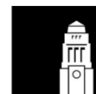
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Hughes, K. orcid.org/0000-0002-5711-0353, Hughes, J. and Tarrant, A. (2020) Re-approaching interview data through qualitative secondary analysis: interviews with internet gamblers. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 23 (5). pp. 565-579. ISSN 1364-5579

https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1766759

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Kahryn Hughes, Jason Hughes & Anna Tarrant (2020) Re-approaching interview data through qualitative secondary analysis: interviews with internet gamblers, International Journal of Social Research Methodology, DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2020.1766759

Re-approaching interview data through Qualitative Secondary Analysis: Interviews with Internet Gamblers

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PRE PRINT VERSION

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Abstract

This paper addresses two interrelated questions concerning what interview data are and how researchers might use them. The first considers the value of a shift from a predominant or exclusive focus upon how data are constructed and produced at interview, and towards how such data might be *apprehended* through different forms of *research engagement*. The second question relates to how and what qualitative secondary analysis (QSA) might be used to tell about the social world. In exploring this, we advance a critique of the divide between primary and secondary analysis, recasting the debate in terms of different degrees and qualities of 'proximity' and 'distance' from the formative contexts of data generation. We revisit a common assumption underpinning ethnographic approaches, that researchers are required to 'be there' in interview encounters to say anything of worth about the data generated. Instead we propose both proximity to, and distance from, the temporal, relational and epistemic contexts of data production offer their own distinctive affordances. Using QSA of interview data from a study of problem internet gambling as an empirical crucible, we explore these ideas, considering the kinds of participation that interviewees develop through their reciprocal engagement with interviewers. We illustrate how participants reflexively negotiate the limits to the 'stock' of narratives within which to frame and recount their experiences. Finally, we show how interview data can be used both to *speak of* the temporal, relational, spatial, epistemic contexts of their production, and also to *speak to* contexts and questions beyond these.

Keywords: epistemology, ethnographic principles, problem internet gambling, qualitative interviews, qualitative secondary analysis, temporality.

PRE PRINT VERSION

Introduction

This paper addresses two interrelated areas of concern. The first relates to the question of what interview data are and what they can be used to say. Building on arguments we have developed elsewhere (Hughes, J. *et al.* this issue), we move beyond a preoccupation with the intrinsic character of interview data in order to consider the significance of the modes of apprehension that are brought to these through different forms of research engagement.

This undertaking informs a second linked concern: of the possibilities for, and usefulness of, Qualitative Secondary Analysis (QSA) as a particular mode of research engagement (Tarrant 2016; Tarrant and Hughes 2019a; Hughes and Tarrant 2020a; Hughes and Tarrant 2020b; Tarrant and Hughes, 2020; Hughes J *et al.* 2020). Here, through exploring questions of 'proximity' and 'distance', we revisit the distinction between primary and secondary data and analysis, noting the problems with that distinction, and the affordances of our approach for how data might be re-imagined and apprehended.

Bringing together what are often treated as two distinct areas of debate — debates centring on what interviews can be used to say, and those relating to how such data might be repurposed — we present and discuss QSA of interview data with people who self-identified as 'problem internet gamblers'. We use this work as an empirical crucible within which to advance a series of arguments. First, partly in line with writers elsewhere (Silverman, 2017; Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019), we explore how interviews and the data that are produced therein, can be understood as shaped by, and expressive of, social relationships and processes which extend beyond those of their immediate contexts of production (Tarrant and Hughes, 2019a, 2019b). Second, we advance a view of interviews wherein participants' accounts are both constrained *and* enabled by cultural narratives, idioms and disciplinary tropes. Here, we focus primarily on those which relate to narratives of addiction. Third, in doing so, we part company from an ethnographic principle whereby it is only through direct sensory apprehension of what people do in specific social contexts that we can develop a secure empirical basis to say anything of worth about them. We show how 'remove' from the initial contexts of data production — including the sights, smells, textures, and manifold sensory data accessed by 'being there' — can also afford insights about participants as well as about the research team and the questions they felt compelled to ask. Here we shall show, again in relation to QSA of the internet gambling data, how temporal and epistemic distance provides further insights and opportunities not so readily available at the time the original research was undertaken.

Taken together, our argument centrally explores what and how the QSA of interview data can be used to tell about the social world, including that beyond the immediate contexts of interview encounters. In doing so, we demonstrate how participants, when reaching the limits of what narrative tracts enable them to say and do, can be aware of those limits and reflexively seek to reach beyond these. We show how a reconsideration of why and how people engage in interviews can be used to tell about, for instance, the different kinds of expectations, plans, intentions and purposes for engaging in research, and how these must be considered as reciprocal with those of interview researchers. Finally, in promoting the argument that cultural narratives, tropes, idioms and so forth can be reflexively mobilised in the service of various forms of purposeful participation in interview settings, we acknowledge the power resources, theorising, and intentionality that participants themselves bring to the interview encounter.

Re-thinking Interviews: 'proximity' and 'distance'

In qualitative research we are often concerned with how data are shaped by participants and researchers through different forms of methodological and theoretical engagement (Ezzy, 2010).

PRE PRINT VERSION

These questions are integral to understanding what sorts of 'evidence' such data comprise, and how they might be used to 'tell about' society (Becker, 2017).

