market principles of supply, demand, capital accumulation, competition and monopolization which operate within the sphere of lifestyles, cultural goods and commodities' (Featherstone 1991, p.84). What this suggests is that the state was seeking to do much more than simply meet consumer demands and provide for their wants and desires.

What we were witnessing here was essentially 'the ideology of the free market and of leisure, as free choice conspire together to produce a 'permissiveness' in this realm of commodities, economically underpinned by the logic of profitability in the leisure industry, since it is the sale not the use of the commodity which is significant' (Clarke and Critcher 1985, p.121). In other words, individuals were apparently now being swayed by choice and availability, and on the surface were being given the power to control their own gambling decisions. In practice this meant nothing of the sort. As Clarke and Critcher point out, when the production of goods and services are controlled and created by the market in this way, the process operates not only materially but also ideologically. This process underpins the basis of capitalist society and 'what the market cannot produce for us as consumers, we look to the state to produce for us as citizens' (1985, p.201). In this case, the state was not merely conspiring for its own financial gain and powerful economic position by encouraging gambling but also conspiring to turn its citizens into consumers responsible for their own gambling affairs.

In 1994, The De-regulation and Contracting Out Act allowed the state to make small changes without having to implement other new legislation on certain forms of business, including gambling. One of the main changes that occurred was in casinos. It was now easier to apply for memberships, opening times increased, and a new range of games were introduced with increased prizes. Another institution to witness changes would be the bingo hall. Bingo halls would now become more attractive to a wider variety of age groups, they could change their opening hours,

they introduced the use of a debit card system and gaming machines and they also increased the amount of prizes and jackpots. There was also a significant change to gaming machines in general. They could now accept a variety of coins and notes and the most important change was the removal of the method of paying out winnings before people had the chance to re-play them.

As Roberts (2004) notes, however, perhaps the second most significant change in gambling, after the introduction of the National Lottery, occurred in 2001, when the UK government abolished its 9% tax on betting shops, which some gamblers could avoid by placing bets online or by telephone with overseas based bookmakers. The government replaced this tax with a 15% levy on bookmakers' gross profits. The results of this change were momentous and the annual turnover on gambling increased significantly. At the same time demands were made as businesses wanted to advertise and sell their gambling products in a variety of new ways. In the betting environment, Sunday and evening horseracing was now permitted, as well as increased opening hours which were implemented swiftly. These changes coincided with the Budd review from the Home Office in 2000 whose remit it was to re-examine gambling regulation. Under the chairmanship of Alan Budd, this review recommended that the gambling industry should be 'treated as a business like any other, capable of generating a wide range of economic benefits, including jobs' (Runciman 2014 p.24), with the rider that it should not be allowed to degenerate into an all-out free market.

All gambling until 2012 (with the notable exception of the National Lottery) was covered by the 2005 Gambling Act. This replaced all previous legislation including the 1968 Gaming Act. The 2005 legislation set out to keep gambling crime free, keep it open and fair, and keep children and the vulnerable protected. Its overriding aim was to keep gambling laws flexible. This Act was important in terms of changes in the way gambling was readily accepted as the norm. It reflected not only new relaxed governmental attitudes but also increasing demands from the gambling industry for change. The relaxation of the law and increase in advertising and introduction of better amenities in gambling sites were also crucial components that lead to the enhancement in the amount and range of gambling games that could be bet on. Today there are around 9000 betting shops, 144 casinos and 2500 online

gambling websites. Gambling creates a £58bn turnover where around 70% of people gamble per week (Gambling Commission 2015).

In 2012 the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee undertook a review of the 2005 Gambling Act and published its report under the title *A Bet Worth Taking?* As Runciman acerbically points out, if that 'question mark was meant to indicate some doubt, not much was evident in its findings'. The report suggested three things. First, most consumers are intelligent and responsible people perfectly capable of deciding for themselves whether they should gamble or not. Second, there is the need for more research on addiction and this should naturally be funded by the betting industry. Third, if the research suggests that there is work to be done in protecting consumers from themselves that work should be done by the betting industry itself. As Runciman (2014) concludes, the mantra underpinning the state's view of gambling today is thus: 'the consumer is no fool; the evidence is not yet in; the industry knows best'.

In order to appease attacks from the 'do-gooders' intent on spoiling the fun of the vast majority of gamblers because of the actions of the feckless minority the state has done two things in the light of the findings from *A Bet Worth Taking?* First, it promotes 'harmless' forms of gambling. In 2014 the government reduced gambling tax for bingo firms from 15% to 10%, from fears that bingo halls are struggling and some may have to close due to online competition. Second, resist letting the betting industry expand its reach into non-traditional betting environments such as coffee shops and pubs. But responses lag behind technological developments in the gambling industry and changing attitudes to gambling amongst the wider population. As Orford (2003) pointed out over ten years ago, technological developments and changes in social attitudes to gambling in the twenty-first century continue to outstrip the power of much gambling legislation. The commodification of gambling continues unabated.

## **Conclusions**

The discussion developed in this chapter has drawn attention to the societal changes that provide the building blocks for understanding the changing face of gambling today. The context and rationale for the study has been outlined by focusing attention on the key economic, social, political and technological developments that



have led to the emergence of a new configuration of gambling located in a market dominated, neoliberal risk society. The discussion developed above suggests that if ours is a risk society, it is one in which we are trained first and foremost as consumers (Bauman 2007), where individualization coincides with self-awareness about and assumed responsibility for risk.

The observable impact of neoliberalism in the state's administration and control of gambling has led to the emergence of deregulation, which has in turn led to the marketization of gambling. What this tells us is that neoliberalism is not just a question of economics, but of ideology. Thus it is the principle of neoliberal governmentality that consents that the 'politics' of gambling and the gambling 'market' should fall under the same rubric: 'freedom' and 'choice' rather than 'control' and 'regulation'. From the standpoint of neoliberal ideology this is not a contradiction. What this suggests is that not only is gambling today undergirded by individualized responsibility but society itself is driven by the 'dice-life' (Baudrillard 2001) or 'casino culture' (Bauman 2000). What this indicates in turn is that gambling is no longer a distinct and discrete activity engaged in by (rational) leisure gamblers and (irrational) gambling addicts but it is the way that we *all* have to live today.

If this understanding is right, for the vast majority of people, gambling has become an integral part of everyday life; it has become the way we live now, and permeates the whole of everyday life. This observation is reflected in the best new studies on gambling. For example, Reith reveals the extent to which the state has colluded with the market to open up gambling up on the high street. As she point out, this has in no uncertain terms led to 'shifts in the fabric of social life, including increasing secularization, the declining influence of arguments concerning the immorality of gambling, and the spread of consumerism, have created a climate that is conducive to the proliferation of gambling as a mainstream leisure activity' (Reith 2007, p.35). But what Reith overlooks, or is not prepared to concede, is that gambling is no longer best understood as a contingent leisure activity that takes place away from normal everyday life.

As was pointed out above, critical gambling studies has outlined the ways in which gambling has been transformed from principally an underground leisure pastime to a globalized, multi-billion pound consumer industry which has seen the interests of neoliberal capitalism and the state converge around the expansion of gambling

profits (Reith 2013). Reith's overarching thesis is that gambling has become an important aspect of consumerism through neoliberal capitalism which generates huge profits and that this consumer gambling world is an important arena in which contemporary risk society is defined and policed. Yet in the UK there is a distinct lack of critical research which explores the everyday gambling worlds in which these phenomena take place. This is a surprising omission given the contemporary concern about these issues in critical gambling studies. This study seeks to address this gap by considering gambling from the perspectives of gamblers themselves. By exploring gamblers' accounts of these issues, it is hoped the thesis will contribute to a greater understanding of the complexity of the commodification of gambling and which ostensibly thrives in the midst of neoliberalism's embrace, 'the ideology that governs our lives, but which 'has, for most of us, no name' (Monbiot 2016).

However, before we consider the findings emerging from my own study of serious leisure gambling the approach adopted in the pursuit of this challenge must be explained and justified, ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically.

## Chapter 5

### Research Methodology

#### Introduction

This thesis is based on two years of research with serious leisure horserace gamblers in West Yorkshire. As was demonstrated in the literature review chapters, to date most understandings of leisure gambling have been limited not only because they fail to grasp the point that gambling is, and always has been, a mirror of the social, political, economic and cultural changes in the society in which it takes place, but also because they evince a collective tendency to see it at worst as a social pathology (for example, Bergler 1970; Halliday and Fuller 1974; Collins 1996) or at best as a form of 'casual leisure' (Stebbins 1999). The starting point of the present study is once these limits are overcome, then it is possible to understand gambling as the truly fascinating leisure activity it is. As the reader will see in the analysis chapters, the ambition of this thesis is to demonstrate the empirical, conceptual and normative significance of gambling for both gambling studies and leisure studies by developing a research approach that emphasises a dimension of gambling that is not normally discussed in the literature, namely gambling as serious leisure. In order to achieve this ambition the central aim of the first part of this chapter is to provide an in-depth consideration of the philosophical paradigm underpinning the thesis and the epistemological and ontological implications of the methodology for the empirical study and the theoretical and ethical challenges it presented for the researcher. The second part of the chapter details how the participants were recruited to take part in the study, how the fieldwork unfolded in practice, and the process adopted for interpreting the findings, in order to facilitate understanding of how the thesis eventually took shape.

As the reader will see, the study was influenced by what might be described in the broad philosophical sense as the interpretivist paradigm, which Reith (2007, p.7) explains offers a research strategy 'concerned with the interpretation of meanings, culture and contexts of gambling'. As she continues, such 'an approach is based on



the premise that social meanings are created through the intentions and understandings of individuals, which in turn are embedded in culturally and historically specific conditions'. Such a strategy, to quote Zygmunt Bauman, 'gestates an ontology that legitimizes it in terms of the intellectual mode: an ontology within which language only is accredited with the attribute of reality' (1992, p. 22). In other words, the intellectual world conceived within the ontology underpinning this thesis is focused on understanding on how serious leisure horserace gamblers organize their everyday worlds and actions and construct shared common sense knowledgeability in social space (Schütz and Luckmann 1974) with the explicit aim of making irreversible changes in the cognitive maps, stocks of knowledge and distribution of 'topical relevances' (Bauman 1992) 'inside' extant gambling studies. My foremost aim in this regard is to ensure that, no matter how difficult knowledge production within this ontology becomes, I will endeavour to ensure plurality in the research process in order to rail against making any foregone conclusions – which as was demonstrated in the literature review is too often the trend in gambling studies. In real-world terms this means that the research underpinning this thesis was not only committed to understanding serious leisure horserace gambling and its attendant life-worlds from the points of view of its members with the intention of extending knowledge within critical gambling studies, but also that it was characterized by reflexivity within the research context of adopting such an approach.

The methodology was reflexive in the way that it located the subjective position of my own role in the research process and, crucially, as will be demonstrated in the analysis chapters, documented this in such a way that acknowledged the extent to which and how this process of involvement impacted on the findings of the study. In developing such an approach I made an explicit attempt to recognize my own subjectivity as a resource, and as such an important aspect of the research process, in so doing challenging positivist notions of objectivity and value-neutrality.

In order to demonstrate how this was achieved the next section begins by offering a rationale for the chosen research methodology, which includes a brief but critical discussion of some typical research methods used by gambling researchers and the weaknesses of utilizing such approaches for the present study. The subsequent

discussion is an in-depth philosophical justification for adopting a methodology underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm.

### **Rationale: the limits of extant gambling studies**

As the following discussion demonstrates this study followed Max Weber (1949) in the sense that it first of all recognized the need to distinguish its methods of research. It might seem an obvious point to make, but in this case, the methods of the social sciences were utilized which, in opposition to the natural sciences, were more useful because of their integral focus on human beings. Weber asserted that the individual is the only discernible reality and that any research must start with the rational actions of individuals. As Weber also made clear, one of the key differences between the natural sciences and human sciences is that the latter should be undertaken in order to interpret the world from the individual subject's point of view. The former is concerned with physicality and the natural world while the latter is concerned with the study of human behaviour and meaning. In the natural world, researchers are more concerned with identifying laws and testing experiments. As Weber demonstrated in all his sociology if natural science is successful in highlighting the facts and illustrating how the world 'appears' to be, it offers little in terms of explaining the meanings behind how people behave or act and for what ends. Weber has been criticized by some for failing to provide an adequate basis for a 'meaningful sociology' (Schütz 1967), but what is clear is that his work was a clear attempt to put the social sciences on a sound methodological footing (Jary and Jary 1995), and in this regard paved the way for the emergence of the interpretivist paradigm.

On the face of it, it is difficult to substantiate any claim to one particular methodology or distinct set of methods for any topic. Yet despite the surge of interest in gambling in the last decade, and as was demonstrated in the literature review chapters, there appears little interest amongst the majority of researchers in developing studies of the kind suggested by Weber. As was shown in the literature review even qualitative studies that have been conducted in gambling studies too often place considerable emphasis on pathology or addiction. To this extent our understanding of this enduring social practice has been somewhat dominated by psychological and

medical perspectives, which have tended to on the one hand divorce gambling from its social context and on the other marginalize what gamblers' themselves have to say about what motivates them to gamble (Reith *et al* 2010). This has consequently led researchers to neglect both the social context of gambling and the *actual* subjectivities involved in the gambling experience. The upshot of this is that many, if not all, studies have been less than sympathetic to understanding the meaning and purposes of gambling in people's leisure lives (Spracklen 2009).

In the event, researchers have repeatedly developed survey methods for understanding gambling. As we saw in Chapter 3, much survey research typically relies on individuals filling in questionnaires or divulging to an interviewer in a structured way their motivations for gambling. Indeed, survey researchers have typically focused their attention on surveys designed to obtain evidence of addictive behaviour, asking vague questions, and offering overly crude assessments of how and why people gamble (Downes *et al* 1976; Dixey and Talbot 1982; Sproston and Orford 2000; Valentine *et al* 2008). It is clear that survey research ignores or at the very least marginalizes gambling experience, being exclusively concerned with the actions and products of gambling, or, that is, the addictive nature of gambling activity. What survey approaches also too often ignore is that gambling experience will inevitably also be shaped by factors such as age, social class, gender and ethnicity.

As we also saw in Chapter 3, while most sociological studies of gambling have bucked this trend by trying to take into account these factors, they have been overly concerned with conjuring classifications, structures and organizations and fitting gamblers into ideal types. Yet individuals do not fall neatly into classifications and typologies expounded by theorists and schools of thought. As Green and Jones suggest typologies 'over-simplify human behaviour' (2005, p.164). They also isolate rather than taking into consideration the fluidity of behaviour and actions across time, which means that rather than reflecting on any meanings that actions, behaviours or individuals create, they focus specifically on certain activities themselves. As we saw, for example, Kate Fox's (1999) ethnographic study at the racecourse relied on ideal types at the expense of compelling empirical evidence. Other studies have also fallen into this trap rendering their findings largely atheoretical and empty of the views of gamblers themselves and what motivates them to gamble (Schüll 2012;



Reith and Dobbie 2013; Griffiths and Parke 2002). As Reith and Dobbie argue, the upshot of this situation is that even ostensibly 'qualitative surveys designed to measure the prevalence of problem gambling...produce individuals as units of information that are isolated from their social relations and are suspended in a particular moment in time' (2013, p.28).

We have also seen that most quantitative based studies of gambling tend to assume that social phenomena are constant over time, as well as external to the research process; this observation renders them inappropriate for examining the fluidity of gambling. Gambling is not a one size fits all concept; as the discussion in the literature review showed, the purposes and the meanings of gambling and its place in society varies across time. Instead, the aim of critical gambling studies should be 'to make it possible to understand the intentions, lives and experiences of gamblers as agents, and subsequently...enable an exploration of the ways in which wider political, cultural and economic structures are lived' (Casey 2006, p.7). What is also key to my study is the motivation of attempting to get to grips with a fast moving and expressly fluid social context of serious leisure gambling and its attendant life-worlds, rather than trying to quantify how much or how many times the participants in the study gambled.

Situating my study within an 'addiction' survey framework or conjuring classifications, structures and organizations and fitting gamblers into ideal types was out of the question, then. My ambition was to try to reach that something about gambling that precludes 'scientific argumentation beyond a certain point' (Bech 1997, p.31). The most significant distinguishing feature of my approach in this regard is its respect for gamblers' own subject positions, which not only enabled me to discover their gambling lives in actuality but crucially also allowed gamblers to speak for themselves. It is in this very practical sense that the philosophy underpinning this research can be seen as interpretivist. To this extent, the empirical study I completed was conducted within an ethical framework which attempted to understand gamblers' own points of view developed within the context of their own leisure lives. In summary, my study sought to develop a way of doing research which attempted to empower participants by enabling their voices to be heard, working reflexively to challenge the dichotomy of 'the researcher' set against 'the researched'.

Although they are few and far between the most compelling studies of gambling have been those rich, descriptive qualitative studies that jump off the page and describe their topic in such a way as to make the reader feel straightaway familiar with it (for example, Goffman 1967 and Newman 1972). Understanding the social context in which gambling takes place goes a long way to understanding the motives, feelings and attitudes of the people engaged in it. As was demonstrated in the literature review chapters gambling is conventionally seen as a deviant, or at least marginal leisure activity, and as Van Maanen (1988) has suggested, it is ethnography that has traditionally been the most successful methodology in illuminating idiosyncrasy in an increasingly uniform world.

Taking a clearly qualitative approach, this thesis is grounded in the everyday gambling worlds of my participants. From the outset, I was certain that the best way to research serious leisure horserace gambling would be to gain access to the milieu first-hand to ensure that the study was an accurate reflection of this overlooked leisure activity. Gambling has featured in a small number of ethnographic studies over the years, but mainly with regard to either professional gambling or casual leisure. So clearly, understanding serious leisure gambling would be most beneficial to leisure studies. I also wished to add to the tradition of gambling ethnographies (Cassidy 2002; Fox 1999; Neal 1998; Newman 1972; Herman 1967; Dixey and Talbot 1982; and Maclure *et al* 2006) and ethnographic studies more generally that are rich in interpretation (Geertz 1973; Whyte 1943; Kuper 1988; and especially Bech 1997). To accomplish this, gaining access to 'where the action' (Goffman 1974) takes place was crucial. In order to achieve this, I needed to take into account a consideration of the ontological and epistemological factors that ultimately shaped the research.

### **Some ontological and epistemological considerations**

By making the ontological assumption that social reality is independent of the researcher, the majority of gambling studies fail to understand gambling worlds as they are, and, crucially, in their 'truest' form. For these reasons, such an approach was of limited value to this study. It is generally understood by ethnographers that it is important to understand the ontological situation of people in order to know how they act and live. My central aim with regard to this study was, as Weber explains, to

seek clarification with regards to understanding knowledge that is 'existential knowledge i.e. knowledge of what is and normative knowledge i.e. knowledge of what should be' (1949, p.51), or to put it more simplistically, knowledge that is already there as a result of philosophy and that is uncovered by empirical investigation. In other words any serious study of gambling must seek to try and understand the relevance of individuals and the importance of societal and cultural forms, as well as uncovering their relationships to one another and to gambling as a social institution. Crucially, any such study must also seek to understand how these relations come to be in the first instance.

Ontology is commonly referred to as understanding the essence of being; that is, coming to understand how 'things' in the world are; as they are found in and of themselves. This type of definition finds its basis in the philosophy of Rudolf Carnap, whose abiding concern was 'the construction of an adequate criterion of cognitively meaningful discourse...of what is called the 'verifiability theory of meaning' (Nagel, 1989, p.58). In this view, we need to recognize that ontological questions are also epistemological ones. In terms of this research, studying everyday gambling life-worlds meant locating what makes them important as objects of study in the first instance. In order to consider how this would be achieved in practice, the research utilized a method of investigation known as 'common-sense understanding' (Schütz 1967). In this regard, the first point of reference Schütz identified was the importance of the various types of actions of individuals. Secondly, he illuminated the everyday world as an object of study in its own right. Thirdly, he suggested the importance of making the social world under investigation available, and finally, he stressed the importance of the method of research for understanding and observing how individuals live their everyday lives, in order to provide answers as to what is important to individuals and what influences their actions.

In utilizing this common-sense method of inquiry, my aim was to bring the everyday gambling worlds of serious leisure horserace gamblers to life from the viewpoint of those being studied. In response to the limits of previous gambling studies, I aimed to try and bring to light new aspects of enquiry that have been neglected or not done before. In this way my study aimed its inquiry at *social* gambling worlds from 'within' to not only uncover how gamblers view their own worlds but also the overall context



in which these worlds take place. Following the pragmatic philosophy of Dewey, who offered a theory of knowledge which aims to capture or mirror the 'inner essence' of the world as it is and of itself, my approach utilized 'a metaphor of vision', which assumes that the pursuit of 'knowledge is about portraying or mirroring the world as it really is' (Ritzer and Smart 2003, p. 291). It was by using this 'metaphor of vision' that the study aimed to uncover the key characteristics and meanings of the gambling worlds under scrutiny in terms of serious leisure.

Drawing on this reflexive approach, the empirical work undertaken was used to foreground the importance of individuals and social groups, meanings and actions, and how these relate to the larger socio-cultural world. In terms of understanding gambling, the research, in identifying the importance of ontology, sought the support of what Schütz and Jacobs (1979) call 'reality reconstructionists' or 'insiders' who are an essential part of the world under scrutiny, where the truth becomes verified by the individuals who make up its functioning. In drawing on this insider knowledge the study sought to provide a social commentary on everyday gambling worlds by ensuring it included what is important and meaningful to those who comprise those worlds. In this way I tried to make sure that I 'understood' the gambling worlds under scrutiny rather than enforcing on them my own premeditated hypotheses or assumptions. In this regard the hope was to observe gambling worlds as serious leisure horserace gamblers themselves see them.

In order to achieve this objective, I inhabited gambling worlds like the subjects of my investigation. I became a gambler. This meant that I had to not only observe and learn how to gamble seriously but become a master of the art myself. It has to be pointed out, however, that I was a gambler from the start. I might have been a gambler in the 'casual' sense of the word. However, I had some 'insider-knowledge' which made gaining access to gambling venues and participating in gambling activities easier. I was, to paraphrase Rosenbaum, 'at ease around the culture because my familiarity with it allowed me to interact relatively effortlessly with the group' (Rosenbaum 2000, p. 646). The central aim in this regard was to try to ensure that the participants in my study were responsive to me because I displayed and portrayed the self-awareness of the serious gambler. In this way, I aimed to use myself as a resource which in the event made me more receptive to gamblers in the research process. It is important to note that in this regard my aim was not merely to

be satisfied with describing what was happening in the field, but to also experience it and feel it as my participants did. As Cuff and Payne put it, my ambition was to make the study both intensive and typically accomplished through the acquisition of a detailed and rich acquaintance with the serious leisure gambling worlds under scrutiny, and in the circumstances and ways of those being studied (1979, p. 107).

### **Research design: towards a phenomenological understanding of gambling**

So far it has been argued that the starting point of my study is that gambling is not a separate activity that is distinguishable from everyday life, because it 'complements the demands of everyday life' (Casey 2006, p. 9). Notwithstanding this key observation, we might add, however, that it is important to acknowledge that key features of gambling also include the pursuit of pleasure and the ups and downs that are part and parcel of gambling which ensures that it continues to flourish. What this tells us is that the subjective experiences and the meanings it has for individual gamblers must be considered in depth. Reith and Dobbie suggest such an observation entails the researcher acting as a facilitator 'to tease out' the factors that influence respondents' gambling and the place it has in their lives (2013, p. 29). What this also suggests is that any compelling study of gambling must consider the reasons as to why, where, when and how people gamble. In practice this meant that it was imperative that I had to experience gambling worlds' first hand assessing what it means to be a serious leisure horserace gambler.

Implicit to such an understanding is the phenomenological method of enquiry which helped me gain valuable insights into the feelings, actions and motivations of gamblers. The insights of the phenomenological approach taught me that it I had to try to relate gambling to the larger social context because how 'things' are is important of how 'things' come to be. In the light of this crucial observation this study offers a particular perspective of gambling which, as Bech puts it, 'is characterised as being something which is both everywhere and no place at all, something everyone wants and doesn't want, something everyone knows about and knows nothing of' (1997, p. 39). In other words, it recognizes that gambling is so familiar to us it could almost vanish.

My approach also recognizes that gambling is inherently performative (Goffman 1959; Butler 1990). The study therefore, was reflexive in its efforts to engage and



examine people's experiences of gambling, to learn about the key components of gambling; to elucidate its qualities; to explore its trials and tribulations, and ultimately discover what draws people to gamble where they can find meaning and fulfilment. In order to realize this aim, and as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, following Davidson and Stebbins, I also 'tried to extract from the readings how those in question met the distinguishing qualities of serious leisure' (2011, p.xii), and for whom gambling has become an everyday essential component of their life. To this extent, the intrinsic nature of the study focused its attention on the familiar and the common aspects of gambling and how this impinged upon everyday life. This was important, since as Stebbins points out, it is the amount of commitment and intensity brought to the activity that generates 'different levels of seriousness' (1997, p.124).

In undertaking this approach, I gained access to the life-worlds of gamblers through experiencing. I made sure that I described as much as possible that was going on in these life-worlds even when it didn't seem relevant. What was clear is that gambling is made significant through a variety of actions, contexts and behaviours that can be altered through the course of its development and functioning. Gambling is also instrumental in bringing people together as a group through their commonalities. As Reith and Dobbie suggest 'even a brief explanation of their social lives reveals that gamblers are not lone individuals, but are tied up in webs of social interdependencies' (2013, p.40). Placing emphasis on actions and meanings allowed for a vivid insight into the exploration of the everyday gambling world and where the crux of its significance was founded upon sociability.

The research also worked with Husserl's admonition that it needed to give sufficient attention to the structure of gambling consciousness (Schütz and Luckmann 1974). It worked with the assumption that actual experiences of gambling should take precedence over abstract generalizations, since this is the reality against which all theories ultimately are tested. I made sure that I followed this line of enquiry in bringing together both the self-evident and the symbolic that together constitute serious leisure gambling in reality. As Borsay argues 'most forms of behaviour are to some degree symbolic, but it is the intensity of the symbolism that is crucial in the context of leisure' (2006, p. 223). As Borsay also points out, 'leisure matters and that it cannot be separated from the forces that drive the 'real' world. Nonetheless it remains central to the paradox that gives leisure its meaning and function that while



being of the real world it should be outside it' (*ibid*, p.217). For Borsay, leisure is symbolic because of the border it shares between the everyday world and its separation from that everyday world. As he puts it, the 'juxtaposition of the two worlds, captures the fundamental ambivalence of leisure, that it is both serious and superficial, real and unreal' (*ibid*, p.224). This suggests not only does the boundary between the everyday world and liminal gambling worlds often blur into one, but that gambling is much more than a temporary experience founded on a fleeting moment of chance or whim. As this research attempted to uncover, gambling is for some people a serious leisure pursuit undertaken with careful thought, rational thinking, applied knowledge and desire that blurs the boundary between the 'play world' and the 'real world'. As Giddens argues, 'no form of play is completely isolated from the 'real' world; all play involves an equilibrium between input from the 'real' external context of the activity, and the output expended by the player' (2010, p.189).

### **Moving from philosophising to the field**

As has hopefully been demonstrated so far this study shares with the work of Bech (1997) a phenomenological orientation with a desire to look at the social aspects of everyday life – in this case serious leisure horserace gambling and its institutions, individuals, actions and meanings. To borrow Bech's term the study is concerned with the 'one that exists' (1997, p.4). My ambition throughout the research was to always to remain 'true to the phenomenon'. In this regard and following Jacob Avery I was also adamant from the start that I would not marginalize the extent to which the processes involved in gambling and its relationship with wider social, cultural, economic and political issues 'change and evolve across situations and over time' (2009, p. 460). To this extent I worked with Avery's critique of the consensus in gambling studies which 'seldom even mentions the feelings, sounds, looks and emotions the being engrossed in gambling entails' (*ibid*).

In this regard the aim of the research was to capture gambling worlds and interpret them as I discovered them in their actuality. Nonetheless, as Bech cautions, and as I discovered, I always had to be conscious of my research position. My interpretation aimed not only to be accurate to a gambling world as 'one that exists' but it also wanted to in another sense present what Bech (1997) terms a 'factual story'. In other words, I wanted the participants to speak for themselves, but recognized too that as I

was 'going academic' (Hobbs 1988) it would inevitably entail that the findings of the research would 'take on different meanings and be perceived differently by different subjects, depending on their perspectives, on how they situate themselves or are situated in relation to the entity or phenomenon in question' (Natanson 1973, p.196).

From the very beginning, there was very little doubt, in my mind, that the only way to research serious leisure horserace gambling would be to gain access to serious leisure gamblers and the environment in which they operate first-hand. My research employed a range of techniques grounded in an ethnographic investigation which included direct observation, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. From this perspective, gaining access to serious leisure horserace gambling worlds was critical to the study.

In this sense, and to paraphrase Bech (1997, p. 60), the phenomenological approach I used in this study strove to enter into the lived experience of various gambling worlds to unfold them. In the process it snuggled up to what was quotidian and recognizable, even trivial, for the inhabitants of these life-worlds; however, it did not stay within the already existing boundaries of their conscious or acknowledged experience. It worked with the assumption that specifying the particular characteristics of gambling phenomena implies considering them from the outside as well, in order to determine their difference from other phenomena and the extent to which they are historical and social creations. Accordingly my approach shifted advantageously between insider and outsider perspectives, going into and out of the gambling life-worlds under scrutiny; as well as tacking between levels of concrete experience and the theories guiding the study. To quote Pieper, the 'philosophical act' representing this study began 'with the investigation of the visible, the concrete world of experience lying before my eyes, its philosophy began 'from below', in questioning the experience of gambling encountered, a questioning which opened up newer, more 'astounding' depths to what I was researching' (1948, p.120).

In the event the chosen methodology was entirely suitable to develop a detailed understanding of serious leisure horserace gambling, whilst my involvement as an active agent in the field allowed me to personally experience not only the skills and knowledge but also the emotional intelligence and emotional labour required to be a successful serious leisure gambler (Rojek 2009), and also of course to understand

the feelings and thoughts of the participants who submitted their valuable time for interviews. The ethnography afforded the opportunity to be part of the action (Goffman 1974) in a way that no other method could. Actually experiencing serious leisure horserace gambling in order to understand the complexity of the shared experience of this world – winning and losing, ‘doing the graft’, the thoughts and the gestures, the same pressures of getting the ‘right price’ or ‘getting a bet on’, the different relationships, the negotiations, the privileges and burdens of standing on your own two feet ‘when the chips are down’, and so on. My aim was to try to reveal important aspects of this leisure world that most people seldom ever even think about. By being subject to and involved in the same experiences as my participants, I was able to understand the importance, in their mind, of what would appear inconsequential to someone not in the know, and thus being able to report it accurately.

