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The Time of Our Lives: towards a Temporal Understanding of Internet Gambling

Abstract

Based on a study examining Internet gambling in the home this paper problematizes the current ubiquitous focus on the solitary, isolated gambler. It does so by considering the insights provided by a focus on how internet gambling practices and the internet gambler become seen as a 'problem'. We argue that understanding such identity migration (from gambling to problem gambling; addict to non-addict; gambler to non-gambler) requires us to move beyond a focus on the individual, and consider how participants' families contextualise and are re/produced in this reshaping of identities. In undertaking these analyses, we found that re-articulations of time were core to participants' narratives which described shifting experiences of time, its expansion and its contraction in gambling; that meanings of 'time' were emotionally charged; and crucial in how problem gambling was addressed and resolved, within families. Finally, we consider how reshaping practices within and by families around their own and the gamblers' identities explicitly depended on the temporal re-integration of the 'addict' into their family timescapes.

Keywords   internet gambling, interdependency, time, family, timescapes.

Introduction: Internet gambling and the home

The emergence of the internet has opened up new spaces of gambling; it is estimated that already there are over 2,332 internet gambling web sites owned by 436 different companies listed at *www.online.casinocity.com* making this one of the fastest growing forms of betting (Williams – Wood 2007). The actual number of people who gamble online has been estimated to be between 14–23 million, with between 28–35% (4 million) of these being from the US, 49% (7 million) from the Asia-Pacific region, and 23% (3.3 million) from Europe (with the UK accounting for one third) (American Gaming Association 2006; RS*e*Consulting 2006). One such new online space is the home, leading some commentators to suggest that on-line gambling in the home is more psychologically enticing than off-line forms of gambling because it offers gamblers *anonymity* (e.g. individuals can bet without the social embarrassment of being seen by others), *accessibility* (e.g. people can gamble any time of the day/night) and (controllable) *interactivity* (therefore making it more tempting than some other forms of gambling) (Griffiths 2001). In connection with these ideas, there has been the suggestion that internet gambling marks a shift from 'social' to 'asocial' gambling (Fabiansson 2008) through the removal of gamblers from the 'sociable' locations or playgrounds in which they can gamble (Abbott *et al.* 2004). Nevertheless, it does so by shifting them into global participation through a technology which has been described as transcending geographical and temporal boundaries in a giant global casino, offering immediate access to credit and linking players and betting opportunities globally (Reith 1999. 124). In effect, the world is seemingly available at the touch of a button, from the privacy of one's home. Research with off-line gamblers suggests that those who are more likely to experience problems are people who play on their own; and problem gamblers report that at the height of their addiction it is a solitary activity (Griffiths 1995; Griffiths and Parke 2002). Such findings play out within a broader theorisation of how and in which ways gambling becomes *problem* gambling.

Problem gambling, both off and online, has been considered particularly within the disciplines of psychology, which grapples with discourses of addiction in understanding the compulsion of gambling (Black – Moyer 1998; Steel – Blaszczynski 1998; Welte *et al.* 2001; Clarke *et al.* 2006) and sociology, where writers have extended these ways of thinking in 'adding' sociology to these approaches (Bernhard 2007); incorporating epidemiological accounts of vulnerable populations, such as those espoused during recent debates about the building of super casinos (Volberg 1994; Quinn 2001); or more broadly of vulnerable underclasses, where vulnerability is less a consequence of emotional inadequacy and more related to deficits in educational or social opportunity (e.g. Blaszczynski *et al.* 1999). Pervasive throughout all these approaches is what we suggest is a problematic focus on the isolated, individual gambler. In her comprehensive review of the emergence of the 'pathological' gambler, Gerda Reith demonstrates how predominantly medicalized accounts constitute a subject 'through its opposition to the values of modern neoliberal societies in terms of its loss of autonomy, reason, and control; its at-risk status; and its requirement for therapy' (Reith 2007). This notion of the individual gambler plays out in questions preoccupying much debate of whether internet gambling creates new forms of participation, whether the isolated character of participation inhibits or exacerbates 'problem gambling', and what the effects may be of the potential 'leakage' of gambling opportunities into spaces such as the home produced by the internet.

