

Gambling: Towards a sociological analysis of action and interaction in the betting shop environment.

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Introduction:

The topic I chose for this study was gambling. There were two main reasons for this:

The first was through a personal interest of my own in the area.

The introduction to gambling came through an interest in horse racing. On being brought to the races as a child I was always fascinated by the assembled bookmakers, perched above the crowd as if men of importance, and crying their odds at the top of their voices. The atmosphere generated by these men was fascinating and the amount of custom attracted as a result was terrifying. The common opinion held at the race track was that the bookmaker always won, so to me, betting seemed a pointless activity. However my opinion dramatically changed when I backed my first winner and quadrupled my money as a result. Gambling then became an interesting activity.

After frequenting the local betting shops I quickly realised that gambling was not going to provide an avenue to wealth, yet I still found myself being drawn back. I didn't think myself addicted to the pass-time nor did I think so of my colleagues. The attraction proved baffling to me and provided one motivation to the undertaking of this study. To study the betting shop environment and the reasons people frequent them with the hope of finding reasons other than addiction associated.

The second primary motivation for the study came from the fact that gambling is not a topic widely researched in the social sciences. When such research was undertaken on gambling, it centred on its problematic and addictive implications. I found relatively little research undertaken into the positive social aspects of gambling. It was an area that I thought required investigation. Although the gap in literature proved problematic for comparative analysis in the literature section

This is the area on which the focus of my study lies, on gambling's positive attributes.

The focus of attention in the literature review centres on this. The first chapter is devoted to a general overview of both positive and negative views of gambling and points to how the positive views were overshadowed by the negative.

The second chapter deals with the betting shop environment, its location, physiognomy and the clientele that frequent it.

The third chapter focuses on the play and chance elements associated with gambling.

The fourth chapter deals with a consideration of gambling's relationship with luck. The fifth chapter focuses essentially on the contribution of Erving Goffman to gambling.

The main point I'm arguing toward is that the gambling environment harbours a distinctive subculture. Essentially my studies focus on the actions, interactions and behaviours of participants in the betting shop environment with the aim of highlighting the evidence of that subculture and also arguing to the positive social implications for its members. Ultimately, my argument is geared to establishing gambling activity as something with positive social implications.

Chapter 1- Gambling: From negative to positive aspects.

Gambling is a common leisure activity in most countries and cultures throughout the world. However gambling is also an activity that attracts criticism and censure.¹ This reproach arises out of gambling being a potential social problem. Gambling can be distinguished from other forms of leisure activity in moral or ethical terms as it is assumed to be, at least potentially, a social problem which needs to be controlled.² Most of the available literature on the relationship between gambling and society focuses on its problematic side (i.e. gambling addiction and its implications). Hence, the image of gambling is frequently disparaging and negative. The pejorative and negative way that gambling is presented rest on common ideas of its possible harmful implications. i.e. that which can cause financial, personal and social problems.³

According to MacMillan the genesis of this condemnation is complex; but if one agency is more responsible than any other, it has been the strength of Protestantism in western capitalist societies.⁴ This approach derives from the notion that gambling is primarily an attempt by the gamblers to make 'easy money'; thus a denial of the work ethic and a threat to production. For example, the conceptual distinction historically made between gambling and stock market speculation or insurance investments rests on normative perceptions of gambling as devoid of useful economic functions.⁵ Concentrating on the negative economic effects of gambling, Rowntree and Lavers argue it to cause the diversion of resources rather than the generation of income and employment and conclude it to be poor economic reasoning and an increasingly

¹Walker Michael. 1996:223

²MacMillan, Jan. 1996;12

³Walker; 1992:174

⁴MacMillan 1996; 13-14

⁵MacMillan 1996;13

isolated attitude.⁶ MacMillan contests that this conception is reinforced by a priori of assumptions :

Economic studies have perceived gambling as a self-defeating irrational behaviour proving problematic financially, personally and socially.⁷ Social Science theories have considered gambling as destructive of the individual and of society. Psychoanalysis and psychiatrists have played a key role in arguing that a proportion of the gamblers are unable to gamble and consequentially compromise, disrupt and damage personal, family and work relations.⁸ Roger Munting outlines points similar to those of MacMillan in considering gambling of negative economic function.⁹ As Munting points out, few gamblers have much chance of winning anything substantial or at all. Empirical evidence suggests that most gamblers are aware of this. Common sense dictates that it would, in any case, take but a short time in experience for gamblers to come to this conclusion. According to Munting many of the early critics of gambling attacked it because it was irrational. The very basis of the movement for 'rational recreation' in the middle decades of the nineteenth century was that the pastimes of the working classes were irrational and wasteful, in terms of time and resources. Gambling was one of these activities opposed.¹⁰ J A Hobson, a leading light in the NAGL,¹¹ claimed that gambling by its very nature displayed a rejection of reasoning. Similar concerns were expressed in the USA where gambling was steadily restricted in law through the 19th century because it was based on irrational expectations.¹²

⁶Munting 1996;197

⁷MacMillan 1996;13

⁸ibid

⁹Munting 1996;190

¹⁰ibid

¹¹National Anti-Gambling Legislation

¹²Munting 1999;191

However, Munting points to the need to differentiate between different types of gambling before judging it to be wholly irrational, and looks to rationality in the players ahead of the activity itself.¹³ As Munting argues, people gamble for various reasons to serve a variety of purposes. In many cases it fulfils a social need. According to Munting the emphasis on individual behaviour overlooks the importance of group behaviour and the social functions of activities associated with gambling.¹⁴

Gambling in this way is not essentially irrational. For Munting, bingo provides the clearest example of this, but he also suggests that even football pools had this function, in part because filling in the coupon involved participants (implicitly men in the workplace) in discussion over forms etc.¹⁵ Similar points apply to betting shop behaviour.¹⁶ Gambling also provides a context of social intercourse incidental to the event. Bingo again provides the clearest example though it is also true for casinos, race going and amusement arcades. In solitary pursuits such as the lottery it is likely to be less manifest.¹⁷ Munting concludes that out of the three areas of gambling he studied - the remote speculative market (pools, lotteries), the judgmental (horse racing, sports betting) and the incidental (bingo) where gambling is secondary to other social purposes- none may be discounted as wholly irrational.¹⁸

More often than not gambling will be seen as vice, proving problematic on a social and personal level.¹⁹ According to Michael Walker, ‘an excessive gambler gambles once a week or more, has lost more than he or she can afford six or more times; has lost more than planned on four of the last five sessions;

¹³Munting 1996;194

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵Munting 1996;195

¹⁶Newman .1972

¹⁷ibid

¹⁸ibid

¹⁹MacMillan 1996;13

usually or always chases losses; for whom gambling causes debts; whom wants to cut back or stop gambling and who has tries to stop gambling without success'.²⁰ Walker is in no doubt that gambling causes problems: At the lower level, frequent gambling in casinos, betting shops and gambling clubs takes the gambler away from home, family and friends. The hours spent gambling are hours spent away from the significant 'other' in a persons life. At the other extreme, a gambler may lose not only all of his family savings, but all of the money that can be borrowed from any available source, and may steal, embezzle, and commit fraud until caught or imprisoned.²¹ Walker considers money to be incidental to gambling problems.²² As Walker argues, the problem gambler seeks to win money and believes that he or she will do so with persistence; however, persistence produces increasing debts and gambling increasingly becomes, the only means by which those debts can be paid. The fluctuations in fortunes experienced by gamblers maintain the illusion that debts can be paid in this way. The 'big win' proves that the gambler is right and the 'big loss' simply increases the desperate need of the gambler for success. The hope of making money keeps the gambler involved, but the reality of the debts incurred cause the breakdown of the gamblers personal and social life.²³ According to Walkers view, gambling does not directly cause personal problems such as depression, nor does it cause social problems such as the breakdown of relationships with significant others. As he puts it, gambling directly causes debt which in turn causes the range of other observable phenomena.²⁴ Walker goes on to argue that the reason for persistence in the face of mounting debts and increasing problems in other sectors of life is not simply false belief about the nature of gambling.²⁵ Beliefs do not constitute a motivation in themselves.²⁶ They

²⁰Walker 1996;2

²¹Walker 1996;3

²²Walker 1996;243

²³ibid

²⁴Walker 1996;241

²⁵ibid

must be coupled with a source of motivation in order to produce behaviour.²⁷ As Walker argues; while the motivation for gambling may appear to be the acquisition of money, there may be deeper underlying reasons. At the very least, gambling may be seen as a challenge or contest in which the individual attempts to show his or her true self, or in which the individual attempts to create a sense of self²⁸

What can be called a liberal sociological analysis of gambling gained strength in the years following the Second World War. This presented a more positive explanation of gambling as a legitimate leisure activity.²⁹ In the post-war years, opportunities for the affluent worker to participate in organised gambling increased dramatically in several countries. With increased legislation and responsibility, gambling was no longer seen as a social pathology which would lead inevitably to moral decay and crime.³⁰ From a functionalist perspective it began to be investigated as an instrumental activity directed to an economic end (winning defined primarily in terms of economic success) and as an expressive social activity enjoyed as an end in itself (the intrinsic social and personal rewards of playing the game).³¹ Sociologists have usually dealt with issues such as the social content of gambling situations - ethnographic studies of gambling settings, for example, or the nature of what they term a gambling career. What MacMillan finds illuminating in the post-war liberal sociology of gambling is its interactionist approach, concentrating on immediate social relationships between individuals in the gambling context.³² MacMillan contests that even where gambling is considered as being apart

²⁶ibid

²⁷ibid

²⁸Walker 1996;242

²⁹MacMillan 1996;13

³⁰MacMilan 1996;15

³¹MacMillan 1996;15

³²MacMillan 1996;16

from 'normal' behaviour, interactionist studies have considered the possibility of positive consequences and meanings of gambling from the players viewpoint.³³ Drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives, Macmillan argues that gambling functions as recuperative 'adult play' or as an escapist 'safety valve' from the burden of work; as deviant adaptations to anomie or to alienation; as an integral element of working class culture which seeks to overcome lack of success and security; as an outlet for gamblers to test chance and skill; and as an effective opportunity for self realisation and creativity lacking in the workplace.³⁴ The attraction of contemporary and the commitment of regular gamblers even in the face of consistent losses have been explained predominantly in terms of the rewards gained from social interaction and group association.³⁵ Walker reiterates this point by stating that in some forms of gambling, such as horse racing, regular heavy gambling may be maintained by the positive rewards which come from belonging to a social network of like minded individuals.³⁶

According to MacMillan the central theoretical formulation which has provided the sociological basis for a more positive perspective on gambling was developed by Erving Goffman.³⁷ Goffman 'lifts gambling out of the moral abyss into which successive generations of commentators and reformers have consigned it and renders possible a consideration of its meaning which is freed from a priori association of a negative kind'.³⁸ Goffman essentially argues that gambling provides players with an opportunity to demonstrate strength of character and commitment to valued social codes such as risk-taking, courage and honesty. At the same time his analysis contains

³³ibid

³⁴MacMillan 1996;17

³⁵ibid

³⁶Walker 1996;8

³⁷MacMilla 1996;17

³⁸Downes et al 1976;17

an implicit recognition that gambling contributes to the moral and political regulations of society by reinforcing conventional values. While gambling provides a substitute for challenges removed from ordinary life, it also is given an added civilising function as a beneficial agency of socialisation and social control.³⁹ Wray Vamplew also recognises gambling as a positive social function and goes on to add that gambling performs a social function in providing an open sesame to certain subcultures: 'What won the 3:30 ?' is a safe conversational gambit in any working class bar. In such cultures the ability to pick winners brings social recognition and willingness to share knowledge, particularly the hot tip straight from the stable via dubious friends of friends , serves to cement relationships⁴⁰.