There are two distinct positions on how interview data can be used to 'speak of the social world' which, nonetheless, share a certain common ground. The first is exemplified by work which explores the profoundly personal dynamics of research encounters (e.g. Birch and Miller 2000; Holland, 2007; Holloway and Jefferson, 2012) wherein researchers develop embodied and tacit forms of knowledge and understanding that comes from 'being there' (e.g. Mauthner 2012). From such a position practices of, and investments in, the co-construction of interview narratives by both researchers and participants nevertheless produce what might be considered as a unique data fingerprint expressive of precisely those particular relational and situated dynamics (*ibid.*). Such debates are also tied to ideas about how social relationships comprising interview encounters produce the possibilities for interview talk, and so both enable and constrain the talk thus produced (Duncombe and Jessop, 2007; Mahtani, 2012). Particular emphasis is given to asymmetrical power chances whereby researchers/researched can be understood to have differential opportunities for defining both the subject and object of the interview (Crow 2012; Edwards and Brannelly, 2017). For some writers within this tradition, researchers' connection to the contexts of the interview encounter shapes their analytic opportunity. The 'closer' an interviewer might be to the interview context, the more capable they are of ensuring the 'epistemological integrity and plausibility of their interpretations' (Mauthner, 2012, p. 168).

Similarly, albeit for different reasons, other writers cast doubt on the practice of treating what is said at interview as a kind of reified neutral product, that might somehow be divorced from the situated dynamics of interview encounters themselves (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 2017; Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019) (also, see Hughes, J., *et al.* this Themed Section). Such authors question the utility of treating interview data as 'data', and instead rightfully draw our attention towards always thinking of people *saying and doing things* in interviews — engaged in performative *talk*, and biographical, emotional and narrative *work*. This is a marked step away from the idea of interview data being able somehow to 'speak for themselves'. These authors critique the notion of interview encounters as spaces within which experience is recounted via an authentic voice permitted to speak by virtue of the particular affordances of the research dynamic. Instead, they are at pains to show how such narration of experience is infused with, and mediated by, cultural tropes and idioms (Silverman, 2017; Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019).

Accordingly, these ostensibly antagonistic positions share a common ethnographic principle: that it is only through direct sensory apprehension — observation — of what people do in specific social contexts that we can say anything of worth about them. As such, interview data, particularly those constituted through the narrative production of the biographically intelligible self at interview can be seen as at once 1) emergent from the specific situational dynamics comprising interview encounters; 2) as produced at the interactional juncture between researcher and participant epistemologies; and 3) culturally mediated (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2017; Roulston, 2018; Atkinson and Sampson, 2019). From this position, the reuse of interview data through QSA becomes problematic, particularly in relation to how far it is possible to develop insights that speak beyond the situationally-specific contexts subsequent to the original research (Mauthner 2012; see also Blakely and Moles, 2017). In those cases where data are consciously 'co-produced' what, then, are the distinctive epistemic, ethical, and substantive challenges of secondary researchers revisiting existing studies (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003)? Indeed, is the co-production of data 'insights' dependent upon co-present and synchronous forms of face-to-face engagement? Moreover, given the culturally-mediated character of such data, it becomes particularly problematic to treat interviews as a source of insight into particular experiences.

PRE PRINT VERSION

However, in pursuing their positions, advocates of both critiques discussed above ultimately conflate what can be said at interviews *with what interviews can be used to say*. Put simply, it is not just what interviewees and interviewers say at interview that is important, it is also what such 'talk' when *treated* as particular kinds of evidence through specific forms of research engagement and apprehension, can be used to say about the social world (Hughes, J. *et al.* this issue). Both positions discussed above involve particular modes of research engagement and apprehension — one in which 'being there' affords access via participation to the experiential, the other in which the experiential cannot be accessed because of cultural mediation (cultural tropes, scripts, narratives). Nonetheless, arguably in both approaches data are imagined and apprehended in ways consistent with particular epistemic priorities which themselves are worthy of further scrutiny. Such priorities pivot on notions of 'proximity': temporal, relational, epistemic, interpretive, experiential, all of which are centrally called into question in the practice of QSA, which typically involves varying degrees of 'distance' from initial formative research encounters.

Elsewhere, we have outlined an approach to research engagement that centres more on the practice of 'synthesis' than 'analysis' (Tarrant and Hughes, 2019b; see also Hughes, J. *et al.* this Themed Section). This involves rethinking questions of 'distance' and 'proximity', and entails a departure from the notion that opportunities for insight are inextricably tied to co-presence in the immediate contexts of data production. Instead, other kinds of observations are enabled precisely when we are not there 'in the moment', and when we treat and apprehend interview data in ways different from the original researchers. Accordingly, we challenge the notion that 'remove' from the original spatial, temporal, and epistemic context of the production of 'primary' data is *exclusively* a form of deficit — a loss of something otherwise available (albeit not always fully accessible) in the moment (see also Irwin and Winterton, 2011a, 2011b). Furthermore, the idea that 'distance' is always an obfuscation, a dilution of authenticity, which leaves us invariably in epistemic debt — in a position of sensory empirical paucity, and lacking any capacity for regaining this (assumed to be part and parcel of 'being there') — also warrants some further consideration.