The purpose of this paper, in contrast, is less to consider the individual psychology of prob-

lem gambling than to explore relational textures and temporalities of intralocal (e.g. familial) gambling practices. In a study funded by the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Responsibility in Gambling Trust (RiGT) as part of a broader initiative supporting a range of studies examining different aspects of problem gambling,[1] we posited that the home has become a key site to study internet gambling, not only because it is a space where 'new' groups of gamblers like women, young people, and older people can more easily access such activities *via* the internet (Fisher 1993, 1999; Volberg 2000), but also because families themselves are so deeply implicated in pathways into and out of gambling (Ciarrocchi – Reinert 1993; Abbott – Volberg 2000; Abbott 2001; Darbyshire *et al.* 2001; Krishnan – Orford 2002; Abbott *et al.* 2004; Kalischuk *et al.* 2006; Petry 2006; Wardle *et al.*), much work largely relies on gamblers' own, rather than their family's accounts. Importantly, there is a dearth of sociological research on how families/family practices may shape opportunities to gamble on the internet, and how definitions of *problem* internet gambling are produced within these relationships. In consequence of such lacunae, and an overwhelming preoccupation with the individual gambler, we argue there are associated difficulties with current approaches seeking to address the 'problem' of gambling.

Currently, support for people seeking help for their gambling is provided by public and voluntary therapeutic agencies (e.g. GamCare, Gamblers Anonymous, Gordon House). Within these broader agencies, however, there is considerable slippage and uncertainty around theorizations of 'problem' and 'pathological' gambling where the first draws on psychological models of harm (e.g. to one's life circumstances, to significant others, and so forth) and the second on bio-medical models of addiction (Blaszczyniski–McConaghy 1989; Berridge 1990; see also May 2001; Shaffer 1999; Yellowlees–Marks 2005; Giddens 2006; Hughes 2007). These uncertainties are reflected in an unresolved question concerning which social agency or therapeutic treatment is most appropriate for problem gambling. This ambiguity is exacerbated by a lack of rich data on who, when and with whom 'problem' gambling is identified/defined, and fails to address how gamblers move in and out of self-identified problem gambling without formal agency support or help (Abbott–Williams–Volberg 2004; Reith–Dobbie 2012). We suggest this ambiguity is further compounded by a continued focus on 'the gambler' as a conceptual abstraction: a focus on the isolated, individual gambler and the quest to uncover the 'essence' of his or her 'problem' gambling. Viewed thus, a gambling problem is something that gamblers *have* rather than something they *do*, or produce and reproduce. We consider there is a need, then, for a shift from 'the gambler' towards a fundamental engagement with the relational character of internet gambling in the home and, in particular, to explore how and when internet gambling becomes understood as 'problematic', who decides it is problematic and how, if at all, 'problem' gambling is addressed. In effect, we are exploring what meanings are invoked (about family, identity, etc.) when people talk about problem gambling, and in this way investigate 'processes of relating' (Mason 2004).

Internet gambling and the lens of time

Analyses of time in the reshaping of narratives of people who are moving away from addiction, (e.g. Reith 2007; Klingeman 2000), describe a re-orientation to the future, and 'to the self which involves both a re-articulation of time as well as an increasing sense of agency'

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[1] Valentine, G, & Hughes, K, 'New forms of participation: problem internet gambling and the role of the family ' ESRC (ES/D00067X/1), March 2006-March 2008

(Reith and Dobbie 2012: 2). This paper adds to these debates to argue that such identity migra-tion (from addict to non-addict; gambler to non-gambler) requires us to move beyond a focus on the individual, and consider how participants' families contextualise and are produced in the reshaping of identities. Preliminary thematic analyses of our data overwhelmingly indicated that re-articulations of time were core to participants' narratives which described shifting ex-periences of time, its expansion and its contraction (see Reith 2006) or compression (Giddens 1984, 2006; Adam 2006) in order that they *could* gamble. Additionally, meanings of 'time' were emotionally charged and crucial in how internet gambling emerged as problematic, and to how problem gambling was addressed and resolved within families. And finally, reshaping practices within and by families around their own and the gamblers' identities, moving from 'spoiled' to 'recovered/ing' problem gambler, explicitly depended on the temporal re-integration of the 'ad-dict' into their family timescapes.

