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Gambling and Harm in 24/7 Capitalism: Reflections from the Post-Disciplinary Present

Thomas Raymen and Oliver Smith

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed extraordinary growth in the gambling industry. While this has certainly been a global phenomenon, few countries around the world can rival the growth of the gambling industry in the UK. The Gross Gambling Yield (GGY)—the total amount of money lost by UK gamblers—rose to £14.4bn in the year between March 2017-April 2018, an increase of 4.5% on the previous year, and a number that has been consistently rising since 2011. Such growth is undeniably linked to the democratisation of always-connected, all-purpose smartphone, laptop and tablet devices that have transformed the way we work, socialise, travel, live our domestic lives and, for the purposes of this chapter, gamble in all of these contexts. The UK now has the largest remote online gambling sector in the world. The remote gambling sector is by far the largest sector in the UK gambling industry (40% of overall GGY), as punters lost £5.4bn through remote gambling from March 2017-April 2018 (Gambling Commission, 2018a). The size of the online casino sector surpassed the land-based casino sector more than a decade ago, and today constitutes 70% of all casino gambling, with online sports-betting surpassing land-based sports-betting in 2016/2017, constituting 56% of all sports-betting (Gambling Commission, 2018b). Over the past 8 years, the online casino sector has grown by 203%, compared with 46% growth in the land-based casino sector; while online sports-betting and bingo have grown by 211% and 278% respectively, compared with declines of 15% and 25% in their land-based format over the same time period. In the last 12 months alone, the online gambling sector has grown by 11%, with 40% of the remote gambling's GGY generated through smartphone and tablet devices, a statistic which is forecast to rise to 50% by 2020 (Gambling Commission, 2018b).

Such growth is quite staggering and, as we will see from the ethnographic data and analysis that follows, largely predicated upon the slow and pervasive spread of familial, psychological and financial gambling-related harms. However, the growing influence of technology on the gambling industry has had a far greater impact than simply expanding

participation and industry profit. Such technologies, working in-concert with a post-industrial '24/7 capitalism', have fundamentally altered the *nature* of gambling practice more generally, and problem gambling in particular. As the ethnographic data in this chapter and other recent studies shows (Albarran-Torres, 2018; Raymen and Smith, 2017; Schüll, 2012), much contemporary gambling has shifted away from a spatially fixed and *separate* practice geared around extreme expenditure and high levels of drama, excitement, and 'action' described by the seminal texts that feature in much gambling literature (Caillois, 1957; Dostoevsky, 1972; Geertz, 1973; Goffman, 1967). Today, gambling is a more spatially flexibilised and embedded daily practice that is geared toward more low-stakes, perpetual and accelerated repeat-play which carries an affective state characterised by a more sedentary catatonic 'depressive hedonia' (Fisher, 2009). Such changes have produced a contemporary milieu of gambling whose harms are arguably less spectacular and visible, but far more pervasive, insidious, and severe in their nature, and difficult to identify for gamblers and industry alike.

Nevertheless, with notable exceptions (see Albarran-Torres, 2018; Raymen, 2019; Raymen and Smith, 2017), social scientific conceptualisations of gambling and problem gambling continue to lag behind, remaining influenced by 20th century theoretical approaches which were largely conceived in a pre-digital age, yet continue to be used within a new digital reality of 24/7 neoliberal capitalism to which they no longer apply. Consequently, this chapter begins by drawing upon recent work which theorises the nexus between technology and late-capitalism, locating the altered nature of contemporary gambling within a shift from a 'disciplinary' society of industrial capitalism to a post-disciplinary society of 24/7 consumer capitalism. The chapter will then progress on to explore how the gambling industry, acutely sensitive to such changes in reality, has capitalised upon such a shift, engendering the emergence of a more insidious, pervasive and ultimately more profitable form of 'problem gambling' that contemporary metrics and risk assessment tools struggle to identify. The chapter will conclude with some reflections on the implications this has for current policy, legislative and media focus, before suggesting that we require new and original accounts of individual subjectivity – potentially offered by transcendental materialism (Johnston, 2008) – in order to truly grasp the impact of technological change on contemporary gambling.

Methodological Note on our Participants

Before continuing any further, it is worth discussing in a little more detail the men whose gambling we seek to analyse and the cultural and gambling milieu they occupy. The data presented in this chapter is based upon an 18-month ethnographic research project from the winter of 2015 through the summer of 2017, and was originally designed to explore male sports-betting cultures in the contemporary context of consumer capitalism; something we have described elsewhere as 'lifestyle gambling' (Raymen, 2019; Raymen and Smith, 2017). As online sports-betting through mobile phones and tablets has increased by 211% in the last 8 years, now occupying the majority of this gambling sector (Gambling Commission, 2018b), sports-betting has been loosened from its spatial mooring of the high-street bookmaker's shop. It has since embedded itself as a central component of the wider masculine weekend leisure experience and its associated spheres of the pub, sports fandom and weekend football attendance, to create a thoroughly socialised and identity-oriented culture of sports-betting. The men we observed and interviewed ($n=28$) were thoroughly embedded in such masculine weekend leisure cultures. They were predominantly white, in their late twenties or early-to-mid thirties and passionate committed football fans. While far from being middle-class or particularly wealthy, these were socially-included men with families or girlfriends, jobs and mortgages, holding occupations such as an electrician, a real estate agent, several self-employed tradesmen, a community sports coach, a transport manager and a secondary school teacher, to name a few. Under more stable social conditions, they might be described as the aspirational and upwardly-mobile 'Mondeo Man' of middle England; a homogeneous identity that these men were constantly wrestling with and trying to escape due to consumerism's injunction for 'cool individualism' and social distinction. The gambler, once seen as a vice and degenerate 'type' was now, on the surface of things, just your normal happy-go-lucky thirty-something: an armchair football fan who enjoys cheap import lager, takeaway and a bit of banter with his mates.