From this, Vamplew concludes that gambling clearly has a positive side and is not merely the irresponsible, anti-social activity, caricatured and condemned by the anti-gambling brigade.⁴¹

³⁹MacMillan 1996;16

⁴⁰Vamplew, Wray 1989;215

⁴¹ibid

Chapter 2: Typology of the Gambling site

A. Location, population and motivation.⁴²

In the late 1950's bookmaking became legalised. As a result betting shops became visible and proliferated after the 1950's especially in working class districts and urban areas. Despite being located on street corners and among conventional shops and public amenities, bookmakers were required by law (in this case the 1968 Act) to ensure that innocent passers by would not incidentally gaze in and be corrupted.⁴³ Essentially they were required to distance themselves from their immediate surroundings: This led to a bleak exterior design - many bookmakers blacked out their windows to stop people looking in and adopted an austere interior design to ensure that people did not stay around.⁴⁴ However in April 1995 the 1968 Act was lifted and bookmakers were allowed to choose their own levels of hospitality. This led to more comfort oriented design (i.e. more seating) and improved display in the office plus the regulation of opening hours to suit clientele.⁴⁵ As Reith argues, it remains to be seen whether such deregulation will prove sufficient to alter the physiognomy of the book makers and so overcome the cohesion of a social formation from centuries of social stratification.⁴⁶

The concentration of bookmakers in working class neighbourhoods leads to a complete and overwhelmingly working class clientele. Downes et al., argues that the working class use betting shops between five and twelve times as often as the middle

⁴²The information specified here applies to the Britain but the themes in question have implication for the Irish case.

⁴³Reith, Gerda 1999;112

⁴⁴ibid

⁴⁵ibid

⁴⁶ibid

classes, with frequency increasing with the descent down the class hierarchy.⁴⁷

Downes et al. also points out that the betting shop clientele is predominantly male. He argues that males are eight times more likely to use the premises than females and that when women do bet on a race they do so by proxy, asking for a male friend or relative to place the bet for them rather than enter the premises themselves.⁴⁸

On the surface the gambling population seems apparently homogenous (i.e. male and working class), however this homogenous betting population contains a variety of subgroups with various motivation for and experience of gambling.⁴⁹ According to Reith; recent research into the area has documented this diversity of gambling showing that punters gamble for a range of reasons- for excitement and intellectual challenge, as well as to socialise and for financial gain-and that these motivations are also reflected to the times at which the individuals bet and the type of bet being placed.⁵⁰ Neal conducted a study on the bookmakers betting population that highlighted three categories of bettors. The 'morning flutter punters' were mainly pensioners who visited the betting shop every day as part of a sociable routine and placed low stake multiple bets which allowed them to dream of a big win for a price that was within their means. The 'lunchtime punters' consisted of low or semi-skilled workers who dropped in every lunchtime to place more expensive high-rate/high-return bets thus relieving the monotony of the working day. 'Afternoon punters' consisted of non-routine workers such as waitresses and bar staff, for whom the trip to the betting shop provided a routine and an outlet in which to socialise and gossip. These punters tended to place individual bets so maximising the excitement of a race, especially when they had the

⁴⁷Downes 1976;122

⁴⁸ibid

⁴⁹Reith; 199;122

⁵⁰ibid

time to remain in the bookmakers to watch it when it was going on.⁵¹ From this study Neal concluded that the fundamental characteristic of all punters was that they invariably lost money, and furthermore, that winning it in the first-place was never a primary motivation to play. As Downes et al. argues, few gamblers realistically believe that gambling will truly be a short cut to wealth. This leads to winnings being blown or re-bet.⁵² According to Reith; the activity itself contained personal and social rewards which give it value regardless of the outcome of any particular game.⁵³ Downes et al. et al supports this view by arguing that all gambling takes place in some concrete social setting which may attract in other bettors for social reasons; i.e. a desire to be 'one of the boys'.⁵⁴ They go on to conclude that most motivational themes for gambling do not stem from... 'human nature', but are mainly derived in a process of interaction with a particular social and cultural environment.⁵⁵

B. The betting shop-an in context look.

Otto Newman in his book, Gambling: Hazard and Reward, contests that the one and only sociological contribution seeking to study the gambler within his social and gambling context, and attempting to account for the satisfaction derived from gambling in interactional and transactional terms is the brief but illuminating study presented by Zola under the title '*Observation on Gambling in a Lower Class Setting*'.⁵⁶ The information was collected through the use of participant observation in a New England tavern doing service as a sub-rosa betting shop. On the basis of his findings the author proclaims interpersonal factors and the dynamics of association to be dominant in lower class gambling action and activity. In his view the betting shop forms for the

⁵¹Reith 1999; 113-114

⁵²Downes et al 1976;24-25

⁵³Reith 1999;114

⁵⁴Downes et al 1976;26

⁵⁵Downes et al 1976;26

⁵⁶Newman, Otto. 1972;18

occupationally, socially and culturally deprived a common and self-contained refuge from the hostile and indifferent outside world.⁵⁷ He goes on to argue that the betting shop provides for the 'defeated, dispossessed and despised' a fantasy substitute universe where they are enabled to enact a charade transforming them into activists, victors and entrepreneurs: where, by the beating of the system personified by the bookmakers runner, they are able to experience the illusion of accomplishment, achievement and personal control, even in only their and infrequent moments of triumph.⁵⁸ He concludes by saying that for these, experience of the initial definition of insider and outsider and, above all, the associated mutual fulfilment of their various functions and roles is vital and indispensable.⁵⁹

Newman goes on to argue that although it is by no means established that the subcultural context of the American study would find itself eventually replicated within a different and divergent social milieu, it would seem that systematic empirical investigation based upon observation of gambling within its social and interpersonal context, and of the gamblers inside their own environments, may well offer the best hope of elucidating causes accounting for the widespread persistence of gambling as well as disclosing some of the social functions gambling does serve.⁶⁰

Both Reith and Fox point to the 'arcane terminology' associated with gambling and horse racing respectively. Phrases like 'were you on that one' and 'riding top of the ground' characterise the world of horse racing and gambling alike. Fox argues that this complex terminology accentuates the insider outsider division of racing followers.⁶¹

⁵⁷Newman, Otto 1972;18

⁵⁸Newman, Otto 1972;18-19

⁵⁹Newman, Otto 1972;19

⁶⁰Newman, Otto 1972;19

⁶¹Fox, Kate 1999;56

This arcane wagering terminology, in that it accentuates insider /outsider division. essentially contributes to the betting and horse racing culture. As Claude Levi-Strauss argues 'In effect, on one hand, culture defines itself through language.⁶² P.A Lamal, in commenting on verbal behaviour, supports this view. Lamal contests that a person in a culture learns to speak in accord with the verbal patterns of the community . On a specific occasion, the community providers reinforcement for a certain way of speaking and withholds reinforcement or supplies aversive stimulation for other, unacceptable responses. In this manner, the individual comes to conform to the customary practices of the community and in so doing, contribute to the perception of a culture.⁶³ Reith argues similarly that a complex frame of reference underlies horse race betting. Such a frame of reference, based on the art of handicapping, demands considerable skill and knowledge; for the list of variables which can influence the outcome of a race is vast, requiring the talents of a perceptive and experienced individual for effective interpretation.⁶⁴ Walker supports this view by arguing that a complex interplay of factors combine to produce the final order of horses finishing in a race(i.e. the horses form, the quality of the jockey, the track and the length of the race being a few contributing factors). The punter must be able to interpret this mix of information and from it, judge whether a horse is being offered at favourable odds.⁶⁵ Reith argued that such levels of complexity have elevated the practice of betting into a virtual science with top punters regarded as skilled probabilists, admired and respected among their peers.⁶⁶

⁶²Henall, Marcel. 1991;72

⁶³Lamal, P.A 1972;32

⁶⁴Reith 1999;112

⁶⁵Walker 1996;16

⁶⁶Reith, Gerda 1999;113

C. An ambiguous site.

Culture is '... that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life and give expressive form to their social and material experience'⁶⁷

According to Gerda Reith every gambling site forms its own separate world, each with its own distinctive ambience.⁶⁸ Each site has the character of what Erving Goffman calls a 'social occasion': Events which are bounded in time and space and which are possessed of a distinctive ethos.⁶⁹ Essentially the bookmaker site is argued by Reith to be an ambiguous site, a site in transition; concentrated but becoming more diffuse; separate but in many ways incorporated into the local environment.⁷⁰ According to Reith; a concentrated site is an area of intense, localised activity that tends to exist outwith the local environment in their own separate spheres. On the other hand, diffuse sites are disseminated over a wide area, and tend to be incorporated into the routine of daily life.⁷¹

Essentially, in terms of gambling, the bookmakers site can be seen as a concentrated site: Only the gambling activity- from making a bet, to watching the action unfold- is contained within its walls. Therefore Reith argues that as a scene of action in its own right the bookmakers is a concentrated site.⁷² However the bookmakers exists also as part of a larger whole insofar as it exists to receive an image of the race and accept bets to and from areas outwith the actual scene of action. In this sense it functions as a diffuse site, dispersing a single localised event throughout a wide area: the race track action is dispersed and diffused.⁷³ Telecommunications (such as interment and phone

⁶⁷Hebdige, Dick 1979

⁶⁸Reith, Gerda 1999;97

⁶⁹Goffman, Erving 1963;10

⁷⁰Reith, Gerda 1999;111

⁷¹Reith 1999;96-97

⁷²Reith 1999;114

⁷³ibid

betting) enable this more widespread diffusion, which according to Reith, make the gambler an individual and isolated unit.

Eoin Leiker pointed to the increase of telephone and online gambling in Ireland . In an article in the Irish Times (on March 1998) he argued that the states largest bookmaker, Paddy Power, is already taking credit card bets by telephone and plans to offer online betting within a year.⁷⁴ On August 31, 1999, Jamie Smyth argued that both Paddy Power and Terry Rogers will offer direct Internet betting in new interactive websites under development.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Leiker, Eoin 1998. The Irish Times

⁷⁵Smyth, Jamie 1999. The Irish Times

Chapter 3. Gambling and play in an environment of chance.