Re-using Qualitative Interview Data

Early debate on whether it was possible to re-use qualitative data maintained somewhat rigid distinctions between primary and secondary analysts based on their connections or otherwise to their contexts of production (Moore, 2007; Geiger *et al.*, 2010). In her seminal paper, Niamh Moore (2007) questioned the distinction between primary and secondary analysts, pointing out that for analysis to become 'secondary', data must become 'secondary' too. She argued that to talk about 'pre-existing data' blinds us to how these are co-produced in new contexts (*ibid.*). Instead, Moore proposes that (re)use involves primary analysis of a different order of data (Moore, *ibid.*; see also Henderson et al., 2006).

We agree with Moore that the boundaries between primary and secondary researchers are often blurred. However, there has been great innovation in methods of qualitative data reuse, partly spurred by her key contribution to this debate, and the further development of QSA as a burgeoning methodological field. Our position is that analyses become 'secondary' in as much as the data involved are being put to new uses beyond those underpinning their original generation, thus recasting the data as a different 'order', even when this occurs within the team or context of the original research. In effect, this idea of secondary analysis is consistent with Moore's, but requires us to articulate the range of approaches and practices involved in producing different orders of data. As researchers, we are always at a remove *and* we are always proximal. What varies is the different *degrees* and *qualities* of proximity and distance in relation to different kinds of

PRE-PRINT VERSION

relationship with the interview, different kinds of endeavour, different kinds of question (Moore, 2007; Geiger *et al.*, 2010; Irwin, 2013; Tarrant and Hughes, 2019a; Hughes and Tarrant, 2020a). This undertaking, in turn, necessitates reflexive engagement with how we recast datasets as theoretical objects, identifying not only how they were produced, but how and why they may be reused (see also Hughes, *et al.*, 2016; Tarrant and Hughes 2019a). Distinguishing such complexities of data re-use through new languages of QSA enables us to 'write in' different temporalities and different modes of analytical engagement. Thus, the language of QSA is infused with particular modes of epistemological reflexivity which require more exact explication.

Interview Dynamics

Part of the epistemological reflexivity necessitated by the QSA of interview data pertains to the particular dynamics of interviews as research encounters. As we have argued elsewhere (see Hughes, J. *et al.* this Themed Section), a core problem with viewing interview encounters as arenas within which respondents make various kinds of narrative appeal is that it assumes a specific kind of intentionality and mode of participation by interviewees (and interviewers). In turn, certain forms of power dynamic are axiomatically presupposed, and the characteristics of interviews are stylistically reduced to a singular, essentially invariant paradigm. In response to this position, we develop a view of interview encounters as at once social arenas with their own emergent dynamics and affordances, and, simultaneously, as nexuses of relationships which extend across space and time considerably beyond the immediate contexts of data production (Fink and Lomax, 2016; Tarrant and Hughes, 2019b). Consequently, we view interview encounters as infused with broader social relationships and enduring axes of social distribution which should be neither presupposed nor downplayed, but instead, must be explored substantively as part and parcel of research processes (Skeggs *et al.*, 2008). Accordingly, our concern here is to consider how we may use methods of QSA to interrogate features of participants' research involvement, how these are structured by particular relational dynamics, but not reducible to such in any simple sense. In this way, we explore *both* how participants actively seek to engage in interviews to address their own interests (Thapar-Björkert and Henry, 2004; Karnieli-Miller *et al.*, 2009; Rodríguez-Dorans, 2018) *and* how the possibilities for their research participation are contoured through, and reflective of, broader relational contexts (Tarrant and Hughes, 2019b).

PRE PRINT VERSION

The ESRC/RiGT study and Methods of QSA

The interview data we revisited for our QSA work was collected in a study that examined the impact of problem internet gambling on family relationships funded by Economic and Social Research Council/Responsibility in Gambling Trust (ESRC/RiGT) (Valentine and Hughes, 2006–2008)[i]. The small body of then emerging literature on the topic was heavily characterised by psychologistic approaches to understanding problem internet gambling. The quest to uncover the 'essence' of the gambler's 'problem' preoccupied much of the debate, and still does albeit with some notable exceptions (see Reith and Dobby, 2013; Dobby *et al.* 2018). Valentine and Hughes proposed a critical sociological approach to challenge what they considered to be a problematic hegemonic focus on the 'isolated, individual gambler'. Their study explored what meanings were invoked (about family, identity, problem and so on) when people talked about problem gambling, and in this way investigated 'processes of relating' (Mason 2004; Valentine and Hughes 2010; Valentine and Hughes 2012; Hughes and Valentine 2016). An online scoping survey was used to recruit self-identified 'problem internet gamblers' to the study, and two waves of life history interviews were completed with 26 gamblers (20 men, 6 women). The study also collected one-off in-depth interviews with a significant other (e.g. child, sibling, parents and a non-kin personal assistant) nominated by and recruited through participant gamblers in efforts to explore how and whether people negotiated the definitional work of 'problem' internet gambling (n=69 interviews).