However, as our research drifted away from ethnographic observation in pubs and football grounds and moved to a more exclusive one-to-one interview-basis, many of our participants quickly revealed that they were not *just* lifestyle gamblers. Far from it. Consequently, we have continued our research and discovered that the 'lifestyle gambling' we described previously actually constituted a comparatively small

proportion of their gambling time and expenditure¹. Sports-betting was what they would do on a weekend, or during those occasional mid-week nights when there were domestic fixtures, or European football competitions such as the Champions League. The associated costs of beer, recreational drugs, and travel to away football matches caused many to quickly dial-back their 'lifestyle gambling' and shift towards more mundane and isolated forms of mobile gambling. During the working week, most of our participants confessed to gambling almost every day, to greater or lesser degrees, and through a variety of gambling mediums such as online poker; mobile casino apps; or 'gamble-play' stock-trading apps and games (Albarran-Torres, 2018). Moreover, these gambling practices took place in almost every time and place imaginable: at work, on the commute to and from work, lying in bed, on the toilet, at home while looking after their children, or during quiet evenings once their children and/or partner had gone to bed. This was a low-stakes *perpetuity of gambling* which was present in virtually every sphere and pocket of their daily lives. While most of these individuals were only classified as 'moderate risk' gamblers on the problem gambling severity index² (PGSI), the pervasive, accelerated and repetitive nature of their low-stakes gambling generated financial harms, psychological and familial problems which far exceeded their classified status as gamblers who only experienced moderate-level problems. Living under the financial precarity of late-capitalism, these 'moderate-risk' gamblers did not have to lose staggering sums of money for their gambling to become problematic. Deepening overdrafts, spiraling credit card and phone bills³, and the relentless pressure of high-interest payday loans have become all-too-familiar in their daily lives, part of a culture of indebtedness which is both normalised and necessary for the current model of late-capitalism (Horsley, 2015). Yet each morning on their commute, during each boring work meeting, or during periods sat

¹ This is unsurprising given that online casinos and mobile casino apps constituted 55% of the GGY of the UK online gambling sector, compared to 41% of online sports-betting.

² The Problem Gambling Severity Index is a standardized self-assessment measure of at-risk gambling behavior. It is comprised of 9 likert-scale questions which revolve around issues such as (but not limited to) betting more than one can afford to lose; gambling with larger amounts of money to obtain the desired level of excitement; betting to recover losses; whether gambling has affected mental health or well-being, and whether gambling has caused financial problems for themselves or their households. However, as this chapter explores below, the changing nature of gambling arguably renders the PGSI an inaccurate and problematic assessment tool due to some of its flawed underpinning assumptions about gambling behavior.

³ Many mobile casino and gambling apps have recently introduced a 'pay by phone bill' service. Individual gamblers also reported using 'Touch ID' technology on smartphones which identify the phone-owner's thumbprint to either withdraw funds from an associated bank account or add their gambling account deposits to their mobile phone bill.

around at soft-play areas half-paying attention to their children, they would return to these gambling markets not in pursuit of 'excitement', 'action' or even to profit; but to, as one of our participants, Kenny, put it, "*just keep playing and pass the time. When you're gambling, you're never bored. It looks boring. But the time passes in a really pleasant way*". In an accelerated timeframe, this has contributed to strained personal relationships, family breakdown and prompted growing mental health issues among these men including alcohol abuse, depression and anxiety that have in many cases resulted in the prescription of anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications. It is these harms, and their relationship to the perpetual nature of repeat-gambling in digital culture with which this chapter is concerned, and how it has emerged as a product of late modern consumer capitalism's creation of a technologically-advanced post-disciplinary society of 24/7 consumption.

Gambling in a Post-Disciplinary Society

Existing social scientific research has tended to position gambling as distinct or separate from everyday life (see Albarran-Torres, 2018; Raymen, 2019; Raymen and Smith, 2017 for exceptions). Gerda Reith (1999b) has described gambling as '*a ritual which is strictly demarcated from the everyday world around it and within which chance is deliberately courted as a mechanism which governs a redistribution of wealth among players as well as a commercial interest or 'house'*' (Reith, 1999b: 1; emphasis added). For the most part, gambling spaces are understood as separate 'magic circles' of play which have different rules, rhythms, norms and values (Barthelme and Barthelme, 1999; Huizinga, 1949). Gamblers are perceived as taking on temporary gambling identities and personas of 'action' within these spaces, identities which are detached from the individual's wider lives, roles and identities (Caillois, 1958; Geertz, 1972; Goffman, 1967); while the phenomenology of gambling constitutes a 'temporal break' or escape from the emotional rhythms of everyday life (Cosgrave, 2006; Reith, 1999a, 1999b).

Such conceptualisations of gambling practice and gambling spaces are reminiscent of Foucault's (1995) 'disciplinary society', which is characterised by a series of enclosed institutions which carefully shape norms and behaviour through the meticulous segmentation and ordering of time and space. In Foucault's disciplinary society, the individual is scarcely free from such enclosed spaces of discipline. Individuals pass from the family, to school, to the military or the workplace; all of which hold in common the

'three great methods' of disciplinary power: the establishment of rhythms, the imposition of particular occupations and behavioural routines, and the regulation of the cycles of repetition (Foucault, 1995: 149). Within these institutions, the bodies of masses of individuals are subtly manipulated through the imposition of rigid body postures, behavioural routines and spatial power-relations. Spaces are clearly defined and partitioned to create functional and useful spaces that can effectively manage the behaviour of the bodies within them. In Foucault's disciplinary society, time and space are carefully segmented with everything having its proper time, place and space. As he describes, in a disciplinary society,

Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual...Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed. One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation (Foucault, 1995: 143).