A. The playground.

Reith points out that gambling sites are united by certain common features, which have been described by Huizinga and Goffman in their delineation of the formal properties of playgrounds.⁷⁶ For both Huizinga and Goffman, the 'peculiar character' of games is characterised essentially by their separateness, both temporally and spatially, from everyday life: They involve both a physical and mental crossing of a threshold out of the ordinary world and into the world of play.⁷⁷

For Huizinga, this involves a steeping out of real life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. As Huizinga states 'Play is distinct from 'ordinary life' both as to locality and duration.'⁷⁸ Essentially, this is a main characteristic of play; 'its secludeness, its limitedness. It is 'played out' within certain limits of time and place and contains its own course and meaning.'⁷⁹ Goffman supports this view by describing gambling activities as 'world building', whose events constitute a field for fateful, dramatic action; a place of being; an engine of meaning; a world in itself different from all other worlds.⁸⁰ According to Huizinga, play creates order. Inside the playground an absolute and peculiar order reigns.⁸¹ All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course.⁸²

⁷⁶Reith, Gerda 1999;128

⁷⁷ibid

⁷⁸Huizinga 1970;28

⁷⁹ibid

⁸⁰Goffman, Erving. 1969 *Encounters*

⁸¹Huizinga 1970;29

⁸²Huizinga 1970;28

As Huizinga states; playground activity or play is a free activity standing quite consciously outside ordinary life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interests, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.⁸³ Jean Paul Satre wrote that humans exist as totalities, not collections and therefore reveal themselves in their most insignificant and superficial behaviour.⁸⁴ Reith goes on to add that play is the highest manifestation of humanity, in which the true nature of the individual can be realised or expressed.⁸⁵ Furthermore, just as the play world is animated by a different set of rules from those which govern everyday life, so players within it are animated by a different set of motivations from those of the everyday world; in which Reith argues, they are free to experiment with new roles and to temporarily adopt new identities.⁸⁶ In such a world, the gambler awakens to a new sense of reality and a new sense of selfhood.⁸⁷ This new reality and new selfhood, combined with its essential feature of separateness means that the gambling arena forms a self contained realm of activity, set against the world of utilitarian goals with its own rules and conventions and within which the gamblers orientation to the everyday world is changed.

⁸³Huizinga 1949;32

⁸⁴Reith, Gerda 1999;1

⁸⁵Reith, Gerda 1999;3

⁸⁶Reith, Gerda 1999;128

⁸⁷ibid

B. Identity from chaos.

Submersion in an environment of chance creates a kind of experimental chaos in which players cease to perceive their surroundings in the ordered logical manner of rational consequences.⁸⁸

One of the most striking feature of this 'stepping out of real life'⁸⁹ is the tension and thrill of the game, the irresistible seduction of money and chance. Reith argues that this affective experience is generated by the creation of, and subsequent resolution of tension in the game: This centres on the risk faced by the individual while awaiting the outcome of their stake where, in between, the gambler waits in anticipation.⁹⁰ In this state of suspended animation, the conflicting values of fear or hope run in the tingling aggression up and down his spine.⁹¹ This feeling essentially parallels the description of the play mood as one of 'rapture and enthusiasm', where a 'feeling of exaltation and tension accompany the action, and mirth and relaxation follow'.⁹²

According to Reith the apex of the gambling experience is the moment when excitement peaks and gamblers are gripped by the fever of play, playing on and on, oblivious to their surroundings, their losses, the passage of time and even to themselves.⁹³ It's a situation in which time freezes and gamblers become absorbed into a total orientation to the immediate 'here' and 'now'. In this state they become

⁸⁸Reith, Gerda 1999;129

⁸⁹Huizinga 1970; *Homo Lundes*

⁹⁰Reith, Gerda 1999;131

⁹¹ibid

⁹²Huizinga 1970;10

⁹³Reith, Gerda 1999;131

creatures of sensation, seeing but not really being aware of their surroundings, perceiving but not truly aware of what is going on⁹⁴

Their fleeting nature, and the vacillation between excitement and boredom, makes repetition an intrinsic feature of games of chance⁹⁵. As Reith concisely puts it ' because a game ends so quickly it must be repeated, and this is one of the most essential features of play'.⁹⁶ Gamblers play in order to experience the tension and expectation of a game, but because it is almost over as soon as it begins it must be continually repeated. According to Huizinga tension means uncertainty, chanciness; a striving to decide the move and so end it. The player wants something to go, to come off; he wants to succeed by his own exertions.⁹⁷ It is this element of tension and solution that governs all solitary games of skill and application; the more play bears the character of competition, the more fervent it will be. In gambling it is at its height⁹⁸

Due to this tension and resolution the gambling site reverberates to the drums of a steady repetition.⁹⁹ This tendency to repeat is seen by Baudrillard as something which is more than simply a definite feature of games of chance but a movement which annihilates the relation between cause and effect. ' Their true form' he argues 'is cyclical or recurrent, and as such they put a definite stop to causalities by the potential return (the eternal return it one will) to an orderly conventional situation'.¹⁰⁰ This eternal return for Baudrillard is an important factor in the generation of vertigo, for the desire to know the result of the next round, to put ones fate to the test once more entice the

⁹⁴Reith, Gerda 1999;132

⁹⁵Reith, Gerda 1999;135

⁹⁶Reith, Gerda 1999;136

⁹⁷Huizinga 1970;29

⁹⁸ibid

⁹⁹Reith, Gerda 1999;136

¹⁰⁰Baudrillard, Jean 1990;146

gambler to play on, and so creates the vertigo of seduction.¹⁰¹ Reith argues that through this constant repetition of a 'fleeting present'¹⁰² the participants in gambling arenas close off from the outside world, show their personality and forget their past, thus freezing themselves in an empty present, a present with no reference to the past or to real change.¹⁰³

Essentially the gamblers experience of space is conditioned by the parameters of the game being played. As Reith argues 'In the excitement of a game the perception of space contracts to encompass no more than the physical dimensions of the highly charged area of play'.¹⁰⁴ Reith goes on to state that this concentration destroys the harmony of perspective to the extent that the centre of the visual field is magnified and the surrounding sphere of the periphery obliterated- a sensation which most of us have had when intense concentration momentarily blocks out our immediate surroundings.¹⁰⁵ When tension peaks, all that is perceived is that which contains the action and it is because the gamblers gaze is so limited that the stage upon which the spectacle of gambling is played out is so correspondingly small.¹⁰⁶ Just as time needs the unfolding of events to mark its passage, space requires points of orientation to delimit its parameters.¹⁰⁷ With everything external to the action obliterated, gamblers are oblivious to the passage of time, to their surroundings and even to themselves.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹Baudrillard 1990;148

¹⁰²Reith, Gerda 1999;139

¹⁰³Reith, Gerda 1999;143

¹⁰⁴Reith, Gerda 1999;143

¹⁰⁵ibid

¹⁰⁶Reith, Gerda 1999;144

¹⁰⁷ibid

¹⁰⁸Reith, Gerda 1999;143-144

However, from among this disorientation comes one of the most frequently discussed aspects of gambling- its ability to act as a conduit for the alteration of identity.¹⁰⁹ Its separation from the routines of everyday life in a kind of fantasy world means that while engaged in it, individuals are temporally released from structures which usually govern their actions. Goffman argues that all games consist in becoming illusory in character, of temporarily adopting a new identity which endures for the duration of the game.¹¹⁰ Goffmans focus on the gambling site points to an arena where qualities and abilities not normally utilised in the outside world can be given free reign: He argues that the gambling situation is governed by 'rules of irrelevance'; which signify the freedom from needing to act for real and allow participants to play act or behave out 'of character' to the situation at hand.¹¹¹ Reith reiterates that this 'fluid gambling identity' is one in which the everyday self is left behind and another person, more pertinent to the ritualised social situation in which gamblers find themselves is adopted. As the traditional categories of orientation loosens and shifts, so the gamblers area of identity becomes less fixed and allows for the investigation and creation of new roles.

C. The position of money

It's a commonly held view (as mentioned earlier) that gambling does not lead to financial gain. As Halliday and Fuller argue, gamblers may win in the short run but most of them will eventually lose in the long run.¹¹² and as Downes et al point out, winnings are usually blown or re-bet with few gamblers realistically supposing that

¹⁰⁹Reith, Gerda 1999;133

¹¹⁰Goffman 1969 *Encounters*.

¹¹¹ibid

¹¹²Halliday & Fuller 1975;12

gambling will truly provide for them a shortcut to wealth.¹¹³ This suggests that financial gain is not the primary motive behind gambling.

Lea et al point to the potential reinforcement of activation (or thrill of gambling) and suggest that this could play a role in all gambling situations: Events such as the pre-race and race sequence of the race track, the spinning of the roulette wheel and the placing of bets, can be reinforcing because they produce excitement, arousal and tension.¹¹⁴ Reith furthers this suggestion by arguing that 'the aim of gamblers is simply to experience the excitement of a game, and thus the main goal is the indefinite continuation of play'.¹¹⁵ Reith argues that, although the motives for gambling can be almost as heterogeneous as the variety of games themselves,- with sociability (for example with women in bingo), financial gain (for example in lottery play), and the exercise of skill (for example in horse race handicapping) cited as the most important elements of different gambling experiences- underlying all this variation is a common element, the quest for excitement, or the thrill of the game as an end in itself.¹¹⁶ As Jock Young argues, coexisting alongside the overt or official values of society are a series of subterranean values¹¹⁷. One of these, for example is the search for excitement. Society tends to provide institutionalised periods in which these subterranean values are allowed to emerge and take procedure. Thus we have a world in which subterranean values are expressed rather than the rules of workday existence.¹¹⁸ This quest for excitement and thrill as an end in itself is present to a

¹¹³Downes et al. 1976;24-25

¹¹⁴Halliday & Fuller 1975;12

¹¹⁵Reith, Gerda 1999;145

¹¹⁶Reith, Gerda 1999;145

¹¹⁷Young, Jock 1997;72

¹¹⁸Young, Jock. 1997;72

greater or lesser extent, in all forms of gambling, and fundamental to it is the delineation of money and the indifference to winning or losing¹¹⁹

Reith points to the position of money in relation to lottery gambling and horse race betting. Lottery players are those most concerned with financial gain, however Reith points to the existence of players continuing to play even after winning enormous jackpots.¹²⁰ In betting on horse racing, Reith argues that winning is important not so much for the stake of money itself but for what a successful outcome shows about a gamblers skill and ability. Money here is associated with social rather than financial rewards, with factors such as recognition, status and peer approval being paramount.¹²¹

Despite the fact that gamblers do not primarily play to win it, the presence of money is nevertheless important. According to Reith, it is vital for the game to be meaningful as it is the medium through which participants register involvement in a game: In modern gambling money is both a means of communication and a tangible symbol of the players presence.¹²² Reith goes on to add that money is necessary for the generation of affective tension - the excitement - in a game of chance -for a stake in a game is not simply the financial value of the wager, but what it represents- gamblers opinion, their judgement, their identity.¹²³ With the placement of a bet gamblers become vicariously involved in the game; the fate of their wagers becomes a test of character, and players who manage to control themselves and shrug off their losses in the face of adversity demonstrate strength of will or what Goffman calls 'face'.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹Reith, Gerda 1999;145

¹²⁰ibid

¹²¹Reith, Gerda 1999;146

¹²²ibid

¹²³ibid

¹²⁴Goffman, Erving 1972;5

Money is essentially the locus for thrill and excitement in a game. As Reith points out; any game can be played without money (i.e. match-sticks as a substitute in card games) but the thrill will not be the same.¹²⁵ Without the existence of an authentic measure of value gamblers cannot enter wholeheartedly into the game.¹²⁶ According to Reith, 'as a measure of the degree to which they are prepared to back their opinion the wager is a measure of the gamblers integrity. Insofar, money exists as a measure of self esteem, winning validates gamblers self worth.'¹²⁷

However, the role of money in gambling is ambiguous. As Reith argues, on one hand it can be seen to be vital, both as the language of play and as a constituent for the thrill. On the other hand, it is not a sufficient reason for play itself, and paradoxically, once in a game it becomes instantly devalued.¹²⁸ For Baudrillard, 'the secret of gambling is that money does not exist as value.'¹²⁹ It would appear then that gamblers do not play to win, but play, as Reith argues, with money instead of for money.¹³⁰ They also must play in games offering a challenge for without the element of chance, the risk of losing all, the game loses its thrill and becomes more monotonous work.¹³¹