Importantly, at the time of the original study, internet gambling was one of the fastest growing global industries, yet little published work focused specifically on *internet* gambling. Thus, the interviews were forays into what was at the time relatively 'unknown territory' for researchers, and a still nascent one for participants. Accordingly, participants were repeatedly asked to explain internet-specific gambling terminology, which differed from the reported language of offline gambling. Crucially, the research team were reaching out to the research participants as 'experts through experience', while simultaneously — as it emerged through the study — participants were reaching out to the researchers for their professional expertise.

The original team met regularly during the fieldwork phase. Early in the process of gathering the second round of interviews with the internet gamblers, the interviewer, Dr Kenten, pointed out that several gamblers had told her that they had disclosed the full extent of their internet gambling to their families directly *after* the first interview. In team meetings, she raised this as a question — why? What was the relationship between research participation and disclosure to significant others? The team responded by including interview questions asking participants why they had taken part in the research and what, if anything, they had got out of it. In return, the participants made a range of surprising, and unanticipated, disclosures. Early team-based analyses identified a complex array of participant-expressed motivations including interviews as therapeutic, as a rehearsal to disclosure, as a means of 'getting the story straight', and as 'cautionary tales' for policy and the public more generally. While discussions about these unexpected findings formed the core of a number of conference presentations by the ESRC/RiGT team, they were never formalised in any written outputs.

Our concern to explore how such interview data might be re-apprehended through QSA, plus our related concern to think about 'remove' from the original contexts of data production *and* the significance of cultural forms and idioms in interview talk, leant us to revisit these particular data. Accordingly, we focused on those aspects of the dataset concerning why people participated in the research, what it did to and for them, both in form and content, the kinds of 'appeal' and 'intentionality' that participants made, and what it was that participants *brought with them* to interview. Our concern was to steer a course between, on the one hand, an analytic focus on the *forms* of interviews, the rules and expectations within them and, on the other, a primary focus on the intimate interpersonal and emotional dynamics of interviews. Of particular interest to us were these provisional findings: that the interviews were engendering practices of self-revelation either at interview, or to participants' families afterwards; that they were encounters in which participants were compelled and able to 'get their stories' straight; that they were involved in making various kinds of appeal, 'am I normal?'; and that their talk followed the contours of narratives of addiction. These findings lend themselves to the reading that such exchanges were in important respects consistent with characteristics of the 'interview society' (e.g. Atkinson and Silverman 1997). Simultaneously, they also align with work exploring the therapeutic experiences and potential of interview encounters (Birch and Miller, 2000) deriving from intimate, personal talk (Rodríguez-Dorans, 2017). Both kinds of readings have extensive utility, particularly when brought together and used as a platform for additional lines of enquiry. Consistent with our attempts to explore empirically the different plans, intentions, practices and forms of engagement undertaken by participants, as well as how interview data are expressive of broader relational contexts, we set out to consider how QSA might be able to take our analysis further in these respects.

For our collective QSA (Tarrant and Hughes, 2020) we had access to a partial sample from the ESRC/RiGT study of 28 interviews with gamblers and their significant others. Employing a retrospective ethical approach (Hughes and Tarrant, 2020b) the data were shared using safe end-to-end encryption software. Hughes (Jason) and Tarrant had access to the transcripts but not the

PRE-PRINT VERSION

limited case data, and nobody had access to any participants' personal or contact details as these had been destroyed as part of GDPR compliance without the original team's knowledge. To begin our analyses, Hughes (Kahryn) developed a file of extracts which contained participants' responses to questions about why they had taken part in the research. The extensive extracts contained transcribed sections of the preceding and following interview talk. By including these larger sections, our early readings of the data alerted us to numerous instances where participants responded to questions about why they took part in the research with questions of their own. Participants' questions included asking about the research team's understanding of problem internet gambling, why the research was being conducted, for whom, and what the research had discovered thus far. The transcripts were searched for further questions asked by participants. These additional data extracts were brought to the larger file. Closer analyses of whole transcripts were then undertaken (Tarrant and Hughes 2019a). Each author undertook their own analysis, which was multi-directional, and multi-modular (Tarrant and Hughes, 2020).

Earlier we indicated our utilisation of a 'synthetic' approach to re-engaging with interview data. We have elsewhere articulated in greater depth what we mean in this respect (see Hughes, J. *et al.* this Themed Section)[ii]. For present purposes, this approach has entailed treating questions of temporal and spatial remove from interview encounters not as a binary divide (between either 'being there', or 'looking back') but as a question of different degrees and qualities of proximity and distance, involvement and detachment, from the original study and its re-apprehension through secondary analysis. Here we seek to explore the affordances of *both* greater 'distance' and greater 'proximity', and to combine, alloy, and blend insights from each through the process of re-apprehension. More concretely, this has entailed the formation of a synthesis of our individual 'analyses', of the interview data we considered, through collective conversation (Bornat, *et al.*, 2008; Tarrant and Hughes 2019a; Tarrant and Hughes, 2020), with a particular sensitivity to consistencies and differences between those directly involved in the original study and those not. Part of this conversation entailed the development of a heightened temporal reflexivity — how in reapprehending these data did they appear different, perhaps in relation to their revealing an 'of their time' character, or, say, in terms of their now offering analytical potential in relation to debates that have developed since the initial time of their inception. Simultaneously, we also sought to return to the 'surprising' and 'unexpected' responses from participants, as 'analytical leads' — opportunities for the pursuit of particular lines of enquiry. In this sense, our approach to the data aligns with the substantive focus of the original team. In the original study, the research team mapped out the range of participant-expressed rationalisations for taking part in the research, as well as arranging the questions they asked into broad thematic groups. Through our QSA, we brought these thematic groupings into a dialogue exploring the inter-relationship between the form and content of each interview considered, as well as the outputs from the original study (e.g. Valentine and Hughes, 2010; Kenten et al, 2011; Valentine and Hughes, 2012; Hughes and Valentine, 2010; 2016).