This is a world that simply no longer exists. Our current world more generally, and gambling in particular, is more accurately characterised by its opposite: a post-disciplinary society. As Mark Fisher has argued, in the technologically-advanced society of neoliberal capitalism in which we are never truly unplugged from the vast matrix of communication systems, "[t]he old disciplinary segmentation of time is breaking down" (Fisher, 2009: 23). Foucault's carceral regime has been displaced by a dispersed 24/7 capitalism in which the various spheres of public and private life, work life, domestic life, and leisure and consumption time have almost entirely collapsed into one another, eroding any boundaries between activities. We work from home long outside of contracted hours, checking e-mails in the middle of the night and as soon as we wake up in the morning (Cederström and Fleming, 2012; Crary, 2013). At work, many of us will sit in front of our laptops with social media pages open in a web browser, chatting to a partner or a friend whilst simultaneously responding to emails, completing paperwork, listening to music, watching a YouTube video, doing online banking, or purchasing something through online retailers. Rather than going to lunch or sitting down for a family meal, many of us frequently have lunch at our desks or eat dinner in front of the television. The idea of having a family meal scheduled at the same time each night sounds entirely antiquated in our present context. Even that most sacred private time spent on

the toilet is not dedicated exclusively to the task of performing bodily functions. It is time often spent scrolling through social media and responding to emails or texts, playing games like *Candy Crush*, or, for the participants in our 18-month ethnographic study, gambling. Many of our participants joked with candour that they would rather not think about the amount of money they had lost gambling ‘on the shitter’ through mobile casino apps. As Nicholas Carr (2010) has remarked, the laptop, smartphone and tablet are ‘technologies of distraction’ which have created a society that does everything at once rather than focusing upon one task at a time; the antithesis of the carefully segmented and concentrational logic of the Foucauldian disciplinary system.

Of course, we should be careful not to confuse technology as the *cause* of this shift to a post-disciplinary society. As Marx pointed out in the *Grundrisse* (1993), capital refuses to abide any material limits to its incessant accumulation and further extraction of surplus value. The disciplinary segmentation of time and space—while once functional for industrial capitalism—has since become a barrier for a post-industrial consumer capitalism which demands the ever-present possibility of consumption. The spatial and temporal limits of the disciplinary society had to be transformed into barriers to be circumvented through social transformation; and the advance of increasingly sophisticated modes of technology has simply been the vehicle for such social transformation, generating a 24/7 capitalism which can achieve a rapidly ubiquitous penetration into every pocket of our daily lives. As Crary (2013: 13) observes, ‘there are now very few interludes of human existence (with the colossal exception of sleep) that have not been penetrated and taken over as work time, consumption time, or marketing time’; and even sleep is under attack with the advent of energy drinks, increased pressures and expectations for work, and the creation of 24-hour cities. Perhaps what is even more significant, however, is that such technologies of distraction do not only permit us to work *or* consume *or* view marketing materials *or* communicate with friends at any given opportunity. It is that the all-purpose devices of the laptop, smartphone and tablet allow and encourage us to do *all of these things simultaneously*, all of the time.

This trend toward a post-disciplinary digital culture has undeniably filtered down to change the very nature of gambling practice. The gambling behaviours of our participants were not carried out in times and places that were detached from the wider orbits of their lives. As we alluded to above, their gambling was thoroughly embedded within their everyday rhythms and routines, taking place in a wide range of mundane

times and places: on the commute, at work, on the toilet, or during evenings at home in front of the television. As Darren, an office worker, and Nick, a tradesman, describe:

Darren: You can set your watch by my gambling during the week to be fair. I have an hour's commute there and back [to work] on the train every day. I get on, find my seat, scroll through Facebook, scroll through Instagram, check out the football gossip on BBC Sport, you know how it is. That takes about 10-15 minutes. Then I tend to jump on [mobile casino app] and play a bit of roulette on there. I can get through God knows how many spins on there. It's so fast. That's what I tend to play as well. It's just easy bit of play innit? Don't have to think about it too much, which is why I like it. Once I'm on there, I kind of just zonk out a bit. Y'kna what I mean? Depending on if I have to do work emails or whatever I tend to do the same thing on the way home. I used to sometimes do a little at work as well, but I've tried to knock that on the head. I still do some days, if I'm in a boring meeting or something or I'm just kind of keeping on top of emails or whatever. Problem with that though is that you get on your phone and start playing [gambling apps] and you look up and an hour has gone by. Then you have to do work when you get home.

Nick: [I gamble] Everywhere mate. I don't have a routine for it really. But it's definitely more days than not. Sometimes when [colleague] picks me up in the van in the morning to go do a job. He's not very chatty in the early morning so I do it quite a bit then. During a lunch break maybe. Sitting on the bog [toilet]. If I'm waiting for a bus or a train or something, or if there's nothing decent on telly and it's just kind of on in the background. Me and the missus tend to just sit on our phones and ignore each other in the evening. Sometimes I do it in bed if I can't sleep. Just play slots or whatever. It's quite relaxing. So yeah...Just kind of flit in and out of it really. Two or three times a day. Mostly casino slots and games like that. Play for 20 minutes, half hour if I'm bored. Sometimes longer. It depends.

Darren and Nick's words above are certainly illustrative of the Deleuzian (1992) post-disciplinary capitalism described above, in which the previously distinct space-times of

work, the domestic home, and leisure and gambling collapse into one another. However, they also raise number of interesting points that go beyond the mere spatial flexibilisation of gambling; and instead reflect changing trends in the *nature* of gambling and its desired affective states in the digitalised world of late-capitalism. What Darren and Nick describe above—which was representative of the entire sample—is reminiscent of what Schüll (2012) has termed ‘the rise of repeat play’; a form of gambling which has been immensely profitable for the gambling both in the UK and more globally.