Essentially, money must be present in games of chance for the purposes of thrill and excitement. However, the status of money in the world of play is contrary to its status in the outside world. Reith argues that money in the outside world is a desirably medium of value; money, in the world of play, is apprehended as a thing that is

¹²⁵Reith, Gerda 1999;146

¹²⁶ibid

¹²⁷ibid

¹²⁸Reith 1999;147

¹²⁹Baudrillard, Jean 1990;86

¹³⁰Reith, Gerda 1999;147

¹³¹ibid

virtually worthless in its own right.¹³² Due to this, money becomes a stake and, as Baudrillard contests, a stake is not something one invests, but it is something which is presented as a challenge to chance.¹³³ Money, in this way, is removed from the world of material necessity and becomes a part of the means for play; it becomes a plaything devoid of economic value. This removal, according to Reith, is even embodied in the use of language in gambling where stakes, wins and losses are always euphemistically coded in the motivational adjectives of volume and weight as 'heavy', 'large' or 'small'; thus avoiding the harsh imperatives of economic reality, of financial profit and loss. Also, in the moment of the stake, the economic value of money is far outweighed by the excitement it creates in play.¹³⁴

Essentially it can be seen that money is the dynamo of gambling. As the currency of the world of play it comes to assume magical properties, becoming an institutional chimera that contributes to the sense of unreality and affective tension experienced by gamblers during play.¹³⁵ Once in a game however, it is immediately devalued, becoming merely a means of sustaining or prolonging the action.¹³⁶ As Downes et al. argues, winnings by gamblers are usually blown or re-bet and even if a loss ensues, the pleasures of anticipating a win can be seen as worth the effort.¹³⁷

Even multi million dollar lottery winners play on, one remarking wistfully, 'it'd be nice to get one more win'.¹³⁸

¹³²ibid

¹³³Baudrillard, Jean 1990;139

¹³⁴Reith, Gerda 1999;148-149

¹³⁵Reith, Gerda 1999;149

¹³⁶Reith 1999;149-150

¹³⁷Downes et al. 1976;25

¹³⁸Reith, Gerda 1999;150

Chapter 4. Gambling and luck

A. Luck as Defence

Downes et al. conducted a study into the luck dimensions involved in gambling. They set out to find whether a 'belief in luck' factor was (a) more associated with working class than with middle class men, (b) more associated with high than with low propensities to gamble and (c) more associated with working class men rated 'high gamblers'. The results supported the prediction that belief in luck occurred among the lower working class. However the data refuted the prediction that a belief in luck would be positively related to the propensity to gamble and also refuted the prediction that working class men with a high gambling propensity would display stronger belief in luck.¹³⁹ Although a belief in luck is not related to a propensity to gamble it does function as a 'predictor' of men's participation in gambling and is thus related to gambling as a result.¹⁴⁰ Downes et al. found that a strong belief in luck does positively relate to gambling participation with 76% of participants having a medium to high belief in luck compared with only 25% of those with a low belief in luck.¹⁴¹

Although luck was an element in gambling participation, it influenced decision making for men and women in different ways. Downes et al. conducted a study of methods of betting differences on horse racing between men and women, and found that a major difference between men and women emerged over method. Their results showed that two thirds of men claimed skill in choice of horse - even if this related to only form or record assessment- compared with only one fifth of women. By contrast nearly half of women and just over a quarter of men who bet based their choice on grounds of luck

¹³⁹Downes et al. 1976;76

¹⁴⁰Downes et al. 1976;202

¹⁴¹ibid

or chance alone. More women covered both options and did not give priority to either luck/chance or skill. However men played up the skill element disproportionately.¹⁴² According to Downes et al., this tells us something about different orientations of men and women to the process of choice, i.e. that men stress the element of rationality, however small, in betting processes, while women discount it.¹⁴³

Downes et al.¹⁴⁴ argues that although favourite backing is consistent with various styles of approach; it implies the reliance on form and willingness to risk the stake for a relatively small return. The exact reverse can be said of outsiders. The fact that a quarter of men and only one in twenty five of the women preferred the more rational method, and 14% of the men and just over a third a third of the women preferred the luck/chance method are indicators of the greater respect paid by men to form and the willingness of women to ignore it in the hope of outstanding returns.¹⁴⁵ Essentially the most rational choice of all is in between, since, according to Downes et al., it is there that the greatest scope lies for a choice which is both realistic and might beat the odds.¹⁴⁶ As Downes points out; over half the men and only two fifths of the women take this in-between choice.¹⁴⁷

Differences between win and each-way bets' clearly distinguish between men and women.¹⁴⁸ Downes findings show that over three out of four women prefer each way bets compared with 47% of the men. Also 17% of the women back to win compared with 42% of the men.¹⁴⁹ Acknowledging that each-way bets are the majority

¹⁴²Downes et al. 1976;130

¹⁴³Downes et al. 1976;131

¹⁴⁴ibid

¹⁴⁵ibid

¹⁴⁶ibid

¹⁴⁷ibid

¹⁴⁸ibid

¹⁴⁹ibid

preference, it points to one further distinction between men and women. For if we assume that bets on a horse to win represents greater faith in one's own judgement than each-way bets - which ensure some return if the horse is placed first, second, third or in large races, fourth- then men are much more inclined to the total risk of betting to win, whereas women prefer to hedge their bets.¹⁵⁰

Men are also more prone to choosing risky type bets- trebles, accumulators- than women.¹⁵¹ Men tend to stretch out their rational choice to two or more races, thus stretching the total risk, while greater preference for women is the curtailment of risk.¹⁵² According to Downes, the contrast here lies between the possibility of making two or more 'rational choices, based on form, the basis for an extension of the odds by linking these choices into a multiple bet; and rendering one irrational choice against form as risk-free as possible in betting each-way and on a single race only.¹⁵³

Downes also points out that more than twice as many men as women read the racing pages daily, and a racing paper at least sometime during the year.¹⁵⁴ He also highlights a positive relationship between assessing form and betting: The heaviest bettors stand out as twice as prone to such readership than the rest; where those betting sporadically are much more likely to read the racing pages daily; and those betting regularly read a racing paper. Essentially, method differentiated readership: those claiming a skill element are almost twice as likely to read both papers (racing pages and racing paper).¹⁵⁵

In summary, men essentially regard skill as a more important element than belief in luck in determining their bets. Men are more likely to take a riskier approach by

¹⁵⁰ibid

¹⁵¹Downes et al. 1976;132

¹⁵²Downes et al. 1976;133

¹⁵³Downes et al. 1976;133

¹⁵⁴ibid

¹⁵⁵Downes et al. 1976;136

making 'win' bets and are more likely to stretch the risky element by applying their skill or rational choice to making accumulative bets. Also they exercise form reading to aid their judgement, judgement in with luck is an unpopular contributor.

This exercise of skill in judgement leads to punters being admired and respected among their peers.¹⁵⁶ The method of choosing the riskiest bet, the 'win' bet also leads to respect and admiration among peers, by it being 'a test of character' and establishes a bettors 'face'.¹⁵⁷ Luck or belief in luck as a gambling method is not given much credit. -as gamblers are predominantly male, luck takes second place to knowledge and skill.

However luck does have its place; it comes to the fore when knowledge and skill let the punter down. Essentially, it functions as a scapegoat. Gilovich found that gamblers attributed different causes to the outcome of races depending on whether they had won or lost. Wins were attributed to skill and effort whereas losses were put down to factors outwith their control, for example distraction and bad luck.¹⁵⁸

Belief in luck here is, what Goffman terms, a 'defensive determination'.¹⁵⁹ As in this way luck takes the role of scapegoat and excuses gamblers of their mistake.

B. Luck in an environment of chance

As already noted many gamblers place their choices and decisions on knowledge and skill in assessment. However, certain cases arise when this application (of skill and knowledge) point to the odds being unfavourable for the gambler, and despite all this the gambler continues on. Reith argues that despite the knowledge and percentages etc. generated by that tool of chance, probability theory, gamblers on the whole tend to

¹⁵⁶Reith, Gerda 1999;13

¹⁵⁷Goffman 1972;pp 215; pp.5

¹⁵⁸Reith, Gerda 1999;157

¹⁵⁹Goffman 1972;180

ignore its insights; continuing to play when the odds are against them, behaving as though they could influence games of pure chance and stubbornly expect to win in the midst of catastrophic defeat.¹⁶⁰ Essentially, thoughts banished from the outside world as superstitious and irrational (i.e. belief in luck) are here given credence and provide a framework which organise and explain the varieties of play and the outcomes of games.¹⁶¹

This luck element is manifest in the world of horse racing in the concept of a 'fancy' or 'fancying' a horse. Usually the 'fancy' comes after the study of form. As Clapson argues, to 'fancy' a horse after studying its form is common speech, but it speaks of predilection and symbolises an inclination as well as a mechanistic perusal of form. More common to the notion of the fancy is a method for winning beyond the perusal of form.¹⁶² Here the 'fancy' is built into the ostensibly non-rational determination of betting choice.¹⁶³

According to Clapson, punters knew that the results were not predictable and so displayed a whole range of superstitious devices to try to frame the result. And these of course are not necessarily inimical to the random results of much gambling.¹⁶⁴ Clapson also noted that superstitions were also a feature of tipping and form publications.¹⁶⁵

Devereaux, in a structural functional study of gambling, attributed this belief in superstition or belief in luck as designed to cope with an untenable situation. As

¹⁶⁰Reith, Gerda 1999;156

¹⁶¹ibid

¹⁶²Clapson, Mark 1992;62

¹⁶³ibid

¹⁶⁴Clapson, Mark 1992;63

¹⁶⁵Clapson, Mark 1992;62

Devereaux puts it, they were designed 'to fill the gaps in positive knowledge and hence overcome the anxieties induced by a feeling of ignorance and helplessness'.¹⁶⁶ However Reith argues that although Devereaux's model contributes something to our understanding of individual gamblers behaviour, it provides only piecemeal explanations for actions which appear as sporadic, ad hoc solutions to difficult situations in which gamblers find themselves.

Essentially, the determination of most players actually stems from their conviction of winning—certainly not from feelings of ignorance or helplessness.¹⁶⁷

An examination of the context in which gambling takes place should serve to clarify the position and importance of the luck dimension.