We combined our own insights in the production of the findings and arguments presented here. Together, these discussions are presented as a form of depth QSA (Tarrant and Hughes, 2019a), focusing specifically on methodological insight in tandem with substantive empirical development. Rather than providing a more detailed and a straightforward thematically-driven analytical narrative, then, this paper explicates and interrogates some of the core debates discussed above as part and parcel of a substantive exploration of problem internet gamblers' purposeful participation in interview-based research. Accordingly, additional details of our analytical process are thus best treated not through further abstracted exegesis of procedure, but rather through the actualisation of our approach in the passages that follows.

PRE PRINT VERSION

Explanations, questions and 'purposeful participation'

Across the sample, numerous participants discussed how they had made a deliberate choice between contacting formal support agencies (e.g. GamCare or Gamblers Anonymous), or the research team. Typically, they discussed how they had opted for interviews with the research team since these afforded a more congenial space; some stating that they had tried formal help agencies but disliked their experiences. Interviews for the study therefore were often a deliberately sought out opportunity for participants to engage in particular sorts of talk.

> *Jephcott*: … I actually thought GamCare was just a way of contacting Gamblers Anonymous.
> *Interviewer*: No it's a separate organisation.
> *Jephcott*: Oh I didn't know that. I have heard of GamCare, yeah, but I will consider that, yeah, definitely. And I might feel different. A part of the reason, a bit selfish reason, for inviting you here is that I thought it, it might be you know, the start of the end to all this. Because I haven't gone to Gamblers Anonymous. The thought of it doesn't appeal to me, and I thought this might be, you know, a cathartic experience if that's the right word… the last thing I want to hear is, you know, really hard luck stories of other people [laughs] it would just depress me I think …'
> *Jephcott, round three interviews.*

Here and elsewhere participants' talk can be observed to draw from an understanding of interviews consistent with their more general 'social life' (Atkinson and Silverman 1997). The idea of the interview as an alternative form of therapy is particularly significant in this respect. Indeed, in a number of cases, the interviews were explicitly likened to therapeutic encounters or having potential therapeutic value, thus bringing them discursively closer to venues for the sorts of 'therapeutic talk' that would otherwise have been provided by formal support agencies. Jephcott, above, further describes research participation as a form of *intervention*, echoed by a number of other participants across the sample.

> When I thought about phoning you's like a little cry for help… I don't know, I don't know. *Brian, round one*

Subsequent to the internet gambling interviews that are the focus of our analysis here, Hughes undertook research in low income contexts, observing how some participants used discrete policy terms to describe themselves in order to broker access to resources (Hughes and Emmel, 2012). Through our QSA, we found consistencies with this research in terms of how gamblers expressed the need to identify as having a *problem* in order to engage with formal agencies to access support in developing explanations about their experiences. Participants in the ESRC/RiGT study typically approached interviews in this vein, treating them as encounters in which they should make 'appeals', often positioning researchers as the arbiters of whether their 'problem' internet gambling was 'normal' (Savage 2011; Blakely and Moles 2017). Once again, here the utility of considering the more general, historically-emergent cultural dynamics of interviews is particularly fruitful and instructive to understanding these behaviours (see also Atkinson *et al.* 2003; Whitaker and Atkinson 2019).

This tendency for participants to foreground the therapeutic potential of interview participation was often explicit and reflexive. Indeed, one participant, Martin, said that he had hoped the interviewer would be able to 'psychologise' him. However, importantly, the interview was not approached by participants as identical to formal agency therapy. Such formal modes of support were often described as additionally problematic in as much as they were said to encourage people

PRE PRINT VERSION

to *address* the 'problem' of their gambling such as through stopping or changing their behaviour. By contrast, in participants' narratives, interviews consistently were approached as offering a 'safe space of disclosure', providing opportunities to test out ideas about their gambling behaviour. That said, for some participants, taking part in the study was indeed apprehended as a moment from which to stop gambling (see, once again, the extract from Jephcott's transcript above). Significantly, however, interviews were discursively positioned as cessation interventions *by* such participants. For example, one participant described taking part in the research as a form of 'display' to his wife of his determination to stop internet gambling (Finch 2007; Hughes and Valentine, 2010). For this participant, the research was both a form of help-seeking and treatment. His wife too, he suggested, recognised the therapeutic qualities of in-depth interviews, and together their combined narrative suggested that if he told researchers he was not internet gambling anymore this operated as a form of accountability.

Part of the help-seeking practised at interview would often involve participants pursuing their own lines of research questioning — typically in order to develop a basis for comparing their experiences to those of others. For instance, interviews with significant others might involve them seeking to compare their partner's situation with that of others in order to test theories, gather data, and gain insights into whether and how such others found 'ways out' of their problem internet gambling.

