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## **Abstract**

This study is one of the first to explore in detail the behaviors, attitudes and motivations of players that show no signs of at-risk or problem gambling behavior (so-called ‘positive players’). Via an online survey, 1484 positive players were compared with 209 problem players identified using the Lie/Bet screen. The study identified two distinct groups of positive players defined according to their motivations to play and their engagement with responsible gambling practices. Those positive players that played most frequently employed the most personal responsible gambling strategies. Reasons that positive players gave for gambling were focused on leisure (e.g., playing for fun, being entertained, and/or winning a prize). By contrast, problem gamblers were much more focused upon modifying mood states (e.g., excitement, relaxation, depression and playing when bored or upset). The present study suggests that online gambling is not, by default, inherently riskier than gambling in more traditional ways, as online gambling was the most popular media by which positive players gambled. Furthermore, most positive players reported that it was easier to stick to their limits when playing the National Lottery online compared to traditional retail purchasing of tickets. Problem players were significantly more likely than positive players to gamble with family and friends, suggesting that, contrary to a popular RG message, social play may not be inherently safer than gambling alone. It is proposed that players (generally) may identify more with the term ‘positive play’ than the term ‘responsible gambling’ which is frequently interpreted as being aimed at people with gambling problems, rather than all players.

**Keywords:** Responsible gambling; Positive play; Problem gambling; Harm minimization; Gambling prevention strategies

## Introduction

The aim of a responsible gambling (RG) strategy is to encourage players to keep their gambling behavior at a low-impact, non-problematic level, as part of several entertainment options that they undertake. In order to promote RG, players are typically encouraged to understand the games that they play and the nature of their playing behavior through information about how problems can develop, and through feedback about their own play (e.g., money spent, frequency of play, etc.). This is referred to as promoting ‘informed player choice’ (Blaszczynski, Ladouceur, Nower & Shaffer, 2005). In addition, players may also have access to tools to help them to maintain a desired level of gambling involvement, assuming that they have insight into how they play (e.g., set spend and time limits etc.) (Griffiths, Wood & Parke, 2009).

While the concept of RG is being increasingly embraced in jurisdictions around the world, the term’s meaning often remains elusive for governments, operators, and patrons alike. For instance, Turner, Wiebe, Falkalski-Ham, Kelly and Skinner (2005) examined awareness of and attitudes towards RG based on a phone survey of 2500 Ontario residents. They found that less than half of the participants (40%) were aware of the term RG (40%). On behalf of the *e-Commerce Online Gaming Regulation and Assurance* organisation, Parke, Rigbye, Parke, et al (2007) conducted a worldwide survey of internet gamblers across 96 countries with a sample of over 10,000 respondents. When questioned about various RG initiatives, the majority were in favour of self-set spend limits, self-set time limits, self-exclusion, regular financial statements, and a self-assessment test to determine and describe their current gambling behavior. Follow-up focus groups revealed that players preferred ‘soft-touch’ RG measures that they could manage themselves, rather than mandatory restrictions

imposed upon all. Other research studies suggest that this reluctance to embrace ‘limits’ might actually be broader than first thought. For instance, McDonnell-Phillips (2006) noted that players did not respond well to the term ‘limit’ even when they acknowledged that this was precisely what they had done in relation to their own gambling. The term ‘limit’ may sound too restrictive and imposing for some players even when they have the option of setting it themselves. At the same time, Parke, et al (2007) also found that some players did not see the point of having RG initiatives at all and suggested that they were only relevant to players with gambling problems. Similar attitudes to RG have been noted in both qualitative focus group studies (e.g., Wood & Griffiths, 2008), and large scale surveys (Griffiths, et al, 2009).

A seminal work in helping define the concept of responsible gambling is found in the description of the ‘Reno Model’ (Blaszczynski, Ladouceur, & Shaffer, 2004). This work emphasizes a science-based framework for responsible gambling, and defines responsible gambling (RG) as follows:

*“Responsible gambling refers to policies and practices designed to prevent and reduce potential harms associated with gambling; these policies and practices often incorporate a diverse range of interventions designed to promote consumer protection, community/consumer awareness and education, and access to efficacious treatment”* (p.308).

This shift also reflects wider social and cultural changes that have seen more of an emphasis on the importance of consumers making informed purchase choices on a wide variety of products and services – whether reading nutritional labels for dietary purposes or clearly understanding the implications of signing credit agreements. As is the case in a number of settings, facilitating *informed player choice* has become a major priority in building responsible gaming policy and strategy – an approach that reflects the fact that millions of participants willingly play games of chance worldwide every day as a legitimate and moderate leisure activity (Wood & Bernhard, 2010).