In an environment governed by chance the strict use of form(i.e. probability theory) is, as Baudrillard puts it, 'a statistical response, [a]dead response to chance; an approach which is quite simply 'demented'.¹⁶⁸ The gambler is obviously in concurrence with this mode of thought and consequentially rejects the explanatory force of statistical calculation etc. 'regarding the gambling event not as one among a broad dispersal of indifferent occurrences, but as an exceptional individual event imbued with meaning in its own right'.¹⁶⁹ Essentially the distinction drawn is between the scientific and magical, the objective law opposed to individual subjectivity.¹⁷⁰

Gambling is a specific event concerned with the here and now, 'the outcome of this game at this time', so gamblers look away from the scientific explanations, 'inclining instead towards that which explains and makes meaningful the specific event'.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶Reith, Gerda 1999;157

¹⁶⁷ibid

¹⁶⁸Baudrillard, Jean 1990;145-146

¹⁶⁹Reith, Gerda 1999;158

¹⁷⁰ibid

¹⁷¹ibid

This function elevates gambling from a domain of statistical motivation to transcendental significance so that it is no longer 'an abstract expression of statistical coefficient, but a sacred sign of the favour of the Gods'.¹⁷²

The distinction, as already noted, is between rationality (scientific calculation etc.) and mystical or superstitious (or luck) thought. Both modes of thought operate to make sense of uncertainty. As Reith argues, we know from phenomenology that knowledge is socially constructed and adapted to meet the needs of particular situations, and it is in this sense that the gambler rejects the type of knowledge provided by probability theory, adopting instead another type of knowledge, more relevant in an environment of chance. It is this latter system (a belief in luck system) that provides a means for understanding the gambling situation and a rationale for action while in it.¹⁷³ Within in this context, far from being simply and personally irrational, the world-view of the gambler appears as a framework of thought uniquely adapted to the peculiar nature of their environment. ¹⁷⁴

¹⁷²Caillois 1962;126

¹⁷³Reith, Gerda 1999;159

¹⁷⁴ibid

Chapter 5. Gambling as Action

A. Action and unification

Goffman's term action applies to activities that are consequential, problematic and undertaken for their own sake.¹⁷⁵ As such, action and gambling must be closely related. According to Goffman, there is an definite link between gambling and action as it is in the world of gambling that action has its slang beginning, and gambling is considered to be the prototype of action¹⁷⁶. Gambling also has strong links with chance taking. According to Goffman, where action is found chance taking is sure to be.¹⁷⁷ However, the degree of action, its seriousness or realness, depends on how fully these properties- the consequential and the problematic- are realised.¹⁷⁸ As such action must be clearly present and tangible in the gambling environment as this environment is one governed by chance; one where the consequential and the problematic are fully realised.

Goffman argues that action is most pronounced when the four phases of play- squaring off, determination, disclosure and settlement- occur over a period of time brief enough to be contained within a continuous stretch of attention and experience.¹⁷⁹ These four phases are exemplified by Goffman in an analysis of coin tossing between two boys. The squaring off phase presupposes physical alignment and decision on the stake or amount of the gamble. According to Goffman they commit themselves to the game through stance and gesture and pass the point of no return.¹⁸⁰ The determination phase, is the phase during which relevant casual forces actively and determinatively

¹⁷⁵Goffman, Erving 1972;185

¹⁷⁶ibid

¹⁷⁷ibid

¹⁷⁸ibid

¹⁷⁹ibid

¹⁸⁰Goffman 1972;154

produce the outcome.¹⁸¹ The third phase, known as the disclosive phase or revelatory phase, is the time between determination and informing of participants. The settlement phase, the fourth phase, begins when the outcome has been disclosed and lasting until losses have been paid up and gains collected¹⁸². The period required for participants to move through each of the four phases is known as the span of play.¹⁸³ According to Goffman; it's through the span of play which can be contained within a continuous stretch of the attention and experience that action seems most pronounced.¹⁸⁴

It is during this span that the individual becomes immersed in the action, or as Goffman puts it, 'releases himself to the passing moment', wagering on the outcome of seconds to come.¹⁸⁵ In this stage a feeling of excitement is aroused.¹⁸⁶

Goffman argues that there are two distinct capacities for action participation:

1. As someone who hazards or chances something valuable and 2. as someone who must perform whatever activities are called for.¹⁸⁷ In the second capacity the individual must stand alone, but in the first, which is more of our concern, the gamble can be shared.

Action is something that one can obtain a piece of; the performer of the action is typically a single individual, but the party he represents can contain a quickly shifting roster of jointly committed members.¹⁸⁸

According to Goffman; the site of action can be found by examining social organisation.¹⁸⁹ Certain segments of each community seem more responsive than others to the attraction of action; thus sites of action are formed, in which, Goffman

¹⁸¹ibid

¹⁸²ibid

¹⁸³Goffman 1972;155

¹⁸⁴Goffman 1972;185

¹⁸⁵ibid

¹⁸⁶ibid

¹⁸⁷Goffman 1972;186

¹⁸⁸ibid

¹⁸⁹Goffman 1972;200

notes, individuals respond not as members of a local community but like minded otherwise unrelated members of a great society.¹⁹⁰ In the site of action, Goffman argues that a freemasonry of individuals who would otherwise be strangers is involved. It's a site in which the traditional mechanisms of acquaintanceship and personal invitation are not needed to for participation: the risk of participation serves instead.¹⁹¹ In sites such as these (gambling sites) people are essentially united through the action they pursue. Looking at the situation in Nevada casinos Goffman states that, casino tables are by definition open to any adult with money to spend. In spite of the apparent impersonality of the operation, strangers at the same table find that a slight camaraderie is generated, by a joint and mutually visible exposure to fate. Big, bettors, with an implied involvement because of the size of their bets, and the implied status of the visibly moneyed, render themselves somewhat accessible to fellow players and even to watchers. Imputed mutual responsibility for outcome (in the limited but constant sense in which this is imputed) adds to mutual exposure and relatedness.¹⁹² Essentially this exposure to action, this exposure of oneself to fate that is mutually attractive is the looked for camaraderie for actions seekers or gamblers. Through this common interest, action then can be deemed a unifying tool among gamblers.

B. Character and action

According to Goffman; it's during fateful events both consequential and problematic, that qualities of character emerge. Goffman outlines four qualities of character that are displayed during such fateful events:

Courage- the capacity to envisage immediate danger and yet proceed with the course of action that rings danger on. Goffman points to this quality among professional gamblers. These gamblers are respected for a quality called 'gamble' namely, a

¹⁹⁰ibid

¹⁹¹ibid

¹⁹²Goffman 1972;211

willingness to submit to the rule of the game while chancing a major part of ones current capital-presumably with the grace to carry off the win or loss circumspectly.

Integrity- refers to the propensity to resist temptation in situations where there would be much profit and some impunity in departing momentarily form moral standards (i.e. to refrain from excessive involvement)

Gallantry or gameness- is the maintenance of courtesy when forms are full of substance. (i.e. maintain courtesy when fully immersed in the game)¹⁹³

Out of all the categories associated with the management of fatefulness Goffman takes a particular interest in the fourth quality, composure. Essentially composure refers to self-control and self-possession, or poise¹⁹⁴. According to Goffman, composure is a double-sided attribute as it effects both the functioning of primary property and is a source of reputation in its own right.: Composure has a behavioural side , a capacity to execute physical tasks in a concerted, smooth , self-controlled fashion under fateful circumstances. Composure also has what is thought to be an affective side, the emotional self-control required in dealing with others.¹⁹⁵ Added to this composure has the capacity to contemplate abrupt changes in ones fate without loss of emotional control.¹⁹⁶ Composure also has a bodily side, sometimes called dignity that is, the capacity to sustain one's bodily decorum the face of costs, difficulties, and imperative urges.¹⁹⁷ A final aspect of composure must also be considered; stage confidence, the capacity to withstand the dangers and opportunities of appearing before large

¹⁹³Goffman 1972;218-220

¹⁹⁴Goffman 1972;222

¹⁹⁵Goffman 1972;223-224

¹⁹⁶Goffman 1972;225

¹⁹⁷ibid

audiences without becoming abashed, embarrassed, self conscious or panicky. Behind this is a special type of poise that pertains to dealing with the contingency of being under observation of others while in a discredited role.¹⁹⁸

Essentially, the maintenance of composure is a common concern in many different cultures and across many different strata, primarily for two reasons:

1. whenever an individual is in the immediate presence of others, especially when he is comparatively involved with them,-as in for example, the joint maintenance of a state of talk- his capacity as a competent interacting is important to them. The social order gained in the gathering draws its ingredients, its substance, from disciplines and small behaviours. An individuals contribution of proper demeanour is melded with the contribution of the others to produce socially organised co-presence. He will have to maintain command of himself if he to make himself available to the affairs at hand and not disrupt them. Discomposure will disqualify him form these duties and threaten the jointly sustained world the others feel they have a right to be in.¹⁹⁹

2. Individuals activities, whether in the presence of others or not, involves the use of human faculties-mind, limbs, small muscles. This management (of such faculties) must be acquired and maintained in special circumstances. Any temporary failure of control due to concern about the situation will lead to self consciousness and maladroitness and hence give cause for discomposure.²⁰⁰

As Goffman argues, because persons in all societies must transact much of their enterprise in social situations, we must expect that the capacity to maintain support of the social occasion under difficult circumstances will be universally approved.

¹⁹⁸Goffman 1972;226

¹⁹⁹Goffman 1972;228

²⁰⁰Goffman 1972;228-229

Similarly, since individuals in all societies and stratas must perform tasks, the composure (and character) that this requires will every where be of concern.²⁰¹

As already stated, gambling participants display a variety of skills and knowledge in decision making, they also display 'courage' and 'gameness' through their willingness to take a chance and make a bet. As Reith argued, levels of complexity associated with reading form have elevated the practice of betting into a science where top punters are regarded as skilled probabilists, admired and respected among their peers²⁰².

Essentially, character and composure are important elements in the realm of gambling activity. The gamblers display of 'courage' and 'gameness' in his facing of risks contribute to his peers perception of him. The gamblers wagers, the amount wagered or risked, their judgement and willingness to back it in the face of chance, their ability to take wins and losses indifferently, all contribute to the to the gamblers character and are all important elements in the gamblers interpersonal relationships.

Ultimately, the fate of their wagers become a test of character, and the player who manages to control themselves, and shrug off their losses in the face of adversity demonstrate strength of will, or what Goffman calls face. -'Face is an image of the self delineated in terms of approved social attributes'.²⁰³

Otto Newman, in a study of the sociology of the betting shop, pointed to the importance of character in this social situation. 'The successful bet' he argued 'made in the face of overwhelming odds, in defiance of expert opinion, is seen as the result of personal courage and honesty. Their honour, prestige and self-respect will be revalidated by withstanding, without flinching within the range of public scrutiny, the assault of a sustained losing run, and by display of the appropriate mixture between

²⁰¹Goffman 1972;229

²⁰²Reith 1999;113

²⁰³Goffman 1972;5

elation and restraint in the moments of triumph.²⁰⁴ According to Newman; each subtle nuance of action and reaction will undergo the litmus test of judgement by equal, will serve- not as on first impact one might assume, to divide the wheat from the chaff, to separate the leaders from the men in competitive encounter, but rather- to sustain the common values, to confirm the image of what men ought to be like- resolute, independent , yet co-operative, humorous, modest, indifferent in the face of danger and of adversity²⁰⁵.

The coup in a betting shop is not, according to Newman, assessed in quantitative terms, but rather as a matter of quality. The outfacing of heavy odds, the courage to defy the majority successfully, to think and act independently- is not only rewarded by due personal recognition to the winner, but by expressions of common jubilation and exhilaration, in which all the regulars take part.²⁰⁶ This jubilation and exhilaration is seen as a common triumph over the massed forces of the outsiders, a victory of 'us' over 'them'.²⁰⁷

In this environment losses are borne nonchalantly and shrugged off with laughter or self-mocking. Defeat is anticipated and not shameful. Essentially, character is important in this environment; both in the exercise of composure in the face of peers and in maintaining character to strengthen the 'us' against 'them' boundary. As Newman argues in this environment defeat is not shameful, but lack of character, of moral fibre are.²⁰⁸

In such a gambling site, the maintenance of character appears fundamental.