### **Distinguishing between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*: does it matter?**

The next part of this chapter illustrates in practical terms the insider-outsider perspective underpinning my methodology as well as, in Rapuano’s terms, the meaning-making processes ‘to understand the interconnection between the social and cultural realms’ (2009, p. 621) of the philosophical basis of my research approach and the gambling worlds it sought to make sense of. As the ambition of the research was to examine and try to understand gambling in its social context, by exploring its everyday worlds, it developed a qualitative methodology, which included ethnographic participant observations and semi-structured interviews with my participants. Ultimately, the study created a familiarization with the serious leisure horserace gambling world. As Bech would say, this enabled me to reveal ‘a unique social world’ which ‘it unites with itself distance and closeness, anonymity and involvement: you can drown in the crowd and remain yourself, you can be together with others yet free of them and free to them’ (1997, p. 98).

As this approach suggests the study aimed to open up accounts of serious leisure horserace gamblers experiences by giving gamblers themselves a voice from their viewpoint and within the context of their own gambling experiences. In other words, the study was ethnographic in orientation. As Maclure *et al* suggest ‘from a sociological perspective, ethnography is a way of examining how members of



particular groups, constitute aspects of their everyday lives, and how they consciously develop meaning from their interactions with others' (2006, p. 167). It was in this sense that I explored gamblers lives under conditions of their own choosing, gathering insights into their individual and shared gambling practices and experiences as they happened. The process was carried out over a sustained period of time with direct and prolonged observation as well as creating relationships that enabled and provided useful contacts for the interview process. As the reader will see, the interviewees would become pivotal tools of insight in helping me learn about the 'meaning-making processes' of serious leisure horserace gambling.

Following Merleau Ponty, my starting point was to immerse myself in the serious leisure horserace gambling world to better understand individuals as gamblers, where more knowledge could be gained from the action as it happens and in their moment of occurrence. In this regard I tried to distinguish between the two ways individuals come to experience everyday life: *Erfahrung*, or 'what happens to me when interacting with the world' and *Erlebnis*, which is 'what I live through in the course of that encounter' (Bauman 2014, p.8). To put it simplistically, where *Erfahrung* is concerned with objectivity and knowable facts that are independent of the individual, *Erlebnis* is concerned with subjectivity, and is made real through the individual. This suggests it is only through *Erlebnis* that we can gain a vivid insight into the mind-set of the serious leisure gambler. As Maclure *et al* suggest 'while knowledge of the complexity of gambling practices has been expanding, there is little research that privileges the voices of those who are immersed in gambling cultures' (2006, p. 166). It is with this notion in mind that the study operated *Erlebnis*.

However, it also recognized that not all phenomena can be simplified into such a dichotomy, and as such 'it is essential to pay to the limits of these, point to the dimensions of the object which transcend them, and, occasionally, switch to other, 'non-scientific' forms of intercourse and writing' (Bech 1997, p. 5).

By drawing on some insights from John Berger we can understand why. This is because, as he argues, we have to recognize as researchers that no reality is ever entirely present. As he puts it, 'reality is not a given: it has to be continually sought out, held - I am tempted to say salvaged' (2001, p. 461). In this view, reality exists in the culture through which it emerges and is founded upon its own justification in order to sustain its hold and we have to use our sociological imagination in order to

reveal it. My own way of achieving this was to give priority to the gambling worlds I encountered in the field, as they were experienced by gamblers. Following Goffman (1967) I found that gambling worlds were often (if not always) 'strongly oriented to action, as some gamblers are, can perceive the potentialities for chance. Action is at once vicarious and real' (2005, p. 269). As the reader will see in the next chapter, and building on Goffman, action in present day gambling contexts does not merely take place proximally (at the event), it also takes place remotely (away from an event) and crucially in the case of serious leisure horserace gambling to a greater extent virtually (on-line).

### **The field of inquiry**

My research was divided into two aspects over the course of the two years. I initially began by spending the first part of the research carrying out direct and participant observation at racecourses and betting shops in Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

Wakefield was chosen because it is a standard sized city that hosts a range of gambling outlets. It was also chosen because of its proximity to my home. In the event most of the research ended up focusing on serious leisure gamblers with a keen interest in horseracing. As a result most of the ethnography took place at three major racecourses in Yorkshire: Wetherby, York and Pontefract. The racecourses were chosen not only for local convenience but also because they differ in crucial ways. Wetherby is a national hunt racecourse; and one of only a few located in northern England. The two other courses chosen are flat racing tracks which are distinguished by the two places in which they are located. York is an affluent, historical city and Pontefract is a small, working class, market town. I attended regular meetings across the national hunt and flat calendars. The core flat racing season takes place over the summer months and the core of national hunt racing takes place over the winter months. Thus immersing myself into gambling spaces at these racecourses allowed me to speak to gamblers freely and most were willing to reciprocate their thoughts and opinions without feeling pressured or obliged to do so.

I visited numerous gambling sites. Following other gambling researchers, I spent two or three occasions a week gambling between three and four hours at a time (Fox 1999; Neal 1998; Newman 1972; Dixey and Talbot 1982; and Maclure *et al* 2006).

This was complemented by my research into newspaper reports on the latest



developments in the betting industry and the activities of the betting firms online and in shops. However, the fieldwork was not subjected to clear cut portions of time because as the research illustrates it was not only reflexive in its process but mine was also an 'on-going' study. The fieldwork was designed purposely to locate gambling in its social context and was essential to establishing networks and relationships to try and understand the meanings people find in serious leisure gambling. During the initial observations in the field, I was also able to identify specific points of interest that informed the structure of the research and thesis. This enabled me to draw my own conclusions regarding serious leisure gambling I witnessed first-hand, rather than obtaining them solely from the interviews.

The research began by participating in the life world of gamblers through a variety of different gambling techniques. I observed, took notes and experienced the gambling worlds first hand. I made sure that I was able to effectively listen and comment on the daily habits of gamblers, which in Bech's terms meant 'sticking to the phenomena' in question (1997, p. 5). The fieldwork was essential to establishing networks and relationships. Throughout the fieldwork, a record of field notes was stored that were useful to locate time and place and can vividly describe certain traits of the 'field' as they happened. The field notes were detailed and described the 'actuality' of the field which included what had transpired not only in terms of context and themes but they also described behaviours and actions, characteristics, as well as the terminology of serious leisure gamblers. Field notes were made not only on observations but also my own involvement in gambling activities. The field notes were later elaborated on to offer more detail and clarity but more importantly, they were not just a tool for describing what happened but they also offered an interpretive technique of bringing the fieldwork to the analysis process. In this sense, the approach was reflexive in that it not only illuminated particular contexts and situations but it also located reasons and meaning of using such a research strategy. Thus the field notes not only offer 'actuality' of the field but they also teach me to deem what are the most important aspects of the research. The only practical downside to the participant observation was my inability to chronicle events or conversations as they happened. To remedy this I would go home to write up as much as I could remember from the events I'd experienced on that particular day.



Weber (1949) offers researchers a method in this regard. He dubbed it *verstehen*, which can be defined in its most basic sense as meaningful understanding. In terms of the present study, this meant putting myself in the position of the individuals who were the subjects of my investigation. This was done via two methods of *verstehen*. The first was *aktuelles verstehen*, which entailed gaining knowledge through participant observation with gamblers in their own environments. Secondly, the study involved *erklärendes verstehen*, which entailed me, in the light of what I had observed, trying to account for the reasons behind certain types of actions. In practice this involved me building my knowledge of serious leisure horserace gambling first hand by 'doing the graft', as one of my participants Kevin called it, before placing bets like any other gambler. This enabled me to begin to understand the meanings serious leisure gamblers find in gambling and subsequently facilitated an interpretation of the overall social context. This in turn enabled me to interact with serious leisure gamblers through multiple conversations about gambling and to learn how some gamblers develop serious leisure careers. As Rapuano suggests, I found this important since my interactions with gamblers facilitated an understanding of the shared meanings associated with serious leisure gambling and how gamblers use 'these meanings to construct and make sense of their practice' (2009, p. 622). Through these interactions I also built a rapport with the participants in my study by accompanying them to gambling venues, and demonstrating that I too had 'done the graft' when I talked with them about gambling issues or when I was placing a bet. In terms of this research, this also meant trying to understanding how gambling is experienced as serious leisure (rather than work) and how it is employed by gamblers where they establish meaning through their actions.

Weber is once again helpful in this regard. He identified four types of action (Weber, 1949): action that has a purpose; action that has rationality (and which ultimately governs its meaning); action that is determined by attitudes and personalities; and action that is determined by routine that has become an everyday activity. It can be argued that gambling consists of all four of these types of action as identified by Weber which meant that the social world is in constant flux; it changes, re-forms and alters at different times and in different contexts. It was my job as a researcher to try and uncover the underlying motives and ideals that are intrinsic to particular groups. I wanted to not only understand how actions are made but also how these can be

understood further by the meanings that individuals give to their gambling actions too. This meant watching, participating and creating an experience drawing attention to the participant's feelings, behaviour and expresses their opinions from their point of view. This was also a useful resource in helping to reduce the barrier of researcher against the researched. It aimed to discover the ways that social research brings together empirical knowledge and theoretical underpinnings to produce a particular study of the world. As Garfinkel puts it 'look around you and everywhere you will find ordinary persons going about their everyday business performing familiar, remarkable activities. This mundane fact is the very crux of the social world' (1967, p.137).

My continued presence at these gambling sites provided me with opportunities to observe serious leisure horserace gambling, including the people my participants came into contact with and their social interactions, as well as their routines, the gambling setting itself, the structure of the 'working' day and the various undertakings involved. This allowed me to record a great deal of detail regarding actions, verbal and non-verbal behaviour, interaction, and the social context in which all this occurred, before I slowly began identifying the most important, often recurring, insights, and then pursuing them in detail, while simultaneously applying existing theoretical ideas from extant studies of serious leisure.

### **Recruitment strategy**

I not only gained first-hand accounts of its subjects by integrating myself within the different social spaces in which gambling takes place, but I also found that certain behaviours and relationships with others can fluctuate and alter in different circumstances and gambling situations. Therefore, I found it necessary to supplement the research with semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed me to build a trust between myself and the participants in the study. By carrying out three waves of interviews it helped provide in-depth longitudinal evidence about individuals' gambling experiences. I felt it was necessary to carry out three-waves of interviews in order to gain a better understanding of serious leisure participants than one initial interview would allow. The gaps between the interviews varied from participant to participant. As Stebbins has demonstrated, there are some differences that need to be distinguished between serious leisure participants differentiated by

the varying amounts of time and commitment each devotes to engaging in the activity and preparing for it' (1997, p.124). Thus it can be said that they come from across the spectrum 'ranging from dabblers through enthusiasts, experts and fanatics' (Mackellar 2009, p.88).

The field work was designed purposively to achieve a range and diversity of serious leisure horserace gamblers rather than attempting to try to represent the wider gambling population. All of the participants in the interview process lived in West Yorkshire. Each of the participants was contacted through personal contacts and snowballing, the use of advertisements to further recruit participants was not needed in this study. To protect the integrity of the research (and myself), no individuals who were known to me in a personal capacity took part in the research. I met each participant at least twice and often several more times, depending on their commitment to the study. I built a rapport with each of the participants by meeting them at or accompanying them to gambling venues.

The research participants in this study were all self-identified serious leisure gamblers. The term 'self-identified' serious leisure gambler is significant since it tells us something important about the level of the individual's commitment to gambling. Participants in the study were diverse in age ranging from 26-58. The mean age of the participants was 37. All of the participants were employed and most of the participants were either home owners or living in rented properties. They were primarily white males with some higher educational background. This can be considered as one limitation to bear in mind when unpacking the key findings from the research in the next chapter. A wider variety of gamblers from different ethnicities and a wider exploration of gender may have uncovered different results. However, those that were recruited occupy a particular position on the gambling spectrum, gambling playing a significant part in their everyday lives. For the majority of the gamblers who took part in the study, gambling began at an early age where they watched and learnt how to gamble through friends and family and continued to gamble because not only do they enjoy it but also because it is where they find pleasure, enjoyment and above all else social recognition.

Each of the participants in their own different ways had a deep attachment to gambling but it differed in terms of their commitment and dedication. All of the



participants were encouraged to talk freely about their relationship to and experiences of gambling. As we will see in the next chapter how serious leisure gamblers place their bets and where this takes place tells us something very important about understanding gambling as a serious leisure pursuit.

The study however had to bear in mind the ethical considerations that can affect any type of empirical research. The interviews were designed to follow a semi-structured format, with a view to not only ensuring consistency across all the participants (Bryman 2001), but also allowing for the interviews to be guided by what the participants themselves considered to be most relevant and important. Semi-structured interviews also show less of the formality of the structured interview technique. The aim of these was to give priority to the individual and their social and cultural characteristics. It allowed me to explore in greater detail a larger amount of data pertaining to the gamblers in question. It highlighted key information such as social, cultural, political and economic definitions.

### **The interviews and direct observations**

The interviews included some direct observation of gambling activities and the everyday routines associated with serious leisure gambling. I often conducted some portion of the interview at gambling venues, met the participants' gambling associates, friends and family. I listened to the stories of gamblers first to understand their self-perceptions as 'gamblers', uncovered their gambling habits, what gambling meant to them, their own views on gambling, experiences of gambling, the social aspects of gambling and general perceptions of gambling. Participants were also encouraged to ask the researcher questions, and provide feedback about their experiences of taking part in the research. The ethnography helped facilitate the interviews because rather than being asked to talk about their gambling activities with a stranger, I was able to talk to them as a fellow gambler. I also approached the interviews in an informal way. Trust is an important part of qualitative research (Brewer 2000) and, because of my knowledge of gambling, I found out that they were much more receptive to my requests to discuss at length their gambling experiences.

Each participant was asked two sets of questions. First I used a set of structured questions to ask each of the participants about their age, marital status, educational

background, occupation and financial status. This firstly helped me give some shape to the interview as well as providing some general ideas of discussion. It also allowed some contextual information to be gathered on each participant as well as uncovering individual motivations. Secondly, I used a more open-ended list of questions to ask the participants about how and where they first encountered gambling, and their 'career advancement', that is, how their interest developed over time learning to gamble in the correct way; learning to recognize the effects of winning and connecting them with playing; and learning to enjoy the sensations associated with winning. In order to achieve this I first had to learn about each individuals history with gambling and secondly, look for changes in each individuals perceptions of it and then the use of it, and thirdly, why do these changes take place.

The focus of the questions was on the gamblers themselves and what drew them to gambling, what meanings they find in gambling and what significance it has in their life. I also utilized 'an iterative approach whereby each interview picked up where the last one left off' (Reith and Dobbie 2013, p. 29). This approach was successful because it made sure that the interviews were detailed and many topics were covered, and it also ensured that they allowed for continuity, like Mackellar I found that 'while efforts were made to ask a similar set of questions from all respondents, at times it was necessary to extend the line of questioning where new insights provided by one informant were verified in interviews with others' (2009, p. 92), which would also enable a trusting rapport to be developed between the researcher and participant and like Mackellar suggests, 'the interview also provided information on how to identify and seek out serious participants at the event' (2009, p.91).

In each of the initial interviews, which took approximately 1-2 hours to complete, depending upon how much we talked, I consciously created the most time for participants to speak freely in response to my questions. If answers were unclear or vague I would probe for more detail, but for the most part, each of the participants were very willing to talk about their gambling careers. Because of my knowledge about gambling they often asked me what I thought of particular things they said or did. While I worked to maintain a professional distance between the participants and myself, in most cases the interviews took the forms of an engaged encounter to make sense out of gambling lives that had no representative model. The relationship that was developed with each participant was equally as important as

the one before because like Rapauno 'I spent many hours in casual conversation beyond the sessions with these participants' (2009, p. 623).

This approach shared similarities with research undertaken by Reith and Dobbie (2013) who utilized a longitudinal participant observational study of gamblers. In both studies the crux of the matter is to uncover how much gambling plays a meaningful part in day-to-day lives and how gambling habits have moved on over time. As Reith and Dobbie suggest, it is an approach linked to temporality 'that is based on context and meaning, grounded in, for example, the experience of turning points and key moments rather than the measurement of states' (p. 28). In utilizing an approach similar to this, it allowed me to gain full access to the serious leisure horserace gambling world, where I was able to form a relationship with other gamblers and was successful in practice because it was focused primarily on the participants themselves and it allowed them to speak on behalf of themselves about their gambling behaviour in which the research ultimately wanted to 'assess the factors that had influenced respondents' gambling and the place it had in their lives' (p. 29). I was soon able to have more in-depth discussion with gamblers because what started off as semi-structured interviews turned into more unstructured informal conversations which placed great emphasis on the importance of gambling in their everyday lives to uncover their relationship to serious leisure gambling because as MacKellar suggests 'these visual clues to finding serious participants were clarified by their intensity and zeal for the activities' (2009, p. 92).

### **Becoming a participant observer of serious leisure horserace gambling**

These findings from the interviews were supplemented with the participant observation which was conducted with the explicit objective to uncover the cognitive frames by which gamblers, in intersubjective ways, organize their everyday worlds and actions and construct shared common sense knowledgeability in social space (Schütz and Luckmann 1974). The key focus of this qualitative study in utilizing two ethnographic processes was useful. Firstly, the interviews and participant observations were developed with the aim of capturing the social processes of meaning formation around gambling in order to generate new theories and concepts. Secondly, the analysis involved organizing and exploring the findings around both the gambling career contingencies and the cognitive frames which constituted the



different gambling worlds under scrutiny. This second process enabled the study to build on the existing typologies identified in the gambling literature.

This qualitative approach allowed me to build trust between myself and the participants in the study. It also allowed me to be an active part of the process and I was able to utilize myself as a resource tool. While most of the data comes from the participant observations and interviews, a good deal of the framing and research questions came from extant research but most of all from the theoretical framework underpinning the study. These findings were also compared and contrasted with other similar work in the field (e.g. Neal 1998, 2005; Reith *et al* 2010; Valentine *et al* 2008) but I also made sure that my research always kept its focus on the individuals in question and brought to life 'their special ways of living, experiences and expressions - to spread and become universal' (Bech 1997, p.195).

Throughout the second year of the study I slowly crossed the gap between direct observer and participant as I became much more knowledgeable of both the 'work' and the 'leisure' involved in serious leisure gambling. During this period, I also began to learn how to be a serious leisure horserace gambler. This move from direct observer to participant observer was never my aspiration but it enabled me to develop much more nuanced understanding of my participants' perspectives and the meanings that underpinned their intentions and interactions.

During my initial observations, it was hard to make sense of the sheer complexity of serious leisure gambling, because I was not part of it. I was not conversant with the psychology of the serious leisure gambler and of the intricacies of the milieu, and it was not until I actually became part of that world that I began to make full sense of it. I slowly became submerged in this serious leisure activity and developed a deep appreciation of what is involved. I witnessed the ups and the downs. But the main thing that dawned on me, and what will be explored in some detail in the findings chapters, is that serious leisure gambling involves a duality: the 'work' involved takes place 'backstage', while the 'leisure' dimension takes place firmly on the 'front stage' (Goffman 1969).

As the study progressed, I was confident that I had gained a strong sense of both the 'work' (i.e. the hard graft) and the 'leisure' (i.e. the typical social interactions, events, conversations and routines within the field) involved in serious leisure horserace

gambling. Consequently, the ethnographic section of the study ended in the winter of 2015. Having developed a good rapport with my participants conducting the second and third interviews was a relatively easy process but it was also a necessary one. My ethnographic research greatly facilitated this part of the interview process as by the time I came to request the second and third interviews I was knowledgeable about serious leisure gambling and them as individuals. They knew I could relate better now to what they were saying and I think this made them more receptive to my request for further interviews in a much more informal format.

## **Data analysis**

The data analysis involved a process of continual reflection and interpretation because data was collected not only from the 'field' but also from the interviews as an 'on-going' process to form an interpretive contextual narrative. The field notes were used as tools of data not only because they contained vital pieces of information about 'what happened' but they also shared the thoughts and feelings of the entire 'research journey'. All the findings from the interviews were integrated with the participant observations. Because most of the interviews took place in gambling settings they were not always recorded. Those that were recorded were fully transcribed. The interviews that were transcribed I utilized digital recording equipment. The transcriptions were undertaken manually which meant that all the components of the interview were transcribed in their entirety and nothing was left out or discarded thereby, allowing me to fully maintain focus on the participants in question. Although, as the next chapter will illustrate key findings from the study, the transcription process inevitably utilized those themes, models and categories that were best suited to serious leisure.

At the offset it can be understood that some initial themes were anticipated. This was further collaborated by observations and the data collection process, preliminary analysis of the interview transcriptions, the literature review and my own initial hypotheses. However, I discovered that collecting data and analysing data was not as straightforward as first anticipated. Initial conceptions of what one may have had were challenged by the emergence of new themes and categories. It was not a case of testing what I knew but rather being open to the possibility that new challenges would emerge along the way. The research was by no means a linear process. The

fieldwork was reflexive, a continuous process of analysing and challenging at different levels of the research process.

### **Criticisms of ethnography**

It has been argued by some sociologists that to understand a topic ethnographically, one should select more than one setting because generalizability is important (Brewer 2000). My research findings challenged this assumption. In methodological terms, my study was small-scale and localized, but this was in keeping with the most other ethnographies. Whilst no doubt other serious leisure gamblers with other gambling interests will act differently, this thesis explores in detail the experiences of a small sample of serious leisure horserace gamblers in West Yorkshire, whose passion resided in the main in horseracing, as opposed to making sweeping generalizations about all serious leisure gamblers. Undoubtedly, the study would be very difficult to duplicate, but this was not at the forefront of my thoughts. My ambition was to present as an accurate reflection as possible of this important aspect of leisure and the sub-culture contained within it.

Most methodology textbooks suggest that the limitations of ethnographic research pivot on issues of reliability and validity (see for example Bryman 2004, p291-317). It has been argued forcefully by LeCompte and Goetz (1982) that ethnography is limited by its inability to ensure validity and reliability. Let us briefly look at each of these in turn.

Validity, or ensuring that research findings not only represent an empirical reality but are scientifically accurate, is of great concern to social scientists. However, questions of validity not only hang over ethnography but every other methodology available to the social researcher, meaning that dismissing ethnography on issues of validity is not a strong enough reason not to utilize its methods. Notwithstanding this observation I firmly believe that my chosen methods were the most valid for this study, as conducting first-hand observations of serious leisure gambling allowed me to see many important features of this leisure milieu, aspects of serious leisure gambling behaviour, patterns, regularities and irregularities which would not have been possible had I not been physically present.



LeCompte and Goetz (1982) have also criticized ethnography on the grounds of reliability, or the belief that it precludes generalization or other researchers from reconstructing the setting and getting the same results. However, Becker (1998) has forcefully argued that no two studies can be the same, no matter the extent to which the researcher goes to in order to make it so, simply because the research setting will invariably change over time and because of the different personnel involved. My own approach to reconcile this problem followed Hammersley (1990; 1992) in developing an approach which involved a more 'subtle', pragmatic response which follows Rorty (2007) in arguing that for any ethnography to be reliable it must be so for good and assignable reasons. This is another way of saying that any ethnography must not only have direct relevance for those who constitute its milieu but also make an intellectual and practical contribution to its field of study.

### **Ethical issues**

I found and made sure that I brought ethical issues to the forefront of the study. Gambling can be a problem for some individuals and families causing both financial difficulties and psychological harm. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand serious leisure rather than gambling as an individual problem, so it anticipated that the chosen research methods and their outcomes were unlikely to cause the participants any direct harm.

In the process of the research, I firstly made sure that I had completed the University Ethical documentation as well as ensuring ethical committee approval (See Appendix 1 and 2). Secondly, I made sure that informed and valid consent was obtained from all participants who were interviewed. In most cases this was obtained verbally given the ethnographic nature of the study. However, on occasion, I provided each interviewee with a participant information sheet outlining in clear English the essential elements of the study (See Appendix 3 and 4). Whether this information was given to the participants verbally or in writing I ensured that the participants were able to make an informed decision about whether the study was for and of interest to them. The information included the following: what the topic of the research was about; the voluntary nature of involvement; an assurance about participant anonymity; details about what will happen during and after the research has taken place. It also allowed the participants the ability to speak freely on the

subject of gambling, without the fear of been labelled, frowned upon or judged. I also offered potential participants the opportunity to either discuss or read about the topic further should they so wish. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. If necessary, the participants were given information on where to seek appropriate support services.

The study was introduced to potential participants as one about gambling as a serious leisure activity. While it is possible that presenting the study in this way may have drawn attention to the word 'serious' and allowed it to be misconstrued, as Green and Jones suggest that 'despite its obvious usefulness as a tool to examine certain forms of leisure participation, there has been little systematic research into serious leisure participation' (2005, p. 166), even though there are many leisure activities that we can term 'serious'. One of the reasons for this neglect, they suggest is that the term serious leisure can be classed as an oxymoron. Leisure signifies joyousness and pleasure while the term serious implies the opposite, something that is severe and demanding. It was ethically important to offer clarity to the participants about the nature of the study as part of the process of obtaining informed consent.

Like any other ethnography, my research was 'covert' in parts, in as much that my role as an ethnographer was not immediately disclosed to everyone I came in to contact with in the field. At times, I am sure that some people I came into contact with were unaware of my role as a researcher. However, at no time was there any intention to deliberately deceive anyone; it was simply how the research evolved in the field.

Wherever possible I guaranteed participant privacy and endeavoured to secure private locations to conduct the interviews. Having said that all the interviews took place in public forums, either in gambling locations or other public places, such as coffee shops. I also made sure that I gained approval for the interview to be recorded and transcribed. Both electronic data and written notes were kept in a secure place and I made sure that they remained confidential and that the anonymity of the research participants was paramount. In terms of minimizing potential harm to myself, I made sure that I familiarized myself with the health and safety policies of all the research locations. I made sure family members/friends were made aware when interviews and participant observations were taking place. This involved information

on departure and arrival back times. I also ensured I had my mobile phone with me at all times.

As was identified earlier in the discussion the study involved ethnographic participant observation which saw me partaking in gambling like any other group member. All the participant observations took place in public gambling locations. When I spoke to people about gambling in the field, I based the research on the principle of honesty. This precluded any kind of deception and the use of covert participant observation. I also ensured that participation was restricted to placing small numbers of low stakes bets. To this end I kept a record of the frequency of gambling activity, noting times and places and levels of stakes - receipts were retained where possible. I also maintained the right balance between the roles of participant and researcher at all times. I also minimized the risk of 'going native' by reading all the literature on problem gambling; in this way I made myself aware of all the 'danger signs'. I was always in full contact with my supervisory team.

### **Other challenges encountered in the field**

The methodology was successful in adopting an interpretivist paradigm for the current study. However, a number of challenges did arise and posed some minor issues to myself in the process. Firstly, in common with other researchers I had to reconcile my status as a concurrent 'insider' and 'outsider'. What was different about my particular situation from other studies was that I was an outsider in a double sense: both as an academic and as a woman. However, as stated above the qualitative approach I developed allowed me to build trust between myself and the participants in the study. Secondly, as stated at the offset I am a gambler in the 'casual' sense of the word which allowed similar experiences and viewpoints to be acknowledged with the participants in question. However, the problem posed by the research was would I openly inform the participants that I was a gambler? I did tell them precluding any form of deception where I didn't have to hide my identity and it allowed me to form a relationship with the research participants based on a principle of honesty. The participants therefore, would not have to think about altering their behaviour and not disclose any useful information. I discovered that study had to be based on reliability and a trust needed to be established between myself and the participants for the study to be successful.



I was initially concerned that other serious leisure gamblers would be suspicious of my presence there; however, I am confident that they never considered me as inferior of lacking any 'knowledge' in any way because I 'worked' and 'leisured' alongside them during the participant observation, not just placing bets, but dressing the part and speaking the right language. One of the things I had not anticipated was that most of 'the graft' involved in serious leisure gambling, which to use an analogy from Erving Goffman (1974), took place, not in the 'front stage', in the public arena, but 'backstage'. In the event my access to this aspect of serious leisure gambling was restricted to the semi-structured interviews. In order to overcome this limitation I also did my 'own graft'— studying form, participating on web forums and so on to secure the best bets at the best prices – in the process feeling what it feels like to be a serious leisure gambler.

The study began with an inquiry into the gambling actions and behaviours of serious leisure participants. Once I began conducting the interviews, it became clear that I would have problems locating what to include or exclude and whether this was a true reflection of the participants I had included in the study, rather than just my interpretation. In carrying these problematical implications, however, I discovered it was my task to represent those I had researched as accurately as possible and present their views the best way I could. I was aware, though, that at times during the interview process, they may have in some instances prompted and determined participants' answers.

In this case, I found that during the interview process I was somewhat younger than some of the participants I was interviewing. In some cases this may have been viewed as a positive as some participants felt that they had more knowledge to share, with my apparent lack of it. However, I also needed to be aware of any conflicting power struggles because most of the participants were male. I made a conscious effort to overcome this by trying to eliminate already pre-existing beliefs on either side, however, this was harder to achieve in practice. Therefore, I made sure that I did not try to influence the participants in any way and instead let them speak for themselves. However, the crucial aspect of this study was to explore the subjective experiences of individual gamblers and learning what gambling means to

them as a common everyday activity and I hoped in this sense that this was achieved.

### **Some concluding thoughts**

The philosophical basis of this study can be summed up through Simmel's concept of *Wechselwirkung* in which the researcher had to turn an 'object of experience' into an 'object of cognition' (Ritzer and Smart 2001, p.68) to illuminate the process by which I had to manage how the field work unfolded in practice to how the data were collected and finally to how that data would be best interpreted. However, this does not mean that data was only gathered from the field. My research findings also came from other ethnographic studies, existing gambling literature and the qualitative methods utilized by the study. This meant understanding and analysing serious leisure horserace gambling as a double hermeneutic (Giddens 1987). This was also facilitated by the relationship that gamblers have not only with their surroundings but also with other gamblers with whom they interact with as like-minded individuals, learning from the self, but also from each other, and the social world they inhabit.

To this end, the study explored the social world of serious leisure gamblers from gamblers' point of view and how it is interpreted academically. As Wacquant puts it 'through a methodical and meticulous work of detection and documentation, a deciphering and writing liable to capture and to convey the taste and the ache of action, the sound and the fury of the social world.' (2004, p. vii). I immersed myself in this social world of gambling, observing and analysing, describing, interacting and conversing with serious leisure gamblers. I tried and believe I was able to understand and portray the meaning that serious leisure gambling has in peoples' lives and how this is formulated around the social environment created by gambling. This also inevitably meant that I also had to try to understand gambling in its socio-historical context which is also to recognize that 'most of the assumptions underlying different explanations for gambling derive from the particular disciplinary or theoretical perspective of the researcher' (McMillen 1996, p. 7).