In a report prepared for the *Australian Gambling Council* on the principles of informed choice and gambling, Blaszczynski, Ladouceur, Nower and Shaffer (2005) highlight three basic strategic tenets

that they argue should underpin informed choice: (i) individuals are personally responsible for their level of participation in gambling; (ii) informed choice is a pivotal requirement for responsible gambling; and (iii) science can contribute in determining which information is necessary to promote informed choice in gambling. Therefore, it follows that in order to effectively promote RG, the player should have all the necessary information and resources available to make well informed decisions on when to gamble, when to stop, and how much to spend. Such information should include ‘facts’ about playing games and the probabilities of winning, prize structures, etc. but can also include information about the players’ own behavior in order to promote *behavioral transparency* (Griffiths & Wood, 2008). This would provide information to allow players to consciously monitor and understand their playing behavior.

Research developing and evaluating RG strategies has advanced at a dramatic rate, with the predominant focus being the relationship of RG tools and strategy upon mitigating the development, to some degree, of problem gambling. In other words, harm minimization. For example, problem gambling is associated with a loss of control and an unwillingness to take personal responsibility for individual actions (e.g., Jacobs, 1986; Blaszczynski, & Nower, 2002; Wood & Griffiths, 2007). RG strategy aimed at promoting and supporting individual autonomy directly focuses on helping ‘at risk’ players to attain a good understanding of their behavior patterns. Consequently, the range of responsible gambling initiatives available has expanded considerably and now includes such diverse features as: enhanced player information and support services, self-diagnostic tests, behavioral tracking and feedback, encouraging pre-commitment to spend and time-limits when playing, warning messages, and educational videos (e.g., Auer & Griffiths, 2013; Auer, Malischnig & Griffiths, 2013; Bernhard, Lucas, & Jang, 2006; Monaghan, 2008; 2009; Wood &

Griffiths, 2008; Griffiths, et al 2009; Monaghan & Blaszczynski, 2007; 2010a; 2010b; Nisbet, 2005; Sharpe et al, 2005; Williams, West & Simpson, 2007; Wohl et al, 2010; 2011; Wood & Bernhard, 2010).

However, in general, the message to players has been about how to avoid developing a gambling problem, by knowing what a problem looks like and focusing on doing the opposite (e.g., staying in control). In other words, RG has been developed in association with thinking and research predicated on the concept of problem gambling. Whilst this approach has considerable merit, in helping players to identify and (perhaps) avoid some of the behaviors associated with, and related to, problem gambling (e.g., chasing, escaping from problems, misperceptions about probability etc.) it does not provide much information about what ‘non-problematic’ gambling actually looks like.

For the purpose of the present study, ‘non-problematic’ was deemed to be a rather vague and potentially value-laden term, as it once again alludes to a focus on problematic play. Similarly, the term ‘normal’ play was considered inappropriate because normal implies that it is something that most people do, and there could be gambling behaviors that whilst not ‘normal’ in terms of frequency, were nevertheless not associated with problems. Therefore, the term ‘positive play’ was coined because it emphasises the behavior and attitudes of players that exhibit no problems or concerns with their gambling. Understanding strategies for positive play not only has the potential to help minimize gambling problems, it could conceivably help players to avoid unpleasant playing experiences, that whilst may not necessarily indicate the start of a gambling problem, nevertheless have some negative consequences associated with them. For example, players spending more than they intended during a particular gambling session. Research on positive play is important for several reasons:

*Responsible gambling is for all gamblers not just problem gamblers:* Many members of the general public do not understand the term ‘responsible gambling’ (Turner et al, 2005), or see RG as only relevant to

players with problems (Parke et al, 2007; Wood & Griffiths, 2008). Examining positive play informs RG from the perspective of ‘normal’ play and may help promote the message that RG is actually there for all gamblers to consider, not just problem gamblers.

*Maximising healthy and positive play:* It is one thing to point out how not to play, but that does not necessarily help players in devising practical every-day strategies that can keep their playing at a healthy level. That is, messages about how to play may be as important as messages about how not to play.

*Describing concrete strategies for everyday play:* Detailing a variety of concrete strategies gives players ideas and options to maximize their positive gambling experiences. It may be that not all strategies are suitable for all players, but a range of different types of playing strategies provides players with more options to consider introducing into their gambling behavior repertoire.

*Understanding what healthy play looks like, rather than just ‘fixing’ problem play:* Much RG research and subsequent strategies are derived from an examination of problematic gambling rather than non-problematic play. There may be other successful strategies to keep play responsible that are not derived from avoidance of problematic behaviors. It is conceivable that non-problematic players may relate more to successful strategies for play that are derived from, and successfully utilized by, ‘normal’ players on a regular basis.