In consideration of time for this paper, we draw particularly on Adam's notion of 'times-capes' which requires us to engage with the times and timing of our participants' lives, includ-ing their timeframes, temporality, timing, tempo, duration, sequence and temporal modalities (past, present, future) (Adam 1998). In particular, our analyses concern the extent to which processes of becoming, diachronicity, etc., are considered as ontological bases for social life (see also Nowotny 1992). As part of these temporal analyses, we develop a concept of 'time horizons' (xx 2007) and, additionally, 'debt horizons'. 'Time horizons' fundamentally concern how far in the future the internet gambler can exert control over their circumstances in order to gamble. 'Debt horizons' refer to the future point at which the gambler will no longer be able to pay for their gambling (e.g. where banks foreclose on debts or credit cards are 'maxed'). Both these time horizons reconfigure and dominate peoples' 'timescapes' (Adam 1998) wherein their identity and living practices bend towards managing, holding off or succumbing to an anticipated future crisis in the context of their family relationships. In this way, drawing together our ideas around practices, and considering them through the lens of social time (Elias 1974) we are concerned with ideas of time as relational and therefore worked through and understood within lived experience. We are particularly indebted to Elias's notion of social time as it demonstrates how time can be conceived of as a symbolic expression of the character of extended networks of interdependencies, wherein people are required to do things at certain times in certain places. Time, for Elias, is something we utilise for orientation, regulation, control, co-ordination, and synchronisation of human activity. By emphasising its symbolic power in synthesising practice and meaning, Elias demonstrates how time emerges as a tool for social interaction and, through a consideration of his theory of social time, we are able to understand ourselves as compressed into more tightly regulated temporal flows through increasing extension of our networks of interdependencies. Elias's notion of 'social time' is crucial to understanding how our everyday practices are relationally constituted and, for the purposes of this paper, how particular 'times' serve to characterise and fix emotional meanings implicit in (non-gambling) practices. These ideas will be taken up in greater detail later.

Background to the study

Our study sought to address two main questions. First, whether internet gambling gen-erates new forms of participation for people who would not consider traditional gambling and, second, to explore family contexts of internet gambling and elicit new information on what are currently described as 'self-correcting' strategies (Abbott *et al.* 2004) in prob-

lem internet gambling, and considering how families identify what 'problem gambling' is.

In order to gather data on the family contexts of internet gamblers we developed a multi-method, qualitative longitudinal design for the study that built on previous web-based research (Holloway and Valentine, 2002). First, we devised an online scoping survey, links to which were posted on gambling and non-gambling websites, especially gambling discussion boards. In addition to general demographic information about participants, this elicited information about peoples' gambling preferences on and offline, relational and spatial contexts of gambling and, importantly, operated as a recruitment tool, requesting survey participants to contact the research fellow if they were willing to be interviewed.[2]

The data for this paper were generated with 26 internet gamblers, 22 of whom identified themselves as 'problem gamblers', using qualitative longitudinal life-history interviews, gathered twice with a three-month interim period. Twenty were men and six were women. We also conducted one-off in-depth interviews with those whom we designate for the purposes of this paper as a significant other, elected and approached by the gambler (n=69 interviews), to capture data concerning processes of meaning formation around 'problem' gambling. Most often the significant other was a partner, with other nominated significant others including a child, sibling, parents and a non-kin personal assistant. Participants were recruited from across the UK, in both rural and urban areas and, with one exception, all interviewees were white, from nineteen to fifty five years, ranging from unemployed through to professional. The interview schedule for the first interview was developed in conjunction with the questions for the online survey and data gathered were subjected to systematic multi-stage qualitative analysis (Baxter – Eyles 1997). Building on previous research under the ESRC Research Methods Programme, (Emmel et al, 2005) analyses involved inter- and cross-case comparison, identifying linkage and divergence with existing survey data (Emmel and Hughes, 2009). The interviews were conducted by a fieldworker who travelled to different locations in the UK, and in several cases conducted telephone interviews with a significant other (e.g. the father of one of the participants lived in Ireland), and in one case with a participant (who lived on an island off the coast of Scotland).[3] The interviews provided data as to why people gamble and continue to do so despite extreme losses, and the emotional and social benefits and harms they gain from this activity. The time gap (an average of three months) between the first and second interviews with the problem gamblers, and a one-off interview with a significant other in-between, provided real-time accounts of individuals' experiences of internet gambling, including in some cases individuals' efforts to reduce or stop this activity because of the effects it had, or they feared it may have, on their finances, family and work. This modest longitudinal (diachronic) element gave us the opportunity to interrogate participants' understandings of change and similarity in their internet gambling practices; examine how their significant other viewed and understood their internet gambling; and, unexpectedly, provided considerable data on how the interview process had

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[2] The results from this survey will not be discussed here although it is worth noting the dimension of time emerged as statistically significant. Analyses of these results are forthcoming.

[3] It is beyond the remit of this paper to consider in-depth the limitations and otherwise of telephone interviews. Nevertheless, it was noticeable that the telephone interviews were shorter than face-to-face, although all questions were answered. One significant other expressly mentioned that 'it was different over the phone'. Our analyses, however, were specifically concerned with how people understood what was problem gambling and with providing an account of how the gambler's gambling had become problematic. These tape-recorded telephone interviews provided these sorts of data.

been deliberately used by the internet gambler as a therapeutic mechanism (Hughes et al 2008; Valentine and Hughes, 2012 2012). Our recruitment strategy allowed us to access a diverse sample of interviewees with a diversity of gambling histories. Some participants had been gambling for years and were still gambling at the end of the research process. Others had gambled intensively for short periods (e.g. six months), losing thousands and in some cases hundreds of thousands of pounds, but who no longer gamble. Others had lost significant amounts of money but this had not resulted in major financial difficulties. Nonetheless, they all self-identified as 'problem gamblers'. When the term gambler is employed to describe the interviewees it is used as shorthand for problem internet gambler.[4]