My main aim in this thesis is to explore the richness and complexity of serious leisure gambling. To this end I have spent a sustained period of time both interviewing serious leisure horserace gamblers and becoming involved in as many aspects of

serious leisure gambling as possible, exploring the 'behaviour and social roles and rewards that make it meaningful for players' (Reith 2007, p.9). In my view this methodology was sufficient to generate a considerable amount of analysable data. Observing behaviour directly, listening, and participating in the world of serious leisure gambling, ensured that the data I collected represented an accurate, detailed account. Despite the relative merits of other methodologies, the social world of serious leisure gambling cannot be reduced to quantitative measures and I am confident that my study will be an important contribution to both gambling studies and leisure studies. My ethnographic data, along with the findings generated through three phases of interviews, allowed for me to draw together a number of key themes. An alternative, quantitative method would not have been able to generate the same rich detailed accounts of serious leisure gambling. What was important to the present study was 'uncovering the diversity of gambling experiences, including the embeddedness of gambling activity as part of everyday life' (McManus and Graham 2014, p.402). My chosen approach allowed me to witness and be a part of the social world of serious leisure horserace gambling in a way that no other methodology could. Actually experiencing the duality of the 'work' and the 'leisure' involved were great advantages to my research. Had I not tried to learn how to be a serious leisure horserace gambler, I would have had to rely on the interview data alone and would have not been able to fully understand the importance of a serious leisure activity that to an outsider may appear as at best casual leisure or at worst as a kind of social pathology.



## Chapter 6

### On Becoming a Serious Leisure Horserace Gambler and Developing a Gambling Career

#### Introduction

This part of the thesis begins by exploring my assertion that the world of horserace leisure gambling encountered during the empirical part of the study is one that can in fact be understood as serious leisure. In so doing, the following three chapters explore the practices, beliefs and values that constitute serious leisure horserace gambling (hereafter SLHG). My introduction to this world was quick and easy. The first gambler I encountered during the field research was the knowledgeable Kenny, sitting at the bar at York races engrossed in his copy of *The Racing Post*. The day was the Friday of the 2013 July meeting and I had been told by his sister, Alison (who had organized the meeting) that he'd be waiting for me in the first floor bar in the Knavesmire Stand. In his mid-fifties, extremely intelligent, grey hair, medium built and of average height, Kenny greeted me with an enquiring interest: "Alison tells me, you want to speak to some gamblers?" The study had begun. Over the next two years I would seek to understand what drives those who pursue gambling as a serious leisure practice in order to understand the investments it requires of them and its activities and roles which are only known to those who choose to partake (Elkington 2014). This thinking was guided by the idea that SLHG is best understood as a devotion structured around a field of leisure that 'calls forth and gives a life to a specific form of interest, a specific illusion as tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game and as practical mastery of its rules' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.117).

In developing this field specific approach to understanding horserace gambling my thesis provides a way of re-orienting the conventional understanding of serious leisure which has tended to reify it around certain core attributes or features to offer an ideal-typical model. In the next chapter it is suggested that by reconceptualising serious leisure as a historically constituted field of practice, structured around wider

societal changes – especially but not exclusively the shift from producer to consumer capitalism – and inextricably linked to changes in technology, we can develop an alternative theoretical framework that is able to dissolve the dichotomy between serious leisure and casual leisure. I will argue that this alternative framework also enables us to elucidate more fully serious leisure practitioners' views and lived experiences in relation to their field of devotion. My approach, therefore, permits us to render an account of serious leisure which is more attuned to the practices of serious leisure participants themselves. I develop this thesis through a critical re-appraisal of Stebbins' classic model of serious leisure in the context of the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism and an exploration of SLHG as a case study.

However, Stebbins' classic interpretation of serious leisure is not completely abandoned but is imported into my own thesis. The theoretical approach developed in the next three chapters seeks to include both aspects. Having said that, the central aim of my thesis is to change the focus of analysis away from ideal-type functionalism in order to understand serious leisure as a site specific but more fluid practice with field like qualities, in an attempt to capture the emergent nature of its everyday social reality. This emphasis on emergent social processes hopes to capture something of the evolving nature of serious leisure without neglecting the continuities and established structures that feed into social processes and practices of individual participants. In other words, in order to avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater, my thesis aims to offer a theorization of SLHG without completely breaking with earlier research in the field. My argument here is that Elkington's (2014, p.101) proposition that in engaging with serious leisure we must take into account site specific ways of 'thinking and seeing, of being-in-the-world' within the context of the space of relationships that they occupy, can help make the epistemological leap that is needed to build on Stebbins' classic conception of serious leisure. In other words, the aim in the following three chapters is to provide an insight into the universe of SLHG that is not permitted by the notion of serious leisure as it is conceived by Stebbins. As a first step, though, in instigating this alternative theoretical approach we must begin by identifying how and in what ways Stebbins' model could apply to SLHG. This is the aim of the rest of this chapter.

This last point notwithstanding in order to develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which my participants developed serious gambling careers, the analysis will also draw on Howard S. Becker's (1953) classic case study of 'becoming a marijuana user', in which he identifies four key stages of development of learning and experiencing what it means to inhabit a gambling universe. This application of Becker's thesis might appear at first glance a strange one given that it is concerned with the 'career' contingencies involved in becoming a serious soft drugs user. However, as will be demonstrated, Becker is important since he provides us with a theoretical framework that focuses its attention firmly on the experiential and social (rather just the individual) aspects of serious leisure. This offers us a way of challenging Stebbins' propensity to ascribe the development of serious leisure to 'antecedent predispositions' rather than 'motives and experiences' that emerge in the course of experience (Becker 1953, p.235). In this regard Becker also provides us with a theoretical framework for understanding the shift from dabbling to devotee leisure which is not only rewarding for individuals, but is able to move beyond individualized understandings to illustrate the importance of social recognition in serious leisure. In this regard, it is my argument that Becker provides us with a way of understanding serious leisure as a social affair that is more nuanced than Stebbins' overly functionalist account which has a tendency towards the assumption that those leisure activities that carry the greatest rewards are the ones which have the greatest importance for society – rather than for the actual individuals involved in specific serious leisure practices who are the ones who embody and know them best (Elkington 2014).

### **Learning how to become a serious leisure gambler**

In Becker's (1953) view, and contrary to what Stebbins suggests, we do not necessarily have to identify social types in order to understand the development of serious leisure careers, but instead we need to identify the career contingencies (Järvinen and Ravn 2011) involved to look at the changes in the individuals' conception of the activity in question and the experiences and meanings it provides for them. As we saw in Chapter Two, Geertz suggested that gambling is 'occasion of social intercourse in which participants create, reify and internalize a shared web of meaning' (Sallaz, 2008, p.13). When gambling captures the imagination of someone



they begin to acquire the resources, such as cultural and social capital, which are influential to the production of its social world. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) explain this is what underpins the specific interest that drives the 'game' and what entices those whose imaginations have been captured by it to learn the dominant narrative of the field, the 'doxa' that defines the game in terms of its symbolic capital. In Bourdieu and Wacquant's view this the ultimate goal in taking part in any specialized leisure field, the reason why the 'game' is pursued.

Becker's theoretical framework suggests that once his or her imagination has been captured in this way the gambler must first of all learn the right way to be at home in his or her new found world. In Becker's view this initial career contingency is usually provided by imitation, teaching or observation. In the course of this learning the individual's attitude and feelings to gambling will change, facilitated as they are by social experiences. As Green and Jones suggest 'it is during this stage that initial values and attitudes about the activity and the associated identity are formed' (2005, p172). This socialization through participating in gambling activities promotes the accumulation of some basic knowledge, skills and techniques where the participants learn how to progress their gambling skills further.

As my research showed gambling for the serious leisure gamblers I spoke to often began at a young age and with gambling encounters with friends, family or work. This kind of pre-socialization into serious leisure gambling was the experience of Brian, who was an accountant in his mid-twenties:

It started at high school about Year Eight really; it just started with a pack of cards amongst friends. I figured a way to pretty much beat everyone at school from there onwards. So, yeah, I started with cards and didn't really start gambling on football or horses until I was around eighteen or nineteen years of age.

One of my female participants, Denise, a quiet, unassuming and well-spoken woman in her early forties, had a similar experience:

Actually, it started at a young age. Everyone gambled in my family so we used to play card games every Sunday afternoon at my mother's house. At about 8 or 9 and I used to play cards at the local park near me with my brother. He

used to play football there, so I went down with him and I played card games on the side.

As did Andy, who was a sports broadcaster in his late-twenties:

When I was younger we would always go round to my grandad's house and play cards and you would play for pennies as well as going out on family days to the racecourse –and that's where you learnt things and obviously at high school you learn about fractions. But it was in gambling where I put my maths to good use!

Another of my participants, Shelia, a tall, slim and pretty woman, in her early-fifties, explained that it was through a part-time job whilst she was still at school through which she was introduced to gambling. As the following quotation shows, it was during her work at a local greyhound track that she developed what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) call 'a feel for the game', whereby she eventually found herself perfectly at ease within a gambling environment, whilst at the same time quickly learning to understand its freedoms and constraints:

When I was around 14 years of age I got a job at Elland Road dog track collecting glasses and clearing the food tables. I didn't have a clue about gambling back then. After I'd been there a few months I got to know a lot of the regulars: bookies, trainers and punters. I also quickly picked up how everything worked: when dogs were trying, when they weren't. I even learned a bit of tic tac<sup>1</sup>. What most excited me were the clashes between the bookies and big betting men, the faces. It was there at that dog track that my fascination with gambling began, you know. Most of my friends thought I was a bit funny, you know odd, at knowing all this stuff about betting. But they didn't think it was funny when I told them how much money I was making. This older lad, Peter, used to put my bets on for me....Later I moved on to the horses, but there the similar rules apply; it is just at a different level. You've got to watch how things work. Find out who's in the know. All that kind of stuff. My time working at the dog track taught me so much.

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<sup>1</sup> Tic-tac was a traditional form of sign language used to convey information about betting odds on the racecourse and at greyhound tracks. Odds were distinguished by gestures, touching various parts of the body or sometimes indicated verbally by slang. The tic-tac 'men' often wore white gloves to ensure the odds that they were conveying could be clearly visible. Some would utilize their own codes to confuse other bookies and punters.

As Bourdieu and Wacquant would suggest, fundamental to understanding the 'perfect coincidence' of this kind of social relation, when somebody develops a 'feel of the game', is a 'doxic relation', which they identify with that tacitly cognitive and practical sense of knowing of what can and cannot be achieved in any given leisure field.

If Becker's thesis provides a powerful model for identifying and exploring the contingency of the motives and dispositions that emerge in serious leisure gamblers early gambling experiences what it fails to account for and what emerged from my research is that serious engagement with gambling might often begin in a social context but it always is accompanied with some kind of episode, an event of such overwhelming excitement for the individual involved, the cause and meaning of which is often difficult to explain.

Kenny, who described himself to me as someone who works in the building industry, but "only when he has to", explained in some detail his own initiation into horserace gambling:

The first bet I had. I remember it well. It was my sister who got me into it, in a roundabout way. She'd somehow got to know a woman who chalked up the odds in the local bookies and this woman got her into gambling. It didn't last long. But for a little while she'd do a daily Round Robin<sup>2</sup> – this is a three horse bet. Anyhow, my sister always followed this jockey called Greville Starkey because she liked his name. I thought it was a ridiculous thing to do and that the jockey had a ridiculous name. She rarely won a penny and soon stopped wasting her money. One day before then, I asked her what she was doing and she explained that for a little investment you could win a few quid by accumulating your bets. I never thought anything of it. A few weeks later, I was on holiday in Blackpool with some mates and one of their brothers. This lad liked a bet. I went to the bookies with him one day and decided to do one of these Round Robins. Bit of bravado really. I made out to him I knew what this betting lark was all about, even though I actually knew very little. I picked three fancied horses ridden by Greville Starkey (bloody Greville!), Willie Carson and

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<sup>2</sup> A Round Robin is a three selection accumulator of ten bets that includes three doubles, one treble and three single bets.



Lester Piggott, who were all top jockeys at that time. Couldn't believe it when all three won: 5/1, 6/1 and 15/2. The last winner was in the last race at Newbury. We listened to it on the tannoy in the bookies, which was full of Glaswegians. I can't remember the name of the horse but Lester Piggott was on it. Amazing. I relive that win to this day. 'The Pig' is stalking the leader a furlong out with a double handful under him and then he presses the button. What a feeling as he hit the front. Nothing beats that. As the commentator describes the action, I'm riding the horse in the bookies (laughs). 10p Round Robin paid just short of £60. My wage was only about 32 quid a week back then. I couldn't believe it. That day I found out something about myself, I didn't know. I'd found something I was good at. As they say, the rest is history.

As we saw in Chapter Two this kind of experience is defined as 'flow' by Csikszentmihalyi (1974), who argues that leisure activities such as gambling contain a level of uncertainty of outcome that allows for individual creativity. The idea is that when individuals place a bet they enter a world of 'flow' or a stream of higher consciousness – a relationship with time, space and experience that is far removed from everyday experience.

Another one of my participants, Kevin, a fifty eight year old man, who described himself to me as an "engineer who likes a flutter", talked about his first deep experience with gambling in a way that suggested that it too evoked a similar 'flow' experience:

The moment I recall has to be at the Knavesmire [York races] in the mid-1980s. We'd gone on a trip with the [working men's] club. I'd just gone for the drinking really. I'm half cut by mid-afternoon. York is packed. It's the big race and the betting's wide open. I've backed Pat Eddery on a horse called Advance because my dad always backs him. I've put £10 on at 9/1. Pat Eddery was the go to jockey at that time; just like Ryan Moore is today. Everyone seemed to have backed Eddery. By the off Advance is about 5/1. The race started. What an atmosphere. The noise was unbelievable. It was a tight finish but Pat gets Advance up on the line. Polyfilla they used to call him – fills holes that nobody else can get into (Laughs). Fuckin' unreal that moment. I'd never felt anything like it before.

Another one of my participants, Brian, tells the story of an altogether different introduction to his passion for playing cards:

I've never told anybody else about this. It sounds a bit naff, I know. It was video of an old film believe it or not. Like I said I starting playing cards at a young age, mainly brag and pontoon. I was always good a bluffing. One day my mate tells me he's seen this film on TV about a poker player who's just like me – I think he was taking the piss really. The film is Cool Hand Luke starring Paul Newman. So I got it out from the video shop the next day and watched it. This boy is cool. The moment when Luke wins a game of poker on a bluff and says "Yeah, well, sometimes nothin' can be a real cool hand". How cool is that? Winning a poker hand with a bluff. That takes some bottle. I wanted to be Luke so much. I still do (jokes). Cool Hand Brian (laughs).

The second career contingency identified by Becker and important to this study is the way in which participants deal with their initial awareness of coming to terms with the effects or the feelings of the activity and being able to recognise and understand these. At the most basic level for gamblers this is about learning how to win.

As a result individuals will continue through group participation to imitate and learn until they achieve the right results, or in other words, until they can enjoy the effects of participation properly for positive outcomes. Essentially, as Becker suggests, the individual has to learn how to form a relationship with the experience of gambling. Through this connection, individuals will notice changes in themselves and their relationship with the activity; they will in this way be able to witness alterations of their feelings and their understanding of their initial conception of the activity will change. It is the socialization with other people who are undertaking the same behaviour that is important here and it is ultimately what allows further change to occur. As Becker points out these changes in understanding and experience not only ensure that pleasure is sustained but are also important in keeping the ephemeral effects going. One of the main incentives for any gambler is obviously the anticipation of winning. As one of my participants, Jimmy, a tall, dark haired man in his early thirties, who when I met him was always dressed smartly and exuded self-confidence, bordering on arrogance or cockiness, said:

The thrill of winning. It is unbelievable. When you know what can happen, even when you've had that "near miss" experience and have come so close, you want to have that feeling again, and again.

It might be a platitude, but time and again the participants in the study highlighted the importance of the thrill of winning for the first time, their longing to repeat the same experience and how this encouraged them to, as Carse (1986) would say, 'continue the play'. As Brian pointed out:

I said I was thirteen or fourteen but it probably started younger than that with cards. Basically, I learnt to play cards in my family and most of my friends played cards and I was quite a good player. I was quite successful with cards but it was always small stakes so I moved into the horses to try and win more but also in the hope finding another kind of buzz.

Through experiencing and experimenting firstly with different gambling activities or games in a 'casual' sense, allowed all my participants to move into other kinds of gambling. This enabled them to not only develop their own personal gambling interests but to also continuously improve their gambling skill set through prolonged participation and a continued engagement. To paraphrase Malcolm *et al* (2013, p. 127), here the quest for exciting significance prevailed, and that excitement was centrally connected to a rewarding experience that became habitual and that served to produce and reproduce a positive sense of self. As Becker points out this sustained engagement creates a significant milestone for the individual involved as the activity now can be experienced as a pleasurable one. This is because the individual is now more aware of their personal development and continues with it because its effects have become easier to achieve. As Kevin explained:

When I tell folk that I gamble on the horses, I tend to get two reactions. There is one kind of person that quickly tries to change the subject onto something else. The other kind of person is simply flummoxed as to how I understand what I'm doing. I tell them that this is how horseracing was for me when I first got into it. I had to learn the ropes. I don't know how and when it happened. All I know is that at some point I felt that I just knew what the score was. Though it should be said I'm a quick learner.



Stebbins argues that 'skill development is progressed through practice, instruction and determination' (Mackellar 2009, p101), but what he ignores are the social relationships involved and which are key to the process. For Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), this second career contingency is really about building social and cultural capital, which suggests that we must recognize the two way relationship between the individual and his or her ability to cross into and be accepted into the activity by its significant others.

Throughout my interviews all the participants provided examples of how they looked for this this kind of social recognition. But Kenny's experience is perhaps the most informative. Whereas most of my older participants developed serious leisure gambling careers over a long period of time, he actively sought out a serious leisure gambling identity very early on. His attitude was simple:

Once I became hooked on the racing game, I was determined to do things properly. You see people betting stupidly all the time. The thing is to learn how to bet properly. I knew I had to learn all the ins and outs. When you've been in the racing game as long as I have you know what you're doing. But I didn't know what I was doing in the beginning. So I set out to learn from the best. I watched how those in the know went about things. Gambling is like any other specialist activity it demands that you know your market. It requires intuition, fitness of mind and body, courage when the chips are down, especially when you're on a long losing streak, but it also demands the sort of mental work most people wouldn't associate with it. You need more than a quick mathematical brain. For instance, when a horse is a good price and it isn't – no matter how much I fancy a horse, I won't ever back it if it doesn't represent value. If I think a horse is value to back at 6/1 and it is 11/2 or 5/1, I won't back it. That's a mugs game. You have to do your homework. I do my homework. I learned how to do my homework.

It is important to note from these insights from Kenny is that experience has to be sustained if the interest is to carry on. The third career contingency, Becker

suggests, involves learning to enjoy the products of the activity. Individuals have now gained the social means by which they can enjoy themselves without the risk of any bad side effects or unpleasurable feelings. The activity becomes an experience that is enjoyed for itself, where pleasure is the ultimate indicator of engagement. All the serious leisure gamblers I spoke to gambled not only for financial reward and the buzz of winning, but for social pleasure and personal fulfilment. But as Brian explained, for him, it was not always like this:

It took me a long, long time before I had the confidence to tell anyone I am a gambler who specializes with the horses and football. In the early days I simply didn't have the confidence. Yes. I had won some good pots and had built up a good reserve of stake money. But I simply didn't have the confidence to say to anyone this is what I do. That came with time. I'd been a regular on the Yorkshire tracks – Ponte, Wetherby, York, Ripon, Thirsk – for about five or six years before I really knew what I was doing.

This final career contingency identified by Becker illustrates that the individual has become fully complicit in understanding that the activity he or she has engaged in and is now purely there for enjoyment. As he suggests the individual 'has to learn to produce effects, learn to recognize the effects and connect with them and learn to enjoy the sensations he perceives' (1953, p.373). It is through going through these four career contingencies that a full experience with the activity emerges. Most importantly, Becker draws attention to the fact that, different people will endure different experiences and will have varying interpretations. However, unless a deep understanding of an activity takes place, full participation won't ever be achieved. Kenny offers some interesting insights in this regard. He clearly has achieved a full understanding of his chosen serious leisure pursuit:

Look. Today I know loads of bookies, regular punters, and stable lads. I really do feel at home on the racecourse; the racecourse is somewhere that feels like an extension of me, where I properly fit, if that doesn't sound daft. It is not the gambling, really, cos I do most of my betting off the racecourse. I just like seeing the faces, hearing the whispers, the buzz created by the crowd, the tradition of it all; it is a really great place to me to be.

As my research showed, this movement into more specialized areas of gambling interest signified something important about the sense of meaning serious leisure gamblers find in their activities. Becker's (1953) four career contingencies are, however, useful in illustrating how some of my participants became gamblers, which involved the following: learning to gamble in the correct way; learning to recognize the effects of winning; connecting these effects with playing; and learning to enjoy the sensations associated with the activity. This background information is essential to the discussion because as it was stated in the literature review chapters most studies of gambling fail to acknowledge the reasons, feelings and motivations behind individual gambling actions and rarely in the gambling literature are we able to see how gamblers are initiated in order to learn the 'value of the stakes of the game and as practical mastery of its rules' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.117).

### **Understanding horserace gamblers as serious leisure gamblers**

This chapter has so far illustrated how we can identify the particular career contingencies involved in beginning a serious leisure career. In this regard I have tried to build on Stebbins' putative insights by demonstrating the importance of the social setting in which serious leisure careers (in this case gambling) develop by trying to capture something about the rituals, thrills, and pleasures involved and the importance of building social and cultural capital for developing a 'feel for the game' and for finding social recognition. We are now in a position to apply Stebbins six characteristics of serious leisure to illustrate how and in what ways my participants might be understood as serious leisure horserace gamblers (hereafter SLHGs). In utilizing key insights from Stebbins, the rest of this chapter will illustrate that there is a distinction to be made between casual horserace gamblers and SLHGs, but also crucially between professional horserace gamblers and SLHGs.



### ***A leisure career, a work career, or simply a serious gambling career?***

As has hopefully been demonstrated up to now is that implicit to understanding what it means to be a SLHG entails, to paraphrase Kane and Zink, identifying the participant's recreational specialization – what they see themselves as and how they want to be seen (2004, p.335-36). In other words both personal and collective identity are pivotal to the SLHG. As Elliot and Lemert, (2006) have pointed out, learning and understanding oneself autonomously is fundamental to self-expression and self-gratification and the ways in which we perceive we are understood and accepted by others. In other words, personal identity must first be recognized before collective identity can be experienced. Indeed, as the last quotation above from the interview with Kenny demonstrated, SLHGs they must first of all be able to recognize themselves as SLHGs.

In order to understand what we mean when we speak of a serious leisure career, or what Tsaor and Liang (2008) call 'recreational specialization', we need to focus on three specific components: the 'focusing of behaviour, the acquiring of skills and knowledge and a tendency to become committed to the activity such that it becomes a central life interest' (2008, p.327). A serious leisure career in other words is epitomised by a full development of knowledge and mastering of skills because the individual involved is 'willing to practice regardless of the time and money requirements and work harder for their recreation knowledge and skills which results in a higher level of recreation involvement' (*ibid*, p.338).

My research suggested that it is typically this kind of continuity and perseverance with the activity that enhances a specialized interest in SLHG. As demonstrated in the penultimate quotation from Kenny's interview above it was his personal path of development, individual growth and progression, as well as his eagerness to learn specialized gambling skills and knowledge, that set him on course from a purely leisure role to a particular kind of 'work' role. In other words, Kenny's career signified not only a specialized interest in gambling in his 'leisure' but also the deconstruction of the dichotomy between 'leisure' and 'work'. As Rojek (1995) has aptly pointed out, in 'postmodernity' no longer can leisure and work be categorized as separate spheres, distinct from one another. Work and leisure were once viewed as two co-

existing concepts, each defining the other. The term Rojek uses to describe this transition is 'decentring' in which both 'leisure' and 'work' are deeply rooted in the same kinds of experiences. What this suggests is that the uses of leisure must be understood in relation to the context that produces them, which also tells us that they do not stay the same over time.

As Kenny explained, he has never really had "career as such in the world of work" but has been able to develop a sense of vocation through his commitment to gambling, where he has been able to not only test his skills and knowledge but also to develop his 'expertise in the activity through experience' to develop a personal career (McQuarrie and Jackson 2002, p.39). For Kenny, like many others who choose to develop a leisure career, his time is framed around a structure that resembles the traditional working day. He told me, for example, that there is a lot of work that goes into preparing for the 'big' race meetings. In Kenny's case, this work begins weeks in advance of actual race meetings by identifying the race entries, studying race forums and all the key blogs, finding media releases by trainers, studying the form, and then finding the best prices available.

Another way of understanding gamblers commitment to their chosen leisure career lies in the way it intersects with other commitments. In this respect it is useful to draw on the work of George Homans, identified by Stebbins, who suggested that 'the main costs and rewards of an activity, when psychologically weighted against each other, result in a personal sense of 'profit' or 'loss' (Stebbins 1997, p.122). For some of the other SLHGs I spoke to, such as Kevin, their calendar is ultimately shaped by their gambling activities. As he explained to me, he plans his family life around the major horserace meetings:

Like I said, earlier the missus knows not to book holidays, family things or anything like that in March (Cheltenham), April (Aintree), June (Epsom), July (Royal Ascot), August (Goodwood and York). We're autumn holiday folk in our house (laughs).

Stebbins argues that in order for a serious leisure pursuit to develop into a full-blown serious leisure career, there must be evidence of commitment to what he terms 'devotee work', which he identifies at the far end of his casual-to-serious leisure

continuum. Devotee work is 'an activity in which participants feel a powerful sense of devotion, or, in other words, a 'strong and positive attachment, to an occupation that they are proud to be in' (2014, p.4). As Stebbins suggests in an earlier publication this means that 'we should be looking at the various kinds of careers pursued by serious leisure participants, as well as the different patterns of their attendant costs and rewards' (1992, p.134). There are six characteristics identified by Stebbins that distinguish the devotee: first, the individual must be profound, that is they must have 'substantial skill, knowledge or experience or all three' (2009, p.113). Second, the individual must not only be prepared to make choices but also embody the freedom to fulfil those choices. Third, individuals must 'have significant opportunity for creativity or innovation, as valued expression of individual personality' (2009, p.113). Fourth, the individual must be an excellent time manager in the sense of being realistic about how much time they can devote themselves to a serious leisure activity. Fifth, the individual's chosen serious leisure career requires desire and commitment. Last but not least the individual will endeavour to ensure that their chosen leisure career take place in a social context where they can engage in their activities freely. As Stebbins makes clear, the devotee career is one in which the individual will be able to sustain and develop their chosen leisure vocation to 'find it highly appealing, learning a new technique, perfecting that already learned and learning expertise and emotion' (2009, p.115).

During my participant observations, I found these six characteristics embodied in the behaviours of all the serious leisure gamblers. But perhaps the best example was Andy, who was constantly on the lookout for new ways in which to upgrade his skills and knowledge:

When you gamble properly, you have always got to be ahead of the game, which means being open to new ideas. There is so much information available now about the horses: websites, Apps, blogs, racing forums – everyman and his dog is an expert. I use everything that is available to build up my knowledge. But you've got to be able to separate out the quality stuff, because there is a lot of garbage out there. In my view, those gamblers who can do that will have the most success.



## ***Amateurs and professionals***

In developing his thesis, Stebbins argues that 'devotee work' can be broken down into two broad categories: amateurism and professionalism. As he puts it, the amateur is a particular social type who must be distinguished from the professional who devotes him or herself to their work and makes a substantial living from it. As Stebbins goes on to say, amateurism in marked contrast is 'characterised by necessity, obligation, seriousness and commitment, as expressed by regimentation and systematization and progresses' (1992, p.9) and the process is never-ending or ever complete because 'there is an infinite amount to be learned experienced, or acquired, even those acknowledged to be the best are still developing in this sense' (Stebbins, 2014, p.42).

As we saw in the literature review, Mark Neal defined the professional gambler as someone who does:

A great deal of research. They go through the form book with a fine-tooth comb, seek out contacts and in some cases visit the gallops to see a potential selection training. They bet on relatively few horses per year; and spend a considerable amount of time assessing individual selections. Their decisions thus involve informed in-depth assessments of factors that can influence the outcome of particular races. Their sources are wide and on the whole reliable, and their modes of weighing up the influence of various factors have their roots in the realities of horse racing. Most of all however, they are concerned with long-term percentages. Because of this, professional gamblers are renowned for their lack of emotions while witnessing the victory or defeat of individual selections. Defeats are an inescapable feature of their business, and they take the probability of their defeat into account in their selections in this sense, their decision-making process corresponds to bounded rational action (Neal 1998, p.587).

The far end of the career spectrum is epitomised most by professionals who represent the highest achievement of career advancement because they have accumulated specialized knowledge, technique and experience. What differentiates the professionals from amateurs is that the 'professionals must specialize to succeed, amateurs need not' (Stebbins 1992, p.39). The professional gambler

exhibits a great deal of commitment, strict discipline, a dedication of time and skill and where learnt knowledge can be applied but more importantly they carry out their profession as 'work' not for leisure. As Stebbins suggests 'the would-be devotee must have reasonable control over the amount and disposition of time put into the occupation (freedom). They must have a taste and an aptitude for the work. The devotees must work in a physical and social milieu that encourages them to pursue often and without significant constraint in the core activities' (2014, p15). The professional gambler is the embodiment of the horseracing intellectual, who scours every avenue to him or her for information and does weeks of research in order to prepare their bets. The professional gambler is thus someone who is by default less emotionally involved in his or her preoccupation than the leisure gambler, because he or she has their eye on making a living over the long term. Not only does the professional gambler display superior skill, expertise and critical judgement in dealing with risk and uncertainty but also restraint, control and composure.

What we also know is that to date there has been no place in the gambling literature for amateur 'devotee work'. What this suggests is that my identification of the SLHG as an amateur devotee is a new social type. But what is it that distinguishes the serious leisure gambler from the professional gambler? Kenny explained when I asked him if he saw himself as a professional gambler:

I'm not a professional gambler. No, no way (laughs out loud). I don't even know any professional gamblers! Never met one in my life. I'm not in that league. Look. Professional gamblers are basically people who are able to get access to insider knowledge. I don't have that. People like me do not know the right people. You've got to remember that horseracing is full of money and money people; the sport of kings, they used to call it. It still is. I could never make a living from gambling because I don't have access to insider knowledge. Some idiots claim they do but that's tosh. Racing is full of rumours and blokes who claim they know someone in the stable, and all that kind of thing. Bull shit. By the time that kind of "knowledge" gets to the bottom of the food chain it is either useless or not true. I never believe a word. What I do is use my common sense. Look. I could never make a living from what I do. I don't have access to insider knowledge. What I do remove as many uncertainties as possible before taking

any risks. I also have to watch my risks because there are too many uncertainties I can't remove.

SB: Can you elaborate on that?

OK. Simple example. One of my favourite races over the years used to be the Grand National – still is I suppose. Everyone thinks this race is a lottery. Wrong. There might be forty runners in it but I'd argue the reality is the winner will usually come from a group of around 10 horses. It used to be even less when there were a lot of what they call "social runners". These days it is a more competitive race but it still holds a lot of value. Think about it: 10 runners who have a chance of winning and the bookies pay 5 places and 6 and 7 on the exchanges. That is not a high risk race. I backed a horse called Balthazar King last year because it was in the 10. This is a horse that jumps well and stays longer than the mother in law. All important, since as you might know, the Grand National is over 4 miles long. I got an ante-post price of 33-1. The horse ended with a starting price of 8-1. It finished a close second and I was in the money at 8 and bit-1 a place. Fandango.