There have been numerous studies that have helped us to understand what problem gambling looks like, and how it can develop, although arguably there is still a lot that we do not yet fully understand. However, to date, there appears to be very few studies that have focused upon ‘normal’ players’ gambling behavior, and none that have examined personal strategies for maintaining play as a healthy and enjoyable experience. Ricketts and Macaskill (2004) interviewed a very small number of

high-frequency (i.e., gambled at least weekly) but non-problematic gamblers (n=7). All bet in off-course bookmakers and three also played slot machines. The findings focused upon the similarities and differences between problem and ‘normal’ gamblers, rather than on what makes ‘normal’ play positive. Normal gambling, in this context shared, to some extent, the following characteristics with problematic play with most of those interviewed: (i) *arousal* – from winning or the prospect of winning; (ii) *skill and achievement* – in picking winning horses; (iii) *triggers* (e.g., racing pages in newspapers, vicinity of bookmaker, racing on television). The desire to gamble was the same for both groups, although their reactions were predicated by differing levels of control. By contrast, the following differences between ‘normal’ and problem gamblers emerged: (i) *entertainment* – gambling was only viewed by the ‘normal’ players as an activity that involved spending to be entertained; (ii) *emotion management* – problem gamblers frequently played to escape from negative emotions; (iii) *costs associated with gambling* – problem gamblers experienced significant financial, relationship, and personal emotional costs; (iv) *control* – ‘normal’ gamblers were able to resist urges to gamble, whereas problem gamblers had severe difficulties; and (v) *control strategies* – normal players were able to successfully apply avoidance, call upon social support, and undertake other distracting activities to maintain control.

Ricketts and Macaskill (2004) provide a glimpse of some of the ways that gambling can be maintained as a positive experience. However, there is little detail given of how actual strategies are practically employed. Furthermore, the sample size was very small and three of the four ‘normal’ gamblers reported that they had experienced gambling problems in the past.

Wood and Griffiths (2008) conducted a series of focus groups with Swedish online poker players to examine issues that affected players’ trust of online poker websites. The study involved 24 players who were either defined as ‘professional players’ or ‘casual players’ according to their motivations to play and tactics whilst playing. Although no problem gambling screen was utilized in the study, the casual players exhibited no indication of any issues that might be related to problem gambling.

Casual players reported that they played for fun and excitement and to alleviate boredom, they preferred to play with low stake amounts, and they enjoyed the social interactions of playing and communicating with other players. They also reported that they would undertake other activities whilst playing, such as watching television, listening to music, or talking to friends. However, there was no specific discussion of strategies that they employed in order to keep their playing at a responsible level.

To date, it appears that there is a distinct lack of research examining gambling in the context of what can make it both an enjoyable and responsible experience. Research in this area is arguably important, as a frequent message that is given to players is that gambling should be 'responsible and fun.' Detailing a variety of everyday personal RG strategies may have value for some players by providing practical examples of how this goal can be achieved. It is of course important to point out how to avoid developing potentially problematic gambling habits, but it could also be helpful to highlight strategies associated with enjoyable and moderated play. Given that responsible gambling is often viewed as for people with problems, an emphasis on highlighting 'normal' and 'enjoyable' play strategies may resonate with a wider segment of the population. Furthermore, by contrasting healthy and responsible gambling experiences with problematic gambling, a better understanding of how gambling can get out of hand can be gained, and how such behaviors might be prevented or at least minimized. The present study was therefore designed to investigate the different ways that players engaged in 'positive play,' what motivates such play, and what makes for an enjoyable long-term play experience. The study explored and detailed common themes relating to 'positive' gambling behaviors reported by a self-selected sample of UK players, across a wide range of gambling activities.



## Method

*Participants:* The total sample comprised 1,797 lottery players. The study identified 209 players (11.6%), from the total sample that answered “yes” to both of the Lie/Bet screening questions. These players were defined as possible problem gamblers (PPGs). There was no significant relationship between the sex of the participant and whether or not they were classified as a PPG ( $\chi^2 = 1.841$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.175$ ). After excluding those who answered ‘yes’ to either of the two screening questions relating to potential concerns about their gambling behavior in the last 12 months on the Lie/Bet Scale (see ‘Materials’ below), the sub-sample that answered all the questions relating to positive play comprised 1,484 individuals. There were approximately equal numbers of males (51.4%) and females (49.6%). The ages of participants ranged from 17 to 88 with a mean average age of 47 years (median 48 years). Participants were located in a wide range of regions from across the UK.

*Materials:* The questionnaire comprised four sections asking a variety of questions: What makes an enjoyable playing experience? Where are games played/purchased? What strategies are employed to avoid spending more than intended? To what extent is gambling for entertainment or mood modification? What types of games are played and what is the frequency of play. What does ‘responsible gambling’ mean and whose responsibility is it (individual, gaming company, government/regulator)? Questions were also asked relating to the likelihood of setting spend and time limits (when playing online), the balance of gambling with other leisure pursuits. Demographic questions concerned gender, age and the closest city to which the person lived. In order to identify any individuals who may be at-risk for developing gambling problems, the Lie/Bet screen was

included. Götestam et al (2004) in a series of validation studies concluded that the Lie/Bet screen appears to function as a good screening device for at-risk gambling in normal community samples.