In such a situation, the individual has the risk and opportunity of displaying to himself and to others his style of conduct when the chips are down. In this case character is

²⁰⁴Newman 1972;128

²⁰⁵ibid

²⁰⁶ibid

²⁰⁷ibid

²⁰⁸Newman 1972;129

gambled.²⁰⁹ This all occurs during moments of action, which leads Goffman to argue that action must not then be perceived as irrational or impulsive, even where risks without apparent prize results. Loss to be sure is chanced through action, but through action a real gain of character can occur²¹⁰. This voluntary taking of chances is a means for the maintenance and acquisition of character.²¹¹

²⁰⁹Goffman 1972;237

²¹⁰Goffman 1972;238

²¹¹ibid

Objective of the research.

The main objective of this research is to give a sociological account for gambling as possessing positive social implications

For a study of this type the following hypotheses will be addressed:

- to ascertain the motivations influencing gambling.
- to asses the sociological implications of these motivations.
- to see whether these motivations contribute to a distinct gambling subculture.

Methodology:-

A. The kind of data needed.

The objective of my study deals with an in context look at the bookmaker or betting shop environment which concentrates on the setting and situation at hand.

Issues I specifically want to investigate are interactions, actions and behaviour of the betting shop participant population so a study of the betting shop's natural environment should allow this.

B. The research method.

The method of data collection chosen for this study is the qualitative method of participant observation. Informal talk also contributed to data collection, however, participant observation was the primary research method.

This method of research (participant observation) proved essential for the nature of the study undertaken.

As Jennifer Mason points out, with participant observation, you have an ontological perspective. This perspective sees interactions, actions and behaviours and the way people interpret these, act on them, and so on, as central.²¹² This perspective also allows you to observe interactions which take place in a certain context²¹³, (i.e. the gambling) and also enables the conceptualising and observation of the setting itself.(i.e. the betting shop).

²¹²Mason, Jennifer. 1996;61

²¹³ibid

Participant observation also provides an epistemological position. According to Mason, this position 'suggests that knowledge or evidence of the social world can be generated by observing, or participating in, or experiencing 'natural' or 'real life' settings, interactive situations and so on.²¹⁴ This position is 'based on the premise that these kinds of settings, situations and interactions 'reveal data', and also that it is possible for a researcher to be an interpreter or 'knower' of such data as well as an experiencer, observer, or a participant observer'.²¹⁵

My position is one of shared experience with the researched. Mason argues that people with a shared standpoint with the researched, 'know what the experience of that social setting feels like, although of course not necessarily from the perspective of all the participants and actors involved, and in that sense they are epistemologically privileged'.²¹⁶ Also, this type of position will generate data on social interaction in specific context as it occurs, rather than relying on peoples retrospective accounts, and on their ability to verbalise and reconstruct a version of interactions.²¹⁷

According to Judd, Smith and Kidder, this immersion in the research setting is at odds with the anonymity of experiments and surveys. However this is not to the researchers disadvantage as 'this lack of anonymity of respondents may ensure that the researcher observes phenomena as they are and not as the respondent or the researcher wishes they were'.²¹⁸

This position essentially should give an accurate account of interactions and actions in the betting shop environment.

²¹⁴ibid

²¹⁵ibid

²¹⁶Mason, Jennifer. 1996;62

²¹⁷ibid.

²¹⁸Judd, Smith and Kidder. 1991;303

C. The sources of data collected

For the purposes of comparative analysis I concentrated specifically on two bookmakers; both located in Carlow town.

I visited these bookmakers whenever possible over an ongoing period of three months where participant observation was employed in research collection.

My position was of a shared standpoint with the betting shop population. This enabled an in context study of the betting shop culture that encompassed the setting, situation, interactions, actions and behaviours of the participants involved. My immersed position in the environment meant I did not stand out as a researcher; this contributed to a natural environment setting for the researched and led to a definite picture of how things are in that environment.

My own experience of the environment also contributed as a source of data.

Theoretical Framework:-

Gambling as Action.

Goffman in his essay on games and gambling analyses, outward from the archetype of two boys tossing a coin for the coin, and ends by making gambling intelligible in the context of a total culture. The culture in question is naturally that of the USA, but the range of application is universal.²¹⁹ As such I consider it a sound basis for my study of betting shop gambling.

Action consists of both the problematic and the consequential, and is an end in itself. In all games of chance or skill, the outcome is problematical. The term problematic is here taken in the objective sense to refer to something not yet determined but about to be.²²⁰ The outcome or problematic is determined through four phases of play -or what is known as the span of play:²²¹

1. The squaring off phase- this is the decision making stage for bet or wager amount, where in the case of coin tossing, the boys decide to toss for the coin. Physical alignment is also undertaken in this phase to enable the coin toss.
2. Determination phase- this is the phase where casual forces actively and determinatively produce the outcome. Casual forces of determination can be a combination of pure luck or chance with relevant skill or knowledge.
3. The disclosive phase- the outcome is revealed in this phase.

²¹⁹Downes et al. 1976;15

²²⁰Goffman. 1972;153

²²¹Goffman. 1972;155

4. The settlement phase- this phase begins when the outcome has been disclosed and lasting until losses have been paid up and gains collected.

The distinctive property of games and contests is that once the bet has been made, the outcome is determined and the payoff awarded all in the same breath of experience.²²² It's the uninterrupted nature of the sequence that gives games their intensity, though the length of each phase and the time between can differ between games.

The consequentiality of gambling lays the foundation for an understanding of its implications of its participants. The consequentiality of gambling is created out of the staking of money on the outcome of a bet. Goffman argues that the purpose of the stake is to induce a correct seriousness into the attitude of players toward a game. This combination of seriousness with play in the gambling environment promote an appropriate attitude set toward games that can only be fully appreciated if the players adhere to the rules governing the game. The stake is the commitment of players to serious play, however, it is also the prime determinant of its consequentiality: For play can become too serious, resulting in it being increasingly consequential for the players. Full immersion can occur and what began as serious play can become fateful action. The greater the consequentiality, the more fateful the action.

Fatefulness can never be eliminated from society, but men do their best to minimise it as much as possible. Reaction to fateful circumstances constitute action and as such action celebrates self determination via the revelation of character under stress: certain properties of character (integrity, gameness, courage, composure) emerge during fateful circumstances only. The participant in an action site, relative to his display of

²²²Goffman 1972;156

character is judged and essentialised. Character is of the utmost importance in the site for those involved in activity, as it can be acquired or lost through peoples reactions in fateful circumstances. Character is gambled in such situations. Even if material loss ensues character gain can occur.

Essentially a site of action is a site for men to test their character in the face of others.

As Goffman argues certain segments of each community seems more responsive than others to the attraction of this kind of action.²²³ Fatefulness, which many persons avoid, others for some reason approve, and there are those who even construct an environment in which they can indulge in it.²²⁴ Essentially the cult of masculinity ascribed to lower-class culture in general is seen by Goffman as fatefully inclined.

The above assumptions mad by Goffman can be found in his essay 'Where the action is' pp 149-270 of Interaction Ritual. 1972

²²³Goffman 1972;200

²²⁴Goffman 1972;214

Findings, Discussion and Conclusion.

Findings:-

Ladbrokes in Carlow

The first bookmakers studied was located near the end of the main street in Carlow town. This bookmaker is part of the Ladbroke chain which had recently overtaken the private owned betting shop in that location, to which it relocated from its original standing on the adjoining street.

The area surrounding this bookmakers is dominated by public houses, some retail businesses are also located in the area. Due to its location this betting office attracts those who frequent the neighbouring public houses and those who work nearby. It harbours a clientele of low or semi-skilled worker coupled with the retired and unemployed.

This betting shop is dominated by a core set of supporters or regulars; mostly those that frequented the old betting shop in that area. However a few 'floaters'²²⁵ are also evident but these mostly hail from different betting shops looking for a change of luck.

As already stated the betting shop was dominated by regulars: This was one of the first facts that I noticed about the betting shop; that the same faces occupied the same setting each day, with their absence noted if they were not there. I noted one such occasion when one regular failed to appear on day of important racing:

Sean-'Where's Mick today Jim? Thought he'd be here to get an early price on Micko's Dream in the Thyestes'.

Jim- His daughter's getting married today so he backed him ante-post yesterday.

The most common occurrence of absenteeism for regulars was visiting another bookmakers for a change of luck. However this is only a temporary absence as they

²²⁵Punters noted for daily appearances only.

always return back to their regular haunt. This departing in the search for luck and inevitable return is met humorously by the other regulars who notice that with the return, the person must not have found the luck he searched for, and point out that the same races are being ran in the other betting shop also.

Most, if not all the regulars that frequented the betting shop were acquainted with each other. For some this acquaintanceship extended beyond the betting shop as certain people were noted entering and leaving together. The strong relationship that exists between regulars leads to knowledge being shared between the group. If one punter received a hot tip, he would be sure to tell his colleagues; although in a secretive manner as tips were respected and never shouted around.

However, most of the time tips as such are second hand, if not third hand information but the information is relayed as if he received the knowledge first hand-i.e. from the horses mouth. For example, I received a tip from 'a friend of the owners son', that a certain horse (Cois Cuain trained by John Oxx) ran disappointingly last time out. The stable expected him to win next time out; which was in a race at the Curragh on derby day. When speaking to a colleague I relayed this information that I received. On the day of the race I overheard the person I had informed relaying the information to another (i.e. passing on the tip). However, differences were apparent. In relaying the information this person in question stated that he received the news first hand himself from the stable. As he put it **-I was talking to a lad from Oxx's yard and he said Cois Cuain was the one for this race. Get him at a good price and he'll be worth a few bob.** This information was relayed in a clandestine manner with heads bowed together and spoken quietly. It was also manipulated in such a way as to promote the image of the person relaying it. To the person receiving the information the informant appears as someone with close connections with trainer, someone on the inside track, someone who knows what he's talking about and who's information and opinion should

be heeded. This image is strengthened through the secretive manner in which the message is relayed. However, the outcome of the race did nothing to confirm this created image as the horse finished fourth. The alteration of information in this case is not atypical. Tips are commonly received and passed on in this manner and are respected because of their associations with inside information and the shrewd way that they are relayed.

The closeness of acquaintanceship between the regulars in this environment leads to big wins being celebrated by all. One horse Killeshin, a rank outsider, came in at one hundred to one on a particular day. Some of the regulars backed him; probably because there is an area just outside Carlow called Killeshin. This coup generated much conversation in the betting shop around the time of occurrence and the victorious punters were admired and respected. Their friends seemed to share in their triumph.

I noted one punter mentioning the occurrence to another where he stated smiling:

- Did ya hear about that fella that won at 100/1 Mick, ? Killeshin. Did ya know good auld Tom Carroll and Pat Ryan had him? The reply came with an awed smile
- Jaysus, well fair play to them.

This big win was also looked on with respect and admiration for the triumphant punters, as through whatever means they exercised, they had picked an unlikely winner and backed him to confirm their choice.

Betting is seen in this environment as a courageous act. The willingness to risk making a commitment, of putting one's opinion on the line, and backing it up with a stake is met with admiration and respect from peers. This image is confirmed when proved right by getting winners. After watching a competitive steeplechase race in which their own fancy was beaten two regulars recognised the winning horse as one they were told would win by another colleague. This conversation ensued:

-'Where'd our lad come?'

-'Down the field. Look at that winner, that's the lad Mick told us to back'

In such a situation, for the victorious punter, admiration and respect ensue, leading to a temporary image being created for him by his peers. An image of a knowledgeable and skilled punter. I noted one of the two regulars asking the punter that supplied them with the correct information first time, this question:

'What are ya going with for this Mick?'