‘Too Wired to Concentrate’: Repeat Play and ‘Boredom’

Schüll’s (2012) study of machine gambling in Las Vegas observed a marked shift in the industry’s focus away from high-rolling tourist table gamblers who would stake large sums and lose quickly, and towards local players who sought a steadier, low-stakes repeat play oriented around video poker and slots machines. Generating impressive revenues for the Las Vegas gambling industry, the city witnessed the ubiquitous spread of gambling machines both within and beyond large tourist-focused resort casinos. In the 1980s and 1990s rows of video poker and slot machines began popping up around Las Vegas in leisure spaces such as bars or diners, and domestic errand spaces such as supermarkets and petrol stations—an example of post-disciplinary capitalism’s early efforts to expand opportunities for consumption and capital accumulation by eroding the boundaries between different spheres of life. But Schüll’s interviews with machine gambling addicts reveal a repeated desire to stay ‘in the zone’ of machine play for as long as possible; a ‘zone’ described by Borrell (2008) as a state of ‘suspended animation’. Repeat gambling, according to Schüll’s research, induces an affective state characterised by a trance: a numbness, mindlessness, and synergetic fusion between self and machine that is experienced through remaining within an almost catatonic state of mentally undemanding, mind-numbing mechanical repetition. Repeat gamblers are not particularly concerned with winning or losing, but simply extending the experience (and associated affective state) of repeat play (Raymen and Smith, 2017; Reith, 1999b). Schüll’s findings are reflected in our own findings, both in Darren’s description of ‘zonking out’ and Nick’s description of finding mobile casino slots as ‘relaxing’. Countless other participants were similar in their paradoxical characterisation of their gambling in almost therapeutic terms such as ‘monging’ out, ‘chilling out’ or ‘switching off’, despite its damaging overall effects on their finances and mental health issues:

Dave: It's just something easy to do on your phone. Something a bit mindless. That's why I'm not big on like live poker tournaments or anything because it takes too much brain power. Gets too intense. I'm more into slots or roulette. Just easy and mindless. Something to keep you occupied. It's like, you ever on YouTube or summin' and you just kind of get into those wormholes where you just watch one pointless video after another and you're not really interested, you just kind of watch and mong out and let it go onto the next video? It's a bit like that.

Glenn: I spend a shit-load of time on things like casino slot games and stuff. It's just like a game really, to switch off. That's the thing. You keep talking of it as *gambling*. But like, I *know* it is gambling, yeah? But I don't think of it in the same way as say when I've been to an actual casino and played blackjack or roulette. It's more just a game. I'm not living and dying on each spin. It's more like how I feel when I play Candy Crush. Just easy. Tap. Tap. Swipe. Don't need to strategise or anything really. Just a game to switch off from.

Mark: In the week I just play those kinds of like mind-numbing games. I don't mind betting on the football and stuff when you're out with the lads and that because that's part of the fun. You're out on it [drinking alcohol] and it's a bit more of an atmosphere. But in the week like on the way home from work or something? Nah. I'm stressed out enough as it is with work and dealing with parents and that. So if I do bet, it's more like games of chance where you don't have to think.

The affective states of borderline-catatonia that the 21st century repeat gambler desires is a far cry from the high emotional drama associated with the likes of Caillois (1957); Dostoevsky ([1866] 1972); Geertz (1973); and Goffman (1967) which continues to dominate contemporary gambling literature. Focused around the roulette wheel (Dostoevsky, 1972); the casino card table (Goffman, 1967) or the cockfighting circle (Geertz, 1973), these pre-digital accounts depict gambling as a symbolically meaningful practice in which people can seek 'action', prestige, and play out individual and broader social drama. As we can see above, during the working week there was an expressed revulsion among our participants for what they saw as emotionally-demanding forms of gambling such as live poker tournaments, sports-betting or dog-racing. However, what

is noteworthy from the above quotes is how contemporary gambling has converged with and responded to broader trends in digital behaviour. Most striking from the above comments, which were repeatedly expressed across our sample, is how the experience of digitalised repeat play was likened to, and holds significant affective similarities with the experience derived from other non-gambling activities such as scrolling through social media, or the simplicity of 'hyper-casual'⁴ games such as *Candy Crush*, *Fire Balls 3D* or *Rolly Vortex*. Indeed, it is notable that upon entering the game of *Candy Crush*, the user is confronted with messages such as 'Chill and Unwind', "Relax...and play Candy', 'Swipe the Stress Away', and 'Swipe. Match. Relax'. Such games are designed to induce a state of 'zoned out' numbness which is arguably being mimicked by forms of repeat-play mobile gambling, and their popularity is evidenced by mobile casino slots games contributing £2bn (37%) of the remote casino sector's £5.4bn GGY in March 2017-April 2018. This lends credence to Albarran-Torres' (2018) recent theorisations of contemporary gambling not as forms of risk-laden profit-seeking organised around the sums of money won and lost, but as forms of 'gamble-play' that are geared toward achieving a distinct shift in the player's affective state.

As this form of intuitive repeat-play gambling has infiltrated mobile phones and become spatially separated from the fixed mooring of the gambling machine, they have effectively synergised and converged with the wider technological subjectivities generated by a post-disciplinary consumer capitalism. This post-disciplinary society of control (Deleuze, 1992) has cultivated new subjectivities which are caught in a perpetual state of 'depressive hedonia' that is tailor-made for consumer capitalism. As Fisher (2009) correctly distinguishes, while depression is usually associated with a state of 'anhedonia' – an inability to get pleasure from anything – the new depressive hedonia of post-disciplinary consumer capitalism is the 'inability to do anything *except* pursue pleasure' (*ibid.* 2009: 22) at every given moment, irrespective of whether one is at work, at home, at university, or commuting. It is an edgy and agitated condition in which individuals seem to be 'too wired to concentrate' (*ibid.* 2009: 24): compulsively checking and re-checking their mobile phones, re-entering social media accounts mere seconds after they've closed them, playing endless games of *Candy Crush* or *Angry Birds*, and, for our participants, gambling.