*Procedure:* Prior to the survey, 20 people were interviewed in order to develop suitable questions for inclusion in the main survey. Following the development of the survey instrument, an email request was sent to UK National Lottery players that had previously indicated, that they would be willing to take part in lottery-related research projects. The recruitment notice was also posted on the National Lottery *Facebook* page. The request asked for players to voluntarily participate in a study examining positive playing experiences and strategies used to keep gambling fun and problem-free. It was not possible to calculate the response rate as the population from which the sample was drawn was unknown (i.e. players who have had positive gambling experiences and have strategies to share). The following results primarily focus upon the responses of positive players (n=1,484). However, the results do include some comparisons to PPGs identified in the sample (n = 209).

## **Results**

*Games played:* Positive players reported playing a wide variety of games in many different settings (see Figures 1 and 2). Not surprisingly, the most frequently reported game played was the National Lottery (98.9%) followed by scratchcards (65.5%), sports betting (32.7%), electronic games (e.g., slot machines) (28.5%), bingo (20.8%), and casino card games (14.9%). The least reported form of gambling was the playing of casino table games (13.5%). PPGs reported playing all games significantly more frequently than positive players, with the exception of casino table games, (see

Table 1). However, there was no significant difference found between the number of PPGs and positive players who only played exclusively via the Internet ( $\chi^2 = 2.991$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.084$ ).

*Where games are played or purchased:* The most frequently reported place to play or purchase any game was via the Internet, with 93% of respondents having done this at least once before (65.5% at least once per week), followed by at a local supermarket or shop (37.4% at least once per week), in a pub or bar (3.6% at least once per week), at a bingo hall or club (3.3% at least once per week), at a racetrack or betting shop (3.7% at least once per week), at a friend's house (1.8% at least once per week), and at a casino (1.3% at least once per week) (see Figure 2).

The games that were most frequently played or purchased via the Internet, were: National Lottery draw games (89.8%), followed by scratchcards (43.7%), sports betting (19.4%), electronic gaming machines (13.2%), bingo (12.5%), casino card games (10.2%), and casino table games (8.5%). Of those who played or purchased any game regularly via the Internet (i.e., at least once per week), a quarter of these also regularly played or purchased games in a supermarket or shop (24.9%). A small minority reported regularly playing games in a pub or bar (2.8%), at a racetrack or betting shop (2.5%), at a bingo hall or club (1.9%), at a friend's house (1.2%), or at a casino (0.9%). PPGs reported playing or purchasing games significantly more frequently than positive players in a supermarket or local shop, in a pub or bar, via the Internet, or at a friend's house.

The possibility to win a large prize was considered as (at least sometimes) important by almost all positive players (96%), with a similar response to the possibility of winning a small prize (91.4%). Being entertained was considered (at least somewhat) important by more than two-thirds of players (68.4%). However, playing socially was not considered by most positive players as a reason to gamble (63.5%; see Figure 3). Other popular reasons for playing any game (at least sometimes) related to having some fun (65.5%), and for the excitement of the experience (60.8%). By contrast,

only a minority of players reported that they (at least, sometimes) played to relax (30.6%), because they felt upset (4.3%), felt depressed (7.6%), or because they were bored (21.2%) (see Figure 4).

There were no significant differences between positive players and PPGs in terms of the reported importance (for an enjoyable experience) of winning a large prize, winning a small prize, gambling for fun, or being entertained. However, PPGs were significantly more likely than positive players to report that being excited was important for an enjoyable gambling experience ( $\chi^2 = 21.333$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and that feeling relaxed was important for an enjoyable gambling experience ( $\chi^2 = 9.464$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ). Furthermore, PPGs were significantly more likely than positive players to report that they gambled to alleviate boredom ( $\chi^2 = 54.506$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), when depressed ( $\chi^2 = 75.172$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), or when upset ( $\chi^2 = 63.356$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). PPGs were also more likely than positive players to report playing with family and friends ( $\chi^2 = 26.305$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

*Personal strategies for playing responsibly:* The vast majority of players in the study reported that they employed one or more strategies to help ensure that they did not spend more than they had intended. The most popular strategy, was to decide upon a spending limit before beginning to play, with nine out of ten respondents (90.2%) indicating that they mostly, or always, did this and only a small percentage (6%) suggesting that they never did this. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) reported that they always worked out how much they could afford to lose before they played, compared to less than one-third (27.8%) who suggested that they never did this. Another popular strategy used was to set a time limit for playing, with just over half mostly, or always, doing this (52.8%), and just over one-quarter suggesting that they never did this (26.1%).