Finally, as our intention was to collect situated accounts it is not surprising that our data are embedded within, and dependent upon, the participants' relational contexts. However, our interview schedules were constructed so as, initially, to elicit life history accounts of participants' internet gambling. These life histories, without prompts for relational narratives, engaged precisely with what Mason (2004) terms a 'relational layer'. The analyses presented here seek to contribute to these debates by forwarding a conception of relationality as integral to processes of identity formation and maintenance (see also Ribbens-McCarthy 2012). While, as Ribbens-McCarthy suggests, the language of families provides a key discourse in contemporary western society, we seek to extend these analyses by situating such identity formation and maintenance in practice rather than reducible solely to narrative.

New forms of participation? Beginning internet Gambling[5]

Our sample includes people with a diversity of gambling histories of varying lengths of participation, with very different degrees financial loss, or no financial loss at all. Participants also engage/d in a diverse array of internet gambling activities, including bingo, slots, poker, sports betting including football, rugby, cricket, horse racing, dog racing, etc. However, all the participants for this paper identified themselves as 'problem gamblers'. Our recruitment strategy, which encouraged participants to self-identify as problem gamblers without providing a structured definition of 'problem', was deliberately chosen such that we could explore any variation in definition, and the contexts in which participants had developed their own definitions of problem gambling. In providing narratives of their gambling experiences, participants generated what could be termed as accounts of *multi-phased trajectories of participation*. Without intending to posit an invariant account of 'becoming problem gamblers', it is nevertheless useful to consider participants' explanations of how internet gambling practices describe trajectories of gambling, moving from phases in which they 'maintain' their gambling, to problematic compulsion, to immersion in gambling. In considering these shifts in practice and meaning, we are able to observe negotiation processes entailed in reworking these practices as problematic. The following sections therefore piece together aspects of the different temporal textures of these trajectories of participation.

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[4] All the names included are pseudonyms; other information which could compromise the anonymity of the informants has been amended or removed to protect the disclosure of their identities. All the quotations used are verbatim. Three ellipsis dots indicates that a minor edit has been made to remove repetitions or verbal stumbles in order to enable the quotation to be more readable. Where a more substantive edit has been made this is marked in the text in square brackets.

[5] From this point, unless specifically indicated, gambling refers to *internet* rather than offline gambling.

MERIDIONALE

Opportunities of time and circumstance

> *Interviewer: So when did you actually start, start this?*
> *Man: Probably 2002 so I think I was bit bored. I was living in a house on my own so I just nothing really to do… I'd split from the girlfriend, you know, and then it was just spending the nights in front of my computer from then onwards, you know. It was quite… like I'd never gambled before at all. So it was a real new thing and didn't realise it was building from that. So it did.*
> *Man; 25 yrs, Slots, Instants*

A common motivation for beginning gambling was *boredom,* linked with particular times in their relationships where their partner was absent through work, or because the relationship had ended, or they themselves were absent from their home for a time. In this way, participants present time horizons unconstrained by the presence of their significant others who may prefer to sit in a different room in the evening, sometimes each family member sitting in a different room, or even simply staying up later at night than other family members. These open time horizons provided opportunities to gamble without explanation to, or observation by, others. The other aspect of opportunity was that of *circumstance*: internet access, and enough money to begin playing:

> *So what has triggered it recently is some money flooding in; what stops it is a huge loss or periods of activity of work. I think if I'm involved in work I have less tendency to gamble …*
> *Man, 44yrs, sports betting, horses*

Boredom and circumstance emerged as key time dimensions in which to gamble. However, participants frequently described these together with an overall context in which gambling was possible, and went on to discuss emotional histories which they felt underpinned their gambling. One woman, for example, described how she started gambling at the time her young son tried to take his life, and her closest brother was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. A large number of participants talked about difficult family circumstances in their childhood which they felt provided an emotional history to their problem gambling. These, and other participants, also felt their gambling was attributable to particular relational contexts such as dissatisfaction or boredom with their relationship; a broken relationship; or as an escape from particular aspects of their family relationships (e.g. too much time with the children, not enough time alone). Thus time horizons – here, times in which to internet gamble – are shaped through gamblers' intimate circumstances.