⁴ This is how game developers such as 'Voodoo' games describe this new brand of highly popular smartphone games

By effectively infiltrating smartphones and tablet devices, which at this stage of digital capitalism are already ever-present extensions of ourselves, the gambling industry in the UK has been able to circumvent many of the challenges presented through machine gambling. Gambling machine developers had to come up with ingenious ways of 'hooking' the player to enhance time-on-device (Cummings, 1997). The name of the game was to keep the player sat in the chair for hours on end, not even moving to eat or urinate (Schüll, 2012). Mobile gambling, on the other hand, allows the player to flit in and out of gambling apps in ways which mimic their use of other mobile phone apps such as social media or instant messaging services. Most of our participants reported that they would rarely gamble for more than an hour in one sitting. More common was for them to enter into mobile casinos or other gambling apps several times a day and play for anywhere between 20 minutes to an hour at a time. The most common motivation expressed by our participants for their intermittent, spasmodic repeat-play was the avoidance of 'boredom' during those interstitial moments of idleness in their daily routine:

Nosey: It [mobile gambling] is just something to do to kill the time. That's the main thing. A bit like checking social media and that. Just something to do so you're not bored if you're waiting for someone, or sitting on a bus, or just have fuck all to do.

Marc: Boredom mainly. I get bored quite easily to be honest so I need to always be doing something. That's why I'm always on my phone. Can't be just sitting there doing nothing.

Jordy: I reckon most people would say boredom [when asked about gambling motivation]. Play a few games of something. Kills time dunnit? Kills too much time sometimes! Can't tell you the amount of times I've been sitting somewhere needing to leave for something in half hour or whatever, play a few spins, go on Facebook or whatever, or even just play a normal game on my phone like Candy Crush and before I know it I'm rushing out the door 'cos I'm late.

What was most notable from all of our participants on this topic was that, unlike Banks' (2013) edgework-inspired analysis of 'advantage play' gambling, the negative motivation to avoid boredom was not accompanied by a *positive* motivation to *pursue* excitement,

entertainment, or money. This is reminiscent of philosopher Lars Svendsen's (2005) description of boredom as a 'tame longing without any particular object'. Instead, and consistent with Fisher's (2009) notion of a new depressive form of hedonism and the 'zoned-out' affective state of repeat-play (Schüll, 2012), it was simply a matter of 'killing time' and preserving a state of perpetual low-level stimulation. As the likes of Crary (2013) and Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) have observed, in the late modern world of incessant 24/7 capitalism, the highest premium is placed upon activity for its own sake. 'To always be doing something, to move to change—this is what enjoys prestige, as against stability, which is often synonymous with inaction' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007: 155). For our participants, to be bored was simply to be temporarily 'removed from the communication sensation-stimulus matrix' (Fisher, 2009: 24).

For machine gamblers and mobile gamblers alike, an accelerated and frictionless nature of play is crucial to the avoidance of boredom and the achievement of the trance-like, rhythmic experience of repeat-play. As the likes of Cummings (1997) and Schüll (2012) have painstakingly documented, immense amounts of resources have gone into the continuous development of gambling machine design to help better facilitate frictionless play by creating a physical synergy between player and machine. Instead of pulling a lever, players simply tap a button. Instead of depositing coins and tokens, players simply have to swipe members cards to update their balance, thereby removing the symbolism of inserting (and receiving) physical currency. Of course, with mobile gambling, an existing synergy between player and mobile phone is ready-made for the gambling industry; as evidenced through the above discussions of how mobile gamblers would flit in and out of gambling apps repeatedly, building-up cumulatively large hours of play-time in the same way they would use other apps such as social media or instant messaging. On mobile phones, the physical symbolism of notes and coins is already entirely absent, while our participants reported the ease of access to debt through the extension of overdrafts in mobile banking apps, or availability of high-interest payday loans through apps such as Wonga or QuickQuid which have already created a 'closed loop' of everything one would need to continue gambling contained on one device.

However, this has not stopped the industry from seeking new ways to improve this frictionless nature of play. In more recent interviews, participants reported using pay-by-phone bill methods, which simply add gambling deposits to their monthly phone bill,

effectively allowing them to gamble with money they did not necessarily have in their bank account⁵. However, while pay-by-phone casinos are a relatively recent development, they are already at-risk of being rendered outdated, as participants reported moving over to Apple Pay Casinos to take advantage of their Touch ID payment method which uses fingerprint technology first introduced to the UK in 2015. With bank details already stored in the iCloud, which is linked to the individual phone and the fingerprint of its user, deposits can be made to mobile casinos simply by pressing one's thumb to the screen, fostering a more frictionless, less reflective form of payment and play. As Apple Pay Casino's website describes, 'the disadvantages' of other more cumbersome payment methods 'disappear with one simple tap...Now just one finger is all you need for everything to be taken care of: just place your finger on your device's Touch ID and it's all done, you've deposited at your favourite mobile casino. It's that simple' (Apple Pay Casino, 2018). Such trends follow a long history of the casualisation and acceleration of payment in late-capitalism. Under the guise of 'consumer convenience', we have progressively moved further away from the act of handing over cash or the symbolism of payment. The symbolic act of handing over cash was replaced by cheques; while the act of writing out the sum of payment on a cheque was replaced by payment by debit cards. Soon, even the act of punching one's pin number into a card machine has been replaced with contactless payment. Now, with the emergence of Touch ID payments, one need not reach into one's wallet at all.

As we have already alluded, such frictionless repeat play came at a cost to many of our participants. Almost all of our participants have experienced significant-but-intermittent financial difficulty as a result of their gambling, with various participants extending their overdrafts to compensate for gambling losses; taking out multiple credit cards (with bills often going unpaid) to try and mask payments coming out of their bank accounts; or taking on small high-interest pay-day loans to cover excessively large phone bills after a month of unusually large gambling losses. In certain situations, this has contributed to strained personal relationships, with the isolated and easily embedded nature of their gambling often going unnoticed. As Danny, a 29-year-old plasterer explained:

⁵ As a consequence, there is a £30 daily limit to the amount one can deposit through pay-by-phone bill payment methods. However, this resulted in some participants reporting mobile phone bills which stretched to over £200 per month. While these payments would be largely hidden from spouses due to many participants opting for paperless phone bills, this was more than enough money to place a significant strain household finances, with some individuals incurring extra charges for unpaid or partially paid phone bills.

Danny: I need to rein it [gambling] in a bit. That girl I've seeing, remember her? She's left me because of it. She doesn't know that, but it is why.