Two less common, but nevertheless popular strategies, related specifically to non-Internet based gambling. The first of these was only taking a certain amount of money out to gamble mostly or always (46.1%), with a similar number of respondents stating that they never did this (45.9%). The second was leaving ATM cards at home when going out to gamble, and was reported by just over one-third of respondents mostly or always (34.8%). More than half of the respondents (58.3%) stated that they never did this (see Figure 5).

There was a significant association between the frequency of engaging with the most popular responsible gambling strategy (setting a limit) and the least popular strategy (leaving ATM cards at home). That is, those who reported always setting spending limits before playing were also more likely to report always leaving ATM cards at home when going out to gamble ( $\chi^2 = 92.340$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Positive players were significantly more likely than PPGs to report that they engaged in a variety of RG strategies when gambling. These included; deciding on a spend limit before they gambled ( $\chi^2 = 43.568$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), only taking out a predetermined amount of money when going out to gamble ( $\chi^2 = 16.281$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), leaving ATM cards at home when going out to gamble ( $\chi^2 = 30.444$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), deciding upon a time-limit of how long to gamble ( $\chi^2 = 19.184$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), and working out what they could afford to spend before they gambled ( $\chi^2 = 17.678$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

For lottery draw games, just over half of the respondents (54.5%) that expressed an opinion, (i.e. excluding those who were not sure and/or those who had never purchased a game online) suggested that it was easier to keep to their spending limits when purchasing tickets online compared to buying lottery tickets in a shop. Only a small minority of respondents (5.9%) suggested that it was harder to keep to their limit when purchasing lottery tickets online. For all other online games, the most frequent response (from those who had played each specific game online) was that it was neither

easier nor harder to keep to spending limits when playing online. Overall, a minority of players on every game reported that it was harder to keep to a limit when playing online (see Figure 6).

Significantly more PPGs than positive players reported that they found it harder to keep to limits online when playing lottery draw games ( $\chi^2 = 26.124$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), scratchcards ( $\chi^2 = 47.101$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), sports betting ( $\chi^2 = 10.197$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.017$ ), bingo ( $\chi^2 = 8.551$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ), EGMs ( $\chi^2 = 18.015$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), casino card games ( $\chi^2 = 7.780$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.050$ ) and casino table games ( $\chi^2 = 8.275$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.041$ ). Almost two-thirds of the respondents (65.6%) reported that they would consider setting a spending limit when buying lottery tickets online, compared to all other online games. The same was true for setting time limits online, although setting time limits was much less popular overall, with just over half of respondents (56%) indicating that they would not consider setting a time limit when purchasing lottery tickets online. However, time limits may not be particularly relevant for lottery ticket purchases as the lottery is not a game that can be played continuously. That is, the player typically waits several days to get the result of the lottery draw. Nevertheless, time limits were also reported as less popular RG tools in relation to all other online games as well.

PPGs were significantly more likely than positive players to report that they would be willing to consider setting a spending limit when playing the following games via the Internet: scratchcards ( $\chi^2 = 8.738$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.033$ ), bingo ( $\chi^2 = 8.287$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.040$ ), EGMs ( $\chi^2 = 8.312$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.040$ ), casino card games ( $\chi^2 = 11.922$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ) and casino table games ( $\chi^2 = 8.423$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.038$ ). Furthermore, PPGs were significantly more likely than positive players to report that

they would be willing to consider setting a time limit when playing the following games via the Internet: scratchcards ( $\chi^2 = 8.601$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.035$ ), sports betting ( $\chi^2 = 9.696$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.021$ ), bingo ( $\chi^2 = 15.824$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), EGMs ( $\chi^2 = 11.745$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ), casino card games ( $\chi^2 = 16.193$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), and casino table games ( $\chi^2 = 19.507$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

A large majority of respondents (95.5%) indicated that gambling took up only a small part of their leisure time. A small minority (3.3%) suggested that gambling was either their only, or main, leisure activity. Positive players were significantly more likely than PPGs to engage in several non-gambling leisure activities ( $\chi^2 = 33.670$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Almost all of the respondents (96.3%) suggested that it was mostly or entirely the individual's responsibility to ensure that they only gambled what they could afford to lose. However, most of the respondents suggested that gaming companies (70.5%) and government or regulators (62.8%) had at least some responsibility in this respect. There were no significant differences reported between positive players and PPGs in relation to where responsibility for gambling lay.