SB: Have you got any more examples?

That is where the work comes in. OK. It is about knowing your stables. What kinds of races they target. I'll let you in on a secret, if you promise not to tell anyone else (laughs). The Phillip Hobbs and Dickie Johnson combination of trainer and jockey. Hobbs is your old fashioned National Hunt trainer who is all about training chasers. I dismiss all his hurdlers – except when he targets certain races – and follow all his chasers. Hobbs likes to target certain tracks; his horses run well on flat tracks like Stratford and at Exeter and Taunton, and certain races. He's not in the same league as the top guns such as Paul Nicholls and the tops Irish stables so you've got to look at the second tier races. There are a few other things I consider but that is the nitty-gritty of it really.

SB: Let me get this right. So you don't follow the horses, but the stable? Does this mean that you'd gamble on a horse if it had poor form? Aren't you supposed to follow the form?



(Laughing again). You've nailed it. Yes. Form and statistics are not for me. It's about knowing your stables/jockeys. As I said, you have to remove the risks. But there are less uncertainties when you know your stable. I trust Hobbs and Johnson and they deliver. They had a couple of poor seasons over 2012-13, but even then they delivered. Over the last 5 seasons I've made a sweet profit.

For Kenny, to borrow an insight from Cassidy, 'the pleasure of betting resides in the intellectual stimulation of making a selection in a race based on a knowledge of all of the intricacies of racing' (1999, p.113).

Although a couple of the serious leisure gamblers I spoke to – namely Kenny and Dom – were able to gain some extra income from gambling, most of them still worked for a living. Although each of them was committed to their gambling in a 'career-like' way, it never seemed to lose its 'leisureliness'. As three of my participants explained:

Brian: I never really stick to a bank roll or anything because I'm not a professional gambler. I'll set something aside in my betting accounts and try and build the money up.

Kenny: I gamble first and foremost for the love of it, I mean in saying that in terms of my interest, the main thing I do is gamble. I'd probably say that there's a lot out there like me who are equally in love with their sport cos they spend so much of their time with it. What I mean is this. I bet on the horses. I could never bet on the dogs. I simply don't see the point. 5 or 6 dogs chasing a bunny! What is the point in that? I love the racing game.

Kevin: One of the things I love about the racing is the characters. There's a famous professional gambler, Barney Curly. Everybody knows this, so it's nothing new. Early last season he and his friends pulled off a coup. He's been at it for years. This involved four horses of Curley's whose connections all won from an accumulator bet. There was a big whoa in racing cos Curly had done it. But the man has been doin' this all his life as a trainer and professional gambler. Some people have slagged him off for pulling horses or not running them genuinely but this has always gone on in racing. We all know this

happens. It's a bit like that emissions scandal at Volkswagen. The best kept secret in the world. Really! I think the key thing is to try and do what he did and spread your bets, like Curley did, but even that is becoming harder to do. Curley is the best example of the professional gambler. People like me, I tip my hat off to the man.

What these three quotations demonstrate is that serious leisure gambling holds some close links with professional gambling which suggests that the distinction between 'amateur' and 'professional' is not so clearly defined. What is clear from my research is that the proliferation of publically accessible information about the racing industry and the opportunities that have opened up for betting have increased gamblers' chances of becoming more involved in what was once considered the realm of the 'professional'. Writing in the 1980s before the explosion of the internet and its impact on horserace gambling, Rosecrance argued that 'only a select few horse players are able to perform the work of gambling for profit with sufficient facility to sustain themselves financially' (1988, p.224). This might still be the case but as we will see in the next chapter my research suggests that there has emerged a new 'amateur' social type who is as equally committed to gambling as the 'professional' in the sense that they 'plan and prepare, they spend most of their time scouring results, absorbing information, and analysing techniques as well as looking at future races' (*ibid*, 1988, p.225). This suggests that SLHG is a form of leisure practice that is distinguished by its 'craftsman-like' qualities which Sennett (2008) argues refers to a particular set of abilities that are driven by curiosity, unhurriedness and commitment to a job well done.

### ***The personal and the social: developing a gambling identity***

*Gambling is more than a mode of communication. It creates a bond between men (sic) - a bond which defines insiders and outsiders - Zola (1967, p.22)*

There is an inexorable link between SLHG and social identity formation, which resonates with sociological literature discussed in Chapter 3. All of the serious leisure gamblers I spoke to stressed the importance of participating in and experiencing collective identity through their gambling pursuits. What this suggests therefore is that gambling has important social function to play in the lives of SLHGers. It facilitated an environment for gamblers to meet and converse but it also initiated a

shared ethos and values where they could demonstrate their enthusiasm, experience the intensity of winning, and crucially talk to one another about their gambling exploits. SLHG identity is in this way defined in terms of how and in what ways SLHGs gamble. In other words my research showed that those who gambled in similar ways shared in the symbolic act of gambling that defined a group identity. As Jimmy explained:

I do almost all my betting online. But I still go to the races. I find it a more enjoyable experience because there is no social aspect sitting on your own on your laptop. Billy no mates. What is the point in betting and not experiencing what my mate Tom calls the 'warm glow winning' – bit of a poet our Tom. I go to the races to watch the action. The buzz of the crowd. York at the big Ebor meeting, there's 30,000 people in the crowd and you can hear a pin drop just before the off and then the stalls bang open. The crowd goes wild. Everyone is shouting on their own animal but it feels like they've all backed the same one. Mental. And I would rather be there with my mates because they are just as interested as me.

These insights confirm Stebbins' argument that in serious leisure 'social attraction denotes the camaraderie that develops around the pursuit, the appeal of talking about it, and the exhilaration of being part of the scene' (1997, p.123). This is what creates 'flow' and self-actualization in serious leisure. But as Jimmy in the above quotation suggested social reciprocation is key to self-actualization.

Gambling environments facilitate a conclave of shared interests and values. Implicit to understanding these is the concept of subculture, which is defined by Green and Jones as a collection of participants who 'belong to a clearly identifiable group with its own norms, values, behaviours and even language' (2005, p.169) which is shared and develops or reinforces social acceptance of collective leisure choice. Throughout the participant observations I found individuals sharing stories about successful gambles, the invariable 'highs and lows', 'the ups and downs', and tales about 'getting their bets on' and 'getting the right price' – generally how they had been successful in out-foxing the bookmakers:

Dom: It's hard trying to get one over the bookies. They rarely get their prices wrong. I try to get on on Fridays for the big Saturday races. Most of the bookies



do early prices for Saturdays on Fridays when the last evening racing has finished. It is hard to get a good price in the shops on Saturday mornings. The trouble is that most of it's online. Just a few of the shops offer the early prices in the shops. Betfred is good. Couple of weeks ago I did a £50 each way double at 10/1 and 9/2. The starting prices were 7/2 and 5/2! The 10/1 won and the 9/2 got placed. Good result. £378 quid as opposed to £152. Pity the 9/2 shot didn't come in!

The research also revealed that the social context extends to engaging in 'friendly bets' between serious leisure gamblers. As two of my participants explained:

Jimmy: Like I say, we often have a 'friendly bet' so to speak between us. It is supposed to be about the money. But we all know deep down it's for "bragging rights".

Andy: We, my lot, engage in private golf bets. There is a group of us who play. But it is me who has the knowledge about the professional game. I often lay my mates odds to take. I'm confident that most of the bets I lay won't win. But, look, I wouldn't take a lot of money from my mates, because everyone's happy. They're happy cos they got a better price that they would from a bookie. But in some form or other I do usually end up taking their money!

To be involved in gambling collectively in this wider social context creates not only enjoyment for the individuals concerned but opportunities for serious leisure gamblers to 'derive pleasure through their own efforts' (Kjølsrød 2009, p.382). As Goffman (1967) once observed, Andy is also in this regard able to use these to gain mutual appreciation and social recognition amongst his wider circle of friends.

In terms of the inner circle of SLHGs, the following quote from Kenny demonstrates how he experienced a defining moment of mutual appreciation and social recognition which it would seem cemented his own serious gambling identity:

People who know me have always recognized me as a bit of a gambler. But on the racecourse I didn't realise that people noticed who I was. One day I was talking to a bloke at Wetherby, I think it was, and he asked me about a rumour he'd heard about a bet that was going down. I asked why he thought I'd know.

He said something like: "You're one of the main faces down here, everyone knows who you are". I have always been someone who is on the lookout for that inside edge, looking for something that other people don't see, but I'll tell you, I'd never thought anyone else noticed. That day I got a funny feeling. I was chuffed, yer know. I'd never thought for a minute that I had that kind of respect.

What we can determine from these kinds of insights is that for the SLHGs in this study their engagement in serious leisure is pivotal to social recognition which can not only lead to self-actualization and personal enrichment but also ensuring that they continue to find purpose through gambling. Bourdieu (1989) emphasised the importance of understanding such expressions as a form of 'symbolic interest' and he stressed the significance of the symbolic capital in the form of prestige that emerges when individuals succeed in imposing their own vision in a field of interest.

### ***Rewards and costs: or SLHGs ups and downs***

As we have seen so far, and following Stebbins, in SLHG 'the rewards of the activity tend to outweigh the costs, however, the result being that the participants usually find a high level of personal fulfilment in them' (2009, p.19). As Stebbins is committed to illustrating, 'the goal of gaining fulfilment in serious leisure is the drive to experience the rewards of a given leisure activity, such that its costs are seen by the participant as more or less insignificant by comparison. That is at once the meaning of the activity for the participant and that person's motivation for engaging in it' (*ibid*, p.20). As one of my participants, Andy suggested, he spends a great deal of time trying to get the best odds available for his bets but this is because his ultimate goal is always to get 'value for money':

The thrill of pitting yourself against the bookie, trying to get an inside edge, that's part of the thrill of getting a big winner at a big price. When I've beaten the price, I know I'm doing something right. If I put a bet on at 33/1 or 25/1 and it's immediately cut then I know I've placed the right bet. It's not just about winning or losing, it's about getting on at the right price. Price is important. Just last week, one of my horses to follow opened at 15/2 and was backed down to 3/1. I couldn't get on a 15/2, was offered 4/1, but decided to leave it alone. No value, see. It won, like I calculated. But if you go down that route you are asking

for trouble. If you gamble at the right price then you'd hope to win in the long run.

Given the importance of the social context of serious leisure gambling it might also be suggested that what Andy is also hoping to avoid here is 'fear, embarrassment and failure' (Mackellar 2009, p.100). As he went on to explain:

There is no feeling of achievement in a poor bet. I'd rather lose at the right price than win a stupid price. I never follow the market. The key is anticipating the market.

Echoing Andy's sentiments, Kenny explained:

In the last few years Tom Segal<sup>3</sup> has become the racing pundit to follow. The man is good. The only trouble is that once he tips a horse the bookies drop the price immediately. I say to myself every Saturday morning "I hope Tom Segal in't goin' to pick any of my horses". Red Avenger last year. 25/1 in the morning papers. Segal selected it and it came in at 10/1. 25/1 was an excellent bet. I got on at 16/1 EW which was a good bet – cos I priced it at 14/1. Look. No way would I have taken the 10/1.

In addition to the problem of getting on "at the right price", Kenny identified the problem of "getting on with the right kind of money":

Twenty-first century betting with twentieth century stakes. It's difficult to get any decent money on these days. I'm not a big stakes man. My way is all about value. But if you try to put more than £50 on a horse with some bookmakers, then the manager has to make a phone call to somebody, it's pathetic. Online betting is a no, no. I had four accounts at one time but had two of 'em closed – and I wasn't winning what I'd call a lot. Online betting is for mugs. What you can actually have to do is spread your money a bit. So I still think, on the one level, it's difficult to get a good price other than ante-post, you can get ante-post prices, but there is the risk that the horse won't run, especially with the jumps horses. But the market moves very quickly nowadays, so you have to be quick. On big race days and Saturdays all the bets that matter go on early doors. Saturday is value day but you have to be quick.

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Segal, otherwise known as 'Pricewise', is a horse racing tipster in the *Racing Post*.



These interview quotations provide evidence of the ways in which careful selection and paying close attention to detail produce 'different levels of seriousness' (Stebbins 1997, p.124), but they also illustrate participants' continued commitment and dedication to SLHG and the ways in which invested time and hard work tend to pay off in the long run. As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, Bourdieu and Wacquant suggest that the particularity of each leisure field is like a game. So, while all fields operate by the same logic, each once is a distinct universe with its own ethos (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The structuration of the SLHG field, the relations within it and its language, all derive from this particularity. In this leisure field, then, what is at stake is not so much the betting i.e. economic capital, but individuals' struggle to gain the right social, cultural and symbolic capital to be able to participate in SLHG.

### ***Testing skills and knowledge***

SLHG involves structured learning about not only how and when to bet but also with regard to accumulating information about the social organization of racing which as Filby (1983, p.17) argues is 'predicated upon the search for and control of strategic information; the racing game is an information game'. This involves accumulating information about racehorses and their breeding, owners, trainers and jockeys, racecourses, races (including maidens, listed and group races<sup>4</sup>, ratings and handicap marks<sup>5</sup>), and form i.e. past performances<sup>6</sup>. For Denise, form is all:

When you bet you have to be aware of and take into consideration lots of things. Most gamblers back horses for the simple reason that their favourite jockey is on it. I look for a number of things: jockey, trainer, track, weather, going, handicap marks, things like that, so I suppose you have to study more, looking for things like 'horses for courses' – does the horse like the going, the course, has it been dropped in class etc. I also try to go to the races to bet when I can because small things can happen. Last year I was at a small

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<sup>4</sup> Maiden races are events for those horses that have yet to win a race. A listed race is a particular class of race just below a group race. Group or graded races are the highest level of races differentiated by groups 1-6 - Group 1 being the highest category of race.

<sup>5</sup> Handicap marks refer to the weight allowance given to a horse by the BHA (British Horse Racing Authority). Handicapping is a simple process: if a horse wins or performs consistently its rating and its handicap mark will continue to go up. Conversely, if a horse continues to lose and under-perform its rating will go down.

<sup>6</sup> This refers to how a horse has run in previous races.

weekday meeting and spotted the race horse expert Jim McGrath. I scoured the *Racing Post* and spotted he was a co-owner. The horse didn't win, just beaten in a photo finish, but these kinds of things are important.

In marked distinction to Denise, Andy is a self-confessed 'stats' man. As he explains:

I look for trends, simple as that. A bloke I know won't bet on handicaps. Says it's a mugs game. Stakes races, listed races, group races, novice races. All the horses run of level pegging in these races. The stats then are more accurate. Weight for age, so on...

Kevin employs diverse and varying strategies but is of the view that gaining an edge is really about subjective knowledge and skill:

Some idiot once said to me, that to bet on the horses, just go for any, as it's only a stab in the dark. There is much more to take into consideration than they realise; it's a skill. It's about learning from what you do and learning from others and reading up and studying as much information as possible and turning that into balanced decision making. Everyone who bets on the horse fancies their selection; I'm the same. Not sure I've ever backed a horse I didn't fancy. But it can't be just about that. I take into consideration every bit of information I have at my disposal. I look at it all properly, and then I calculate the risks.

Kenny concurred:

I think a lot of it is down to hard work, knowing your horses, knowing your trainers, studying trends, studying the statistics, because statistics have a massive bearing on how horses run, as do things like horses for courses – its bit of a cliché but it's a true one. The same with trainers. It is a lot of hard work really, about doing the spade work. Though it has to be said that things are a lot easier than they used to be. Once upon a time you only had the racing papers and Timeform<sup>7</sup>. Now you've got an enormous variety of forums, blogs, websites, Twitter<sup>8</sup> and so on. I personally find the forums very useful, there is

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<sup>7</sup> Founded in 1948 by Phil Bull *Timeform* is a print and online publication that specializes in tipping horses based on its own ratings.

<sup>8</sup> Twitter is a commercial online social networking service that enables users to send and read short 140-character messages called 'tweets'.

an honesty about them, because everyone on them is after one thing – beating the bookie!

Testing skills and knowledge is an important aspect of SLHG. As this last interview quotation suggests there has been a shift in the way that SLHGs build their gambling knowledge. We need to understand this shift in relation to wider social, cultural and economic changes and the ways these have impact on horserace gambling and that is explored in the next chapter.

### ***Discipline and perseverance***

For SLHGs, unlike those that gamble ‘casually’, discipline is key to how they bet. Rather than letting your ‘heart rule their head’ or get caught in the trap of ‘chasing’ losses as many inexperienced gamblers do, SLHGs, as well as gathering key sources of information before putting a bet together, undertake personal fastidiousness over the long term. As Denise put it:

I am yet to meet a gambler who does do accumulator bets, because every gambler is after that lucrative big win. But these bets in the end are bonuses. It’s hard enough winning on single bets, but I would rather invest my money in one particular horse.

But as another participant made clear, it is not just about the bets you place but how you approach them:

Jimmy: I would say that discipline and thought is definitely the key to betting and if you can put a well formulated bet together, and think about it, just stake what your gonna stake and be happy win or lose that’s a good gamble to me. If you can’t do that it’s a poor gamble simple as that.

Having such awareness of the rationality of betting means that ‘luck’ is perceived to play less of a part in SLHG than it would for other kinds of gamblers. Although some of the gamblers I spoke to told me about their own ‘hard luck stories’ the majority were more pragmatic:

I think for some people luck and superstition play a major part of their betting cos as they see it luck is sometimes with you. I think people have purple



patches, but no I don't believe it has an effect on my betting. You have to make your own luck as my old man says.

Andy drew on his own experiences to answer this question:

Poker players, for instance Amarillo Slim and Doyle Brunson, have talked about being on lucky streaks and being on runs and they clearly believe when your luck is in you need to continue the play. But as far as I'm concerned there is no such thing; but I can see how people would believe in it because there are times when you're on a roll and your subconscious is thinking I've been lucky this week so I should continue the backing. It shouldn't be a factor really, but it is.

As we saw in the literature review chapters, the distinction between chance and skill dominated many of the earlier conceptions of gambling, none more so than in the work of Roger Caillois (1962) who so sharply differentiated between games of *Alea* (chance) and games of *Agon* (skill). The problem with such putative insights is the lack of understanding gambling as a distinct leisure activity in its own right.

As we can clearly see from the interview quotations below, SLHGs often attempt to collapse the duality between *Alea* and *Agon* by seeking to develop their gambling skillset over the long term. As Stebbins points out, 'it is clear that positive feelings about [any serious leisure] activity come, to some extent, from sticking with it through thick and thin, from conquering adversity' (2001, p.6). As Brian explained, the key is to persevere with your own system:

Yeah and picking the right bets, the majority of your bets can be good but they don't win. You know you are placing the right bets but it just didn't happen that time, so you have got to try and stick to your own way of doing things really. Stick with it. A couple of months ago I had four horses in a row that got beat in photo finishes. You've got to take the rough with the smooth. I think it all works out at the end of the day.

## ***A unique ethos and social world***

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue that each leisure field is a particular microcosm with its own logic and it is characterized by a 'specific illusion', a game constructed around struggles for social, cultural and symbolic capital and by practices, ideas, rules and beliefs that constitute the field as a distinct universe. What this kind of interpretation perhaps underestimates is the extent to which gambling is as much about the thrill or the buzz as it is about practices, ideas, rules and beliefs. Indeed, what is also pivotal to gambling is the event of gamble itself and the overwhelming excitement that encourages the continuation of the play (Carse 1986). What my research suggests is that if for most casual gamblers winning is what is the most important aspect of gambling, for SLHGs the continuation of the play is just as, if not more, important. SLHG is ultimately guided by a double logic then: it is a 'game' played for the purpose of winning and a 'game' played for the purpose of continuing the play (*ibid*, p.3).

For all the strengths of Bourdieu and Wacquant's theoretical framework it offers little or no sense of what it feels like in leisure fields. It ignores the fact that our cognitive dispositions are shaped by the bodily experience of being in the world – its spaces, textures, sounds, smells and habits – as well as the leisure activity we are captivated by. SLHG is an all-encompassing world with its own reality that SLHGs are so far inside that life outside seems unreal, or at least dull, in comparison. To borrow an insight from Elkington (2014, p.103-104), there is something of an unknown known, that draws SLHGs to the world of gambling: 'it is a force that cannot be reduced to the social, the natural or the cultural. It is, rather, a phenomenon that brings these areas together and, indeed, in part produces them' (Elkington 2014, p.103-104). This unknown known is essential to SLHG, is the basis of its devotion, and is what makes gambling, for SLHGs, a serious leisure activity that combines cognitive effort with embodied sensuous delight.

In trying to capture what this entails theoretically, Blackshaw (2010) argues that serious leisure (or what he calls 'devotional leisure') is perhaps best understood through Max Weber's concept of a 'value-sphere'. To borrow Blackshaw's line of argument, it has been demonstrated throughout this chapter that the participants in

this study are collectively attracted to the inherent norms, rules, ethics and obligations that comprise SLHG, and that all those individuals commit themselves to it do so as a career. What this leads me to conclude about SLHG, to paraphrase Zinzenhof (cited in Blackshaw 2010, p.142), is that in 'making an existential commitment to their chosen leisure activity, SLHGs not only gamble in order to live, but live for the sake of their gambling, and if there is no more gambling to do they suffer or go to sleep'. As Blackshaw goes on to point out:

The concept of value-spheres is useful because not only does it challenge the functionalist tendency to understand society as a totality, but it also understands that the modern world is not one in which 'everyone is related to a greater or lesser extent to the same ethical powers' (Heller 1999, p.37) and that men and women are capable of succeeding in establishing different ways of life in order to find meaning based on the shared values of their own communities of interest.

In common with Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) Blackshaw is suggesting here that we must try to reorient the study of serious leisure away from core attributes of individuals who commit themselves to serious leisure or identifying key features of serious leisure towards trying to understand the fluidity of the social processes involved in serious leisure and the possibilities it offers participants.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has demonstrated how and in what ways Stebbins' classic model of serious leisure can be applied to SLHG. This discussion was prefigured by applying Becker's (1953) classic career contingencies formulation to move attention away from ascribing the development of serious leisure to 'antecedent predispositions' towards individual 'motives and experiences' that emerge in the course of experience. The analysis was supplemented with field theory borrowed from Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), which enabled me to theorize SLHG as an autonomous field of serious leisure practice driven by its own unique ethos and social world. It has been demonstrated at numerous points in this chapter utilising Stebbins' model that my participants unequivocally engage in serious leisure.



In the next two chapters the aim will be to build on these insights to demonstrate that for all its strengths this application of Stebbins' model leaves us with a rather static understanding of SLHG that to all intents and purposes reifies its unique ethos and social world into a set of attributes. The argument developed in the next chapter will be that SLHG is in fact a historically constituted field of serious leisure practice, structured around wider societal changes – especially but not exclusively the shift from producer to consumer capitalism – and inextricably linked to changes in technology. After fleshing out what these changes are and how they have radically impacted on wider society and gambling in recent years this chapter will demonstrate that SLHG has been transformed in no uncertain terms by the commodification of gambling. This will be illustrated by focusing specifically on the SLHG career of one of my participants, whose biography (and subsequent SLHG career) happened to coincide with the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism that was accompanied in no uncertain terms by the emergence of neoliberalism which served to change the fabric of society (Harvey 2005), and with it both work and leisure experience, by placing value first and foremost on competition and individualization.

The final chapter from the empirical findings will explore the consequences of these radical changes for the social world of SLHG. In so doing it will focus its attention particularly on the radical shift in the practice of SLHG that emerged as result. It will be argued that SLHGs fall into two categories: those who understand the commodification of gambling as an opportunity to extend their existing gambling skills set and those who see it as a radical shift in how they gamble. This chapter will focus its attention on the second category of SLHGs. Drawing on the framework underpinning Goffman's (1969) classic dramaturgical study, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, the field work here will be analysed by exploring the changed economy of the 'backstage' 'work' that goes on when gambling has been 'recommodified', on the one hand, and by revealing the leisure aspects of SLHG in aesthetic space which frame 'front stage' performativity at the racecourse, on the other.

## Chapter 7

### The Recommodification of the Betting Market and the Implications for Serious Leisure Horserace Gambling

#### Introduction

As was pointed out in Chapter 1, my foremost criticism of Stebbins' work is that it studies serious leisure as if it exists in a vacuum outside society and culture. One of the consequences of this is that it tends to dichotomize leisure into two distinct categories – serious leisure and casual leisure – without questioning the impact of changing societal and cultural assumptions. This in turn prevents Stebbins from engaging in aspects of serious leisure practice beyond his own concern about their fit with an ideal-type model. It was also argued that in this regard Stebbins demonstrates in all his work a marked tendency to look down on leisure that is consumerist in orientation. The empirical evidence discussed in the next chapter suggests that SLHG must be understood as a historically constituted field of serious leisure practice, structured around a rapidly changed betting market under the pressure of a global capitalist system that at the beginning of the twenty-first century moved decisively away from the production forms it had taken since its early modern beginnings towards neoliberal consumerism. It will also suggest that we need to identify 'functioning' in SLHG as an achievement of what individuals manage to become, rather than prescribing activities and experiences in advance. In this chapter, drawing on interviews with my participants, my ethnography from the field, newspaper reports on recent developments in the betting industry and my research into betting firms online and in shops, I build on these issues to demonstrate how consumerization has impacted on society generally and how this has led to the 'recommodification' of gambling on neoliberal lines. This has had some significant implications for how and in what ways SLHG practice their craft which will be the topic of the first part of Chapter 8.

The connection between 'the *social* in the *individual*, the *general* in the *particular*' (Bauman 1990, p. 10) in this chapter is made by discussing in some detail the biography and SLHG career of Dom, a twenty seven year old university graduate

from Leeds, who found his leisure vocation while trying to avoid the trappings of unemployment in the low paid sector of the horseracing industry. This discussion enables me to demonstrate how macro-economic changes have impacted on society and culture at a micro level, in Dom's case, by limiting his work career options but opening up an alternative 'career' in SLHG. This discussion also foregrounds the analysis of the backstage 'work' and front stage 'leisure' in Chapter 8 which I argue accompanies the changed landscape of SLHG. However, before we look at any of these things we must briefly take into account the changed nature of capitalism, prompted by an ideological shift to neoliberalism, and how this is connected to wider societal changes.

### **Getting behind the scenes: neoliberalism and the commodification of everything**

As has been well documented in the literature, in the post-war period Britain witnessed two decades of uninterrupted economic growth and full employment; this period was dominated by public ownership and wealth redistribution through the welfare state (Blackshaw 2013). But by the end of the 1970s the fundamental needs of capitalism had changed. This had a profound effect upon the social, economic and political landscape, altering all Western societies ideologically (Harvey 2005). As Blackshaw explains, production based capitalism was undermined by contradictions that were at work in Western democracies at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. This was fuelled by the 1974 oil crisis which saw the stagnation of the world economy. This in turn led to the ideological victory of neoliberalism. In the event capitalism was fundamentally transformed as Western societies began to foreground consumption rather than production. This subsequently undermined existing institutional frameworks, divisions of labour and the social relations underpinning them, as capitalism sought to 'bring all human action into the domain of the market' (Harvey 2005, p.3). As Harvey shows, from the early 1970s onwards processes of deindustrialization began to fundamentally transform society and there subsequently emerged a new market society based on a reoriented consumer capitalism, which led to the diversification of the service, retail and leisure industries that eventually came to dominate all Western economies. Capitalism had begun to replicate the



central features of the market economy identified by Marx – commodification, rapid change, transience – but in new, heightened consumer forms.

Scholarship on this shift in capitalism has consistently argued that we have seen a steady commodification of culture, the collapse of the distinction between high and low cultural tastes, a populism of consumer values in leisure, fragmentation of social classes, and a shift towards life politics reflected in the proliferation of neo-tribes (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1991; Maffesoli 1996). Recent changes in the horseracing industry encompass many of these wider themes found in contemporary society, but particularly the commodification and homogenization of leisure experience (Rojek 1995). Commodification refers to the process by which goods, ideas, labour, services, and even people themselves are purchased as a resource and transformed into objects of exchange. Homogenization as it is used here by Rojek denotes the reduction in cultural diversity as a result of commodification. Commodification and homogenization are a corollary of the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism which was accompanied in no uncertain terms by the emergence of neoliberalism which served to change the fabric of society (Harvey 2005), and with it both work and leisure experience, by placing value first and foremost on competition and individualization.

Competition and individualization have reshaped the focus and direction of all social institutions to provide the support for individual achievement and mobility rather than ensuring social needs (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The result has been an increase in responsibility falling on the individual (Bauman 2000). Contemporary labour markets, especially those within the service sector, are fragmented. They comprise casual, part-time and irregular forms of labour, many of which are insecure, offering little scope for career progression. In Bauman's (2000) view, where work once provided the record of one's life achievement (or failure) and the main orientation point in reference to which all other pursuits, including our leisure, could be planned, it is now regarded as a means to an end for many people. Sociologists, such as Miles (1998), have argued that it is now consumerism that replaces work as the main orienting point in contemporary society. Consumer capitalism is fuelled by the creation of desires and the constant emphasis on satisfying those desires. The logic of consumer capitalism is simply to ensure that our desires are never fulfilled

once and for all, and that we must keep consuming *ad infinitum* in order to fuel the economy (Bauman 2007). This has resulted in consumerism creating a new 'product': the consumer, perpetually dissatisfied, restless, and looking for new things to consume.

### **The metamorphosis of leisure gambling under the auspices of neoliberalism**

As Gerda Reith points out, ubiquitous consumerism has seen to it that gambling has been transformed from 'a semi-deviant, largely underground pastime to a globalized, multi-billion dollar leisure industry' (2013, p.316). Indeed, in recent years gambling is an enterprise that has thrived because of its innovation to adapt to new and changed times, as the figures from the gambling commission demonstrate. In the year between 2014 and 2015, off-course betting generated for the British commercial gambling industry a gross yield of £5.4 billion. This saw an increase of 2% or £112m on the previous year (Gambling Commission 2015, p.5). As Reith points out over the last ten years gambling has become an integral feature of the economy, becoming the 'ultimate twenty-first-century product, sold by businesses and purchased by the consumer – the gambler' (Reith 2013, p.317).

In Britain, this radical change has been underpinned by the transformation of the political, economic and technological context categorized by new perceptions and meanings surrounding gambling as a leisure practice. Once seen as two distinct spheres, guided by certain moral and social undertones – one deviant and the other closely socially controlled – under the auspices of consumer freedom gambling and leisure have today merged as one, becoming not only less regulated but also an integral part of the economy. As we saw in Chapter 4, this transformation has been facilitated by the liberalization of gambling facilitated by central government and shaped by businesses under the rubric of profit. As Reith points out, this reorientation of leisure gambling as consumerism has 'allowed the industry to expand into a global enterprise with a central place in the world economy' (2010, p.317). The upshot of this is that, the commodification of gambling has become global and Britain is now a world market leader.