TR: How do you mean?

Danny: Well like, obviously she doesn't know I gamble. It's not the kind of thing you tell people is it? Especially when you first start going out with them. And money has been a bit difficult recently [later revealed to be over £1,000 in debt], so like I've been trying to tighten the belt a bit. But of course we just started going out a few months ago, so she's like wanting to be fun and going and doing this and that and actually go out and do stuff. And I'm always going like 'nah, don't feel like it' or 'Ah I've got a job this weekend' or something like that, just to make excuses. I'm not about to tell a new girlfriend 'oh I can't go out because I've got load of gambling debt'. Guess she got fed up in the end and chucked it in.

Danny's story was far from unique, with numerous other participants discussing relationships which were strained or failed as a result of lying and attempting to mask gambling expenditure. Others, feeling the rising costs that come from gambling intermittently four to six days a week, experienced mental health issues of stress, depression and anxiety. This resulted in some seeking professional medical help and receiving prescription medication. Others attempted to deal with their stresses through increased alcohol use; while others struggled with stress-related anger management issues and the subsequent professional and domestic impact. In spite of this, most of our participants were unlike Danny above, who eventually conceded to having a gambling problem. When pressed on the issue, they vociferously denied having a gambling 'problem', remarking that unlike 'problem gamblers', they did not allow gambling to interfere with their wider lives or responsibilities. To provide just two examples:

Dean: I wouldn't say I have a gambling *problem*. Not at all. Yeah, I gamble too much, but I think that's just because I'm bad with money. I spend too much money in general mate—on clothes, food, booze, whatever. And it does land me in shit sometimes, having to borrow money or miss credit card payments or whatever.

But I'm not a gambling addict. Like, I don't skip off work or call in sick to spend the whole day down the bookies or sit at home and play online poker.

Tom: I still manage to pick up [daughter's name] from her after-school clubs and take her to stuff like dance and gymnastics on the weekend. I'm not like some of these fucking degenerates you see who leave their kids in the car in the car park or mug 'em off to spend time in some dingy amusements arcade or some shit like that. I gamble the same. I do it quite frequently, but it's not like I'm getting worse or doing it for some adrenaline rush or something. It's just something I do. I'm not spending huge wads of money. It's small amounts. £20 or £30 quid here and there.

In a defensive act of cognitive dissonance, both Dean and Tom invoke well-known traditional identifiers of gambling addiction which are associated with land-based forms of gambling. However, such markers are no longer necessary indicators of gambling addiction in a digital culture. Unlike the machine gambling addicts in Schüll's (2012: 25) research, who organised their lives, routines, and even their movements around their gambling, the spatial flexibilisation of gambling in a digital context allowed our participants to *organise their gambling around their lives*, thereby disavowing the compulsive nature of their practice. In the post-disciplinary society of late-capitalism, our participants did not need to spend hours sat in one bookmaker's shop or casino. They did not need to take large chunks of time away from work or family. They could casually bet sat in the café of a children's soft-play area at the weekend, or under the table of their desk at work. In doing so, the digital context of contemporary gambling has removed many of the traditional 'breaks' or markers of problem gambling; such as gambling larger sums for excitement, spending increasing amounts of time in gambling venues and drawing the disapproving attention of friends or spouses. Consequently, as Mark Fisher (2009: 25) has remarked, 'If the figure of discipline was the worker-prisoner, the figure of control is the debtor-addict' (Fisher, 2009: 25).

In the concluding section that follows, we consider the policy implications of the changing nature of gambling in a digital culture of 24/7 capitalism; particularly as it applies to the design of games and the speed of play, and the need to re-evaluate problem gambling metrics and the domain assumptions upon which they based in order to be more closely aligned to the new reality of gambling in a digital consumer culture. Finally,

we finish this chapter with a call for more research into theoretical accounts of contemporary subjectivity that can begin to provide more rigorous accounts of the neurological relationship between the individual, mobile gambling devices, and the design of mobile games that are also carefully situated within the broader socio-economic context of late-capitalism. It is suggested that emerging work in the field of continental philosophy, specifically that of transcendental materialism (Johnston, 2008; 2014; Johnston and Malabou, 2013), offers promising opportunities for social scientists to develop understandings of human behaviour that can incorporate neuroscientific understandings of *neuroplasticity* together with psychoanalysis and critical analyses of consumer culture.

Policy Implications and Looking Forward

In this concluding section, we argue that the changing character of gambling and problem gambling in a digital culture of 24/7 capitalism problematises the nature of contemporary policy and media focus in the field of gambling in the UK. The rapid expansion of the online gambling market, and the industry as a whole, has resulted in a significant increase in public attention and scrutiny toward the gambling industry and its practices. Aside from concerns around the extent and growth of TV advertising and the gambling industry's close partnership with professional football in the UK, perhaps greatest public attention and debate has centred around the scourge of electronic B2 gambling machines more commonly known as Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs). These are electronic touch-screen slot machines with a number of games available such as roulette and poker in which players have been able to stake as much as £100 every twenty seconds. Numerous mainstream media articles have been penned which assert (rather than explain) the addictive nature of these machines, detailing harrowing stories of lives that have been lost or forever-altered as a result of gambling-related suicide and financial debt. Debate has centred primarily upon the maximum amount of money that players can stake on a given hand of cards or the spin of the digital roulette wheel, in addition to critiques of the concentration of betting shops and FOBT machines in communities of acute socio-economic deprivation. As a result, the gambling industry has entered into meaningful dialogue with the UK government into the regulation of FOBTs, which has produced a legally-mandated reduction in the amount individuals can stake between 20-second spins from £100 to £2 that is due to take effect.