The admired punter did not mind disclosing his opinion to his two colleagues.

In this betting shop punters share knowledge freely.

Opinions are also given during discussions about horses chances in races. This type of discussion usually takes place during the form reading sequence, a sequence I shall explain later, and as result, discussion is minimal and straight to the point and, when between 'regulars' and 'floaters', usually takes the form of a contest with expert opinion being voiced by both side as a challenge to each other. These discussions usually start off with some general comment like **'what do you think for this'** or **'it's hard to know'**, this opens the avenue for further discussion of horses form. Although usually very concise and brief this discussion involves a display of their understanding of the frame of reference on which the horses chances are based (i.e. they understand the complex terminology associated with horse form), and serves as a ground for stating their opinions on the race in question. However this is all done without any display of emotion and the discussion is usually very matter of fact. This type of discussion embodies a contest for image creation; the image desired being the well informed, ice-cool, astute punter.

Both wins and losses in this environment are taken in their stride; usually without much emotion. Both the win and loss ceremony usually end when the race ends.

Losses in this environment are borne nonchalantly and usually shrugged off good humouredly. One punter was noted asking another '**Any winners?**', the reply was, jokingly, '**Where'd you get them**'.

However in some cases, in the face of an unreconcilable losing run, punters become frustrated; leading to the losing runs attributed to something outwith the punters control.(i.e. a run of bad luck or bad jockeyship). Wins, on the other hand are never attributed to good luck, but always to punters skill and knowledge.

Both wins and losses are taken in their stride. As these gamblers ultimately loose more than they win, loss is not seen as shameful. What is looked down upon however is punters overreaction, of letting their emotions get the better of them. My opinion here was reinforced when a young adolescent came running into the betting shop with a winning docket, expressing his delight both verbally (shouting) and physically (jumping and waving his arms). Although the population gathered were not inimical to the boys presence, his conduct did not appear in accordance with the established behaviour and order of the betting shop.

Punters study of form is mostly an individual affair. The study of form itself is a skilled activity as a lot of the terminology can be quite complex. For an outsider the pages of race form would seem unintelligible. Punters never study form in pairs, but adopt solitary roles for this activity. However despite this solitary activity, they are willing, as already stated, to share their opinions when requested. But they are not willing to disclose the amounts of their wagers.

This staking activity is a clandestine affair. Most dockets are left on the counter face down to hide the amount of their stake. The actual amounts bet are rarely disclosed,

and when commented on are usually disguised in euphemisms- i.e. 'heavy' denoting a big bet. For example one punter after seeing his fancy romp home at 6/1 was questioned to the amount of his stake and replied. **-Ah sure, I'd only a small bet on that fella. I lost a few pound in Cheltenham and I am trying to make it back'** Wins and losses are also relayed in the same way. With **I'm making a few pound** denoting winnings and **I'm just about breaking even**, or **I'm down a small bit** denoting losses. The exact amounts or truth is never disclosed in each case.

Most small winnings are usually personal as minor winnings regularly take place. However big wins by regulars are celebrated by all. Even the cashiers share the jubilation if one of the old time regulars are in for a big payout. However for 'floaters' large wins usually pass without fuss; although recognised they are not celebrated, the cashier usually pays out these wins politely and without comment. However despite the owners delight at seeing an acquaintance receiving a big win, a 'them' against 'us' division is still evident. The owners delight is sometimes witnessed when a fancied horse is beaten and a deluge of docketts are crumpled up and thrown to the floor in disgust.

This betting shop is one of definite male hegemonic environment. Whenever females do enter the premises they do so in the morning hours, swiftly make their bets and rarely hang around. Their bets are rarely if ever substantial, usually between 25 pence to £1 maximum, and mostly on horses considered certainties. Womens presence is more evident on big race days, such as Cheltenham or Grand National day, where they usually make small stake bets on horses picked either through luck or through someone's prompt. These women also don't hang around, usually come and go in groups and never attempt to make conversation with any other than their own group while in the bookmakers. The morning women punters, which are usually very few (I

noted only three different women punters), enter alone. I also never witnessed two women in a betting shop together on regular race days (this excludes the cashiers of course). The male hegemony of the bookmakers is actually striking. In this bookmakers only three different women punters were noted as frequenters, frequenting only briefly during the morning period. While the assembly is not hostile to their presence there is an air of disquiet to the womens presence. Although this is not clearly explicit.

The morning period also sees some local workers dropping in to make their bets for the day. These are usually low stake accumulative bets made from a very brief reading of form. These bets usually go with papers tips or fancies for the day. Both the presence of women and such morning workers is too fleeting to contribute anything to the settings environment.

The midday period sees the regulars begin to drift in and take up their positions around the walls studying the pages of the racing papers attached. The majority of these are satisfied with intense scrutiny of their favourite columnist or favourite source of information, however most will also study the information supplied through other newspapers before finalising their decisions. During this time attention by the punters is firmly directed toward their objects of scrutiny, horse form and all the variables that can effect the outcome of a race. Conversation and consultation during this activity is minimal and when occurring never strays from the point. Morning prices or ante-post prices announced by the racing-channel commentator are noted studiously and reported fluctuations in these prices, known as morning movers, are noted gravely. These announcements usually instigate a reflective study of form.

Towards the approach of the first race bets start trickling in, and at the moment before the off when the horses are at the post and under starters orders the momentum of betting activity increases. This comes from punters waiting for the last possible moment to make their bet; its done to see whether the horses odds moves more favourably or unfavourably. The second most important consultation variable in decision on betting is the market. Strength of betting represents opinions and also in turn represent faith in a horses chances. This leads to attention being focused on the betting activity of a particular race which continues right to the off; resulting in most bets being made at the last possible moment.

Punters make their final choice, hand over their betting slips and focus their attention on the screen to watch their horse in running. A stoic atmosphere of attention is evoked by the dry commentary. Most pick a position most favourable from which the race can be viewed and movement around the betting shop during the race is minimal so as not to distract attention from others or block their view. If a regular enters when these positions are taken he will try to slip to the back of the shop, or remain where he is until the race is over so as to not hinder the others view. Punters attention stays fixed with the race until the outcome of their choice is determined. Some races are easily decided with winner being obvious. However the more competitive races usually take until the finishing line to decide. Thus absorbing attention right up until the end. This attention can also be prolonged with particularly close finishes, photo finishes, needing the race course stewards to make the decision as to the winner. This prolongs the action beyond the race itself and is a process can take some time to conclude; thus stretching the attention span beyond the confines of the race itself.

Most races absorb the attention of the punters for the duration of the race. However attention is relative to stake; the more money a punter has staked on the outcome of a race, the more intense his attention on the race will be. This immersion can lead to excitement which in turn leads to punters displaying emotion. During the race, the

most extreme display of emotion is seen in the way punters shout their horses home; usually with 'go on boy'. However this emotion is immediately held in check after the race, as wins and losses are borne rather nonchalantly. Vestiges of relief are evident in successful punters, as are vestiges of disappointment or disgust in losing punters. However, these emotions, through punters exercise of self-discipline and repressed. Conversation after a race comes more freely than before. Winners usually express their assurances that they knew he would win and losers usually stating they fancied the winner but backed another; losers are also attributed to bad luck or bad jockey. Something is always pointed to, rather than acknowledging their bad judgement in choosing that particular horse.

However, post race ceremony, be it good or bad is usually very brief and attention is turned to the next race where the same process of form reading and bet making is repeated. When one race finishes the commentary focuses on the next, drawing punters attention with it.

When the betting gets more serious some regulars and most floaters bow out. However the old-time regulars always hold their own, gaining the recognition of doing so from their peers. Their voice remains prominent in expert discussion and their opinions remain voiced despite losses or wins.

During the period from midday until afternoon, the type of bets differ from those in the morning session. They are usually single bets, made on horses with intermediate odds and are almost always win only. Morning betters incline toward small stake multiple bets on short price favourites. Afternoon bets are usually more substantial, (are usually no less than £1) and are usually focused on individual races.

However some meetings race times clash. This permits cross card betting; to link two horses running at the same time in different meetings in a double. This type of bet is the most frequent, after the single bet in the afternoon session.

Despite persistent losses, many gamblers continue with their activity. This points to material gain as not being a primary determinant behind gambling.

As the afternoon drags on, no evident changes in the atmosphere occurs. Most regulars remain for the duration of the session. Whatever workers appeared during their midday break return to work, but their appearance is noted again at the same time the next day for the same duration. Some floaters remain for the duration of the session but most drop off when the betting gets serious. Of the remaining regulars, the same pattern is displayed: Prior to the race the same studious attitude is employed. Attention is again fixed on the race for its duration. and the same indifference is shown to winners and losers. Regardless of their fortunes composure is strictly maintained. Wins or losses, whatever their magnitude are always spoken of euphemistically.

When asked whether they are up or down punters usually say either **'I'm making a few bob'** or **'I'm breaking even'**. Punters rarely admit to losing much and if they do, they admit to losing small amounts only. - **'I'm only down a few bob, nothing really'** Despite time dragging on and despite the success or failure of the day the hardened old timers that remain still uphold the same self-discipline as before. The same indifference to fate is still as strong as before.

This maintenance of character contributes to the common values of the environment as it reinforces solidarity, revalidates the punters self image and behaviour and also re-emphasises the punters reputation. As such perception of punters to their peers is created and sustained in this way.

With male homogeneity, working class homogeneity strongly exists also.

Although this environment is not hostile to strangers, some stand exempt. I noted two particular self-assured male enter and secure two substantial winning bets. This person stood apart due to his smart dress, and his indifference to a prior study of form. Their dress, and more importantly their betting mechanism differentiated them from the assembly. Their betting decisions were already made and they effectively availed of the best available price. They stayed only for the duration of one race and appeared indifferent to the assemblies perception of them. They stood outside the group and didn't need to obey its moral code. They could celebrate as they wished or lose composure in the face of a loss. It didn't matter to them or the group, as they were isolated from it.

The middle class rarely were seen in this environment, and when they were it was in the same situation as the above example. They never attempted integration into the environment and, it was an environment they seemed by their actions to hold in disdain. The environment was not hostile to them, but they seemed hostile to it.

This code of behaviour did not reject the non-integrated or prevent their integration. Newcomers to the scene, such as floaters were treated politely (it must be noted that such newcomers or floaters were working class). For example during the period of my observation two newcomers achieved full integration. Curiosity brought these two in and instigated their interest. They were not acquainted with any of the regulars at that time, but their mutual interests forged acquaintances. In time they recognised the established code of behaviour and reshaped their actions until they were accepted by the regulars as equal. Then they could offer their own contribution to the common culture. These newcomers were at first tolerated and subtly controlled, shown how to

act by their peers, until their newness diminished and they stood on an equal footing with their peers.

Essentially this betting shop population is predominantly if not exclusively a working class male environment. It's an environment where emotions are strictly repressed to maintain self-image and image perceived by peers: The image sought is one of independent, resolute and self-disciplining man.

Bruce in Carlow

Bruce betting is located in the centre of town just off the towns busiest mainstreet. In the surrounding area is a mixture of pubs, shops and a bank. Bruce is also a bookmakers that underwent a relocation. The old betting office was situated off the towns main areas. The move, however, placed the betting shop into the centre of the towns activity. The relocation also increased the interior space of the betting shop allowing for more customers. Due to its location in the centre of the town's thoroughfare, the crowd attracted is more varied than the Ladbrokes betting shop. The regulars in this betting shop do not dominate as they did in Ladbrokes but their presence is still clearly evident. This betting shop attracts a larger number of 'floaters' than did Ladbrokes as well as a lot of curious entrants who come in to see what goes on inside. However their presence is usually very brief and does not contribute to the environment.