Timescapes of play: Pace, speed, skill

Participants chose games they felt reflected themselves and what they enjoyed. They described their early involvement with internet gambling as one of trying out different types of game and navigating to those which responded in the time frames they preferred. The type of game upon which they ended up concentrating was usually determined in large part by the tempo, speed and skill level required. Slots, for example, offered instant results, and the opportunity for hundreds if not more games per hour. Betting, however, required patience; waiting for the results of a game or a race. For some participants, this required continuous research online about form,

conditions, odds, and so forth. Global opportunity was important in sports betting in that it was accessible at any time of day or night depending on which country the race was being held. The unique time configuration of gambling practices in sports betting was indeed global (an observation that has been made elsewhere; see Reith 1999; Griffiths–Parke 2002). Similarly, poker was played internationally, although not always. The degree of skill and amount of research that was required was also discussed in terms of how this reflected the participants' identity, their relational history – learning about different sports through their partner, their parents or other relatives, being taught by friends, and so forth (see Valentine and Hughes, 2010).

Through these configurations of time, opportunity and circumstance, participants presented accounts of commencing what might be helpful to characterise as 'maintenance' phases of internet gambling. In other words, the contexts in which they began to play, the time they spent playing, the amounts they won and lost, the extent of withdrawal from participation in other relational networks was not considered to be problematic. Our analyses suggest people can 'maintain' internet gambling and the losses associated with it for years by: controlling their budget; stopping for periods of time until they are able to afford gambling again; hiding their gambling from their family, and maintaining participation in their social networks. However, changes in *duration* of play emerged as a key signifier of 'the beginning of the problem.' Through increasing duration, different timescapes of participation began to emerge. These timescapes included increasing withdrawal from family and friendship practices; changing inhabitation of their home, such as using different rooms at night, for much longer periods; and for some internet gamblers participation in national and international gambling activities (bingo, betting, poker, casino) entailed meshing with different global time zones. Adam's notions of *tempo* and *pace* are particularly relevant here, where the intensity of participation changed: more games in longer periods of time. Participants described these changing timescapes of prolonged duration of play at different times of day and night, as intimately linked to a (problematic) *compulsion* to play and concomitant loss of control.

Compulsion to immersion

Participants indicated they identified their gambling as problematic when they were no longer able to 'hold off' the gambling from shaping their broader relational practices. *Intentional* shaping practices involve activities such as deliberately starting an argument so that the internet gambler can withdraw from the family. Involuntary shaping practices might include dealing with or (more frequently) ignoring debt no longer manageable within family finances, or struggling to manage work relationships as jobs are threatened by less time at work. In this move from maintenance of internet gambling, participants described feeling less able to stop than they had previously, whilst simultaneously recognising the futility of 'chasing' wins; and the consequences of their gambling as having physical effects (sleeplessness, moodiness, etc.).

> I would finish work early to come home, I would come home in uniform, sit down, switch the internet on and that would be say three o'clock in the afternoon. Three o'clock the following morning I would go to bed, get up at seven, leave for work for half seven having gone back on the internet again, and then the cycle would begin again, three o'clock in the afternoon come back. Never ate, never drank, lost loads of weight, …
> Man, 36 yrs, Black Jack/Casino

Compulsion to immersion has been described elsewhere in the literature (Quinn 2001; Reith 1999, 2006; Wood and Griffiths 2007). For the purposes of this discussion, meanings of immersion, often described by participants as 'being in the zone', linked the *character* of their play; their sense of *escape* from others; their dissatisfaction with their lives; and, for some, their sense of connectedness with other internet gamblers who understand what it is to be 'in the zone' or who provided the social contact they lacked in their home circumstances (e.g. online bingo, poker). However, these analyses contribute to existing debates in this field by demonstrating how narratives of 'escape' and 'disconnectedness' (see Mason 2004) for internet gambling in the home were always relationally framed and constituted. The emotional tenor of disconnectedness was illustrated through descriptions of how they no longer intersected with their families; where, for example, their sense of day and night was changing as it became increasingly caught up in gambling times. In effect, the gamblers timescapes could be described as disconnecting from those of their family and workplace, and of their friends. Crucially, here, the *practices* in which gamblers participated produced experiences of fragmentation, and disconnection within their families, exacerbating experiences of gambling as problematic and provoking significant others who were aware of their gambling to protest against how much time they spent outside the family, or how 'different' they had become.

> *… the amount of time that she spent on the internet … was one of the things I was kind of mainly upset about because she was spending so much time on that. And then the money was a kind of secondary factor…*
> Husband; wife a poker player, in her 40s

Thus, meanings of family belonging and participation were re-invoked where gamblers failed, in the view of their significant others, to *do* family and *be* that person in ways that were expected.