> In your interviews, people that are stuck in this, you know, like in Tricia's [James's partner's] situation, have they got a lot of time on their hands and are they finding ways out of it?
> *James, significant other interview*

The key point we highlight here is that participants brought their own theories (in James's case, that problem internet gambling related to temporal and spatial contexts), plans, intentions, strategies and lines of questioning to interviews. These arguably extended considerably beyond making certain kinds of 'appeal' through their narrative work in producing the biographically intelligible self; though as we have shown, this aspect to their interview talk was also significant. Participants described themselves as making strategic use of interview participation in order, variously, to address expressed confusion and ambiguity about how to understand their (or their partner's) internet gambling behaviour. Such undertakings are not in any simple sense *reducible* to the cultural dynamics or emergent characteristics of the interviews in which they played out. Indeed, more generally, these can be understood as expressive of broader social contexts characterised by limited opportunities for making sense of gambling behaviour through discussing it with others (Valentine and Hughes, 2012). For example, in addition to ambivalence about attending formal agency support services there were risks associated with talking about the internet gambling in family or other contexts outside of the interview. Discussing problem internet gambling was considered to have the potential to 'destroy' parents with problem gambling histories, 'spoil' the gambler's identity across family networks, and for those in caring or financial professions, sharing such information could jeopardise their jobs.

Therefore, while we can observe participants approaching interviews as a means through which both to explore, formulate and rehearse narratives of the addicted self, understanding the strategic use of interviews by participants in the ongoing management of everyday life entails a consideration of additional modalities of participation. Interviews, then, involved neither solely the rehearsal nor, in any simple sense, 'revelation' of the self through narratives, but rather, presented an opportunity for a negotiated interplay via reciprocal exchange with interviewers for the refinement of narratives, and with them, understandings and framings of experience. Experience too was neither directly revealed, nor simply obfuscated by cultural trope or narrative,

PRE PRINT VERSION

but was approximated, presented, negotiated, recounted, reframed, reapproached: both those emergent experiences of the interview encounter itself, and those experiences drawn temporally and spatially from beyond the interview.

Narratives as Enabling and Constraining: The Affordances and Limits of Narratives of Addiction

The 'renegotiation', 'reappropriation' and 'reframing' of narratives at interview were particularly important to how participants made sense of their internet gambling behaviour as an 'addiction'. While the centrality of addiction might not seem surprising through a present-day reading of these interview data, non-substance addiction was a relatively new and novel concept at the time of the original study. In the interviews, such narratives were mobilised in accounting for *intrapersonal* — highly individualised and psychologised — aspects and dimensions of gamblers' experiences. For example, many participants described 'chasing the win', a compulsion to being 'in the zone', and expressed an increasing inability to mitigate the impact of their internet gambling upon their families, friends and jobs (Hughes and Valentine, 2016). Such ideas are consistent with narrative tropes of addiction — to be out of control, to have surrendered the self to something else, typically a substance and related behaviours (Lewis, 2015). Here narratives of addiction were enabling, particularly in their serving as a discursive channel for participants to express facets of compulsivity and the seeming irrationality of their internet gambling addiction.

However, they were also constraining, particularly when participants expressed an inability to 'speak of' certain aspects of their experience through such narratives. For instance, participants expressed confusion and doubt about how they might reconcile such narratives of addiction with their broader experiences, such as when trying to recount *inter*personal, inter-relational behaviours, meaning-making, management and negotiation around their internet gambling. In particular, such limitations featured prominently in the presentation of those experiences entailing the involvement of family members in the careful management of access to money, or time and opportunities to gamble. Finally, discourses of addiction failed to mesh with what emerged as problematic definitions of what the 'problem' in problem internet gambling might refer to, as this migrated over time in processes of dynamic family involvement (Hughes and Valentine, 2016).

A key example in this respect is where Dennis contacted the research team to take part in the study but described himself as a 'successful' rather than a 'problem' gambler. When asked about why he wanted to participate in the research, he said that it was an opportunity to talk about his internet gambling because he rarely had the chance to do so otherwise, and also he wanted to present internet gambling as a 'positive lifestyle choice'. QSA of his interviews identified how his wife, his 'programmer', his brother and his account manager at a major online gambling site were all involved in managing his money.

> I have ... a programmer who works for me and, you know, it's my income. But even so it has to be really tightly controlled, I have no access to any of my own money because I can't trust myself basically…we have a kind of float of about £70,000 that we bet with. But I have access to virtually none of it... my wife has to talk to my programmer and he moves the money for me … the great thing is the people, my brother, my programmer and my wife, are all monitoring this. *Dennis, round one interviews*

Dennis describes how his brother places his bets, but also that he is 'successful' because he 'understands how compulsive' he is. He later relates how one evening he lost £35,000 because he made a series of errors but was compelled to continue, and it took several months to recover financially. Dennis's account is an exemplar of how participant's stories can be insightful specifically when they disrupt and confront the understandings that researchers bring to their

PRE PRINT VERSION

(re)apprehension of data. We can observe here Dennis seeking to maintain and assert a positive sense of self: presenting a story in which he is 'a hero in his own narrative' (Whitaker and Atkinson 2019). In addition, however, the basis for this involves a different axis of 'problematic'/'unproblematic', 'successful/'unsuccessful', than that typically associated with narratives of addiction. Here Dennis is *both* 'doing' the addicted self, and reaching beyond this particular trope: he is presenting his internet gambling as involving a 'self out of control' ('I can't trust myself') whilst simultaneously doing a self 'in control' through permitting others control of his money. Crucially, 'success' isn't equated with financial 'success', it is the success of recognising being out of control. In his account, then, narratives of addiction are simultaneously reinforced and disrupted, repurposed, through reframing the very recognition of 'being out of control' as a basis of 'being in control' and as such not a form of 'problem gambling'.