*Cluster analysis:* In order to identify different patterns of positive play and associated responsible gambling practices, a two-step cluster analysis was performed. This exploratory statistical method groups together people that have similar scores on a number of variables. Two-step cluster analysis was chosen, because compared to other classical clustering methods, two-step analysis uses both continuous and categorical variables to find the optimal number of clusters and has greater flexibility for examining large samples. Specific questions that the analysis sought to answer were: (i) are positive players a homogenous group of individuals, or are there sub-groups of positive players? (ii) To what extent do positive players undertake responsible gambling strategies? Thirty-eight variables were used to cover the following topics: (i) participant details (age and sex); (ii) factors that contribute to a positive playing experience (win large prize, win small prize, playing socially, having fun, being entertained, being excited, being relaxed); (iii) the place where games purchased or played

(supermarket or shop, pub or bar, casino, Internet, friend's house, bingo hall/club, racetrack or betting shop); (iv) frequency of play (on each different game type); (v) psychological reasons for playing (fun, excitement, relaxation, meet with friends/family, boredom, depression, when upset); and (vi) responsible gambling strategies (setting spending limit, setting time limit, taking cash only, leaving ATM cards at home, working out what one can afford to lose).

Using the Schwarz Bayesian Criterion, two distinct clusters were identified (*Casual Dreamers* and *Responsible Thrill Seekers*) that differentiated 90.5% of respondents into two groups that shared similar responses on the selected variables. The remaining 9.5% gave responses that could not be classified into a specific cluster (see Figure 7). There were no significant sex differences observed between the two clusters.

*Casual dreamers*: This group comprised just under two-thirds of all the respondents (63%). These players had a mean age of 49 years. *Casual dreamers* were more likely than *Responsible thrill seekers* to report that it was important for an enjoyable playing experience that they win a large prize. However, there was no significant difference between the two groups with regards to winning a small prize (see Figure 8). *Casual dreamers* were less likely than *responsible thrill seekers* to engage in all types of gambling, except via the Internet, where there was no significant difference (see Figures 9 and 10). They were also less likely than *responsible thrill seekers* to engage in responsible gambling strategies, with the exception of setting their own spending limits (see Figure 11).

*Responsible thrill seekers*: This group comprised just over one-quarter of all respondents (28%). They were slightly younger than the *casual dreamers*, with a mean age of 41 years. These players played all



games significantly more frequently than *casual dreamers* in every setting except for the Internet, where there was no significant difference in play frequencies observed (see Figures 9 and 10). *Responsible thrill seekers* were significantly more likely than *casual dreamers* to report that their motivations to gamble were: fun, relaxation, excitement, entertainment, boredom, to socialize, or because they were either depressed or upset (see Figure 12).

When it came to personal responsible gambling strategies, *responsible thrill seekers* were significantly more likely to: set a time limit for their play, only take a certain amount of cash to gamble, leave ATM cards at home, and decide what they could afford to lose before they began playing. However, there was no significant difference between either group of players when it came to setting a spending limit before playing (see Figure 11). The setting of a personal spending limit before playing was frequently undertaken by the majority of respondents. There were no significant differences between the two groups, in terms of defining whose responsibility it was to ensure that players only gamble what they can afford to spend. The vast majority of players in both groups suggested that the individual was responsible for their own actions, but also agreed that gaming companies and government/regulators also had a role to play in supporting responsible gambling.

## Discussion

This study is one of the first to explore the behaviors, attitudes and motivations of positive players that show no signs of at-risk or problem gambling behavior and compare it with a group of PPGs. As such, the findings help us to better understand behaviors and strategies that might be actively promoted to encourage positive play amongst all players, in addition to the standard approach to RG that focuses upon discouraging risky playing behaviors. That is, RG might now reasonably use a ‘carrot-based approach’ (i.e., ‘these strategies are associated with positive play experiences’) rather than, or in addition to, more traditional ‘stick-based approaches’ (i.e., ‘do not do this or you could

develop a gambling problem’). Whilst causality for positive play strategies was not established, neither was causality identified for behaviors that may facilitate negative playing experiences. despite this limitation, a strong association between problematic gambling and certain behaviors remains sufficient grounds on which to make recommendations for prevention strategies. Similarly, the positive play strategies identified in this study, arguably, make good sense in relation to current RG theory. However, it is always wise to proceed with caution when considering any new strategy for promoting responsible gambling.

The study also identified two distinct groups of positive players defined according to their motivations to play and their engagement with responsible gambling practices. Notably, those positive players that played most frequently also employed the most personal RG strategies. This emphasizes that RG is a strategy for all players and not just for people with gambling issues and/or problems. The high level of acceptance for personal responsibility when gambling, suggests that RG strategies could benefit from a focus on empowering players’ autonomy for exercising personal control. Such assistance could be facilitated by providing information about the games being played, as well tailored behavioral feedback (e.g., time and money spent), and by promoting tools that can assist players to manage their playing behavior (e.g., limit setting features). Problem gambling is frequently characterized by an unwillingness to take responsibility for personal actions and the use of gambling as a means by which to dissociate and avoid problems. RG strategies that raise player awareness of their behavior are likely to reduce, or at the very least, not support the notion of gambling as an escape from reality.