Importantly, in accounts of how gambling shifts to *problem* gambling, participants identify how the inconsistencies engendered by the idea of using internet gambling to 'escape' begins to break down as the consequences of their gambling precipitates them increasingly quickly into particular confrontations. Such confrontations include those with banks and other credit institutions, with their partners and significant others, with work and, in one case, with formal health and social care agencies. As these confrontations gain temporal imminence, participants describe processes of reframing their understandings and engagement with internet gambling by questioning what their internet gambling has become – what it began as, what impact it has had so far on a gambler's life, and what it has become now – particularly in terms of consequences and loss.

> *…so all these monsters suddenly appeared in the space of a week and I thought, oh shit I've pushed this as far as I can now I'm facing, you know, imprisonment for not paying a fine that I've had lots of chances to pay, and possible death, you know. I just thought, if I don't do something about this I'm finished. Well not to put too fine a point on this, I thought if I don't do something about this I'm fucked, I've got to bounce back. And I'd finally realised, just for once and for all just realised that I just hated the idea of gambling, I didn't want to do it anymore and I really wanted to stop.*
> Man, 50 yrs, poker

In this way, time compression engenders a re-evaluation of internet gambling, and the meanings and experiences of *internet gambling* themselves migrate (e.g. from leisure or pastime, to problem). Through this process of problem migration, internet gamblers' timescapes are reconfigured along axes of relational identity: in recalling what one did before internet gambling, ideas of one's identity as 'spoiled' through internet gambling emerge (McIntosh – McKaganey 2000) and contribute to the gamblers' reworking of their internet gambling as a problem. Dale, for example, gives an example of how his identity as a *father* was spoiled through his internet gambling:

> It affected my behaviour towards my son because I mean I've done some terrible things. I mean I've never done anything to harm anyone else or anything criminal you know, but emotionally in some of the things I've done are really bad. Like I've literally sprinted down the street because I've been on the internet, to pick him up from school, because where we used to live was literally 200 yards from the school. … he'd be basically the last one to be picked up … And then I've picked him up, dashed down all of a fluster and come home and, you know, rather than taking an interest in what he's done at school or his homework I'd sort of, you go onto the PlayStation or what you do now is stick a DVD on, and … shoving him on his PlayStation … Man, 40yrs, sports betting

In response to the *meaning migration* of participation in internet gambling, internet gamblers describe trying to solve the problem by winning enough to pay back the debt, rather than playing for play's sake or playing to 'escape'. These changes engender corresponding shifts in understandings of self-actualisation (Goffman 1972) through internet gambling: both the character of participation and anticipation of its future duration changes. In effect, internet gambling fails as a set of practices through which it is possible to reformulate experiences of oneself as 'beyond' or 'outside' everyday responsibilities; these are carried into the internet arena and tensions and anxieties induced by internet gambling are further played out in increasingly desperate attempts to win. Experiences of relational constraint and conflict (Mason 2004) are exacerbated and, as debt and other horizons close in, gamblers are often thrust into processes of disclosure to significant others. In these processes, definitions of problem internet gambling are reformulated and elaborated as they are renegotiated through and, in turn renegotiate, the gamblers' relational networks.

A problem shared? Problem gambling and problem migration

Disclosure and problem migration

Disclosure emerged as a key practice in defining the problem, a strategy for controlling the problem (often understood as the compulsion) and, importantly, for controlling potential loss for the internet gambler (of partner, children, house etc.) (Valentine and Hughes 2010). While we interviewed some participants whose families were aware of their gambling all along, many participants described delaying disclosure to significant others until a crisis occurred. Others disclosed to national media as a means of telling their whole story without being interrupted by their partner and for 'getting it over and done with in one go' (woman, 51yrs, poker). Incidences of disclosure were described as marking either the 'end' or the 'beginning' of the problem for different people as first, 'the problem' is defined, and second, as it migrates over time. S and K's narrative is a good example of these accounts:

Interviewer: And what was it that kept you from telling K about this debt?
S: I think it was, obviously the amount of debt, but I think the main thing I was worried about
was losing her and the kids, and I didn't want that to happen, and I knew she was going to
find out eventually, but I don't know, I just was hoping like, someone would come along and
pay it all off sort of thing, and not worry about it. So I was just hiding and cheating meself
as well so, and not being honest.
Man, 29yrs, Poker, Blackjack, Casino

The extent of S's debt was discovered by accident. S, however, considered the point of disclosure marked the end of his 'problem' which he describes as an unacknowledged addiction, characterised by an out of control compulsion. Within his narrative, this compulsion was consistently situated in talk about how it lead to escalating debt, and in turn what it would mean to disclose the debt to his wife. For S, disclosure was a process of taking control over the problem, even though this entailed shifting responsibility to his compulsion, and importantly to his wife, K. As soon as K discovered his debt, she took control of family finances, his internet access, his access to cash, decisions about their financial assets and decisions about her return to work in order to earn enough to keep up with repayments. In this way, S effectively 'self-excluded' himself from internet gambling, thus thwarting any compulsion he may experience.