As other authors have observed (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Silverman 2017; Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019), it is problematic to treat what is said at interview as though it directly conveyed 'inner experience' (see also Hughes, J. *et al.* this issue). Flora describes a brief but disastrous five-month period of internet gambling that resulted in £25,000 debt. She was emphatic that she had had an addiction to internet gambling and when asked to describe how she *experienced* the addiction, explained:

> Oh, I mean money loses all sense of any value, it becomes like monopoly money and you don't, you're not aware that you've spent £500 say, you're just not aware of it, you just carry on and carry on and carry on. And I don't think it's exactly the, you know, it's not the amount you're winning, the adrenalin is flowing like mad and, you know, and I've always thought I was quite a sane person and to be caught up in that is just beyond my comprehension why it should happen to me. And if it can happen to me, you know, a person who's relatively sane, then you know, it could happen to anybody. *Flora, round one interviews.*

Evidentially, this extract from Flora's interview does not constitute the unmediated expression of an inner psyche, but arguably neither is it solely the rehearsal of a narrative trope pertaining to 'addiction' or biographical 'authenticity'. Here the modes of expression, the cultural imagery, the narrative definition and ordering, all play a part in (and might be forensically elucidated from) Flora's expressing something of 'what it feels like' to be a problem internet gambler, but also set limits to this.

Consistent with research elsewhere, (see, for instance, Gray, *et al.* 2012) Flora conveys the sense that internet gambling entails a set of practices in which money can be understood to 'lose its value' ('like monopoly money' — a locution used by many other participants in the study). Her reference to being 'sane' too is significant: that Flora's account of her engaging in this kind of practice calls into question its rationality — she presents it as a kind of temporary 'insanity', in as much as it involves being psychologically 'out of control'. Here a phrase such as 'adrenalin flowing like mad' is at once a cultural idiom invoking biomedical discourses of the body, and is also a means of expressing corporeal experience (Gainsbury *et al.,* 2014). Flora is able simultaneously to articulate something of the physiological processes to which she is referring precisely *because* of an idiom which is a technical phrase with considerable cultural currency. Here 'adrenalin flowing like mad' is not something we can observe directly, nor may it perfectly articulate the complex array of corporeal processes that Flora experiences, yet its approximation through interview talk provides in this case at the very least a reference to 'see' what we would not be able to from ethnographic observation alone. Further, in Flora's case, narratives of addiction are arguably *part and parcel* of, rather than a discursive 'displacement' of, that to which they refer. For example, as Hughes (2003) has argued in relation to smoking, discourses of addiction mediate not only the *expression* of

PRE PRINT VERSION

tobacco using experiences by smokers, but, through their increasingly pervasive cultural significance, over time, they became partly *constitutive of* those experiences.

Our QSA, through its synthetic engagement with both these interview data and other sources (study outputs; subsequent theory and evidence) identified how participants' narratives reflected tensions expressed in broader literature and policy attempting to both describe and prescribe for problem internet gambling, as well as ambiguities and absences of narratives which matched their own experiences (Valentine and Hughes, 2010; 2012; Hughes and Valentine 2010; 2016). Participants demonstrated awareness of these broader contexts, explicitly stating that they desired their stories to be used as 'cautionary tales' to inform public discourse, as well as broader policy (governmental) contexts. They argued that if it could happen to them (e.g. the loss of £70k in three months), then it could happen to anybody.

In this way, the working *with*, not just *within* — of producing, not just rehearsing — narratives of addiction can be understood as simultaneously related to: the emergent, quasi-therapeutic dynamics of the interview; to how participants negotiated the narration of aspects of their problem internet gambling; to broader social structural dynamics governing opportunities for therapeutic talk; and to discursive tensions playing out in public and policy discourse arenas. Significantly, such discursive tensions were also at play in how participants reflexively negotiated the limits to the 'stock' of narratives within which to frame and recount their experiences.

'Proximity' and 'Distance': Working at a temporal remove

As we argued earlier in this paper, temporal distance from the original collection of data can afford its own basis for the development of insights perhaps not so readily available or apparent at the time of the original research (see also Thomson and McLeod 2015). A key example, in this respect, related to our observations of the original research team in how they sought to address problems of what gambling behaviours could and could not be discussed at interview. The study design deliberately sought to capture a broad range of internet gambling behaviours, and was particularly sensitive to what participants understood problem internet gambling to entail and comprise. In turn, in the early phases of the research, participants asked for clarity on whether the ESRC/RiGT team were only interested in internet gambling or gambling more generally. In this way, the original team were alerted to how focusing solely on internet gambling failed to capture the whole picture of peoples' gambling participation, as well as ambiguity about what specifically constituted internet gambling as a discreet form. Importantly, participants described how internet gambling could involve a wide array of activities with little connection between them beyond that of 'gambling'. This included slots, bingo, poker, sports betting, and so forth. Thus, 'internet gambling' itself failed to emerge as a concrete 'category' and through questions put to the interviewer, participants sought to 'become informed' about internet gambling more generally.