However, it is our contention that the nature of this debate, and its specific focus upon the FOBT machine found in high street betting shops, is deeply flawed and has in fact been carefully managed and designed by the gambling industry to actively obscure, downplay and draw attention away from the harmful *design* of the games *within* these machines. At the level of design and the experience of play, it should be noted that many of the games played on FOBTs are remarkably similar—often identical—to the digital casino games that are played in the more profitable realm of remote gambling on laptops, mobile phones and tablets. These games, in both their mobile and FOBT format, are geared towards high-speed, rhythmic repeat play which endeavour to achieve a similar shift into a trance-like affective state where players get absorbed ‘in the zone’ (Collins et al, 2016). However, mobile casino games have not received nearly the same public attention or condemnation from mainstream media or the industry. This is in spite of the fact that the GGY generated by FOBTs (£1.7bn between March 2017-April 2018) pales in comparison to similar casino games in the remote gambling sector. In the same time period, UK gamblers lost more money on mobile casino slots games *alone* (£2bn) than they did on FOBTs, while the total GGY of the online casino sector exceeded the GGY generated by FOBTs by nearly £1bn (Gambling Commission, 2018c). The impact of such a specific focus upon FOBTs is significant in two interrelated ways; both of which intend to keep attention away from the design of such games which constitutes the true locus of harm and addiction.

Firstly, by placing such specific focus and attention upon FOBTs, as opposed to a wider focus on electronic repeat-play games more broadly, what is implicitly suggested and unconsciously accepted is that the problem lies *within the physical object of the machine itself*, rather than the *design of the games* within the machine. The betting terminal, along with the betting shop, is falsely presented as containing something dark, mysterious and addictive within its physical materiality that is alleged to be qualitatively distinct from the same games that are played on mobile, tablet and laptop devices. This condemnation of the FOBT can be viewed in similar terms to the late-modern emergence of the term ‘problem gambler’, which Reith (2007) argues was actually beneficial to the gambling industry. While all forms of recreational gambling in Western societies were traditionally seen as a moral ‘vice’, the liberalization of the industry paradoxically coincided with the emergence of the ‘problem’ gambler as a distinct type: an individually-flawed consumer

that was different from and separate to the 'normal', 'safe', and morally acceptable forms of gambling. Consequently, it is a term that has been broadly useful for the industry, placing emphasis upon individual pathologies of the gambler rather than focusing attention upon the harm embedded within the industry itself. With regards to FOBTs, one could cynically argue that as the bulk of gambling profits move away from spatially-fixed gambling venues and towards a post-disciplinary remote sector, the industry has tacitly authorised the scapegoating the FOBT in order to distinguish it from supposedly 'safe' forms of remote gambling on mobile devices that constitute a growing majority of the gambling industry's overall profit. Despite its relative infancy, the fixed odds betting terminal is arguably already a relic, soon to be made extinct by digital capitalism's accelerated pace of change. The same games with the same designs which achieve the same affective state can be experienced through mobile phones, tablets and laptops that are not fixed by the spatial mooring of the betting terminal or the bookmaker's shop.

Secondly, the focus on the amount one can stake on FOBTs misses the problematic nature of the games themselves entirely, and in doing so keeps critical discussion away from game design in an act of policy sleight-of-hand. As Shaffer (2004: 9) has argued, the potential for addiction, 'emerges when repeated interaction with a specific object or array of objects (a drug, a game of chance, a computer) reliably produces a desirable subjective shift'; and as discussed at length through the data above, both FOBT and mobile casino games are designed to produce an almost catatonic affective experience through the frictionless rhythms of high-speed repeat play. Such findings are further validated by the research of Collins et al (2016), who were commissioned to conduct research into the effects of reducing the maximum permitted stake on FOBTs. As they found from their experiments and interviews with FOBT 'problem' gamblers, reducing the maximum permitted stake certainly reduced the pace at which individuals ran out of money; but it did nothing to alter their enjoyment of play, their level of 'absorption' during play, or their desire to continue playing (Collins et al, 2016: 18-19). Therefore, policy suggestions which focus upon limiting the amount an individual can stake can certainly help to mitigate the financial harms experienced by gamblers. However, they do not attempt to address the issue of how gambling addiction comes into being by casting a critical eye upon the relationship between the player, the technology, and game design. Current policy seems content with allowing gambling addiction to flourish while simply attempting to mitigate its worst excesses after-the-fact. The changing nature of gambling

towards a high-speed and mindless form of repeat-play suggests that policy attention should also be trained upon the *design of games*; focusing upon reducing the speed of play; reducing the frictionless nature of payment and deposit by reviewing TouchID payments; and banning the ability of players to play with debt by removing the option to pay with credit cards or via phone bills in order to structurally enforce more frequent 'breaks' that interrupt the addictive nature of rhythmic repeat-play. Indeed, the gambling commission's own report on online gambling expresses such concerns when they write,

'Our concern is that game characteristics can be used to encourage and incentivise consumers to play for longer and/or spend more. Whilst it has long been a practice to offer extra rewards for loyal consumers (such as bonus prize draws after a month of qualifying play, or tickets to sporting events for long term VIP players), *games can be designed to reward more intensive play within a gaming session*. That immediacy and incentive to increase the current gaming session spend might not allow the player to reflect on their activity as they might when playing over a longer period of time.' (Gambling Commission, 2018b: 45)

This moves us onto our second point: the need to re-evaluate the ongoing legitimacy of problem gambling risk assessment metrics such as the problem gambling severity index (PGSI). The assumptions about problem gambling underpinning the PGSI are largely at-odds with, and have failed to catch up to, the new realities of problem gambling in the post-disciplinary reality of mobilised repeat-play. Perhaps the most glaring shortcoming of the PGSI is the question which asks whether the individual needs to play with larger sums of money to generate the same level of excitement. This question is a hangover of existing studies into gambling which emphasise gambling games and spaces as places of 'action', 'drama' and excitement; or studies which locate problem gambling as an individual pathology of low-impulse control. Of course, as we have already identified, the immensely addictive and problematic gambling that takes place on FOBTs or mobile casino games has little, if anything, to do with excitement or money. In many ways, what repeat-play problem gamblers pursue is the opposite of excitement; but rather the desired shift to an affective state of being 'in the zone', where they are neither bored nor 'excited', but simply absorbed. Our research findings, along with the likes of Collins et al (2016) and Schüll (2012), found that the amount individuals would stake had no bearing upon their absorption within the game or their enjoyment from the game. Gambling with less

money did not change their gambling habits. Rather they would simply lose the same amounts of money over longer periods of time.