For K, 'the problem' *began* at the point of disclosure rather than ended and was the start of a process of 'problem migration'. Initially, K describes herself completely preoccupied with the financial consequences of the debt S had racked up. Once they developed strategies for dealing with the debt (selling off an investment property they had, K going back to work full-time and becoming the primary earner), the financial problem migrated to a series of emotional problems.

I mean it's an awful lot of money, but, you know, we'll settle…from a practical point of view,
you know, I can kind of cope with that … It's the high end of emotional things that you go
through, what a change you see in your relationship with your partner from one day to the
next, you know, because it really, really as I say did feel like I was going from being with a
partner and [several] children to go… the whole responsibility and much more debt that I
thought we had and [having one more child] … I was just trying to understand because that
was my biggest worry as I say at the start I couldn't understand. I couldn't understand why
anybody would do that. Why anybody from a non-gambler's point of view, it's such a selfish
thing to do to lock yourself away for hours … and, you know, spend thousands of pounds that
you didn't have, which is taking money away from the family. And, you know, it just seemed
so selfish and I was really after an answer to why would anyone do that.
K, wife, 4 children

K goes on to describe how she struggled with feelings of anger as emerging aspects of her husband's behaviour occurred to her. For example, she describes her anger and distress when she realised that the days he had been at home ostensibly taking care of their children, he had been neglecting them for internet gambling. In this way, S's identity as a father is 'spoiled' for K; he is reduced to 'another child' rather than a partner in her narrative, and the very texture of their relationship changes as she can no longer trust or rely on him.[6] This 'spoiled' identity

is reinforced through S's sense of his own failure towards his family as a provider and a father. Further, the problem of his gambling participation is reworked through therapeutic discourses, as one which implicates her:

> So I still don't know what it was but, you know, there's a nagging doubt at the back of my mind that it was down to, you know, there's something down to me.
> K

This was not consistent across the sample; however, a number of significant others considered either themselves or others (e.g. the gambler's parents) as having responsibility in the formation of the 'problem'.

Across the sample, then, the meanings and significance of debt and money problems migrate over time and are reframed as emotional problems for the gambler and their significant others. Even where participants had not accrued debt, disclosure revealed the extent of their compulsion or involvement in internet gambling and regular spending which partners often resented or deplored. Money spent was reframed as lack of responsibility, wasted opportunity and a normative gulf between the internet gambler and their significant other. Processes of disclosure, therefore, entail reworking meanings and understandings of 'the problem'; not once, or twice, but over long periods of time. Further, in identifying 'what happened' and 'what the problem is' gambling discursively accrues an ontological position/state which requires particular sorts of attention depending on the characteristics of 'the problem' – for example, whether it is an addiction, an habituation, a problem of debt, or a problem of time. The process of defining 'the problem' is also one that *anchors* it in time, positioning a moment from which people date subsequent events (I then went to therapy; I haven't gambled for x number of days). Thus, a dominant tendency is for gamblers to 'fix' the character or nature of practices (inherently dynamic, changing, processual) as 'some-thing'. In other words, fixing the problem can be seen as a process by which practices accrue an ontological presence, a substance that is characteristically rendered as the pivot to a new form of self-relationship.

Additionally, disclosure and 'fixing the problem' fundamentally involves reworking identities within these relationships, often entailing reconfiguration in broader nexuses of relationships (changing jobs, going to prison, going into therapy). In this way, ideas of 'problem gambling' as something the gambler *has* might reflect rationalisations of 'addiction' used within these relationships in order to displace responsibility from either the gambler or their partner; yet to concur with this way of thinking entrenches us in either explaining the problem, or rejecting ideas of addiction. In doing so this obscures the processes whereby 'the problem' is something the internet gambler and, in turn, their significant others negotiate and *do*, interwoven with meanings of family, and how the problem shifts over time.

Different visibilities: now you see me, now you don't

We suggest recognition of the reconfiguring practices in which internet gamblers engage in processes of identity migration (becoming non-gamblers, recovering 'spoiled identities' in their own and others' eyes) engages us in considering how they emerge within and disappear from different relational networks in which a key characteristic of participation is *time*. Those

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[6] See Reith – Dobbie 2012. for a fuller discussion of 'spoiled identities'.

participants who described themselves as working on their 'recovery' from problem gambling identified a core set of practices around which such 'recovery' was 'displayed' (Finch 2007; Hughes and Valentine, 2008). 'Recovery' in the transcripts was not confined to discourses of addiction (e.g, from an illness); other processes of recovery included recovering lost trust; recovering damaged relationships; partners recovering from effects of disclosure and gambling; recovery of spoiled identities and developing a non-gambling identity; and recovery for the family of their losses (money, financial stability, emotional trauma). Practices of displayed 'recovery' involve working on and within relationships with significant others (parents, partners, children), around meanings of engagement and visibility, often summarised as *being there*.