The present study also suggests that online gambling is not, by default, inherently riskier than gambling in more traditional ways. In fact, online gambling was the most popular media by which to gamble for the positive players in this study. Furthermore, the findings indicate that in at least one example of an Internet-purchased game, most players actually found it easier to keep within their limits compared to purchasing the same game from traditional retail outlets (e.g., buying lottery tickets from a supermarket). The important point here is, that the complete structural and situational characteristics of each game need to be considered when evaluating the potential risk of a game. It is entirely possible to design a rather benign Internet game, just as it is entirely possible to design a highly risky game provided through more traditional media.

All games, offered through all channels, need to be carefully examined during the design stages and before launching, in order to understand any potential risks for vulnerable players. Furthermore, consideration should also be given to the fact that the Internet offers the possibility to provide tools to help players to better understand their playing habits, as well as tools that can help them to set their own limits. Such RG features offer the potential to reduce game risks. For example, player-defined limits, detailed account information, behavioral feedback (alerting players to changes in their gambling behavior) and highly accessible, anonymous player support are all RG features that can be offered via online gambling sites. There are an increasing number of studies that are starting to show that such features have tangible benefits in helping players to play responsibly (e.g., Auer & Griffiths, 2013; Bernhard, Lucas, & Jang, 2006; Monaghan, 2008; 2009; Monaghan & Blaszczynski, 2007; 2010a; 2010b; Wood & Griffiths, 2008; Griffiths, et al 2009; Nisbet, 2005; Sharpe et al, 2005; Williams, West & Simpson, 2007; Wood & Wood, 2009; Wohl et al 2010; 2011, 2012; Wood & Bernhard, 2010).

Analysis of the two clusters (*casual dreamers* and *responsible thrill seekers*) suggests that those positive players who played the most frequently and on the most gambling activities, were also the most likely to employ a wide range of responsible gambling strategies, although setting a spending limit

was frequently undertaken by both groups. This finding should be interpreted with caution, as it does not, by itself, indicate causality. That is, we cannot conclude that RG strategy use led directly to positive playing experiences for higher frequency players. Possible explanations could be that, using RG strategies helped maintain positive playing experiences and/or that greater familiarity with gambling leads to increased awareness of and engagement with RG strategies. Whatever the reason, it is reassuring to find that so many positive players value RG experiences. However, although *responsible thrill seekers* utilized RG strategies the most, they only accounted for 28% of total players in the study. *Casual dreamers* also frequently set personal spending limits, but were significantly less likely (although arguably still at a high level) to engage in the other RG strategies. Whilst some might argue that playing less can also be a responsible gambling strategy, it is clear that a range of RG strategies are valued by those positive players who gamble the most on a range of activities.

*Responsible thrill seekers* were significantly more focused upon the experiences of everyday playing and appeared to find gambling more rewarding on a number of levels. Whilst playing for mood modification reasons (excitement, relaxation, boredom, depression, upset, etc.) can be a phenomenon associated with problem gambling, it is possible that the level of control exerted by high frequency positive players – through engagement with a range of RG strategies – helped mitigate against any negative affects. It may also be that the level of mood modification for *responsible thrill seekers*, whilst higher than *casual dreamers*, was nevertheless, still within the range of ‘normality.’ It is worth noting, that for players in both groups, playing for fun and excitement were reported as much more frequent reasons for playing than when upset or depressed.

We cannot be sure why less frequent players utilized fewer RG strategies. Perhaps they did not feel that they needed them, given the less frequent extent of their playing behavior, or perhaps they are less aware of them altogether. Either way, promoting a wide range of RG tools and strategies to all players should have value for raising awareness of the tools that are available. Furthermore, communicating that positive players make use of a variety of RG strategies is a message to be recommended. If nothing else, it clearly shows that RG strategies are not just for people with problems, but are valued by many positive (non-problematic) players as well.

Nevertheless, it was striking the overall number of positive players who undertook a range of responsible gambling strategies, with limit setting being the most common. In particular, setting limits for lottery games was very popular. In part, this is perhaps due to the high level of familiarity with buying lottery tickets online, a service that has been available to UK National Lottery players for some time. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) demonstrates that people need time to understand and adopt new technologies and shows the importance of helping players to become familiar with any online RG tools that are provided. For example, setting time limits was a less popular RG option whilst playing any online game, but this is also less frequently provided as an RG tool. If such a tool were to be promoted to players as a helpful part of everyday positive play, then it would be important to help players to become familiar with its use. Such a system has shown to be very effective on win2day website in Austria (Auer & Griffiths, 2013). Online tutorials, walkthroughs and demonstrations can also be an effective way to increase familiarity with a new service.