Orford suggests that these changes emerged for two reasons: on the one hand gambling legislation was out of step with changes in society, and on the other, because the law has been 'overtaken by technological developments' (2003, p.49). However, it would be more appropriate to suggest that this refocusing of attitude towards gambling was necessary to expand the betting market in line with other neo-liberal markets. Indeed, the key to establishing gambling as a mainstream leisure activity was simple; all the government had to do was open up the gambling market. One of the most distinguishing aspects of this new found freedom is best reflected in the 2005 Gambling Act which permitted gambling establishments to advertise their products and promote gambling. The implications of this significant piece of legislation not only saw to it that gambling was economically viable but would also play a key role in making gambling socially and culturally accepted which has helped to embed it firmly as an important aspect of everyday life. As Reith puts it, this meant 'decisions about whether and how much to gamble should be largely left to the individual, and also that informed choice will result in rational and therefore responsible behaviour' (2007, p.23). For the gambling industry, the opening up of the betting came with just one minor stipulation: that it should provide gamblers with basic education about how to gamble sensibly. This meant gambling providers could freely, without government intervention, 'abdicate their responsibility' (Runciman 2014, p.28), promote their commodities and expand their business interests. The state of play under these new conditions is perfectly summed up by Runciman who argues that 'government has acquiesced in the idea that its regulatory role absolves it of all responsibility to take a stand' (*ibid*). The message emanating from governments over the last decade has been clear, it is not the state's role to monitor people's gambling as long as they do it sensibly, which simply means providing them with 'reliable information and a clear view of what they [are] betting on' (*ibid*, p.23).

Since 2005 the extension of the consumer gambling market and its notions of free enterprise and freedom of choice has changed the way that gambling is seen and led to an exponential expansion of the gambling industry (Reith 2013). This has not only transformed the social and cultural outlook of the general population towards gambling but has also significantly transformed gambling into a new kind of consumer product to be marketed and consumed. Key to this metamorphosis has been new technological developments which have ensured that gambling is no



longer necessarily restricted to particular times and places. The development of gambling into a mainstream leisure activity has been accompanied through a proliferation of gambling opportunities and choices, as well as the production of new consumer products and locations, changing not only *how* gamblers bet but also *where* gamblers bet – thus ensuring the ideal market conditions in which both responsible and irresponsible gamblers are consumers who are being 'looked after'.

As we saw in the literature review chapters, in particular in the work of Gerda Reith (2013), this commodification of gambling has created new kinds of dependency which has had an increasingly harmful effect on both individuals and society. For Reith (2013), the commodification of gambling has not only seen gambling become more widespread but has encouraged a wider social strata of gamblers to bet, in the process mostly affecting those with the most to lose. As we have also seen, to date most research suggests that the problem with gambling lies in its dubious moral status as a legitimate leisure activity. However, what these interpretations ignore is that under conditions of liberalization and de-regulation gambling has been transformed first and foremost into a consumer activity.

What this suggests is that we must endeavour to understand gambling in a different way. As Bauman (1990) suggests, consumerism is the way we live now; in our society we are trained first and foremost as consumers. This creates a paradox. Under conditions of consumerism we are given the chance to assert our freedom as active agents of self-government. However, at the same time we are encouraged to seek security and direction from the market. That is, we develop a reliance on the market itself for the approval of our consumer choices. In other words, ubiquitous consumerism provides us with choice and opportunity but at the same time poses us with the dilemma of social control. As Davis puts it 'by exercising freedom in its consumerist form, Bauman claims, individuals actually enhance their dependency on the very source of that freedom, the capitalist market itself' (2008, p.59).

What is overlooked by Davis, however, is that the market also creates two different kinds of consumers: winning consumers and losing consumers (what Bauman (1998) calls 'flawed' consumers). In gambling studies, over the last ten years, the focus of most research has been on 'flawed' consumer gamblers. The central focus

of the analysis developed in the next chapter concentrates on how the commodification of gambling has created new conditions for successful gambling which has led to the metamorphosis of SLHG. In other words, it will be demonstrated how the commodification of gambling not only leads to dependency but new kinds of freedom by opening up new opportunities.

These are obviously important issues and demand that we research them further. However, my focus in the first part of this chapter is on the ways in which commodification and homogenization and competition and individualization have radically transformed horseracing betting so that we will be in a position to explore how this has in turn transformed SLHG in the next chapter. The discussion below focuses on the rapidly changed betting market under the pressure of a global capitalist system in which consumption replaces production. It is argued that where the centre of the betting market was once the all-encompassing world of the racecourse with its own history, its own habits and language, its own dress codes, its own landscape and its own morality (Cassidy 2002), marked by social class inequality, in the transformation to neoliberal capitalism, this kind of social and cultural continuity is no longer possible. Under the auspices of neoliberalism consumption and betting go together and gambling is recommodified.

### **The rise and fall of the on-course betting market**

In the first instance it is important to explain how horserace gambling was established and how it existed until very recently since it has been entwined with capitalism and markets since its inception. However, this discussion must be brief. It will draw on the work of Rebecca Cassidy (1999, 2002). As Cassidy points out gambling invariably relies on the 'supply side' of horseracing, which is of course the racehorse owner. It is widely understood that horseracing has long been an established elitist sport. The commercialization of the racecourse and its subsequent development only took off with industrialization and the emergence of the railway and print media. During the nineteenth century the racecourse was transformed from a localized, private sporting venue into a national one. This shift transformed horseracing into money-making, mass spectacle and facilitated the growth of the gambling industry. The proximity of new racecourses to major towns

and cities not only made horseracing more accessible and popular but with the coupling of the growth in mass leisure saw to it that the commercial incentives and the economic opportunities for gambling were promoted and expanded. This is turn saw to it that the 'supply side' of horseracing grew in unison with the 'demand side', embodied in the form of 'punter'. As Cassidy (1999, p.106) points out, the circulation of money in racing was and still is essentially an 'uneasy symbiosis' whereby although owners provide the medium on which punters bet, it is the 'punters' who provide the largest proportion of the prize money through betting, which is one part of the incentive for owners to continue to invest in horseracing.

Just as production-based industrial capitalism required a massed workforce, allowing forms of emotional or political mutuality to exist to provide a useful stabilizing function, so it needed a mass leisure population. If in the work place this mutuality manifested itself in trade unions and collective bargaining, in free time it manifested itself in mass leisure participation (Borsay 2005). In this regard mass leisure had an important social function: on the one hand it provided the illusion of 'subjective' freedom by hiding the 'objective' reality of social class domination and control. Writing in 2002, Cassidy argued that betting still continues to provide this social function since like Giddens (1990, p.55) she thinks that capitalism is a system of commodity production based on the relation between private ownership of capital and wage labour which inform social class relations:

By making a bet the punter aligns himself (*sic*) with the connections of his chosen horse. His stake in the future of the race is embodied in his betting slip. He watches the race, not as a dentist, shift-worker, security guard or whatever else he may be, but according to the template of racehorse ownership that is etched onto the racecourse landscape... Here there is a momentary individual freedom, which is pleasurable if inconsequential outside the course. Punters relish this freedom whilst many are aware of its superficiality, which does not seem to detract from its temporary intensity. Racegoers participate in a masquerade, taking pleasure in the idea of being part of 'high society' without believing that anything has really changed. Betting is thus the veneer pasted over the fixed class structure of horseracing, the appearance of mobility that makes the structural inequality more palatable (2002, p.85).



In other words the underlying power that embodies the liminal world of horseracing lies in its ability to make the masses believe they are individuals free to make individual choices. But the truth is that although we think we are individuals who shape our own destinies in truth we have little power in terms of changing things since structural inequality and social class relations ultimately define us and our place in the world. In this regard Cassidy is arguing in this quotation that the freedom to bet is a kind of gloss that makes this duplicity possible. There is no doubt that from the very beginning the betting market has worked within the capitalist structure. But just 14 years since Cassidy wrote these words her assessment of the social function of the betting market is profoundly out-of-date. To appreciate how betting has been transformed must try to think ourselves into a very different world of gambling that the one depicted by Cassidy is this quotation. The betting market which gave primacy to reinforcing production based capitalism, and which was founded upon the cultural hegemony of social class I shall demonstrate below, no longer works in the way suggested by Cassidy. Capitalist enterprise is contingent on production and consumption for competitive markets, prices being the key indicators for investors, producers and consumers alike. In order to make the betting market more competitive there has today emerged a new alliance of consumer capitalism and technology which has transformed gambling in ways unimaginable when Cassidy conducted her research at the end of the 1990s.

The following section of the analysis draws on four sources of primary research: my analysis of newspaper reports on recent developments in the betting industry, my research into betting firms online and in shops, interviews with my participants and my ethnography at a number of racecourses in the north of England. The rest of the discussion is drawn from the existing literature on the racecourse betting market. From this base we have an informative juxtaposition with which to critically explore the metamorphosis of betting on the racecourse and the impact this has had on gambling more widely.

### ***The racecourse betting market: the ways things used to be***

For the purposes of our discussion in this chapter, what is most important about the racecourse is that it until very recently it remained the hub of the betting market

determining the 'starting price' (the value at which bets are settled), throughout the betting shops around the country. The betting ring is an enclosed area of the racecourse where the bookmakers operate. Typically, it is situated in front of the main stands of the racecourse and is populated with bookmakers, with their own pitch which clearly identifies their name, their home town or ancestry, the maximum and minimum stakes for placing a bet and of course, their display of odds. As Cassidy (2002) suggests, like any other market, the betting ring has traditionally been a vibrant space of hustle and bustle where the bookmakers compete for the punters' money and punters can easily and conveniently shop around for the best prices. The picture painted by Cassidy dominates the gambling literature, while as Herman speaks of 'the ever-changing odds' (1976, p.44) displayed on chalk boards, Huggins describes 'bookmakers odds varied sufficiently to make it worthwhile looking for the best odds before placing a bet' (Huggins 2003, p.42). The betting ring is the place where gamblers physically trade their bets; for this reason, the racecourse has traditionally been an intense hub of action, infused with colourful personalities. As Cassidy explains:

Whilst the weight of support for each horse on course is supposed to be reflected by its 'starting price', the major betting firms have a vested interest in attempting to make the price reflect off-course business also. This is where the tic-tac men come in. One of the functions of the tic-tac men, identified by their white gloves and windmilling arms, is to communicate wagers to the bookmakers in order to offset the weight of 'office money' communicated to them via the 'blower'. This information travels from the clearing house of the bookmaker, who calculates that at the current starting price the shop liability would be unacceptably large, to the 'blower tic-tac man', via the 'blower agent'. Professional punters often complain that 'office money' distorts the on-course market, although the bookmaker multiples deny that the practice is as extensive as the independent bookmakers and on-course professionals claim. However, the movement of money by the big bookmaking firms is communicated by tic-tacs in a secret code in contrast to the public signals used to transmit market information between bookmakers (2002, p.77).

The betting ring is, in other words, not only a secret world but one that also incorporates its own charm and alluring appeal. This is what gives betting on the racecourse its ambience. The noise and colour and this mass gathering of characters not only stimulates all the senses but it also adds to the drama and the vibrancy of the betting ring. The betting ring is a colourful but indubitably masculine territory. Cassidy's vivid description of the distinguishing characters that embody the betting ring is captured in another quotation:

My favourite bookmaker is an East End boy made good. He is middle-aged, portly, thinning on top, wears Pringle jumpers and slip-on shoes and a sheepskin coat when it is cold in the ring. He speaks quickly, and responds to questions before they are finished, replying with absolute confidence and a harsh wit. He has strong views about everything, 'I don't take bets from women and I don't do each way', 'That won't win, and anyone who says it will don't know what they're talkin about!' He generally has either a wad of money in his hand or a batch of betting tickets, ready to distribute to punters who back with him because he is trusted and admired' (2002, p.76).

The betting ring then for Cassidy is a concentrated social space of interaction and drama where the thrill and the excitement is generated through the anticipation of betting with one of these unique and invariably famous characters. Although the 'bookies' are invariably viewed by 'punters' as the enemy, according to Cassidy, their individual personalities enable many of them to gain respect, admiration and trust. Betting with a bookmaker on-course has always also been seen as the most preferable way of betting since it is the heart of the market. The face-to-face encounter with a bookmaker brings a level of personal involvement to the bet as the bookmaker and punter attempt to gain ascendancy over one other. This encounter is facilitated by the bookmaker who 'makes a book' which essentially:

involves offering a 'price' (odds) on all of the horses in the race to anyone who wishes to challenge your judgement. These odds express the bookmaker's opinion as to which horse is most likely to win. Come second, and so on through the 'field'. These odds are displayed on course or in the betting shop, where 'punters' (those who bet) may 'take a price' (bet) on their 'fancy' (choice) if they feel that the horse has as great a chance of winning or better than that



expressed by the book. Once punters begin to bet at these prices, the book becomes an instrument measuring the strength of support for each runner in the race (Cassidy 1999 p.109).

In making a book on-course bookmakers calculate what is known as the 'over-round' (basically the sum of all the probabilities in any given race) which gives them their profit. As Zola explains, 'while the method of selection is a rational one, the distinguishing feature is access to information and not the exercise of any particular skill' (in Cosgrave 2006, p.157). It is this 'inside' information that enables the bookmaker to gain ascendancy over the punter.

This 'inside' information has long, however, had strong links to price-fixing, which as Nott (2013) explains in his experience takes place on the racecourse. On most racecourses there was traditionally at least two, if not, three or four betting rings. This meant the bookmakers have traditionally been able to exploit the lack of information available to punters in the 'cheaper' enclosures. As Kenny explained:

In the old days the bookies could lay false prices and clear up. The top on-course bookies would get together and lay false favourites. There are so many punters who simply back the favourite, you see. But even the smaller bookies had tricks up their sleeves. There used to be an old con merchant called Cliff Bailey who used to do the third enclosures on the northern circuit. Bailey would put some money on a large priced horse and then do an imaginary run on it. So you'd see this horse move in from say 33/1 down to say 25/1, then 16/1, then 11/1, and so on. All the other bookies would follow Bailey's lead. He'd sometimes even do it with shorter priced horses which was a bit risky cos he obviously didn't have the money to back himself up if things went skewwhiff. You could see all the mugs wading in to back these horses. Ten minutes later it would go back up in price. Easy money.

Cassidy (2002) argues that at the time of her research the racecourses had by and large eradicated such irregularities as a result of a series of meetings between The Horserace Betting Levy Board and other members of the industry which took place between the years of 1996 and 1998 to try to protect the integrity of the sport in a period of decline. However, in Cassidy's thesis at the turn of the century the betting

ring is not only still the hub of the horserace betting market (albeit often at the mercy of interventions from the big off-course bookmakers) but all the drama and the colour of traditional racecourse culture is still intact.

### ***The new decentred betting market: the ways things are today***

Fast forward ten years. I'm at York for the first May meeting of 2014. Walking into the betting ring is undoubtedly still a momentous event and there is a buzz in the air. But some things have clearly altered. Entering the betting ring is still an event to be sure. But it feels to me just like any other retail space. What is going on there, the competition for punters hard earned money, remains the same, but the sights, sounds, smells of the betting ring, depicted in Cassidy's (2002, p.77) account, 'so capable of making the blood rush', are entirely absent. The charismatic personalities have disappeared, not least the tic-tac men who 'signalled information to their principals in a picturesque and mysterious manner' (Huggins 2003, p.142). The betting ring today is a world in which advertising and media weave their way into the realm of public space and electronic devices from cell phones to laptops proliferate – that once seemingly sacrosanct domain of the betting ring with its own colour and culture has been transformed into a visually consumable spectacle. To all intents and purposes we have witnessed a rationalization of the betting ring resulting in greater commodification and less culture.

Although the betting ring may appear to still be the place 'where the action is' wireless Internet has replaced the distinguishing characters and betting exchanges now determine the on-course prices. Betting exchanges were first introduced in 2000 as the gambling industry was beginning to be deregulated. The first betting exchange was a combination of two corporations known as flutter.com and betfair. betfair is now the largest betting exchange in Britain, closely followed by BETDAQ. As the name implies betfair shares similar principles to the stock exchange. It works on the principles of a free market which allows the gambler to trade and speculate on betting prices. Betting exchanges have revolutionized betting in Britain by offering a more advanced betting medium to gamblers by enabling them to 'lay' as well as 'place' bets. As we saw earlier in the chapter, traditionally, it was the punter who backed horses and the bookmaker who would lay prices. With the introduction of betting exchanges it is now possible to both 'bet' and 'lay'. Punters can now set their

own odds and offer bets against other like-minded people who are gambling on the same event but are predicting different outcomes. In other words, the gambling market allows punters formulate their own 'books' as self-styled layers.

The key issue at stake here was connectivity. Today we are more connected in more ways to more people than we ever have been at any point in human history. This has transformed betting in a number of ways. betfair and BETDAQ are primarily concerned with connectivity. They offered a new medium which brought gamblers together. In order to make some profit from its enterprise betfair charges a 5% commission on winning bets; for regular customers this is reduced to 2%. betfair and BETDAQ have transformed how people bet, providing them with new betting opportunities. As Kevin shrewdly observed:

I'm a big fan of betfair. If I think a horse has no chance of winning and people are prepared to bet on it, I can make a profit. The key is to offset any potential losses. In my experience what happens on the exchanges tells you all sorts. It is not uncommon to see a horse with a price of 5/1 trading at 9/1 or 10/1 or vice-versa on the exchanges. There is clearly a window of opportunity there. So I think people who take gambling seriously or try to make a living from it use exchanges.

The success of the betting exchanges resides in the principle of the free market and their opening up of the ability to trade on a democratic basis. Anyone can trade on betfair or BETDAQ. The importance of the betting exchanges and their growing popularity lies in their flexibility and innovation which has brought new competition to the market. The betting exchanges have widened betting choices for gamblers in other ways.

Connectivity has other implications for betting. New forms of betting are now possible. The great trailblazers for this were the betting exchanges but the major bookmakers were quick to realize the benefits. Like the high street bookmakers the exchanges guarantee best odds<sup>9</sup> to broaden their appeal. But perhaps their biggest

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<sup>9</sup> Best odds guaranteed ensures that the price you take at the time the bet is placed is the price that will be paid out if the bet wins. But more importantly, if the price is greater than the price that was taken the bet will be paid at the higher price.



appeal is that they offer in 'in-play' betting which allows the gambler to place or lay a bet during a sporting contest. All this is typically accompanied with some astute television, Internet and newspaper marketing which portrays the punter as an informed decision maker who has to take into consideration all 'his' options before making an informed decision.

There are other benefits for the bookmakers. Betting on-line also essentially means betting with an off-shore company. This involves the transfer of credit not to William Hill plc, but to William Hill (Malta) Ltd. Bets placed digitally are not captured by a different tax regime but are not part of the Horserace Betting Levy (Thomas 2014), which is a 10.75% statutory duty on bets placed off-course.

As Nott explains, with advances in technology it is now the case that all the bookmakers reap the benefits of the exchanges. As he points out, though, so do the punters. In his view, today there is 'no longer a need to have studied the form yourself, employ a card-marker to do it, or just have an eagle-eyed floorman to price up a race' (2013, p.186). Prices or odds in other words are now dictated by what goes on the exchanges (through the RDT (Racecourse Data Tech) rather than in the betting ring on the racecourse.

These changes have robbed the racecourse of its ducking and diving activities and the vibrancy of the sounds and the atmosphere of fluctuating prices, as well as the urgency that comes with placing a bet. Indeed, the betting exchanges have changed the landscape of on-course betting to the extent that traditional 'layers' have also now been turned into 'traders'. This has had a threefold effect. Firstly, although the bookmakers have been able to lower their risks, their profit margins are now considerably lower. Second, the consequence of this is that the value of prices offered by on-course bookmakers has become less attractive and the value for place positions has been reduced. Thirdly, some bookmakers have stopped laying each way odds on clear favourites. In effect, the emergence of the betting exchanges hand in hand with mobile computer technology has given punters more choice and enabled them to get a better handle on the betting market. What this means is that they can compare the betting exchanges to other aspects of the betting market which enables them to search for the best value for money. As Nott puts it 'once the betting exchange idea caught on, it soon became the best indicator of a horse's

chance ever. Gone were the days of false favourites and big margins. The exchanges bet to 100%' (Nott 2013, p.155). The emergence of the betting exchanges has had a massive impact on the on-course betting market, because what was once determined by those with 'inside' knowledge, the watching faces, has now been replaced by watching markets.

Officially, the starting price of a horse is still determined as it always has been by a number of agencies: the Press Association (who offer estimated starting prices in the morning newspapers), the off-course bookmakers (who offer early prices), the on-course bookmakers (who also include the off-course bookmakers) and the 'Starting Price Reporters', who are employed by racecourses to determine prices based on the consensus that emerges as a result their collective observations of the fluctuating prices available at the racecourse. However, today the off-course bookmakers and the exchanges have most influence on the starting price. The former because they are not so much laying prices as trading them, which means the on-course price is invariably going to be lower than the early prices offered in the offices because the major bookmakers are offering these as loss leaders to attract the most punters. As Kenny said to me on numerous occasions, "anyone who doesn't take on an early morning price on a big racing day is a fool". But it is the latter that have most influence quite simply because they provide by far the best guide to the likelihood of the winner.

Kenny: If you'd have said to me ten, five years ago that we'd be in this situation I'd have laughed in your face. I remember going to the first ever Sunday meeting at Doncaster – must have been about twenty five years ago now. Anyhow, Sunday betting laws had not been changed and you couldn't bet on-course. You had to put your bets on the day before. The atmosphere was dead. I remember that day saying something to my mate about Sunday racing having no future without on-course betting. But in a way that's what we have now. There isn't really a proper on-course market anymore. The only ones who bet on-course now are social bettors, mams and dads, the lads and lasses out on hen parties and stag dos. You see 'em every weekend, especially over the summer, pissed up backing five or six horses in every race and at crap prices. It makes me laugh. People are never off their mobile phones these days. But

they don't use them in smart ways. If they just got on their phones and compared the prices on offer with them on-course, they'd get a right shock – especially the silly buggers backing each way. To be fair, they're only there for the booze and the craic. But nobody in their right mind would bet at on-course prices, especially each way at a fifth of the odds at sixteen plus runner handicap – you're havin' a laugh. It is them Saturday meetings and the big festivals where the on-course bookies make their money, the likes of York, Cheltenham, Chester, Newmarket. All the social gamblers there for a day for a good drink and a dabble on the gee gees. God knows what they [the on-course bookmakers] turn over during weekday meetings at Pontefract, Redcar, Catterick and that.

Two days later I'm in Wakefield town centre. In the last ten years there has been a radical shift in the positioning of bookmakers on the high street in all British towns and cities. Not so long ago, most punters had limited choice in their localities. "By the time I started betting in the late 1970s Billy Hill's had gobbled up most of the independents. You only really had a choice between Peter Smith and Hill's in my area. There was one Ladbrokes and one Coral shop in Leeds city centre to my knowledge. But nobody liked Smith's cos he was a first past the post bookie", explained Kenny. Today the 'Big Three' – Coral, Ladbrokes, William Hill – and some of the new independents have a presence in the same localities. Betting shops appear to be an accepted element of the high street now. In effect, they have become as mainstream as any other of the retailers.

If the betting ring on the racecourse has lost most of its colour and its culture, so has the high street betting shop which has been transformed from a community centre of sorts; a symbolic place of structure, control and companionship and to some an important space of leisure, to another bland, consumer bastion which has all the accoutrements of any other consumer palace. In other words, most betting shops today look and feel the same. There are eight betting shops located in Wakefield city centre in a radius of less than a square mile: three William Hill's; two Coral's; one Ladbrokes; one Betfred; and one Paddy Power. Betting in them feels much like other kinds of shopping found in the consumer society where consumers are seduced by the market and the presentation of novel goods.



The betting shops' aesthetic appeal tries to lure the prospective gambler in with large bright signs, open glass windows and each has a multitude of screens and offers inviting, luring in the consumer. Many of the betting shops I visited provided similar offers, promotions and products, but each tried to differ in the 'experience' that it provided. Free cups of tea and coffee and cakes have become the norm. The betting shop today is multi-functional: it is a betting retail unit-cum-penny arcade, except that the minimum amount wagered on the Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) that dominate the shop space is £1. In one 45 minute period I watched a man lose over £2000 playing Roulette on a FOTB. The result is that the physiology of the betting shop has changed markedly from the mid-twentieth century shop described by Newman as a community centre of sorts which fulfilled a variety of functions and provided for 'a multitude of needs' (1972, p.159). Shops today are clean, non-smoking environments. TV screens dominate and enable punters to watch live and virtual horserace action from around the globe. To use a term coined by Runciman (2014) in today's betting shops 'ambience is everywhere'. Punters are sold the image that they have unlimited choices and options, and more importantly, that they are in control.

For much of the last part of the twentieth century the 'Big Three' had an oligopolistic hold on the betting market in Britain. However, in the last ten years we have seen an opening up of choice on the high street. The 'Big Three' still have the largest presence but they have now got increasing competition from the brash new upstarts. The competition between the bookmakers today is reminiscent of the supermarket price wars. For Hills, Ladbrokes and Coral read Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons. For Aldi and Lidl, read Betfred and Paddy Power. But it has to be said that the betting market is not the food market and it functions through conditions that are specific to betting. As Hindess points out 'the consequences of market allocation cannot be determined independently of what those institutional conditions are' (2003, p.150). There are indeed many similarities between the changed food market and the changed betting market but there are some notable differences. It is to these that we must now turn.

## What else changed?

As we saw in Chapter 4, the opportunity to gamble has expanded as a result of some key interventions from then state: the relaxation of gambling legislation, the expansion of available credit; and the explosion of a consumer culture designed specifically to appeal to our every desire (Bauman 2007). In other words, and especially after the 2005 Gambling Act, betting was opened up to full blown commodification. This transition might be called the 'recommodification' of gambling or the opening up of gambling to consumer culture.

The first thing to say about horserace betting is that is fundamental to all other forms of gambling in the Britain. Horserace betting is important since it is historically the hub of the gambling industry and hence the 'natural' home of the bookmakers. The evidence for what percentage of people bet on the horses is sketchy to say the least. Writing in 1978, Cornish estimated that between 20% and 30% of people bet and about 10% on a regular basis (Cornish 1978). But of course many people who gamble bet on different things. In 2010 it was estimated that 16% of people bet on the horses (British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2010). Since the research for this thesis began in 2013 the climate in which the betting industry exists has continued to evolve. There is no doubt that the popularity of gambling on the horses has declined steadily over at least the last fifteen years as young gamblers have moved to other kinds of betting. As Thomas's (2014) article reports, two of the largest bookmaking firms Ladbrokes and Gala Coral have seen their profits from horserace gambling decline markedly over the last ten years with the former reporting a 40% decline since 2005 and the latter 50% between 2009 and 2014. At the same time the amount bookmakers have been required to pay towards the Horserace Betting Levy and to media rights to the racing broadcasters in betting shops increased by 20%. Both the above bookmakers reported that young gamblers these days prefer to bet on other sports, especially football, and gaming machines.

These findings have also has been confirmed by statistics from the Gambling Commission (2015) which appear to support the argument that horseracing is becoming less profitable, while the appeal of football betting is on the rise. The Gambling Commission reported that between 2008 and 2013, revenue from off-

course betting on horseracing fell 11% from £5.7bn to less than £5.1bn. During the same period, gross gambling yield — the total value of stakes placed minus winnings — dropped from £843.79m to £697.05m. In the same period, football betting turnover increased by more than a fifth to £1.2bn, while the gross gambling yield also jumped from £224.94m in 2008-09 to £293.41m in 2012-13.

There is also evidence to suggest that some aspects of the industry are booming while others are not. From my discussions with a small number of independent bookmakers and cashiers in betting shops owned by the 'Big Three' it is clear that betting on horseracing is in decline and that betting shops are increasingly rely on FOBTs as the most lucrative means of income. My ethnography over two years in betting shops in Wakefield city centre confirms both these trends. In fact, during the course of the fieldwork one independent betting shop closed; and the shop manager revealed to me that his gross weekly yield from horserace betting had dropped from £650 to £250 over just a six month period at the beginning of 2014. What this tells us for the purposes of this study is that, the competition to win the custom of those who bet on the horses has intensified, especially on Saturdays and other big racing days.

These observations notwithstanding horseracing continues to be the second best attended sport in Britain after football, and in 2012 accounted for four of the ten highest attended sporting events. In 2011 racecourse attendances reached a modern era record of 6.15m, but declined marginally to 5.58m in 2012. In 2012 there were 1,369 meetings with an average of 4,077 attendees (Economic Impact of British Racing 2013). What such reports tend to overlook, however, is that the style of race attendance has been transformed over the last twenty years, in line with many other sports, and while the large meetings such as Cheltenham Festival, the Epsom Derby and the Grand National have grown in popularity, mid-week racing has tended to decline.

To put the matter in context, declining revenues from horserace betting have forced the bookmaking industry to invent new strategies for turning a profit. The new calculus looks like this: betfair: 'FREE BET WITH EVERY WINNER YOU BACK AT 3/1 SP OR MORE'; William Hill: 'MONEY BACK 2<sup>ND</sup> TO THE SP FAVOURITE ON EVERY CHANNEL 4 RACE with more than 5 runners'; Bet365: 'PRICE PROMISE:



WE WILL BE BEST PRICE ON EVERY HORSE RUNNING LIVE ON CHANNEL 4'; Ladbrokes: 'MONEY BACK 2<sup>ND</sup> OR 3<sup>RD</sup> TO THE FAVOURITE'; StanJames.com: 'TOP PRICE EVERY RUNNER/BET £10 GET £20 FREE BET'; SkyBET: 'MONEY BACK AS A FREE BET – IF YOUR HORSE FINISHES 2<sup>ND</sup> OR 3<sup>RD</sup>' (Mirror Racing supplement 30 April, 2016). What is clear is that the 'Big Three' have been forced to compete with the new competition, especially from the exchanges and on-line bookmakers who do not have their fixed overheads. What we are witnessing here is indeed a mirror of the supermarket prices wars.

But what is different is that where the 'Big Four' supermarkets squeeze their suppliers, all the off-course bookmakers squeeze the profits of the small on-course bookmakers. Where the new discounting supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl gain increasing market share from 'The Big Four', discounters such as Bet365, Betway, betfair and so on gain market share from the 'Big Three' bookmakers. Just like 'The Big Four' are fighting back by cutting prices, offering price guarantees and loyalty cards, so the 'Big Three' fight back by offering big prices and offers. Bookmakers today, just like other businesses are dependent for their competitiveness, and hence profitability, on consumers (Bauman 2000, p.151). Given the competitive nature of the betting market, bookmakers have to offer incentives if they are to be rewarded with the lucrative business available in the market place of consumer gamblers. For example, William Hill plc, which had an annual turnover of £8.9bn in 2015, can afford the significant and self-imposed loss it made by offering guaranteed best prices on all races during the 2015 Cheltenham Festival as part of a strategy to maintain market share (Banks 2016).

The on-course bookmakers do not have such a luxury because they, unlike the exchanges and the large off-course bookmakers, are not able to run 100% zero margin book. Nor do they have the luxury of being in the position of relying on the Fixed Odds Betting Terminals to pick up any of the slack. Geoff Banks sums up this state of affairs perfectly. The 'natural' home of betting horseracing, and especially the popular festivals, has essentially become the battle ground for gaining market share for other gambling products. Those who speak of 'trickle-down economics' as practised by consumer capitalists often use the analogy of 'a rising tide lifts all boats'. Nothing could be further from the truth in the recommodified world of betting where the biggest losers are the small on-course bookmakers and those gamblers addicted

to FOTBs. As for the large bookmakers, as Banks puts it with a much more apt analogy, they are busy peddling the heart and soul of their core business, like dairy 'farmers selling milk to supermarkets. Undersold to further higher margin products. Gaming' (Banks 2016).