While this is perhaps the most obvious shortcoming of the PGSI, numerous other questions also highlight a disjuncture between this widely-used metric and the new reality of digital gambling and late-capitalism. One question, which asks whether others have criticised the individual's gambling behaviour, clearly fails to acknowledge the isolated, sporadic and easily hidden nature of gambling in digital culture. Many of our participants reported that their friends, families and partners often had no idea that they gambled at all. They played their games on their phones and tablets close to their chest, turned away from prying eyes or in normal non-gambling spaces as part of their daily routine. Their daily lives were not interrupted by long stints at the casino, betting shop or adult amusements arcades, and there was nobody aware enough of their gambling to drag them away from the roulette table or slot machine. This new digital culture of gambling further problematises another question in the PGSI which asks the individual how often they would 'go back' another day to win money they had lost. Even the wording of the question is antiquated, suggesting a return to a specific venue. However, the high-speed nature of play and the frictionless ability to deposit money at the tap of a button or the scan of a thumbprint meant that our participants scarcely knew how much they were winning or losing, or sometimes whether they were winning or losing at all. As Jordy explained:

Jordy: I've got no idea over the course of a month how much I'm winning or losing. It's hard to keep track of really, 'cos you're not really thinking much about it. You notice you're out of money so you deposit another 20 or 30 quid. So bang that goes in. But it's amazing how quickly you forget when the last time you deposited or how much. I used to know because I would have like daily limits for myself. But now with the touch thumbprint thingy, it's just so easy to whack in another 10 or 15 quid.

Money deposited into mobile casino apps was rarely, if ever withdrawn from accounts. As the likes of Reith (1999a) and Raymen and Smith (2017) have observed, despite appearances, money is not the principal *object* of desire within gambling. It is a necessary element, but the principal object-cause of desire (to use Lacanian terminology), is to

simply *continue* the experience of play. Money was not seen as being deposited to 'win' more money, or even to recoup losses, but as simply an access-payment to enjoy the experience of play. If enough money was accumulated, our participants claimed that they would consider 'cashing out'; but acknowledged that it was unlikely that such winnings would be accumulated, and whenever they would get 'close' to that amount of money, they always continued playing. Perhaps the clearest articulation of this phenomena, which was repeated throughout our research, came from Glenn:

Glenn: I don't think of it in terms of putting 20 quid in and trying to double my money. When I deposit that money, in my head it's gone. I'm not getting it back. You're not even trying to really. You put it in so you can play the game. Obviously, if I win enough I'll think to myself 'yeah, nah I should probably take the money and run'. But then the game is over. I used to do that. I would win a bit of money and cash it out. I've done what I'm here for, I've made a bit of money. But then you want to keep playing. So you just end up putting it back in. Eventually you realise there's no point cashing it out. So I just treat that money as gone now. When I deposit it, I just accept that it's staying there.

When Glenn talks about the motivations behind re-staking his winnings or putting more money in when he has lost, he crucially does not talk of his desire to 'win more money', or to 'get back to even'. Instead, he talks about the desire to *keep playing*. These are just a few examples of how the new realities of repeat-play gambling in a digital culture problematise what is now argued to be an out-of-date metric for assessing problematic gambling. Therefore, one key policy priority for the gambling industry should be the development of new problem gambling metrics that can better account for these changes in technology and their impact on the nature of gambling and problem gambling more specifically.

One final suggestion remains. If we are to grasp the true scope and impact of technology upon our subjectivities and consumer behaviours, it is imperative that the social sciences develop new and original accounts of subjectivity that can incorporate understandings of the neurological effects of technology upon our brains and adequately situate them within their wider political, economic and social contexts. Only the most hard-line social

constructivists would deny that our unconscious or our material biological make-up has a significant role to play in our emotions, behaviours, and the formation of subjectivity. For any social scientist who claims to be seriously interested in the pursuit of more robust accounts of reality, turning a blind-eye to the life sciences is entirely unpardonable. Yet social scientists within the fields of criminology and beyond have either consistently scoffed at the notion of incorporating issues of biology into their study, or conveniently left this crucial and painstaking work to as-yet-unidentified others. To try and do so has been seen as committing social science's cardinal sin of 'biological reductionism'; of pathologizing individuals; and even risking implicit association with the dark and fascist politics of eugenics. The life sciences have long been dismissed as too rigid and deterministic to have any explanatory power of the social world. However, developments within the life sciences—particularly neuroscience—means that these dismissals have long been caricatures. Within the neurosciences, the notion of *neuroplasticity* has displaced the idea of the brain as a rigid, unchanging piece of physical apparatus, and has arrived at the understanding that all of our neural pathways and circuits—whether they're involved in feeling, seeing, hearing, thinking, remembering or emotions—are subject to constant change (Damasio, 2000). As the same experiences are repeated, certain synaptic links between neurons grow stronger as other synaptic links grow weaker. The most important issue is that our material-corporeal ground is subject to constant change and adjustment as it interacts with the social world. The constraints of space prevent us from going into much further detail. However, radical movements in the field of continental philosophy, such as transcendental materialism (Johnston, 2008; 2014; Johnston and Malabou, 2013), have firmly embraced such discoveries. Bringing these developments in neuroscience together with philosophy, psychoanalysis, critical understandings of political economy and ideology, transcendental materialism theorises how 'more-than-material' subjects emerge immanently and ontogenetically out of an original material-corporeal ground (Johnston, 2008: xxiii). Needless to say, such frameworks have substantial implications for future research in the field of gambling (not to mention a raft of other social fields transformed by the influence of technology); enabling social scientists to understand the scientific-neurological impact of electronic game design and their capacity for addiction, which can be adequately situated and critically theorised within the broader political-economic, social and cultural context.

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