Although this betting shop is not dominated by regulars, their presence is still firmly staked as they always remain for the duration of the days activities. Like the Ladbroke betting shop they are well acquainted with each other and with the betting shop proprietors and cashiers. These regulars occupy a specific position in this betting shop. One located most centrally, where there is easy access to the racing pages pinned on the walls and where they are have a clear vantage point for the racing action. Absence

of regulars is also noted in the same way as in Ladbrokes and attributed to the same reasons and met with the same good humour when that regular returns. Due to the smaller amount of regulars in this betting shop and the more varied numbers of other type punters²²⁶ the moral code was not as clearly evident as that in Ladbrokes. However, in the realm of these regulars the code of conduct was firmly established. Similar to the Ladbroke environment, bets were also seen here as courageous. Admiration and respect was gained by this activity not out of financial gain but out of displaying character: Out of backing up one's words with money, out of self-determination exercised in the making of a bet and out of taking losses without overreacting. Although strong relations do exist between the regulars in this betting shop, it was of a more competitive nature than that of Ladbrokes. These regulars were all well versed in the complex factors that have to be taken into account when assessing a horse's chances. Their discussions expressed their knowledge and expertise in that area. This knowledge ranged from the commonplace - **'that ground won't do anything for his chances, he doesn't like it soft'** - to the complex - **'He only was beaten two lengths and gave the winner nearly two stone'**. Such intercourse is quite common in both environments but in Bruce betting shop it's stated with more emphasis as if the punters stating it are in competition with one another. Certain punters stand out in the regulars group as competitive. This competition is evident in the self-assured, absolutist view of each of these regular punters that their opinion is the ultimate one, and reinforced by their blind willingness to back up their opinion. In contrast with the Ladbroke betting shop punters, these punters are less willing to accept the opinions of others. Their own selections are firm and abrupt, obvious and incontestable. Their perception of their superiority is confirmed for them through winnings, and in the face of continuing losses their attitude does not change.

²²⁶Floater, Curious, or Non-Serious punters.

I noted two punters examining the form for the Grand National and questioning each other about the chances of a particular horse called Papillion:

-What do ya think of Papillions chances, Eddy? The paper's tipping him'

- Must have a good chance. The trainer wouldn't have him in it if he didn't'

This discussion is met with a loud interjection from one of the self-assured regulars

-'He won't like the ground'

This proved to the interjectors disadvantage as the horse relished the conditions and went onto win the race.

These few competitive regulars add to the atmosphere of the betting shop. They always voice their opinion loudly, and go out of their way to display their knowledge of information. On races which they have trouble making a final decision about and refrain from betting in they assume the others in the shop should be of the same opinion. **-They're mad to be betting in that race' 'How can ya pick the winner of a race like that, it's a lottery.'**

Similar to the situation in Ladbrokes, the morning session consists of women punters and those workers that want to make their bets for the day. As in the case in Ladbrokes the women enter, make their bets quickly and leave without making attempts to communicate with other punters. As in Ladbrokes their bets are of small amounts, and are usually on short priced favourites. Also similar are the bets made by those on their way to work: Again these are small staked multiple bets usually on short priced favourites. Bruce betting shop is also one where male homogeny reigns.

The midday session sees the entrance of regulars and their almost ritualistic pouring over of the racing pages on the wall. Conversation and consultation is minimal here also. Usually the silence is broken by the more assertive regulars stating their opinions.

Ante-post fluctuations are also noted reflectively and gravely. As with Ladbrokes people are willing to disclose their fancy for the race wam asked, and are also secretive about the amount they wagered. Euphemisms apply here to wagers also.

As in Ladbrokes bets begin to trickle in the closer it gets to the first race, and this activity increases in momentum when the orders and off are called for a race. Positions are taken to watch the race and attention fixed on the screen.

The stoic calm evident in Ladbrokes is also evident here but is oft times broken by the comments from those assertive regulars. These seem to have ideas also of how jockeys should ride a race and are not afraid to shout it at the screen. **'That's it, hold him up', 'Will ya get him off the rail', 'Squeeze him, c'mon, let him go' ' Use your bloody whip!'**

If these punters are successful their triumph is met with their own acclaim; **'What'd I tell ya, winner all the way'**. If faced with losers they usually try to pin the blame on bad luck or a bad jockey; **'Look, the jockey didn't even hit him. He's a right gangster that fella'**. For these punters losses are met with frustration. But despite losses these punters carry on in their claim to superiority.

As in Ladbrokes the post -race ceremony is brief with attention immediately switched to the next race. Loss is borne without much fuss by most regulars. The more assertive, are the exception in this case. However they are quickly silenced in the preparation for the next race.

Bet types in this period are usually single bets on individual races. Which as in Ladbrokes, contrast with the morning punters bet types. Punters in Bruce commonly look for value in their bets and so avoid short price favourites. Win bets are also most common, with doubles again the second most popular bet type. Like Ladbrokes this

double betting depends on whether races from different meetings are run simultaneously.

Wins and losses are also spoken of euphemistically in this environment. One punter I noted on a losing streak on asked how he was getting on replied; **-I'm down a small bit. But my luck will come'**. Belief in luck here seems to justify the reason for betting, as if with betting luck will change.

Like the situation in Ladbrokes when the betting begins to get serious some regulars and most floaters bow out. However the same group always remain, betting, despite wins or losses, for the duration of the afternoon. As in Ladbrokes they affirm and strengthen their reputations by upholding their self discipline and remaining indifferent to wins and losses.

Due to its location Bruce attracts more irregular punters. Many of these are smart dressed, business-like men similar to those in Ladbrokes. Their perception of the regulars here is like Ladbrokes, almost hostile. These people don't attempt to mix with the regulars nor do the regulars attempt to mix with them. Their stay is usually short.

However, despite this hostility 'floaters' are treated politely and respectfully. The regulars here are willing to enter into discussion with the 'floaters' over form or the outcome of a race and as in Ladbrokes discussion is freer after each race, when the tension and the excitement of the build up and race sequence has died away. Although no blocks seemed evident to integration into the regulars group in this betting shop, no such integration took place.

The two bookmakers certainly share the working class and male population. Although more middle class participants were evident in Bruce this was probably due to its location in the town centre. These didn't remain for the duration of the session and so didn't contribute anything to the environment. The distinct difference that existed was with the air of competitiveness between both betting shops. Although competitiveness was present in both, with punters striving for recognition, it was more pronounced in Bruce betting shop.

Essentially, the regular members contributed to the environment in both settings: As they were the ones that were there when the shops opened, remained through the duration of the session and were the last to leave. For this reason they were the focus of attention for this study and their actions are the primary contributors to the conclusions drawn.

Discussion and Conclusion.

Both environments represent sites of action as in both there is evident the problematic?? and consequential. The problematic here lies with the events being gambled on, horse races and to a lesser extent dog races. The outcome of these events are something which is determined through the course of racing. Each particular race and the sequence pattern caused by it (reading form, making the bet, watching the race) marks the span of play where Goffmans four phases are evident.

Squaring off can be seen in bet making, where the decision is written on the betting slip, the slip handed in and the bet recognised, and the physical alignment of the better to observe the outcome of the race.

The determination phase, takes place in the races unfolding, and is set outwith the better's control. He can only observe the action as it unfolds.

The disclosive phase occurs with the end of a race when the outcome is decided and the result called.

The settlement phase takes place when winnings are paid to successful punters. More often than not this span of play takes place in the same breath of experience without interruption. As noted, better's attention remains immersed for the span of the race, which is usually uninterrupted. The only difference is between length of horse races.

However it's the consequentiality of action that has implications for its participants and where the focus on this study lies. This consequentiality is determined in the gambling arena by the magnitude of the stake. In the gambling environment studied the stake is responsible for the better's interest in and attention to the racing being shown. The stake leads to commitment to the race as shown by better's physical alignment to obtain a favourable vantage point and their undivided attention to the race until the outcome is decided. The stake is also the prime determinant of bettings consequentiality in that it represents a gambler's opinion and his willingness to reinforce that opinion. In the gambling environment studied, knowledge and opinions and the gambler's willingness to support them through a stake lead to the creation of both the gambler's self-image and to his peers perception of him.

Betting in this environment is a fateful activity. This is shown through gamblers getting more losers than winners. However the presence of this fateful action proves as necessary medium through which the gambler's image is made and lost. It's through the greater potential consequences, as determined by the greater the amount staked, that the situation becomes more fateful. Large stakes represent the gambler's opinion, the outcome determines the image of the better. The willingness to make such a bet represents the gambler's courage. If the outcome is favourable, if the bet is a success, then, as shown, the actor gains admiration and respect from his peers. His knowledge

and skill as better are admired, his courage shown in laying the stake to back the bet up also gains respect and admiration from peers. This creates an image of a courageous, knowledgeable and skilled punter.

The importance of maintaining the correct character is fundamental to the regulars in both betting shops. For Goffman, reactions to fateful circumstances constitute action, and action celebrates self determination via the revelation of character under stress: certain properties of character (integrity, gameness, courage, composure) emerge during fateful circumstances only. Gambling also consists of this reaction to fateful circumstances which in turn lead to character establishment. In the gambling environment both wins and losses are taken in their stride. Wins serve to confirm the gamblers word and lead to respect and admiration. Loss taken without flinching and borne nonchalantly also lead to character establishment. This also gains respect from peers as it displays self-discipline and composure.

The fact that gamblers persist with the activity despite continual losses show that a materialistic motivation is not their central concern. Character and its maintenance is. Gamblers in both betting shops aspire to be admired and respected among their peers. They employ their use of knowledge to achieve this. This display of knowledge can even enter into the form of a contest, with the most knowledgeable proving the winner. However his knowledge is always subject to a test, to fate as the outcome of a race shows. Their reactions to the outcome also contribute to their image.

Essentially all regular participants, through their actions and interactions strive to establish themselves as a knowledgeable, shrewd, independent, resolute, self-disciplined and accomplished better (These represent both personal and group values). For them, betting is putting their reputations on the line. As such they are gambling their character.

Essentially, both gambling sites have an established code of behaviour. A code of behaviour that sees the above values as fundamental. The intrusion of the boy confirmed that such values were prominent as he stood out as disruptive of that behaviour.

Both sites were also explicitly male dominated and explicitly working class. Both sites show, through the actions and interactions of their regulars, the gambling arena to be a site of action. Goffman argues that certain segments of the community were more responsive to sites of action; lower classes and the cult of masculinity.

This site of action, the gambling site, is both problematic and consequential. Although the activity cannot be seen as an end in itself as it leads to establishment of this character. This gambling site is invested with an its own code of behaviour, and through participants actions and interactions, (coupled with its homogeneity i.e. male and working class) gives rise to it's own subculture. A distinctive subculture of action within the betting shop environment.

However it must be noted that as these sites are open to all, more such subgroups may be evident in them, and these particular betting shops may not be representative on the whole. The more competitive betters that stood out in Bruce bookmaker point to the heterogeneity of gambling types. However these betters did also conform to the established code through character contestation, and their lack of self-discipline can be attributed to faults of personality. Further research will need to be undertaken into the area before concluding that the two sites studied are typical of all betting shop environments.

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