### **A serious leisure career as a substitute for a work career: Dom's Story**

As Bauman (2000, p.75) points out, under the auspices of neoliberal capitalism consumers must be 'produced', ever anew, and this is invariably costly to capital since it consumes a large fraction of the total costs of production. This is exacerbated by that fact that competition tends to enlarge costs even further. But capitalism must see to it that markets work and businesses can turn a profit. Indeed, for all the talk of responsibility ('When the FUN stops stop'), with the loosening of state control and the recommodification of gambling the bookmakers have been allowed to subordinate the welfare of problem gamblers to the demands of capital. This observation is nothing new and as I explained in Chapter 3 has been well documented in the gambling literature. What has been overlooked, however, is how the combined effects of technology and the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism have transformed bookmaking as an occupation, creating another groups of losers. As with many other occupations, bookmaking has been deskilled to the extent that they have been replaced by cashiers. This has in turn had major implications for those who work in the betting industry, where low rates of pay and job insecurity are the norm.

While we have already met most of the participants I encountered during the course of my research, in the final part of this chapter I want to take a closer look at Dom's story. By shining a light on his work and leisure experiences and how these intersected at a crucial moment the analysis will attempt to do three things. First, it will demonstrate that even when individuals find little self-worth in relation to their job because it is deskilled and insecure it can open opportunities for creativity and self-fulfilment. Second, it will show that for some individuals it does not make sense to separate their work and leisure. Last but not least it will suggest that 'even in consumption there is creativity of action, for culture is praxis' (Beilharz 2002, p.xxx). In relation to this last point, as we will see in the next chapter, this third aspect of the analysis has major implications for my overall thesis since it suggests that, contrary

to the view offered by Stebbins, serious leisure can be consumer oriented as well as producer oriented.

This is Dom's story. After completing his degree in business studies in 2010 Dom had worked in various low paid jobs. Very much aware that he was unlikely to find an elusive work 'career', he decided he needed to try something different. As he explained to me in our interview:

I did my degree in business studies. Good 2i but I had no chance of getting a graduate level job. I applied for management training positions with Next and a few other large retail companies but didn't even get an interview. After working in a call centre I got a job with William Hill in customer services. I've always been a bit of gambler, so it seemed the right move for me. But that was a bit like working in a call centre; I had to answer phone calls all the time, so I jacked it in. Cos of that experience I was able to get a job at Ladbrokes and that was where I started to learn about gambling properly. Really, I applied to Ladbrokes as a last resort, if I'm honest, it wasn't my ideal choice. Glad I did though. I got to work with an older bloke called Steve who was yer old style bookie. He'd worked in the industry for years. He taught me all sorts. I also got to know some of the regular punters in the shop and it all grew from there, really. I'll tell you, one year working in a bookies is like ten years in any other job. I used to do 60 hour weeks, finishing at 10pm in the summer. On several occasions, when we were short of staff, I worked 8am to 10pm.

After just six months in the job, Dom said he felt comfortable in all aspects of shop bookmaking and felt very capable about doing the job. He applied for a number of manager jobs in and outside Ladbrokes but couldn't get a position. However out of the blue a job came up back at William Hill's head office in Leeds. Seeing it as an opportunity to learn something else, Dom jumped at the chance. Although this job was still not graduate level and largely, in his words, "dull", it nonetheless opened more new opportunities for Dom to expand his gambling skills.

His work career subsequently was to come to have a low priority in Dom's mind. He explained to me that using the knowledge he's learned from working with Steve he started to place much more emphasis on making money through gambling, taking more pleasure in being able to get one over the bookmaker. This shift in emphasis



from work to leisure was reinforced by his attitude towards work in the light of experiences after leaving university:

I've racked up over £20,000 in students loans, I'm twenty six years of age, have a good degree, and still can't get a graduate level job. I still live with my mum and dad. It's fuckin' scandalous. What's going to happen to me and my generation in the future? Permanent life on the minimum wage! No pension!

Contrary the image portrayed in the critical gambling literature, Dom was very level-headed when it comes to money. He explained that tried to save all his wages. This was the typical scenario amongst all the SLHGs I interviewed:

I try to live on my winnings and not spend my wages from work. In the last year I've managed not to touch seven monthly work pays. In the last three months, though, I haven't managed to do that. Swings and roundabouts. But you've got to take the rough with the smooth.

I clear less than £1200 a month from work. Some of my mates earn double and treble that. And I'm the one with the degree! I'd be ashamed to tell 'em what I earn. They'd just rip the piss out of me and buy all my drinks while they were doin' it. They think cos I work at Billy Hill's head office I have a good job. So I let 'em think it. But I have to make money some other way. The gee gee's is my thing. They all bet on football, but there is no edge to be made. Mugs game.

Dom also explained that work for him had now turned into a means to an end. It was a way to pay the bills. In Dom's mind, work was simply a means of acquiring enough money to protect him should he hit a losing streak. He had little or no regard for his employers:

I get no benefits at all for working these (William Hill). I don't think they care. I work for them, but I really don't think they're much cop. I don't even gamble with them to be honest. I've got two accounts, one with Coral and one with Bet365 cos they offer best odds on all races. But there are some perks. I get to see all the movers in the market; where the money's going. I'm pretty matey with a bloke on the trading floor as well and I've learned shit loads from him, but most of all that winning is at the end of the day about following the market – I've

tried to explain this to my old man but he won't have any it! But he doesn't say that when he's pickin' up his winnings from my tips, you know.

As Brown and Hesketh (2004) have argued, leaving university with hopes of getting a well-paid job have diminished drastically at the beginning of the twenty first century forcing most graduates to dim their horizons and take whatever work they can.

Devadason (2008) has argued that as a result young people's ability to plan their careers has been compromised resulting in them thinking in two ways about the future: on the one hand developing 'hopes' and making 'precise plans', and on the other, developing 'wishes' and making 'blue-sky plans'. Dom clearly fits into the second category, developing 'wishes' and making 'blue-sky plans' because he has had to dim his work horizons.

However, contrary to what Devadason suggests, this has not meant that he has put his future on hold since he has managed to find an alternative career in his leisure. Dom's situation challenges the view that paid employment is most important to young adult identities, suggesting that not only is he prepared to take his work life 'one day at a time' but also that he has managed to find an alternative version of the 'good life' in his leisure. Rather than just accepting his lot and submitting to a dead end job, Dom has to date been successful in collapsing the dichotomy between 'work' and 'leisure' to generate both a level of 'career' success and a sense of fulfilment through the autonomy and sense of achievement he finds in gambling.

Dom's story raises some interesting questions about ambition and accumulation. Essentially he learned to develop an entrepreneurial attitude to gambling. In a society that increasingly valorises accumulation of capital and consumer goods, he reflects this attitude in his own way and applies it to his gambling. Although conscious of the fact that he cannot make huge sums of money, his sense of identity still clearly shows signs of ambition and an accumulative nature. Dom has succeeded in building something from nothing in the true 'spirit of capitalism' (Weber, 1992): he is an entrepreneur who has succeeded in combining risk and speculation with the Protestant's propensity for saving and parsimony.

But what was the most fascinating about Dom's story is that he also managed to combine the monotonous conditions of work in the bookmaking industry and what he had learned about the recommodification of betting to develop his SLHG career.

Through Dom's story we begin to see, contrary to what Bauman (2007) suggests, and ironically since he has done it by taking advantage of the conditions placed on the job market under neo-liberal conditions, how Dom found a radical way of extending his ability to make a living from his leisure interest, or in his own words 'get an edge'.

## **Conclusions**

In the last chapter we saw that SLHGs are a diverse sample, some of whom have been ardent gamblers from a very young age. In the second part of this chapter we have looked at Dom's experience, a young man who got into gambling in a serious way while he was waiting for other avenues to open. Dom initially saw gambling as a way of supplementing his income. Five years after leaving university, he realized that his ambitions would never be matched in the world of work but at the time of the research had decided to stay in the bookmaking industry because he saw it as giving him an opportunity to both develop his leisure interest and making a better living for himself through betting. As Bauman (2007, p.10) points out, poor jobs affect people's relationships with 'partners and networks of friends, the standing we enjoy in wider society and the self-esteem and self-confidence that come with it'. Importantly, for Dom, he had also found a way of maintaining his pride and dignity with his friends despite having a low paid job. What this tells us is that those individuals unable to participate successfully in the competitive "winner-takes-all" neoliberal job market do not necessarily fall by the wayside.

The central thrust of the argument developed in this chapter and which culminated in Dom's story has been that capitalism reoriented towards consumer culture under the auspices of neoliberal ideology has combined with technological changes to transform Western economies. In these new conditions some must win and some must lose, despite the idea promulgated by neoliberal ideology that everyone is a winner - though both losers and winners are expected to conform to the ideals of entrepreneurship. It was demonstrated that as a result of these changes the betting market has been transformed through increased connectivity and as a result horseracing has been subject to greater commodification and less culture. As we saw, the racecourse is no longer 'where the action is'. Where traditionally the on-course betting ring determined the starting price, neoliberal market logic has



reversed this logic and decentred it to the exchanges. The main losers here have been the small on-course bookmakers and those gamblers addicted to FOTBs. For all the talk of responsibility (the bookmakers have all voluntarily agreed to support the Senet Group's – an 'independent' body set up to promote responsible gambling standards – campaign: "When the FUN stops stop") with the loosening of state control and the recommodification of gambling the bookmakers have been allowed to subordinate the welfare of problem gamblers to the demands of capital.

We also saw that although horseracing is generally perceived as the 'natural' home of the betting industry, horserace betting is in steady decline. What changed? The loosening of gambling legislation certainly let the genie out of the bottle paving the way for extended choice and the hegemony of consumer gambling. Transitions from one technology to another are inevitably mixed with ironies, and the shift in the betting market from the on-course bookmakers to the off-course bookmakers and the exchanges is no exception. Today horserace betting might still appear to dominate the gambling market. But what was once the hub of the gambling industry is today merely the fulcrum of betting marketing performing where the bookmakers fight out their own version of the supermarket wars.

As we will see in the first part of the next chapter, it is through their awareness of and in their ability to exploit these conditions for their own advantage that SLHGs are able to 'gain an edge'. To paraphrase Bauman (2000, p.89), SLHGs are resourceful consumers, and it is their resourcefulness that insures them against such unpalatable consequences of the recommodification of gambling. In this regard the analysis will explore the backstage 'work' involved in SLHG. The second part of the chapter will explore the 'front stage' social dimension of SLHG looking at how SLHGs spend their 'leisure' time on the racecourse focusing on how it provides 'the circumstances to encourage something of the aesthetic engagement that some leisure settings have the capacity to evoke so forcefully' (Elkington 2014, p.109). In this regard, the analysis will explore the racecourse as a performative arena where SLHGs express 'a common 'aesthetic' to serve as a repository of [their] collective self-expression', that changeable social 'mask', as Maffesoli calls it, which 'blends

into a variety of scenes and situations whose only value resides in the fact that they are played out by the many' (1996, p.10).

## Chapter 8

# The Duality of Serious Leisure Horserace Gambling: the Backstage 'Work' and the Front Stage 'Leisure'

### Introduction

The previous chapter presented an analysis of the recommodification of betting. As we saw the betting market today involves direct and simultaneous access to pooled information on the part of a number of institutions *and* individuals spatially separated from one another. The aim of this chapter is to situate SLHG within this new betting economy. Focusing on those for whom there has been a radical shift in the practice of SLHG, this chapter aims to provide a more penetrative analysis than was offered in Chapter 6 by exemplifying the reach of serious leisure as a historically constituted field of practice, structured around wider societal changes – especially but not exclusively the shift from producer to consumer capitalism – and inextricably linked to changes in technology, rather than reifying it around certain core attributes or features to offer an ideal-typical model. An ideological antithesis lies at the heart of this critique, for it dissolves the serious leisure-casual leisure dichotomy which implies that the former is equated with empowerment, self-actualization, personal enrichment, a sense of accomplishment, community and lasting physical products, while the latter is denigrated as thrill-seeking and hedonistic and symptomatic of consumer culture. In this chapter the focus is on SLHG as a more fluid practice with field like qualities in an attempt to capture the emergent nature of its everyday social reality. It will be demonstrated that rather than looking at aspects of serious leisure created within some kind of social structure, we need to see structure as something constructed by relationships between individuals and the ways in which commitment to a shared interest grows out of this process, and how both structure and agency intersect as aspects of mutual identification.

It will be demonstrated in this chapter that in the light of the recommodification of gambling discussed in the previous chapter SLHG is transformed into a dual mode of backstage 'work' – for which I coin the term 'smart shopping' – on the one hand, and



front stage 'leisure' that takes on a special 'performative' status for some SLHGs, on the other. The evidence that shapes the discussion of the former aims to address how and in what ways do SLHGs gain an edge in the changed betting market discussed in the previous chapter. As we will see, gaining an edge is transformed under present 'market' conditions and falls under two categories: on the one hand, knowledge management and knowledge sharing, and on the other, shopping around for value. With regard to the latter the investigation builds on Allen's observation that 'like opera, horseracing sports the double-edged sword of needing to increase bodies in attendance while preserving the exotics of the enterprise' (2006, p. 201). Therefore the analysis should be read with the caveat that if horseracing remains the sport of the rich the racecourse itself is today more demographically diverse than it ever has been. Indeed, horseracing could hardly be described as multi-ethnic social arena but its social and cultural makeup transcends class and represents a wide range of age groups and genders. As Cassidy observed, 'whilst membership was once a meaningful concept whereby individuals were vetted before being granted their badge, 'membership' now means only 'prepared to pay more' (2002, p.52). Like all other sports today racecourse attendance is formed in the image of the consumer world that surrounds it. It is not the aim of this chapter to demonstrate that horseracing is more democratic, which it is clearly not – as we saw in the introduction chapter, a quick perusal of the literature indicates that the inequality in horseracing has a long established history. Rather, it is to demonstrate the ideological, technological and cultural shift to consumerism that created a set of conditions conducive to SLHG.

Consequently SLHG here is examined as a form of serious leisure that, despite producing things like empowerment, self-actualization, personal enrichment, a sense of accomplishment, community and so on, nonetheless embraces and reflects the commodity oriented culture associated with consumer capitalism.

### **From legislators and interpreters: the changed division of labour in 'professional' horserace gambling**

My starting point in this chapter is that the recommodification of gambling has facilitated the emergence of a new kind of discerning SLHG who has been able to take advantage of the new market conditions to make a success of betting which

was until recently restricted to professional gamblers and others 'in the know'. What the evidence discussed in this chapter suggests is that gambling 'expertise' is no longer centralized in the figure of the professional gambler because the changes identified in the previous chapter have brought about a certain element of 'democratization'. Essentially it is argued that 'professional' practice in gambling has expanded, multiplied and adapted to times of neoliberalism, consumerism, individualization, risk management and radical technological developments.

As we saw earlier, traditionally the successful horserace gambler was embodied in the figure of the professional gambler:

Professional gamblers do a great deal of research. They go through the form book with a fine-tooth comb, seek out contacts and in some cases visit the gallops to see a potential selection training. They bet on relatively few horses per year; and spend a considerable amount of time assessing individual selections. Their decisions thus involve informed in-depth assessments of factors that can influence the outcome of particular races. Their sources are wide and on the whole reliable, and their modes of weighing up the influence of various factors have their roots in the realities of horse racing (Neal 1998, p.87).

The professional gambler, invariably male, is both the legislator and the intellectual, who follows a particular set of rules and conventions. As Cassidy (1999, p.31) explains:

In contrast to the highly agitated mug punter described at the racecourse, the professional gambler divorces betting from its sensuous component, treating it as a business proposition. I suggest that the professional has come to embody certain aristocratic traits which disassociate him from the mug who is condemned by the supply side of racing. The professional is unmoved by loss or success, according with the sporting ideal of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'the same in victory as in defeat'. The professional behaves as though in control of the outcome of his wager, as does the trainer of the outcome of the race.

The status of the professional gambler is guaranteed. He is an expert in so much as it is his achievements that distinguish him; he holds extensive experience and intellect; and everyone concerned recognizes and acknowledges his superiority. He holds knowledge and is preoccupied with controlling and holding onto that knowledge. In other words, to bet successfully is to be a professional, a legislator. The professional gambler's status, like the status of all other legislators, was traditionally determined practically by personal and family connections within the horseracing's institutions, and discursively through the media, newspapers, manuals and other forms of information that implied that only those who are educated in the right manner will know how to bet properly. This is a long established trend in gambling.

However, as we have seen betting doesn't just require knowledge and skills about horseracing, it also requires knowledge and access to horseracing's physical setting (Cassidy 1999, 2002). To be a successful gambler requires knowledge about racecourses, racehorses, owners, trainers and jockeys. One of the most important aspects of professional gambling in horseracing is that it is heavily circumscribed by what Bourdieu (1984) terms cultural capital. The professional horserace gambler must not only have the right *habitus*, but access to information, skills and judgement of taste that can be exchanged for economic gain. In other words, the legislating power of the professional gambler traditionally resided in social class relations. His status was determined either by his inherited social position in the aristocracy or his ability to transcend his existing social class position to gain respect and authority with the horseracing elite. Professional gambling was and to some extent still is explained by social class relations which not only legitimize but provide access to the 'insider' knowledge that makes it successful. This conceptualization recognizes too the ideological dimensions of professional power and how it is related to wider social and economic dynamics, including the rise of scientific rationality and the logic of professional judgement.

As we saw in Chapter 4 one of the key determinants of contemporary society is risk management. Successful risk management is what sustains the legislator's expertise. Gambling is unpredictable but expertise is what professional gamblers are



able to utilize to minimize uncertainty. They do this by making rational responses through risk management. Experts are those individuals in a position of authority, who hold knowledge which makes them distinct and superior to others. In other words, they know better because they know how to interpret that knowledge, categorize it and implement it. Knowledge is dependent on knowing how to use the correct information, having the ability to read it, and then apply it. The 'success' or the 'failure' of a professional gambler ultimately lies in the implementation and effectiveness of such strategies.

Bauman's (1987) distinction between the 'legislators' and 'interpreters' is an attempt to explain the changes in intellectual control of knowledge that have taken place with the emergence of the consumer society. Bauman's starting point is that with the shift to what he calls postmodernity (1992) or liquid modernity (2000) market or consumer culture begins to free itself from the binding or ordering powers of the legislators and with this shift expertise becomes more democratic. As we have seen in the world of horseracing gambling expertise resided with the professional gambler. However, my research suggests that this expertise has today been diffused through the recommodification of gambling.

Before we look at this shift through my research findings we must first of all look very briefly at the ways and means of the 'legislators', who according to Bauman, are those intellectuals who have the power to make the 'procedural rules which assure the attainment of truth, the arrival of moral judgement, and the selection of proper artistic taste. Such procedural rules have a universal validity, as to the products of their application' (1987, p.45). The legislators constitute the authoritative group that holds superiority and control not only over knowledge and values but have the universalizing influence to make their way of thinking valid and therefore accepted as the norm. One of the defining characteristics of legislative knowledge is that it relies on a sophisticated system of 'authoritative statements [that] lead people to select opinions which, because of the fact that they have been supported by the legislators, are considered to be correct and binding' (Ritzer 1997, p.156). It is because that they hold such authoritative binding power, the knowledge produced by the legislators is seen as correct and verifiable. As Bauman puts it is 'legitimized in terms of a better judgement, a superior knowledge guaranteed by the proper method of its production'

(1992, p.11). Bauman argues that in the formative years of modernity the legislators had a dominant, collective, social identity which enabled them to distinguish themselves as superior to all others. This enclave of exclusivity was largely determined by family connections, memberships and organizations, superior knowledge and expertise. It is the legislators, therefore, who establish and determine the parameters of expertise in all areas of social, political and economic life.

As we saw in Chapter 6, 'professionalism' was a strong theme among the participants in my study. The following quotation from my interview with Dom was typical:

I think you need a massive level of commitment to make money from gambling. It is not easy believe me. I was out one night with my mates and we met up with some girls. Johnno tells them I'm a gambler. This girl says, "wow, that's really cool". Some people think you're a waster and others think you're this cool person. They don't have a clue. Successful gambling is a combination of all sorts of things, planning, watching trends, all sorts. Some people think it's about bottle. But I'd say its attention to detail and having a massive amount of patience. Miss one thing and you're snookered. Back in the day I learned a massive lesson. I have a list of horses to follow. I came back from a week in Spain and one on my list had won. I was devastated. It'll never happen again, I can tell you.

SLHG is no ordinary leisure pursuit. As John put it, 'backing horses entails hours of blood, sweat and tears, especially on the run up to a big meeting.' According to John, time is of the essence. John has managed to structure his work around his gambling by working nights. This way he knows he has time during the day to plan and complete his leisure 'work'. He rarely backs horses during the week, except at the big meetings which he tries to attend when they are local. The point that needs to be stressed here is that the John makes sure that he structures his leisure time as well as his work time; that work demands adjustments and personal time is never sacrificed in order to ensure that his gambling continues to be profitable. During my interview with John he explained:

To make a success of gambling the thing you need most of all is time. You've got to have the time to do the homework. You've got to make sure you do the right horses and then get on at the right price. This all takes time. Working nights I get plenty of time, if you know what I mean! [winks]. I do four ten hour shifts from Monday to Thursday and that's my lot. Mondays' are busy, but Thursday is always dead. So I can do some prep work on Thursday night for the weekend.

The run up to the Cheltenham Festival brings with it days, if not weeks, of hard work. Preparation also has to be accommodated alongside normal Saturday betting. As John pointed out, the 'Midlands Grand National meeting at Uttoxeter is on the Saturday straight after Cheltenham, and it has always been one of my lucky meetings, so I have to keep an eye on that as well'.

Participants also referred to aspects of expertise that did not make such an obvious appeal to 'professionalism'. It is these which distinguish SLHGs from professional gamblers and account for the rise of SLHG under the auspices of the recommodification of betting. Brian highlighted this new ethos:

Well, I've been a gambler all my adult life, but it's changed now – and for the better, if you ask me. It's a different ball game these days and I'm still learning the rules. Listen. In the old days you had to do all the normal things, you had to study form, you had to follow the trends, trainers, jockeys, then you had to look at the going, and then consider horses for courses, and all that. I still do some of this stuff cos old habits die hard, as they say. But there's loads of extra things you have to do now. It is better cos you can get hold of all this information. The internet has seen to that. Jockey and trainer blogs, internet forums, twitter, the exchanges, even the bookies provide stuff to help you win! Who'd have ever thought they'd come up with that one. So it's changed a lot.

During the two years I spent in the field, I got to know the gamblers and their individual inclinations and motivations well. It appeared as though the SLHGs separated into two groups, those who saw recent changes in horseracing as an opportunity to extend their existing gambling skills set and those like Brian and Kenny who saw these as ushering in 'a whole new ball game'. As Kenny put it:



I look back at all those years (and time and money) I've wasted because I wasn't in the know. It was like pissing in the wind. Today, it's a whole new ball game. Look. Nobody, I don't care who they are, is ever going to profit from gambling. Even those who claim they have inside info are not guaranteed winners. Nobody is. But, and this is what I mean, gambling today has changed. Two things. It's the amount of stuff that's available. Unbelievable. But the key thing is the exchanges. This has changed betting all together. There are some companies trying to get hold of your cash and this means that you can pick and choose where to bet and if you know what you are doing can get value. It took years to click in my head. But it's all about getting value.

SB: Can you explain a bit more what you mean?

Most people have the attitude that betting is about studying the form or getting a wink from someone. This is nonsense. Like I said today it's a whole new ball game. I don't have access to insider information. And why do the research when other people have done it for you? That's daft. Like I said there is so much stuff available. It's about sorting out what is good info and what isn't. Once you've done this you need to get some value, get an inside edge.

SB: What do you mean by value?

I mean a price that reflects the chances of the horse, given all the info you've got about its chances. Look. If when I've done my research I come up with a horse I'm gonna back, I won't back it if I can't get on at the right price. In my view, if you get value, at the end of the day you'll always make a profit. You might back a horse like I did last week which fell a mile out when it was cruisin'. That's bad luck, which is part of what gambling is about. But that horse will be an even better price next time it runs – as long as it don't fall again (laughs).

Kenny was perhaps the most informative of my respondents and his insights pointed my thesis towards an important development concerning changes in gambling and how SLHGs have been successful in taking advantage of these. What this clearly shows is that some SLHGs are successful because they have managed to adopt a 'management' strategy or what Bauman (1990) calls a 'consumer attitude' to gambling infused with neoliberal principles of value for money, efficiency and the ability to profit from the 'supermarket wars' in the bookmaking industry.

## **The commodification of SLHG: or smart shopping as smart gambling**

Shopping as an activity that takes place in physical retail spaces has been privileged in the literature. Little attention has been given to what happens to consumer goods after their purchase. It has been argued by some that marginal and resistant consumption behaviour has been neglected in the literature (Crewe and Gregson 1998; Appadurai 1986; and Hetherington 2004). Gregson and Crewe (1997) have argued that to all intents and purposes most critical interpretations of consumption rely primarily on theoretical interpretations and economic models, largely neglecting to develop understandings of shopping activities first-hand. In the analysis below my intention is to address each of these limits by demonstrating that with the recommodification of betting, SLHG has become a form of 'smart shopping' guided by informed consumer choice.

Featherstone (1991) has argued that traditional understandings of shopping in consumer society revolve around three ideas. The first idea identifies the shopper as the manipulated consumer being force-fed a constant supply of unnecessary goods versus the opposite notion of consumer freedom and choice. The following account represents a radical departure from this kind of analysis. The second idea identifies the ways in which individuals cement social ties and establish difference through the act of consumption. The third idea concentrates on the aesthetic and bodily pleasures of shopping for the individual, where consumption activity is experienced as a leisure pursuit rather than a functional necessity. I will return to the second and third ideas identified by Featherstone in the second part of this chapter. In this section of the analysis I want to argue that it is 'smart shopping' that actually enables SLHGs to extend consumer freedom and choice and make a success of their gambling exploits.

SLHGs basically operate using the key principles of 'shopping' which to paraphrase Bauman (1990, p. 202-3) means simplifying the betting process into a series of problems, which first of all:

can be specified, more or less clearly defined, singled out and dealt with. It means, secondly, believing that dealing with such problems, solving them, is one's duty, which one cannot neglect without incurring guilt or shame. It means, thirdly, trusting that for every problem, already known or as may still arise in the

future, there is a solution – a special object or recipe, prepared by specialists, by people with superior know-how, and one's task is to find it. It means, fourthly, assuming that such objects or recipes are essentially available; they may be obtained in exchange for money, and shopping is the way of obtaining them. It means, fifthly, translating the task of learning the art of [betting] as the effort to acquire the skill of finding such objects and recipes, and gaining the power to possess them once found: shopping skills and purchasing power.

This is what I call 'gambling wisdom' which is based on smart shopping. For the purposes of this study, gambling wisdom describes the intellectual and practical experience, knowledge and good judgement needed to place a bet and at the right price. Knowledge management is a constituent feature of gambling wisdom and refers to the efficient handling of information, or what Kenny described in the above quotation as 'all the stuff available', in order to turn a profit from gambling.

The extension of the consumer market has ensured that expertise today has become not only more democratic but that it is found in all sort of places. As we began to see in Chapter 6 access to information has opened up radically with the internet and has become widely available for little or no cost. Social media has extended its scope in terms of its range of forums and apps. Being both consumers of information and producers of knowledge, the practices of SLHGs are both consumptive and productive. It is their skill in interpreting all the information available and turning it into knowledge that transforms the SLHG from a consumer into the producer.

SLHGs are in the paradoxical position of being powerless and powerful, powerless since they do not have access to inside information the way that professional gamblers do, yet powerful because they have decided to reject these constraints placed upon them by reimagining how and in what ways they gamble. Unlike other leisure gamblers SLHGs are not prepared to passively accept the constraints they face. They turn powerlessness into powerfulness by rejecting the constraints placed upon them and embracing gambling as a fully-fledged consumer activity.

These observations notwithstanding the theory emerging from the surveillance studies literature (for a summary see Lyon 2007) would appear to suggest that it is the ability to monitor gamblers' betting accounts that provides the bookmakers with



the real power as they can both observe and control gamblers betting. However, what is overlooked in the literature is that the reshaping the betting market to fit the new needs and demands of capital has also opened up new opportunities for discerning gamblers to exploit these conditions. Kevin revealed the ways he goes about things:

I've never had a betting account closed down or anything like that – probably cos I don't make any money [laughs]. No. The thing is that I have six different accounts, all with the major bookmakers. They [these accounts] all work for me in different ways. I got a free £100 for opening my Betway account. I purposely don't bet on my accounts some weeks and you can bet that you'll be offered some kind of bonus. My Coral card gives me access to best odds on every race and all the other special deals. I think I only had two winners at the Cheltenham Festival this year, but I got loads of free bets on my Sky BET account. The best one was the Ladbrokes Grid card. This wasn't an account but like a Nectar card thing. I got loads of free bets and it repaid you identically with the stake you placed. But they pulled it. The trick is to make them work for you and I make all of mine pay.

These answers indicate that for all the effort put into enticing online gamblers with their money, in the case of SLHGs it does not appear to work. Here the roles are reversed and Kevin is out to exploit the bookmakers. In a sense, Kevin acted like Jean-Paul Sartre's (1969) famous café waiter, who in going overboard in his adherence to rules of his profession, is actually play acting as a waiter. But whereas the waiter is acting in 'bad faith' by being too 'waiter-esque', Kevin, in acting like an uneducated consumer gambler by adhering to the rules of consuming which are as Bauman (1990, p.203) suggests involves 'listening to those who know better', was able to take advantage of the enticements offered by the bookmakers. Monitoring his own gambling more closely than the bookmakers allowed Kevin to 'gain an edge', all the while acting like an uneducated consumer gambler. The ability of SLHGs to employ such tactics reveals more insights into the kinds of 'smart shopping' which allows them to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the bookmaking industry busily inventing new ways to entice unsuspecting gamblers.

Competent use of the internet is central to smart gambling. The 'working' practices of SLHG are facilitated by digital technology. The use of technology by SLHGs serves a triple process. First, technology provides them with access to a vast range of information about horses. Secondly, it provides them with a means to manage that knowledge and information. Third, it provides them with the medium to both bet on and 'lay' horses. Kenny's approach is to 'gain an edge' by not so much extracting the true worth of a horse's chance from the bookmaker but by surpassing it. As he puts it:

The time to get on is early doors on Saturdays and the big festival meetings or even the night before – non-runner no bet. Take your pick. Look. Just last week Paddy Power offered quarter of the odds in a 13 runner handicap and in stakes races. Coral first five places in a 25 runner handicap. Hills offered to beat any price during the Cheltenham Festival. It isn't rocket science.