Whilst the main focus of the study was aimed at investigating positive play, it is nevertheless worth discussing the findings of those players identified as PPGs. The percentage of players classed as PPGs (11.6%) is far greater than the most recent UK prevalence study (0.9%; Wardle, Moody, Spence, et al, 2011) despite the fact that the UK prevalence study had a much larger overall sample size ( $n = 7756$ ). However, this observation should be interpreted with caution, as the sample in the

present study was drawn exclusively from a self-selected population of players, and not the general population as is the case with demographically representative prevalence studies. We would expect a higher number of participants that engage in gambling at more excessive levels, from a sample of players compared to a sample that also includes a significant proportion of non-players. Furthermore, as a self-selecting sample, it may be that the study was responded to more by players whose gambling is a rather salient part of their lives, than players in general (see discussion on limitations below). There could also be issues about the different screening tools used (i.e. Lie/Bet in the present study versus DSM-IV and CPGI used in the national gambling survey). However it is worth noting, that whilst the focus of this study was primarily about positive play, it nevertheless identified a sample of PPGs that was three and half times bigger than the number of PPGs identified by the latest British prevalence study. As such, the present study provides a great deal of insight into the reported behavior and attitudes of this vulnerable population.

In line with previous findings relating to problem gambling, the study found that the reasons that PPGs gave for playing were much more focused upon modifying mood states (e.g., excitement, relaxation, depression and playing when upset) than entertainment reasons, such as playing for fun, being entertained, and/or winning a prize (e.g. Ricketts & Macaskill, 2004; Wood & Griffiths 2007; 2008). This supports the view that problem gambling is motivated less by the notion of winning money than it is by the actual experience of playing. For PPGs, gambling is frequently the only social activity in their lives. Gambling fills a void and when gambling ceases it is important that there are other activities to fill the gap where gambling used to be (Wood & Griffiths, 2007). Furthermore, a wide range of social activities provides social support and a distraction to avoid gambling when

feeling depressed or frustrated. For RG purposes, it is important to stress that gambling should only be one activity that people do for fun, and having a balanced social life is important.

One rather interesting finding, was that PPGs were significantly more likely than positive players to gamble with family and friends. The supposed benefit of playing socially is a message that is often times heard as a responsible gambling message. However, the current study suggests that social play may not be inherently safer than gambling alone. Reasons for this may be family members who gamble excessively normalize gambling for other family members and/or results in gambling becoming a major entertainment activity for other family members. Similarly, those whose friends gamble frequently are perhaps more likely to also gamble with them as a regular social activity. An alternative explanation may be that for people with gambling problems, other frequent gamblers become their friends by virtue of proximity and familiarity.

Furthermore, gambling with friends and family may not necessarily help players to have a positive gambling experience. It may be useful for some, if they find that the company of others helps them to stay in control of their playing. But, sometimes friends or relatives may persuade people to gamble more money than they intend, or keep them from leaving when they want to. Also, just because a player goes to a venue with friends or relatives, it does not always mean that they stay with them once they arrive. As an RG message, and based on the findings of the present study, it appears that there is not enough evidence to justify gambling with friends or relatives as a helpful strategy to avoid excessive play.

*Limitations of the study:* The participants in the present study were not selected randomly from the population and may therefore unlikely to reflect the general British population. Rather, they represent a sample of people that regularly gamble. Respondents were contacted via email and social media, specifically through National Lottery-related social media, and there is a high representation of both National Lottery players and online players more generally. Nevertheless, it was these

players who were of primary interest in this study, as they represented a sample drawn from the desired population (i.e., regular gamblers).

The profile of participants, in terms of their participation in a range of gambling activities, shows higher rates than identified in the most recent British prevalence study (Wardle, et al, 2011). That is, whilst virtually all the participants in the present study played lottery games, they were also more likely to have gambled on a wide variety of other activities, than would be expected from the UK population generally. This is perhaps not surprising considering that the recruitment strategy was aimed at enlisting people who gamble. However, as such, we may be confident that the study achieved the aim of examining the positive play experiences of players on a wide variety of game types and not just those of lottery players.

The use of self-report data is both a strength and a limitation. For a study that enquires about the motivations behind actions, self-report is an appropriate methodology by which to gain the level of personal insight required. However, we cannot be sure that players always do what they say they do, or that they all have a good understanding of what motivates their play. Whilst some survey respondents may have answered untruthfully, there was no motivation for them to answer that way. The survey was anonymous, and it is unlikely that significant numbers of respondents would be deluded or untruthful about their gambling behavior, particularly when the focus was mostly upon healthy non-problematic behavior.



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