Being there

Spoiled identities, betrayal of trust, negotiations around responsibility and reintegration within relational networks, such as familial networks, involve *being there* as an ostentatious practice of 'display'. In this way, internet gamblers characteristically seek to knit together their and their family's timescapes through engaging in specific, and emotionally charged practices, in order to demonstrate they are no longer gambling, but also that they are actively seeking reintegration within particular relationships.

> But I think you know, over the last… certainly a year maybe we've made a lot… we've made a good attempt to do things together, going out more. Not doing anything special I mean just for example on Friday night he came home from work and I said right, let's take the car out and let's nip down to Peebles, I fancy a fish supper. You know, this nice fish and chip down there, you know, so it's an hour's run, you know, so let's do that, let's walk along the high street, you know. … We'd done nothing special but we did it together, you know, and that's what counts. Woman, mid-40s, online poker

Such practices also include help-seeking, such as attending GamAnon meetings, or other therapeutic venues. Several participants began attending these forums for their partners but, as time progressed, increasingly for themselves as they engaged in processes of identity formation of non- or ex-gambler. Maintenance of this process of identity formation is achieved through reworking space–time practices of everyday life. Thus, in addition to reinvigorating previous friendship networks, participants describe displacing longing to gamble by engaging in new hobbies and pastimes, re-engaging in family practices such as doing more with their children (part of recovering a spoiled parental identity) and doing more domestic work around the house. Thus, these practices of reworking relational identities involves a fundamental shift in visibility for gamblers. They become visible for *not* doing something they were doing invisibly before and, further, become visible in both formal and informal relational networks such as self-help groups, and with financial organisations.

Strategies for *financial* recovery, where people engage with credit agencies, banks, financial support and advice services, etc., are also infused with emotional meanings. Engagement in these networks signifies taking control and responsibility, being honest and facing up to things, getting 'better' (illness, moral recovery), and moving beyond addictive behaviour. Across the sample, however, even where debt was being successfully managed within families, participants continued to apportion responsibility to credit agencies for the extent of debt which they had 'been permitted' to accumulate. This parcelling out of responsibility carried across into signifi-

cant other interviews, surfacing in their discussions about who or what was to blame, who or what was the problem, and how 'things' had ended up this way. In this manner, the ubiquitous discourse of 'problem gambling' as something an individual has, rather than a relational practice, continues as a discursive 'stumbling block' for families who continue to seek to discover 'an answer' despite a history of meaning formation and negotiation they have provided at interview.

Conclusion

In this paper we have sought to problematize a widespread focus on the isolated, individual gambler as the primary unit of analysis for internet gambling. In doing so we have reframed the question of whether the isolated character of internet gambling participation inhibits or exacerbates '*problem* gambling', and instead considered *how* internet gambling practices are problematized in the home. In brief, we suggest the myriad of interdependencies that are shaped as gamblers pursue opportunities to gamble, opportunities to disclose the consequences of their gambling practices, and opportunities to display recovered identities, underscores a fundamentally relational character to internet gambling.

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We suggest temporal dynamics are particularly important to understanding the case of internet gambling which has some important differences from other forms of gambling relating centrally to the temporal qualities of 'online play'; and to how gamblers strategically position temporal practices within, and as part of, family practices, in order to produce opportunities to gamble on the internet. In relation to this undertaking, the paper has focused upon the *multi-phased trajectories of participation* of online gamblers; in doing so, it centrally explores how discursive categories of ‹problem gambling› are produced and reproduced, interpreted, maintained, resisted, and contested by gamblers, their significant others, and by other members of the broader social networks of which they form a part. Elias's notion of 'social time' is crucial to understanding how particular 'times' serve to characterise and fix emotional meanings implicit in (non-gambling) practices. For example, 'being there' at particular times such as meal times, engaging in family practices as part of being and doing family serves to 'display' emotional commitment to those within the family. Further, and crucially, these temporally-bound practices constitute practices of self-actualisation, comprising extended moments (time with the children) in which evidence of identity migration can be 'displayed' to others within the family and further serve to 'repair' spoiled identities. Most importantly, in this way we have sought to establish that identities within families, and meanings of family, are not only sustained through narratives or discourses of family, but are situated within and produced through particular *practices* over time. This paper thus offers an opportunity to consider the locality of embodied practice in the context of a ubiquitous and geographically unbounded technology. ✳

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