The large number of betting shops on the high street present other opportunities for smart gamblers:

Andy: One of the most difficult things today is getting on some decent money. It is ridiculous. If you hold a betting account and start to make money the bookie will simply close it down. I actually prefer to bet in the shops. It is time consuming but it works out in the long run. That said, if you try to put 50 quid on a horse, the cashier will have to make a phone call. Ridiculous. I tried to put 50 quid EW on a horse at 25/1 and they wouldn't have it. Most they offered me was 25 quid EW. There is three Billy Hill's shops in Wakefield, so I put 25 quid EW on in each, no problem. So basically I got 75 quid EW on. The other thing to do is get best odds. This way you can't half get some value. I backed a horse last month at 14/1 and it went out to 20/1, but by taking best odds I got the 20s.

SLHGs see the prices on offer as resources and as smart gamblers they simply try to work the odds on offer to their own advantage. One way of theorizing this kind of smart gambling would be to argue that it depends on a kind of creative consumption. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) have argued that consumer capitalism has shifted away from the means of production towards the 'new means of consumption'. In Ritzer and Jurgenson's view these conditions comprise the range of settings that facilitate people in their consumption activities, including gambling. The need to 'enchant'

these basic settings in order to entice the consumer entails a creative obligation on providers, something that capitalist leisure corporations have long understood. The difference today is that now even the most experienced experience producers have to learn to engage consumers in the process of designing, distributing and performing the experiences themselves, to the extent that they become 'prosumers'. One tactic used by the big bookmakers is the sponsorship of jockeys and trainers who provide gamblers with information on the chance of their rides and runners. For example, Betway sponsors the jockeys Richard Johnson and Davy Russell and the bookmaking firm Coral sponsors horse trainer Dan Skelton. The bookmakers try to entice their customers by providing exclusive inside knowledge from those who embody the racing world. This may be an information game but Denise reckoned she profited from it:

I follow Dickie Johnson's weekend blog. You've got to read between the lines a bit, but overall what he says is true. I've had some good winners following what he says.

This landscape of 'prosumption' essentially features the sharing of information and expertise in a simultaneous act of production and consumption between providers (the bookmakers) and consumers (gamblers). The inclusion of this kind of 'gifting' by the bookmakers is interpretable as an attempt to add value to the betting odds offered, by adopting 'insider' information features. This is of course one way in which bookmakers are after increasing their profits. However, SLHGs simply see these blogs as added-value features which they utilize with the rest of the mass of information that exists 'out there'. This resonates with informal systems of gift exchange that are proper to earlier forms of capitalist production (Mauss 1970). It is important to recognize, though, that gift exchange as it is used here is not a spontaneous outburst of generosity rather it is as a form of information exchange that reinforces the social solidarity of those who gamble seriously.

However, the gifts that individuals give are not offered to create a sense of community. This is a mass gift culture (Mauss 1970). Most of these web sites, blogs and forums give information without the expectation of anything in return. Gift exchange here can be understood in three ways: as a collective response to the idea that all punters share one thing in common which is to beat the bookie; as a



backlash against professional gamblers who set up their own web sites in order to sell tips; and related to this explanation, perhaps the most convincing is the 'performativity' (Butler 1990) of expertise of those who think they can tip better than professional gamblers and enjoy the thrill of proving it – or not as the case may be.

As we saw in the last chapter and in this one information is key to success in horserace gambling. Richard Harper (2010) argues the primary qualities of information are flow, disembeddedness, the compression of time and space and real-time relations. He argues that in the twenty-first century our lives are replete with information and yet we are constantly seeking out ever new ways of communicating. Harper argues this is because we relish the new forms of communication that have arisen as a result of technological innovation which reflect what it means to be human – 'alive, connected, expressive' – today. As we have seen the most compelling reason for communicating for SLHGs is that not only are they always looking for ways to 'gain an edge' but the more information they can gather will enable them to be better prepared to turn all that information into worthwhile knowledge. According to Harper, communications have their own 'texture', their own 'feel' and social and cultural meanings; we are not merely biological processors of information and communication is never neutral. Basically, this involves learning two things: the ability to distinguish what is good and bad information and the ability to recognize signs of quality in products and then matching these to the betting scenario. Communication amongst SLHGs then is best understood as performativity and so is their use of it.

### **Interim conclusions**

Exploiting the opportunities offered by a declining betting market, SLHGs recast gambling as a form of smart shopping guided by informed consumer choice. Indeed, when SLHGs talked to me about how they practise their craft, the central motifs were those of the modern marketplace: having the right information to know the horse in question is worth the price being offered by the bookmakers, comparing the market to find the right 'suppliers', ascertaining what is value for money, keeping up to date with market trends, taking advantage of promotions, value for money, selecting the right time when to bet, selecting new products and reviewing old ones, and so on. To

summarize what can be concluded about smart shopping from the interviews and the ethnography is that it involves three stages: firstly, gathering information and then considering the different scenarios involved; secondly, identifying the choices available; thirdly, thinking through the consequences – which is the best choice now and which is the best choice should the scenario change e.g. in the event of a non-runner, should the going conditions change, and so on. It is with these in mind that SLHGs look at the products offered by the various bookmakers and then decide how they are going to plan to use them, how long they are going to use them, and how they must be nurtured to make them useful. We can conclude that three issues always – quality, quantity and price – effect the decision making of SLHGs. Walter Benjamin (2003) famously argued that the apparatus employed by any artistic medium is entirely improved when it is able to transform consumers into producers and bystanders into collaborators. From the research findings discussed above we can conclude that smart shopping as smart gambling collapses the dichotomy between (active) production and (passive) consumption to ensure that SLHGs occupy a new critical space in the world of horserace gambling.

### **The fall of 'the racing tribe' and the rise of the neo-tribes**

As the forgoing discussion demonstrates attaining the knowledge and the right 'shopping' skills to fully engage provides SLHGs with a heightened sense of achievement and a career as well as a sense of belonging. Both are strongly felt precisely because they are difficult to achieve. As we saw in Chapter 6 social recognition is important to SLHGs since it can lead to self-actualization and personal enrichment. What emerged equally as important was the thrill of winning and 'the exhilaration of being part of the scene' (Stebbins 1997, p.123). Every participant in this study said the same thing: SLHG is not just about the gambling, it is also about the social life. And it was. Indeed, and some of the respondents I interviewed have made strong, lasting relationships through their gambling exploits:

Denise: I've made some great friends though the horses, like Kelly, Steve and Sheila. Kelly is from York, who I met at the races when we were both complaining about all the stag dos and hen parties spoiling our fun. Then there is Steve who lives in a village in Northumbria somewhere. Sheila's now one of

my best friends, if I ever go out to the pub it's normally with Sheila; we meet once a month. She's a really, really, really good friend who I've also learned a hell of a lot from. Her brother owns race horses. She's dead ordinary, though. Rarely gets any tips from him; Sheila told me even his trainer doesn't know when the horses are going to win. Fancy that! But she can pick 'em, I can tell you. If she gives one the nod, which isn't that often, it usually does the business.

Each setting influences the nature of serious leisure undertaken, the meaning each individual takes from that leisure practice, the extent to which each individual is free to practice, and the extent they feel existentially and collectively empowered. In the rest of this chapter the aim is to explore how SLHGs spend their 'leisure' time on the racecourse focusing on how it provides 'the circumstances to encourage something of the aesthetic engagement that some leisure settings have the capacity to evoke so forcefully' (Elkington 2014, p.109).

As has been well documented in the literature, the flâneur is the quintessential man of leisure who is best placed to 'reap aesthetic meaning and an individual kind of existential security from the spectacle of the teeming crowds – the visible public – of the metropolitan environment' (Tester 1994, p.2). What I will argue below is the way in which SLHGs 'reap aesthetic meaning' and gain 'existential security' is through a connectedness with others and through a sense that they are at one with those around them. Although SLHGs did not use the term to describe their own social grouping, the 'leisure' side of SLHG frequently conformed to various forms identified in the concept of aesthetic social spacing, which emerged affectively in their quest for experiential intensity or 'flow' on the racecourse. SLHGs experienced 'flow' along two dimensions. On the one hand, they often experienced it when they were concentrated and working hard towards a specific end, such as when they were absorbed in the challenge securing a bet at a good price.

Sheila: As my hubby says, says there's some 'hard graft' involved. But it never feels like that. I know that might sound daft. I think it must be cos you never have time to think about anything, like. It's like being on autopilot. You know what you need to do and you just get on with it, especially when you trying to get the best price.



On the other hand, they always readied themselves in anticipation of the experience of flow because like all other gamblers for them 'the quest for excitement is the thrill of the game, it is an end in itself' (Reith 1999, p.145). I witnessed this sense of anticipation time and again which was always at once expressive, emotional and special.

In the first part of this chapter Featherstone's work was used to establish the importance of consumption to understanding the 'work' side of SLHG. In this final part of the chapter I will draw on the way his work stresses the ways in which consumption habits and behaviours tend to distinguish social relationships and define individuals focusing on the ways SLHGs cement social ties and establish difference through the act of consumption and how they derive aesthetic and bodily pleasures from consumption activity when it is experienced as a serious leisure pursuit. Before I do this, however, it is important to say something about what the analysis developed below is not.

As we saw in the literature review chapters it has been argued by numerous commentators that horseracing is an all-encompassing world with its own history, its own habits and language, its own dress codes, its own landscape and its own morality (see Cassidy 1999, 2002 and Fox 1999). During my ethnography I had the opportunity to observe horseracing at over forty meetings first hand and it hardly if at all mirrors the popular image and especially the idea of 'the racing tribe' presented by Fox. None of the main foci identified in the accounts presented by these authors have a comparable importance in the new circumstances of consumer culture. While Cassidy acknowledges the impact consumer culture has had on horseracing she does not explore this in any depth. Social class relations, for the majority of the population, remain important at a macro level, especially with regard to hereditary factors and work opportunities, but they are no longer powerful indicators of the social at a micro level, and especially with regard to consumption based leisure activities such as going to the races. This kind of consumption is described by Warde (1997) as post-Fordist consumption. It understands collective consumption as involving groups of increasingly reflexive individuals who do not so much share some kind of social background but rather consume in similar ways to one other. Their

social identity tends to be defined in terms of their shared leisure lifestyle choices. Individuals who consume in similar ways thus are understood to share a symbolic act of consumption and it is this that defines them as a group. My ethnography suggested this kind of approach is a much more accurate way of theorizing horseracing today and that we need to think the idea of 'the racing tribe' in the plural.

While Bennett (1999, p. 607) recognizes that tribalism, or what he calls after Maffesoli (1996) neo-tribalism, is a central feature of mass consumerism and can be put down to 'sheer range of consumer choices which now exist'. This suggests that a consumer-oriented society is overloaded with choices that make possible the construction of infinite cultural identities. In most accounts neo-tribal expression is articulated through popular cultural consumption and is understood as wrapped up with consumer choice. That may be so, but we must also recognize that consumer choices are outward experiences that reflect individuals' inward experiences. Indeed, as Maffesoli (1996, p.11) points out we must not ignore the 'ambiences, feelings and emotions' that underpin tribal orientations. Such a view fits neatly with my own ethnographic observations of SLHGs at the racecourse.

This observation notwithstanding what I also found in my ethnography is that if the conventional image of 'the racing tribe' is a dated one it nonetheless appears to have a deep and lasting resonance because the ideal-types identified in Cassidy's and Fox's accounts still make their appearances on the racecourse. But as we will see below my research suggests that this is merely a simulacrum of the original 'racing tribe' which erodes the distinction between representation and the real thing. As we will see shortly in the discussion of how some SLHGs engage with horseracing it is in fact the simulacrum that becomes the measure of the real (Baudrillard 1983). However, before we do this it is important to outline a theoretical approach which provides a useful way of articulating such cultural change.

Williams (1977, p.121) argues that the complexity of any 'culture is to be found not only in its variable processes and their social definitions – traditions, institutions, and formations – but also in the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements'. In exploring this complexity he distinguished three historical currents: 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent'

institutions and formations that exist at any one time in any culture. By 'residual' he meant those once dominant elements of a culture's past that are on the wane, but are sometimes determinedly 'revived', in a deliberately, 'specializing way'. As he puts it:

Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue-cultural as well as social-of some previous social and cultural institution or formation (*ibid*, p. 122).

As we have seen Cassidy (1999, 2002) has argued that as a class based sport horseracing has historically imposed various constraints on social interaction, whilst at the same time allowing certain freedoms. Drawing on these insights from Williams the findings from my ethnography suggest that the horseracing culture identified by Cassidy and Fox has been rendered obsolete by social, economic and technological changes but it is still operational in the cultural process. What SLHG do at the racecourse, along with the rest of horseracing's neo-tribes, is to 'perform' this residual cultural formation in their own inimitable ways.

As Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) have argued the classic theory of performativity is offered by Goffman (1959), who conceives of the social world in dramaturgical terms as a stage, framing the individual conceptually within the production of everyday life. Goffman argues that social interaction with others is thus a 'performance' that takes place under the freedom and constraints of the social context or 'setting' in which it occurs. Conceptualising the everyday world performatively brings into focus the body and its presentation. Building on these insights Butler (1990) argues that the social world is accordingly discursively produced. Butler offers the view that social identity is constructed as a discursive practice. It is in this sense that performativity blurs the distinction between the real world and its representation. What this suggests is that performativity is an aesthetic mode of communication that aims to secure meaning and value. Thus there is always a link between how people perform themselves and their interpretation of that performance in the moment, through the discursive registers which inform their actions.



In the following section of this chapter it is argued that this 'performativity' can be read as serving the individualizing ends of consumer capitalism by replacing collective identities with highly individualistic consumer lifestyles, shaped not by concrete social relations, but on imaginary investments in the world of images (Baudrillard 1998). The argument underpinning these arguments is that with the demise of producer capitalism and rise of consumer capitalism and its attendant culture, Western societies revitalize themselves as centres of leisure, driven by the service and entertainment industries. In the event consumer capitalism is best understood as a symbolic economy, controlled by visual realms which are often managed or monopolized by cultural intermediaries (Ewen 1988; Featherstone 1991).

Developing these ideas below it demonstrated how and in what ways SLHGs make their own 'imaginary investments' in the residual culture of 'the racing tribe' leading to the formation of their own neo-tribal version through its performativity. My interview with Brian is chosen as a focus for this discussion as it is illustrative of this cultural process of performative reproduction in action and it confirmed to me in no uncertain terms what I had witnessed many times first-hand.

### **The front stage 'leisure' of SLHG and its 'performativity': Brian and Julie at the races**

A predominant theme that emerged in the research was the importance of the 'leisure' side of SLHG. Fundamentally this 'leisure' side was interpreted by SLHGs as the 'other' side of their serious leisure identity which was not only where they could express their engagement with the thrill that comes from betting but also where they confirmed to the rest of the tribe their rightful place in the culture. I am aware that the example drawn from the study below is not wholly representative of all the participants. Nonetheless, whilst the 'leisure' side engaged in by each participant in the study was unique to some extent, it always involved its own element of performativity. My participants performed their SLHG identities in different ways. Kenny, just like the proverbial professional gambler described in Cassidy's book by Gorer, was a master of understatement and a 'good sport' who took his 'sporting

chance' with his money and demonstrated his 'sportsmanship by showing neither regret at losing nor elation at winning his wagers' (1955, p. 83). During my times with him at the races Kenny always performed this social identity to perfection.

Brian was very different. In performing the role of a serious racegoer, he rendered his own experience as SLHG inherently worthy of attention. This was perfectly illustrated through his admission that when he and his partner Julie go racing, they only ever wear Barbour:

We always get toggled up in our Barbour because we think it is important to look the part, if you know what I mean. I've got a classic Beaufort wax coat that I wear in the winter and one of those Baffle quilted jackets for the summer meetings – which is really smart. I wouldn't wear me wax coat anywhere else but at the races, though. There it really looks the part. You feel as though you fit in better wearing Barbour stuff, don't you? That's what we think anyway. Julie's got about four different jackets, I think, but they're all green ones. Green is the right colour for the races, we think. That's Julie's Wetherby wear, we call it. Barbour in winter. But she puts her best frocks on for the summer meetings. But I'm always just smart casual.

Thus the 'leisure' side of SLHG, for Brian and Julie, entails the performativity of wearing traditional Barbour wear to achieve a connection with horseracing's tradition, and its enduring culture. What this tells us about Brian is that the symbolic relationship he has with the social world of racing is multi-sensual: not only is he a SLHG but it is important to him that he *looks* as well as *feels* like he belongs in the world in which he spends most of his leisure time.

Here performativity signifies an engagement with what Brian and Julie imagined to be the 'real' world of horseracing and this validates their leisure and gives it a purpose:

When you go to the races it is important to be part of it. I love the smell of the the flowers, the mown grass, the horses. Ripon's our favourite track. When you get out of the car you can smell it. It's perfect. Then when you get through the

turnstiles you can feel the atmosphere building. We always head straight to the bar. Julie likes to do some people watching. I wouldn't admit it to but I do as well. We love it in the bar in the club stand. We've met some really lovely people there. In the summer we drink Pimms on the lawn and just people-watch. There you're really immersed in it. This friend Julie's made at the races said that it just feels like being on a film set. And she's right. We love it.

In this last example, how the social world of the racecourse is negotiated by Brian and Julie emerges as a subjective achievement. Through their performativity they convince themselves they are part of this world, by trying to embody it, deeply and optimally (Elkington 2014). Brian recalls his and Julie's performativity through an embodied perception of practice. A key aspect of their experience lies in its relation to 'the racing tribe' and the residual culture they seek to maintain. Brian and Julie understand this culture as an entity to be corporally engaged with: aesthetic social space is not only sensed but it is thus also recreated by consuming its 'look' which they perceive in turn makes it possible to engage properly with its culture. As Bauman suggests consumer culture is, in essence, about gathering [such] *sensations...*; it is the *having* of sensations, and even more the hoping for new sensations, that tends to be experienced as pleasure' (2002, p.154).

Social space in this instance must therefore be understood as dynamic and not just situated. It emerges as a combination of aesthetic consumption and cognitive production that takes place in 'open' space-time (Bauman 1992). In short, to manifest itself through practice, aesthetic space relies on individuals like Brian and Julie performing engagement with the culture of a bygone horseracing world with an awareness of what (they cognitively) conceive 'the racing tribe' and its culture to be, and how that shapes (and is shaped by) social practices. This is not consuming according to social class but the way in which Brian and Julie define themselves according to their own consumption choices.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that the way we dress is a crucial marker of class distinction which suggests that clothes are a crucial aspect of cultural capital, part of how elite groups establish, maintain and reproduce positions of power in leisure fields, reinforcing their dominance in social relations. As Cassidy (2002) observes this has always been important in horseracing. That may be so, but what we have here is



merely a form of consumption that places the emphasis on individuality and leisure lifestyle choice to reproduce a residual culture. This is neo-tribal *post-Fordist* 'niche' consumption (Warde 1997). Brian and Julie like many other racegoers I observed are captivated by the game of recreating a lost object. In their case the lost object is performed in Barbour. The result is a repetition of the past is always temporarily reconciled with reality through a simulacrum of 'the racing tribe'. These observations bring us to an important question. Does all this amount to anything real? Whether it is real or not is perhaps beside the point because it is performing their distinction that is important. It is this that confirms to the outside world that Brian and Julie belong, have earned their rightful place in the culture, for no other reason than that they are able to perform it. To repeat what I said at the end of the previous chapter, in this regard, the racecourse is a performative arena where SLHGs and others like them are express 'a common 'aesthetic' to serve as a repository of [their] collective self-expression', that changeable social 'mask', as Maffesoli calls it, which 'blends into a variety of scenes and situations whose only value resides in the fact that they are played out by the many' (1996, p.10).

## Conclusions

The critique underpinning this chapter started with the assumption that under the auspices of neoliberalism capitalism fundamentally transformed as Western societies began to foreground consumption rather than production. This was accompanied with an attempt to offer an understanding of SLHG as a more fluid practice with field like qualities in an attempt to capture its emergent nature under these changed conditions. The aim was not only to demonstrate how horserace gambling is transformed under these new conditions but also how the serious leisure-casual leisure dichotomy collapses as a result.

The chapter has explored the 'work' – the 'smart shopping' – that underpins SLHG and how this compared to the aesthetic symbolism of social spacing that goes on with front stage performativity. The connection between the two lies in consumerism and the way it has become the central mechanism and the driving force behind SLHG. Bauman (1992) argues that we are all consumers today who have willingness to be seduced as we blindly put our faith in the market. In common with Stebbins, Bauman has a tendency to look down on anything this is consumerist, including

leisure. What such a view ignores, and what I have demonstrated in this chapter, is that serious leisure under the auspices of consumer capitalism is simultaneously consumptive and productive.

Drawing on Bauman's distinction between legislators and interpreters, the first part of the chapter argued that in our consumer culture where gambling is recommodified and self-development is moved to the forefront of society there has emerged a new kind of 'professional' gambler, the SLHG (the interpreter), whose skills set is very different from the professional horserace gambler (the legislator). The analysis subsequently explored the 'work' side of SLHG. It was demonstrated that it is their ability to utilize 'smart shopping' to both turn information into knowledge and gain an edge in the betting market where the expertise of the SLHG lies and that this expertise is both consumptive *and* productive. The 'leisure' side of SLHG was theorized in terms of performativity, emphasising its role in processes of self-realization and presentation. Butler's (1990) work was important here. It enabled the analysis to capture the dynamic interaction of self, body and dress, acknowledging the aesthetic, embodied nature of SLHG as it is used to both express identity in the leisure field and to act back on and reinforce identity for those involved at a corporeal level. We saw that dress – in our example Barbour outfits – thus was used as a tool for self-management (Craik 1994) reflecting choice and expressivity, and above all else individual agency, producing for Brian (accompanied by Julie) a version of the SLHG through consumption. Dress here was interpreted as a set of cultural artefacts, borrowed from a residual world and then performed in a consumer world, shaped by social and economic forces, but reflecting current social and cultural concerns rather than past ones. In other words what we had here was not dress as marker of class distinction, as an aspect of cultural capital, part of how elite groups establish their authority, and use it to maintain and reproduce positions of power, but merely the performativity of a leisure lifestyle that confirms the social identity of SLHGs.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusions**

#### **Introduction**

This concluding chapter will summarize the thesis focusing on what has been accomplished in this study and how it contributes to original knowledge. The main overarching substantive aim of the study has been to investigate serious leisure through the lens of horserace gambling, while recognizing the pervasive societal influence of neoliberal ideology, the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism, and major developments in digital technology. The main objectives in this regard were to discover four things: how leisure horserace gambling has been transformed under the auspices of consumer capitalism; what the reasons were for these changes; what these changes tell us about the production and reproduction of serious leisure gambling; and the social interactions that constitute this unique leisure field.

The research context put under scrutiny – leisure gambling – which is in itself a little researched area. Most recent research is concerned with gambling addiction. This thesis provides the first focused investigation on leisure gambling as a serious leisure practice that I am aware of. This thesis is also rare in its approach to understanding serious leisure as the majority of work in the area relies on certain dichotomies and focuses on core attributes or features to offer an ideal-typical model. The foundation of this thesis is to develop new theoretical insights that contribute to gambling studies and the serious leisure perspective. The majority of this chapter is therefore dedicated to summarizing the main findings and discussing their theoretical implications.

However, there is one other area that needs discussing and that I go through prior to the final conclusions regarding the main contributions to knowledge. This relates to the methodological implications of the thesis. I discuss the methodology I have employed and explain its potential for further research. Thereafter, I end the thesis by summarizing my contributions to knowledge from the three empirical chapters by drawing them together to explain how and in what ways they help us to understand



the changed world of consumer gambling and SLHG specifically and serious leisure more generally.

### **Methodological conclusions and implications for further research**

My aim throughout this thesis has been to present an accurate account of one particular leisure field and the individuals that inhabit this setting. The prelude to the empirical study necessitated a rigorous examination of gambling, the gambling literature and recent changes which have transformed the ways in which people gamble. In conducting the empirical study itself I acknowledge that I have focused narrowly on a small number of SLHGs, but this is deemed ample for the purposes of the thesis. In this thesis, I have employed a qualitative research process that entailed 'sticking to the phenomena' (Bech 1997, p.5) in question by immersing myself into the field of SLHG. Wherever possible, I have attempted to find the right balance between the empirical data and the theoretical insights developed to transport the reader to this specific serious leisure world and to generate the conclusions that I have reached.

The empirical study employed a combination of research techniques grounded in an ethnographic investigation which included direct observation, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Of course, the SLHGs I interviewed and observed did not exist within a vacuum. They and their experiences were intricately woven into the fabric of society and culture and were subject to all its forces and influences – play, the pleasure principle, consumerism, individualization, risk – which were outlined in the literature review chapters. In this thesis it has been demonstrated that qualitative research has the capacity for allowing us to enter the life-worlds of our participants. In this study it has been instrumental in facilitating an understanding of the *doxic* experience of SLHG (Bourdieu 1984; 1989), in particular an appreciation of the 'recreation specialization' it provokes in SLHGs and the 'focusing of behaviour, the acquiring of skills and knowledge and a tendency to become committed to the activity such that it becomes a central life interest' (Tsaur and Liang 2008, p. 327).

Data from the qualitative interviews illustrated the processes of this leisure field and allowed an in-depth understanding of the production and reproduction of SLHG. These data were also contextualized with evidence from the wider study of social,

cultural, economic and political changes in society. The methods employed here, especially in Chapter 6, made use of macro perspectives as well as micro perspectives to reveal the workings of SLHG. It was the combination of these that ultimately enabled me to reveal in the pages of this thesis the duality of SLHG which involves a backstage 'work' side and a front stage 'leisure' side. I will detail what we can conclude from these data in the next section of this chapter. The illumination of this field of SLHG has, however, generated a number of further questions where similar methods could be employed. Let us look at these first.

The methodology I have employed here, and some of the insights gained through the research process, could be usefully turned to some other areas of research. The most obvious is of course other kinds of gambling. Perhaps the other most obvious example that might be considered is a comparison of SLHG and professional horserace gambling under the changed conditions of the recommodified betting market. Some of what I have disclosed in Chapter 7 is in all likelihood indicative of similar changes in professional gambling. This for understandable reasons could not be subjected to a systematic analysis in this thesis and presents the opportunity for further research.

SLHG provides both a social and a virtual a context in which people can come together and participate in a shared passion. My research found that all the participants enjoyed the informal connections that they formed through the 'work' side of SLHG and social networks they made during the 'leisure' side for their inclusive qualities. The organization of SLHG as it was revealed in the interviews and ethnography suggests the capacity for open access and inclusivity to a shared world that is ripe for investigation through the concept of community. One such avenue for research is offered by Ray Oldenburg (1989) who posits the idea that leisure spaces constitute 'third spaces' where people can put aside the pressures of modern living to find the vitality of community and the different kinds of democracy it offers. Space in the way it is imagined by Oldenburg is composed of much more than physical elements of the location in question. It incorporates also the interpersonal attachments, group identities and communal bonds among those individuals who routinely interact in that space and which often extend beyond it.

It might also be useful to pursue more earnestly the relevance of gender, ethnicity and social class divisions for SLHG. These could not be pursued in the present study for reasons of space, but they may well be relevant for explaining the shifting dynamics and reproduction of SLHG. The sample of this study included only a couple of women and did not include any individuals from ethnic minority groups or upper middle classes and upper classes and this might have contributed to the perspectives explored. The evidence emanating from the present study is not conclusive and indicates an uncertain picture in relation to gender, ethnicity and especially social class.

As the discussion of Dom's story indicated in Chapter 7, the relentless competition to get a foothold in the job market, limited opportunities and having to battle unemployment, underemployment and low pay, do much to erode the confidence of young people in today's society. The stories of a small number of other participants in the study were also suggestive of the effort involved in maintaining a façade of respectability in the face of these conditions and the role that serious leisure can play (and its limits) in alleviating them. This is also an area that presents an obvious focus for any future research.

### **What the thesis has accomplished**

Through the investigation of the experiences of SLHGs, the exploration of a range of theoretical perspectives and by making some of its own contributions to knowledge this thesis has achieved the aim and objectives reiterated at the beginning of this chapter. Table 1 provides an overall orientation to what I have achieved in this thesis and what was analysed in the last three chapters, and it will form the focus of the discussion in the rest of this final chapter.



**TABLE 1*****A Comparison of Horserace Gamblers***

<b>Leisure Gambler</b>	<b>Professional Gambler</b>	<b>Serious Leisure Gambler</b>
Casual leisure	Work career	Leisure career
Event	Working day	Working day and the event dissolve in SLHG
Punting/Partying (Aesthetic)	Work (Ascetic)	Work/Performative re- creation (Ascetic/Aesthetic)
Finite player who gambles for the excitement and purpose of winning	Infinite player who gambles for the purpose of winning and to continue the play	Infinite player who gambles to continue the play and for the excitement and the purpose winning
Decontrol	Control	Controlled decontrol
Reliance on gut feeling and good luck	Decision making based information gathering and insider knowledge	Decision making based on gambling wisdom and smart gambling
Inexpert	Expert (Legislator)	Expert (Interpreter)
Mass	Solitary figure	Solitary figure/Social figure
Spectator	Participant	Participant/Performer
Consumer	Producer	Prosumer
Overstated	Understated	Modest

***Implications for gambling studies and the serious leisure perspective***

My research has shown that gambling has undergone a transformation of seismic proportions under the auspices of the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism. As Giddens (1990) forcefully argues social, economic and cultural practices are consistently being revised in modern societies as a result of technological developments. It is with this observation in mind that the thesis offers

its first contribution knowledge, which is the idea that gambling in the twenty-first century is transformed in tandem with the emergence of the play ethic (Kane 2004) as Freud's 'reality principle' and the 'pleasure principle' strike a new deal (Bauman 1998). As Chapter 7 showed it is also such developments that have contributed to this radical revision of gambling and subsequent changes in way that people bet. One of the most important aspects of technological development has been the transformation of technologies of communication which brought about the new era of the internet and the smartphone which allow gamblers to bet when and wherever they like. That there is a connection between successful gambling and technical proficiency is another new idea identified in this thesis. The rise of digital technologies also means that gambling is no longer just a casual form of leisure; it is a way of being an active, productive, innovative gambler. The second major contribution to knowledge of this thesis is its identification of a new kind of gambler who was hitherto absent from the gambling studies literature: namely the SLHG.

What are the conceptual implications of this study for the serious leisure perspective? It was demonstrated in Chapter 6 how and in what ways Stebbins' classic model of serious leisure can be applied to SLHG. This discussion was prefigured by applying Becker's (1953) classic career contingencies formulation to move attention away from ascribing the development of serious leisure to 'antecedent predispositions' towards individual 'motives and experiences' that emerge in the course of experience. The analysis was supplemented with field theory borrowed from Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), which enabled me to theorize SLHG as an autonomous field of serious leisure practice driven by its own unique ethos and social world. It was demonstrated at numerous points in Chapter 6 utilizing Stebbins' model that my participants unequivocally engage in serious leisure. These findings in turn yielded important insight into the making of this leisure field as a fluid process, an appreciation of the spirit which gives SLHG its 'specific form of interest' and provides those committed to it 'a specific illusion as tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game and as practical mastery of its rules' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.117) that the serious leisure perspective does not facilitate.

What are the theoretical implications of the evidence that contradicts the classic model of serious leisure? At the beginning of the thesis it was argued that for all the

strength of Stebbins' thesis it draws on a reified one-size-fits-all model by which all serious leisure must fit a universal ideal. My foremost criticism of Stebbins' work is that it studies serious leisure as if it exists in a vacuum outside society and culture. One of the consequences of this is that Stebbins' conception of serious leisure does not have a proper sense of agency. Without an understanding of the relations, efforts and possibilities within which individuals operate, it would not have been possible to develop a grounded understanding of the experiences of SLHGs; it was only with attention to agency that the construction of SLHG could have been understood as an outcome of their practices. This is the first way that this thesis has advanced the study of serious leisure.

One of the other consequences of treating serious leisure as if it exists in a vacuum outside society and culture is that it tends to dichotomize leisure into two distinct categories – serious leisure and casual leisure – without questioning the impact of changing societal and cultural assumptions that have accompanied the shift to consumer capitalism. What I found throughout the interviews and the ethnographic investigation resonates with many other studies of consumer culture: that today many people have become 'simultaneously, *promoters of commodities* and the *commodities they promote*' (Bauman 2007, p. 6). Underpinning this area of exploration has been a rigorous examination of the ways in which the social and cultural world of SLHG reflects the transformed world of consumer capitalism. This thesis has illustrated the ways in which the distinction between production and consumption is an outdated dichotomy that hinders our understanding of SLHG. The purpose of this dichotomy in Stebbins' work is to distinguish between serious leisure and casual leisure. But within SLHG this dichotomy is not as clear as Stebbins's model would suggest. Stebbins' serious leisure perspective, which was developed to understand leisure in a society in which producer capitalism prevailed, is effective for considering leisure settings where there are clear differences between production and consumption activities. However, this dichotomy only works within a specific historical context and my research shows it has been overly extended into analysing contemporary forms of leisure. This thesis has shown that under the auspices of consumer capitalism it is perhaps inevitable that consumerism and its attendant 'consumer attitude' (Bauman 1990) will feature to some extent in *all* forms of leisure, including serious leisure. But the thesis has also shown that even when this is the



case the purpose of serious leisure is not exclusively consumerist in orientation. Chapter 8 demonstrated the difference between production and consumption collapses in SLHG into a form of prosumption (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). This is the second way that this thesis has advanced the study of serious leisure.

To discuss horserace gambling in terms of whether it is serious leisure or casual leisure is to reinforce other powerful dichotomies. For example, my research shows that SLHGs resemble professional horserace gamblers in the sense that they are both infinite players whose central aim in gambling is to win but also to continue the play. However, SLHGs also resemble casual leisure gamblers in that they also gamble for the excitement. So we can say that if professional gambling is about maintaining control and casual leisure gambling is about decontrol, SLHG is perhaps best understood through the concept of controlled decontrol. This kind of evidence points to a collapse of a third dichotomy, after production and consumption, after serious leisure and casual leisure, there is professional gambling and casual leisure gambling. This is another way that this thesis has advanced the study of gambling.

### ***Towards as theory of SLHG: smart gambling and performativity***

Chapter 8 demonstrated that SLHG pivots around its backstage 'work' and its front stage 'leisure' side; it constitutes an ascetic/aesthetic duality. In the first part of the chapter it was suggested that the division in expertise between the 'legislators' (professional gamblers) and the 'interpreters' (SLHGs) (Bauman 1987) is consequent upon the different positions these two groups occupy in relation to insider knowledge. I subsequently argued that expertise has been diffused through the recommodification. The new terminology I have coined to explore this is specifically developed to highlight the democratization in expertise that emerges with the recommodification of gambling. Thus 'gambling wisdom' is used to identify the ways in which SLHGs apply human creativity to answer the demands of a recommodified betting market, and how they combine intellectual and practical experience, knowledge and good judgement. While the term 'smart gambling' has been coined to understand the ways in which some SLHGs have developed the key principles of shopping to gambling. Basically, smart gambling involves learning two things: the ability to distinguish what is good and bad information and the ability to

recognize signs of quality in products and then matching these to the betting scenario. I have concluded that three issues always – quality, quantity and price – effect the decision making of SLHGs. This is another way that this thesis has advanced the study of gambling.

The wider implications of the shift from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism have also been illustrated by this part of the study. Whilst my research allowed me to explore the connections between consumer culture and gambling, it also dictated that I draw some parallels with the wider implications of consumerism. It was demonstrated that the first and foremost the cultural world of SLHG reflects the transformed liquid modernity identified by Bauman (2000, 2007) in which consumer culture reigns supreme. In this sense, it was demonstrated that the event that is the contemporary horserace meeting is intimately connected to the surface fluidity of consumer culture found in liquid modern society, especially in terms of the 'leisure' side of SLHG, where performativity and its associated symbolism are key to the experience. My thesis showed that the old ambience found in the racecourse betting ring may have gone, but the opportunities opened up by the internet, the exchanges and marketing have transformed the ways in which SLHGs bet. After all, as Cassidy (1999, 2002) has demonstrated, the racecourse betting ring never set out to be atmospheric, but to perform a valuable and profitable environment in which on-course bookmakers could profit from unsuspecting punters. The same it can be said of the marketized and technology enhanced, decentred betting market today which in no uncertain terms has brought about the growth of new betting practices aimed at fleecing addicted gamblers. I argued that as the 'natural' home of the gambling industry, horserace betting is currently used as the primary product to market gambling and is knowingly undersold by the large bookmakers to further higher margin products. Some SLHGs have quickly learned how to exploit this anomaly and have been able to embed the opportunities it brings into smart betting.

Much of the literature speaks of the horseracing world as if it were a stable reflection of social class inequality (see for example Cassidy 1999, 2002), but my research suggests that it is fact an institution that has survived precisely because it has had to become amenable to metamorphosis. The actors depicted in the racing world by Cassidy have left to become part of a new consumer world. My research shows that

the big festival and Saturday race meetings offer spectators events in which to socialize and engage in performativity, immersed in a time and space where it seems like anything is possible and imagination is the only limit. What my ethnographic observations suggested is that the racecourse generates its own event, with numerous neo-tribes (Maffesoli 1996) and their sets, costumes and props moving from venue to venue, in order to perform their own version of the bygone racing age in a deliberately, 'specializing way' (Williams 1977). The most compelling way in which the thesis found to convey the essence of that metamorphosis from dominant institution and cultural formation to residual institution and cultural formation was the concept of performativity. As my ethnography and interviews revealed the front stage is set for a series of episodes, a kind of mania, a collective desire to recreate a lost object, a consumer paradise in which some SLHGs ready themselves in anticipation of the experience of flow because like all other gamblers for them 'the quest for excitement is the thrill of the game, it is an end in itself' (Reith 1999, p.145).

My research suggests therefore that the racecourse is therefore not a fixed entity, rather it is a contingent and situated social space – an episodic event – which is constantly produced and reproduced subjectively for its consumption. This means that the performativity of the ambience of a bygone racing age can be conceptualized as simultaneously produced cognitively and consumed aesthetically to serve the social practices that (re)produce it. At the races the 'leisure' side of SLHG emerges as a realm within a realm, it is to take part in a performance, a series of rituals and dramas, in which SLHGs are both participants and performers. What rendering of social space is being practiced in those performances? Where does that leave reality? A pastiche? A parody? To ask whether any of this amounts to anything real is beside the point since it is simply the performativity of it that is important. SLHGs like many other groups who attend the festival and big Saturday race meetings today imagine that theirs is a restoration role and they simply stage their own public performance. As we saw, in fulfilling this role, Brian and Julie choose Barbour outfits. No doubt the choice has something to do with a vanished racing world, but it is not only this particular history that is at work. The reality of the characterizations performed by Brian and Julie and others like them lays not in the real world but in the performances of the actors.



The racing world depicted in the work of Cassidy (1999, 2002), to repeat, is a dead world until it is revived once again through the performativity of its gifted performers. As I argued in Chapter 8, in our consumer society it is in fact the simulacrum that becomes the measure of the real (Baudrillard 1983). The performativity of SLHG in aesthetic social space is ultimately shaped by what its subjects want it to be, just then, for the time being, at the races, which has become a sort of theme park carried on down the years, an insincere likeness of the real thing, nothing more and nothing less than the performances that the neo-tribes produce and are consumed by. And when the race meeting ends the performers in turn vanish, until they choose to come into existence the next time. The front stage 'leisure' side is for some of SLHGs I interviewed and observed the aesthetic correlative of the ascetic backstage 'work' side, their way of being themselves – at once an expression of their SLHG identity and an embodiment of consumer culture. This is the duality of the performativity of SLHG.

This might suggest to some that the 'leisure' side of SLHG is merely consumptive in orientation. Yet such a view rests with a universalizing premise: compared with other kinds of serious leisure, SLHG resembles a tainted form; held against other examples of serious leisure, most if not all of its practices appear to be sustained by passive consumption rather than active production. But that would be to miss the point of this thesis which has demonstrated that in the case of SLHG, serious leisure is not limited by consumer capitalism but is ultimately shaped by it. From this point of view, consumerism is no longer the antithesis of serious leisure, but its embodiment. This is perhaps the most telling way that this thesis has advanced the study of serious leisure since it offers a theoretical framework for conceptualizing practices of serious leisure under the auspices of consumer capitalism which can be utilized in future serious leisure research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Application for Ethics Approval of Research

<b>Sheffield Hallam University</b>
<b>Faculty of Health and Wellbeing</b>
<b>Research Ethics Committee</b>
<b>Sport &amp; Exercise Research Ethics Review Group</b>
<b>APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL OF RESEARCH</b>

In designing research involving humans, principal investigators should be able to demonstrate a clear intention of benefit to society and the research should be based on sound principles. These criteria will be considered by the Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group before approving a project. **ALL** of the following details must be provided, either typewritten or word-processed preferably at least in 11 point font.

Please either tick the appropriate box or provide the information required.

<b>1) Date of application</b>	05 February 2014
<b>2) Anticipated date of completion of project</b>	May 2016
<b>3) Title of research</b>	The Changing Face of Gambling: An Investigation of Serious Leisure Horserace Gamblers



<b>4) Subject area</b>	Social and Cultural Studies in Gambling Sport, Culture and Society
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<b>5) Principal Investigator</b>	
Name	Siobhan Blackshaw
Email address	s.blackshaw@shu.ac.uk
Telephone/Mobile number	0114 2252598
Student number (if applicable)	22042365

<b>6) State if this study is:</b> (If the project is undergraduate or postgraduate please state module name and number)	
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<b>7) Director of Studies/Supervisor/ Tutor name</b>	Professor Simon Shibli
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<b>8) Intended duration and timing of project</b>	<p>January 2014 to May 2016</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>January 2014 – December 2015: ongoing literature review</li> <li>Feb 2014 – June 2015: data collection</li> <li>June 2015 – December 2015: data analysis</li> <li>January 2016 – May 2016: write up</li> <li>May 2016: submission of thesis.</li> </ul>
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<b>9) Location of project</b> If external to SHU, provide evidence in support (see section 17)	SHU
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<b>10) State if this study is:</b>	New
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## 11) Purpose and benefit of the research

Statement of the research problem with any necessary background information (no more than 1 side of A4)

The broad aim of the proposed study is concerned with the ways in which consumerism, risk and individualization have transformed gambling in neo-liberal societies. Its starting point is that although risk and chance might foreground the way that individuals live now, in the majority of sociological and cultural studies, gambling surprisingly remains a bounded category of practice and experience (e.g. Munting, 1996; Reith, 1999; McManus, 2000). This approach is reflected in most, if not all, published work on gambling, which continues to place considerable emphasis on pathological/addiction based approaches. To this extent our understanding of this enduring social practice has been somewhat dominated by psychological and medical perspectives, which have tended to on the one hand divorce gambling from its social context and on the other marginalize what gambler's themselves have to say about what motivates them to gamble (Reith *et al*, 2010).

As a critical response to this state of affairs, the proposed study will explore sports gambling in its social context, examining its everyday worlds. The two overriding objectives of the study will be to re-conceptualize how different gambling worlds operate and explain how governmental control of gambling has been individualized and marketized.

In order to make an original contribution to knowledge, the study will develop a programme of research grounded in three concepts: consumerism, risk and individualization. The theoretical orientation of the empirical study will in turn be located in three specific conceptual approaches. First, the work of Bourdieu, and especially his concepts of habitus, cultural capital and field, will enable the study to explore how different gambling worlds (heterodoxies) operate in a consumerist society and crucially how gamblers become gamblers and the extent to which they are caught up in and by the game (*illusio*), of believing that the gamble is worth taking and recognizing its stakes. Second, the concept of social spacing—specifically those aspects and products of *cognitive*, *aesthetic* and *moral* 'spacings' (Bauman, 1993)—which builds on Bourdieu's work by offering gambling studies a new way of understanding and mapping different gambling milieu. Thirdly, the concept of governmentality (although not as Foucault understood it) which attends to the freedoms and controls operating in contemporary neo-liberal consumer societies and how these impact on gambling. With regard to this third conceptual approach, the originality of the proposed study will be located in its ability to explore the extent to which the terrain of governmental control has shifted from the relationship between the state-individual to the state-individual-market nexus.



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<b>12) Participants</b>	
<b>12.1 Number</b>	25-35
<b>12.2 Rationale for this number</b> (eg calculations of sample size, practical considerations)	The field work will be designed purposively to achieve a range and diversity of gamblers rather than attempting to try to represent the wider gambling population. Following Valentine <i>et al</i> (2008) and Reith <i>et al</i> (2010), it is anticipated that the precise number of interview participants will be between 25 and 35.
<b>12.3 Criteria for inclusion and exclusion</b> (eg age and sex)	<p>As the focus of this study is on the changing face of the social worlds of gambling (rather than gambling as personal problem), it is anticipated that the primary criteria for inclusion will be that research participants' gamble at least once per week. In line with other studies (Neal, 1998; 2005; Reith <i>et al</i>, 2010; Valentine <i>et al</i>, 2008), it is anticipated that the number of self-identified gamblers will be larger for men than for women but that the social class, ethnicity and ages of gamblers will come from across the spectrum.</p> <p>Nobody under the age of 18 years will be participating in the study.</p>
<b>12.4 Procedures for recruitment</b> (eg location and methods)	In order to maximise range and diversity, the study will utilise a variety of recruitment techniques. It will recruit gamblers from existing social networks (10 people have already volunteered through this technique), by placing advertisements in supermarkets, libraries and other community venues, and by approaching individuals themselves in casinos, bingo

	halls and betting shops.
<b>12.5 Does the study have *minors or ‡vulnerable adults as participants?</b>	No
<b>12.6 Is CRB Disclosure required for the Principal Investigator?</b> (to be determined by Risk Assessment)	No
<b>12.7 If you ticked 'yes' in 12.5 and 'no' in 12.6 please explain why:</b>	N/A

\*Minors are participants under the age of 18 years.

‡Vulnerable adults are participants over the age of 16 years who are likely to exhibit:

- a) learning difficulties
- b) physical illness/impairment
- c) mental illness/impairment
- d) advanced age
- e) any other condition that might render them vulnerable

### **13) Details of the research design**

#### **13.1 Provide details of intended methodological procedures and data collection.**

(For MSc students conducting a scientific support project please provide the following information: a. needs analysis; b. potential outcome; c proposed interventions).

Attempting to understand gambling in its social context, by examining its everyday worlds, is best approached through qualitative methodologies, which in this instance will include participant observation, semi-structured interviews and key informant interviews. The study will also draw on the approach made famous by Howard Becker (1953) in his study on becoming a marihuana user (i.e. becoming a gambler): learning to gamble in the correct way; learning to recognize the effects of winning and connecting them with playing; and learning to enjoy the sensations associated with winning. Crucially this aspect of the methodology will also draw on insights from recent research by Järvinen and Ravn (2011) to explore the process of moving from gambling as a casual leisure activity to gambling as a serious leisure pursuit and potentially a gambling problem; this model contains six 'career' contingencies which the proposed research aims to adapt in relation to gambling. This symbolic interactionist model will be supplemented with the findings from the interviews and the participant observation which will be conducted with the explicit objective to uncover the cognitive frames by which gamblers, in intersubjective ways, organize their everyday worlds and actions and construct shared commonsense knowledgeability in social space (Schütz and Luckmann, 1974). These methods will require the researcher to build trust between herself and the participants in the study. It is anticipated this will be achieved by on the one hand integrating herself within the different social spaces in which gambling takes place and on the other carrying out three waves of interviews which will help provide in-depth evidence about individuals' gambling experiences.

**13.2 Are these "minor" procedures as defined in Appendix 1 of the ethics guidelines?**

No

**13.3 If you answered 'no' in section 13.2, list the procedures that are not minor**

This study will involve participant observation which will see the researcher partaking in gambling like any other group member. Participant observation will take place in a public gambling location, where it is accessible by all. When the researcher speaks to people about gambling in the field, they will reveal that they are a researcher if they are asking questions regarding the research, otherwise it will be unnecessary. All issues relating to field work has been discussed with her supervisory team. She will also ensure that this participation is restricted to placing small numbers of low stakes bets. The researcher will also keep a record of the frequency of gambling activity noting times and places and will also keep receipts where possible. The researcher will also seek to maintain the right balance between the roles of participant and researcher at all times. Should the researcher feel at any stage that she has begun to 'go native' she will seek the advice and support of her supervisory team. The researcher will minimise the risk of 'going native' by reading all the literature on problem gambling to make herself aware of the danger signs. The researcher will also always be in full contact with her supervisory team who will always ask questions regarding the fieldwork.

**13.4 Provide details of the quantitative and qualitative analysis to be used**

This is a qualitative study which will accordingly be underpinned by qualitative analysis.



This will involve two processes. Firstly, the interviews and participant observation will be examined with the aim of capturing the social processes of meaning formation around gambling in order to generate new theories and concepts. Secondly, the analysis will also involve organizing and exploring the findings around both the gambling career contingencies and the cognitive frames which constitute the different gambling worlds under scrutiny. It is anticipated that this second process will enable the study to build on the existing typologies identified in the gambling literature. This two-fold qualitative approach will require the researcher to build trust between herself and the participants in the study. It is anticipated this will be achieved by on the one hand integrating herself within the different social spaces in which gambling takes place and on the other carrying out three waves of interviews which will help provide in-depth longitudinal evidence about individuals' gambling experiences. These findings will also be compared and contrasted with other similar work in the field (e.g. Neal. 1998; 2005; Reith *et al*, 2010; Valentine *et al*, 2008).

**14) Substances to be administered (refer to Appendix V of the ethics procedures)**

**14.1 The protocol does not involve the administration of pharmacologically active substances or nutritional supplements.**

Please tick box if this statement applies and go to section 15) [ ]

**14.2 Name and state the risk category for each substance. If a COSHH assessment is required state how the risks are to be managed.**

**15) Degree of discomfort that participants might experience**

Consider the degree of physical and psychological discomfort that will be experienced by the participants. State the details, which must be included in the participant information sheet to ensure that the participants are fully informed about any discomfort that they may experience.

Gambling can be a problem for some individuals and families causing both financial difficulties and psychological harm. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the social worlds of gambling rather than gambling as an individual problem, so it is not anticipated that the chosen research methods and their outcomes are likely to cause the participants any direct harm.

Informed and valid consent will be obtained from all participants who are interviewed. It is anticipated that in most cases this will be obtained verbally given the ethnographic nature of the study. However, should the need arise, the researcher will provide each interviewee with a participant information sheet outlining in clear English the essential elements of the study. Whether this information is given to the participants verbally or in writing the researcher will ensure that participants are able to make an informed decision about whether the study is for and of interest to them. The information will include the following: what the topic of the research is about; the voluntary nature of involvement; an assurance about participant anonymity; details about what will happen during and after the research has taken place. The researcher will also offer potential participants the opportunity to either discuss or read about the topic further should they so wish.

**16) Outcomes of Risk Assessment**

Provide details of the risk and explain how the control measures will be implemented to manage the risk.

The researcher will make sure family members/friends are made aware when interviews and participant observations are taking place. This will involve information on departure and arrival back times. The researcher will also ensure she has her mobile phone with her at all times.

The researcher will guarantee participant privacy and will endeavour to secure where it is reasonably possible private locations to conduct the interviews. However, they will take place in a public forum either in gambling locations or coffee shops. Both electronic data and written notes will be kept in a secure place.

The researcher will familiarize herself with the health and safety policies of all the research locations.

During the participant observation the researcher will participate in gambling like any other group member but this will be restricted to placing small numbers of low stakes bets. The researcher will also keep a record of the frequency of gambling activity noting times and places and will also keep receipts where possible. The researcher will also seek to maintain the right balance between the roles of participant and researcher at all times. Should the researcher feel at any stage that she has begun to 'go native' she will seek the advice and support of her supervisory team. The researcher will minimise the risk of 'going native' by reading all the literature on problem gambling to make herself aware of the danger signs. The researcher will also always be in full contact with her supervisory team who will always ask questions regarding the fieldwork.

<b>17) Attachments</b>	<b>Tick box</b>
<b>17.1 Risk assessment</b> (including CRB risk assessment)	Yes
<b>17.2 COSHH assessment</b>	N/A
<b>17.3 Participant information sheet</b> (this should be addressed directly to the participant (ie you will etc) and in a language they will understand)	Yes
<b>17.4 Informed consent form</b>	Yes
<b>17.5 Pre-screening questionnaire</b>	N/A
<b>17.6 Collaboration evidence/support correspondence from the organisation consenting to the research</b> (this must be on letterhead paper and signed) See sections 9 & 10	N/A



<b>17.7 CRB Disclosure certificate <u>or</u> where not available CRB application form</b>	N/A
<b>17.8 Clinical Trails form (FIN 12)</b>	N/A

<b>18. Signature</b>  <b>Principal Investigator</b>	<p>Once this application is approved, I will undertake the research study as approved. If circumstances necessitate that changes are made to the approved protocol, I will discuss these with my Project Supervisor. If the supervisor advises that there should be a resubmission to the Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group, I agree that no work will be carried out using the changed protocol until approval has been sought and formally received.</p> <p>S.BLACKSHAW_ Date 05.02.2014</p> <p>Principal Investigator signature</p> <p>Name Siobhan Blackshaw</p>
<b>19. Approval</b>  <b>Project Supervisor to sign either box A or box B as applicable</b>  (refer to Appendix I and the flowchart in appendix VI of the ethics guidelines)	<p><b>Box A:</b></p> <p>I confirm that the research proposed is based solely on 'minor' procedures, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group 'Ethics Procedures for Research with Humans as Participants' document, and therefore does not need to be submitted to the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group.</p> <p>In terms of ethics approval, I agree the 'minor' procedures proposed here and confirm that the Principal Investigator may proceed with the study as designed.</p> <p>----- Date -----</p> <p>Project Supervisor signature</p> <p>Name -----</p>
	<p><b>Box B:</b></p> <p>I confirm that the research proposed is <u>not</u> based solely on 'minor' procedures, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group 'Ethics Procedures for Research with Humans as Participants' document, and therefore <u>must</u> be submitted to the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group for approval.</p> <p>I confirm that the appropriate preparatory work has been undertaken and that this document is in a fit state for submission to the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group.</p>

	<p>----- Date -----</p> <p>Project Supervisor signature</p> <p>Name Dr Donna Woodhouse-----</p> <p>---</p>
<p><b>20. Signature Technician</b></p>	<p>I confirm that I have seen the full and approved application for ethics approval and technical support will be provided.</p> <p>----- Date -----</p> <p>Technician signature</p> <p>Name -----</p>



## Appendix 2: Risk Assessment Pro Forma

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**

**Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee**

**Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group**

**Risk Assessment Pro Forma**

**\*\*Please ensure that you read the accompanying**

**Risk Assessment Risk Ranking document before completing this form\*\***

**Title of research**

The Changing Face of Gambling: An Investigation of Serious Leisure Horserace Gamblers.

**Date Assessed**

05 February 2014

**Assessed by**

**(Principal Investigator)**

Siobhan Blackshaw

**Signed**

S.BLACKSHAW

**Position**

Principal Investigator

**Activity**

**Risks**

**Control Measures**

Participant observation and in-depth interviews at gambling sites	<p><b>Risk</b> of psychological harm caused by [discussion of gambling and anxiety about dealing with interview situation]. (R2 = C1 x L2) <b>LOW RISK</b></p>	<p>Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. If necessary, the participants will be given information on where to seek appropriate support services.</p> <p>This study will involve participant observation which will see the researcher partaking in gambling like any other group member. The participant observation will take place in public gambling locations. When the researcher speaks to people about gambling in the field, she will base the research on the principle of honesty. This will preclude any kind of deception and the use of covert participant observation.</p> <p>All issues relating to field work have been and will continue to be discussed with the supervisory team. The researcher will also ensure that this participation is restricted to placing small numbers of low stakes bets. To this end the researcher will keep a record of the frequency of gambling activity, noting times and places and levels of stakes - receipts will be retained where possible.</p> <p>The researcher will also seek to maintain the right balance between the roles of participant and researcher at all times. Should the researcher feel at any stage that she has begun to 'go native' she will seek the advice and support of her supervisory team. The researcher will also minimise the risk of 'going native' by reading all the literature on problem gambling; in this way she will make herself aware of all the 'danger signs'. The researcher will remain in full contact with her supervisory team throughout the course of the empirical study and will consult them on any issues that emerge in the course of the research.</p> <p>Others (relative, friend) will be informed of the location, time and duration of each interview. The researcher will carry a mobile phone. Having said that all the interviews will take place in public forums, either in gambling locations or coffee shops.</p>
	<p><b>Risk</b> of 'going native' i.e. personal gambling addiction caused by participation at sites. (R2 = C1 x L2) <b>LOW RISK</b></p>	
	<p><b>Risk</b> of travel and locational dangers caused by road/rail accidents and meeting with unfamiliar persons. (R1 = C1 x L1) <b>LOW RISK</b></p>	

<b>Risk Evaluation (Overall)</b>
Low



### **General Control Measures**

Is a pre-screen medical questionnaire required? Yes [ ] No [ x ]

1. Participant given verbal information or information sheet. Confirm understanding.
2. Participant reads and signs informed consent form should this be required.

### **Emergency Procedures**

1. Leave location if personal safety is at risk.
2. Alert named individual if incident relating to a potential threat has occurred.

### **Monitoring Procedures**

Continuously monitor throughout interview for signs (verbal and non-verbal) of emotional distress or offence.

**Review Period**

Annually

**Reviewed By (Supervisor)**

**Date**

## Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**

**Faculty of Health and Wellbeing**

**Research Ethics Committee**

**Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group**

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**TITLE OF PROJECT:**

**The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself**

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?

YES/NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?

YES/NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions?

YES/NO

Have you received enough information about the study?

YES/NO



<p>To whom have you spoken?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• at any time</li> <li>• without having to give a reason for withdrawing</li> <li>• and without affecting your future medical care</li> </ul>	<p>YES/NO</p>
<p>Have you had sufficient time to consider the nature of this project?</p>	<p>YES/NO</p>
<p>Do you agree to take part in this study?</p>	<p>YES/NO</p>
<p>Signed ..... Date .....</p> <p>(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS).....</p>	
<p>Signature of Parent / Guardian in the case of a minor</p> <p>.....</p>	

## Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**

**Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee**

**Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

<b>Project Title</b>	The Changing Face of Gambling: An Investigation of Serious Leisure Horserace Gamblers.
<b>Director of Studies</b>	Professor Simon Shibli
<b>Principal Investigator</b>	Siobhan Blackshaw
<b>Principal Investigator telephone/mobile number</b>	0114 2252598

### **Purpose of Study and Brief Description of Procedures**

*(Not a legal explanation but a simple statement)*

#### Research Aims

This study is interested in the ways in which recent changes in society and governmental policy have transformed gambling. It is specifically interested in identifying factors that explain why, how and in what ways people gamble in the twenty-first century. It is hoped that the study will provide new information on people's lived experiences of gambling.

#### Why have you been invited?

I have invited self-identified gamblers from across all sections of society (which includes both men and women) to take part in the project.

Who must the study exclude?

Unfortunately, I must ask you to **not** participate if you are under 18 years of age.

When and where will the study take place?

The study will take place in a public place-either at a gambling location or a coffee shop - at a time that is convenient to you.

What will you be asked to do?

The study will take the form of an interview. You will be asked to answer questions about your age, social background, relationship with gambling, key life events associated with gambling, where you gamble, what kinds of gambling interest you, and so on.

How long will the interview last?

It will last for approximately 1 to 2 hours.

Are there any risks involved in participating in the study?

The risks involved in participating are negligible. However, if there are questions that you find distressing or intrusive, you are free to not answer those questions or to withdraw from participating.

Are there any benefits involved in participating?

Unfortunately I will not be able to pay you for participating in the study. However, at the end of the study, I will be able to send you information about the findings.

How will I maintain your confidentiality and privacy?

What you tell me in the interviews will be kept anonymous.

Who is organising and funding the study?

The study is for my doctoral thesis and is organised and funded by Sheffield Hallam University.

What If I have questions about the study?



Please contact me by email at [s.blackshaw@shu.ac.uk](mailto:s.blackshaw@shu.ac.uk), by telephone at 0113 2532156, or by post at Department of Sport, Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Hall, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield S10 2BP.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part in the study or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you do decide to take part you will be given this participation sheet to keep and be asked to sign an informed consent form.

If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact The Research Ethic Committee in the Department of Sport using the details below for further advice and information:

Dr Donna Woodhouse [d.woodhouse@shu.ac.uk](mailto:d.woodhouse@shu.ac.uk) or telephone 0114 2255670.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

***If necessary continue overleaf***

It has been made clear to me that, should I feel that these Regulations are being infringed or that my interests are otherwise being ignored, neglected or denied, I should inform Dr Donna Woodhouse, Chair of the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee (Tel: 0114 225 5670) who will undertake to investigate my complaint.

**FOR USE WHEN STILL OR MOVING IMAGES WILL BE RECORDED**

**Consent to scientific illustration**

I hereby confirm that I give consent for photographic and/or videotape and sound recordings (the 'material') to be made of me. I confirm that the purpose for which the material would be used has been explained to me in terms which I have understood and I agree to the use of the material in such circumstances. I understand that if the material is required for use in any other way than that explained to me then my consent to this will be specifically sought.

1. I understand that the material will form part of my confidential records and has value in scientific assessment and I agree to this use of the material.

Signed..... Date.....

Signature of Parent / Guardian in the case of a minor

.....

2. I understand the material has value in teaching and I consent to the material being shown to appropriate professional staff for the purpose of education, staff training and professional development.

Signed..... Date.....

Signature of Parent / Guardian in the case of a minor

.....



I hereby give consent for the photographic recording made of me on.....  
to be published in an appropriate journal or textbook. It is understood that I have the  
right to withdraw consent at any time prior to publication but that once the images  
are in the public domain there may be no opportunity for the effective withdrawal of  
consent.

Signed ..... Date .....

Signature of Parent / Guardian in the case of a minor

.....