Revisiting these concerns and the data which relate to them some 12 years later provides a significant temporal remove from the original study which serves as the basis for a series of insights. Through our QSA we became 'surprised at the surprise' of the original research team (Hughes included) at participants wanting to include the range of gambling activities (e.g. slots, bingo and poker) that they did in their accounts. The surprise of the original research team was in part expressive of a phase in the development of the internet where it had yet to saturate 'everyday' activities to the extent that it does in the present day. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, it made more sense to distinguish between 'offline' and 'online' behaviours and practices. However, since the time of the research, such distinctions have been considerably more permeable, divisions between 'real' and 'virtual' have lost something of their purchase in a context in which, for instance, gambling online might encompass sitting in a football stadium, using a smartphone to retrieve the

PRE PRINT VERSION

odds for the next player to score after half-time, and placing a bet moments later. In this way, we can understand, albeit in a modest way, something of the 'of their time' character of the data collected.

Where the original research team expected a relatively stable, possibly contiguously delineated field of study, they encountered instead a nascently emerging field in which, for the participants of the study, the 'offline' and 'online' worlds had already come to merge in important respects. Hughes of the original research team was uniquely placed, in this respect, to blend via our QSA certain insights derived from her temporal proximity to the original research with those insights now possible through the 'distance' afforded by revisiting these data and the discussions surrounding them more than a decade later. In this way, our QSA has permitted the existing data to 'travel' (Tarrant and Hughes 2019a) and so secure insights in addressing new methodological and substantive questions.

Conclusion

In our discussion above, we have explored what a QSA of interview data can be used to say about society. This undertaking has involved a rethinking of interview encounters and what researchers do in and with these. In essence, our approach involves a shift from a predominant or exclusive focus on the production or construction of interview data and towards a consideration of how these are *apprehended* by researchers. This shift also involves foregrounding an examination of different modes of research *engagement* — both by participants and researchers in the unfolding dynamics of interview encounters, and within and subsequent to these, through the modes of analysis that are brought to the data so generated.

Allied to this undertaking is a move away from a binary distinction between primary and secondary data and its analysis. This centres on the recognition that researchers are always engaged in research *processes* which are temporally bounded and defined, albeit by different 'timescapes' (Tarrant and Hughes, 2019a). To take a case in point, an interview is never an isolated 'event' or 'moment'; it is invariably part and parcel of a longer-term set of processes which extend from before the inception of any particular study to after its completion. Even an interview encounter itself can be understood to have its own timescape: its beginning is 'the past' when those involved reach its end. Likewise, its 'end' is not the 'moment' the audio recorder stops, or transcription is completed — 'analysis' typically extends considerably after formal technical data coding, thematic articulation, and even publication have taken place. For instance, engagement with a study by subsequent researchers might continue, extend or augment some of this analytical work (Neale, 2019). Or, indeed, it might yield entirely new insights or prove significant to avenues of inquiry scarcely imagined by the original team involved in the research. When viewed processually, then, it makes sense always to think of different *degrees* of 'remove' — temporal, relational, and epistemic — from the immediate contexts of 'primary' research. A recognition of this, we argue, suggests the need for greater epistemological reflexivity concerning the different degrees and qualities of proximity and distance from the formative contexts of data generation and their attendant modes of apprehension and engagement. This includes the kinds of questions asked by researchers and participants, the forms of participation these entail, and the social conditions under which these become possible.

Our QSA work has centrally involved a departure from the principle that 'being there' (in the immediate contexts of formative data production) constitutes the principal, perhaps exclusive, basis for being able to develop secure observations about the social world. Rather, we have explored how both greater 'proximity' and greater 'remove' each offer their own analytical

PRE PRINT VERSION

affordances, the sum of which might be greater than their parts, particularly when brought into dialogue and 'blended' or 'alloyed' accordingly (see also Tarrant and Hughes, 2019a).

Our move in this paper away from a sole focus on the inherent qualities and characteristics of interview data and towards an additional consideration of the modes of (re)apprehension that researchers bring to these is the basis for a central claim. Namely, that interview data can be used both to *speak of* the temporal, relational, spatial, epistemic contexts of their production, and also to *speak to* contexts and questions beyond these. Here, we have sought to show how interview data can be used to speak simultaneously to debates at the interface between what interviews can be used to say and what can be said through QSA, plus more substantively, to questions concerning the character of participants' engagement at interviews.

We have endeavoured to demonstrate that in the case of the problem internet gamblers whose interviews were the key foci of our QSA, such forms of participation are complex. These highlighted a broad array of intentionality, purposeful forms of engagement, modes of participant questioning and theorising, sense-seeking and data gathering. Such modes of participation, we argue, pertained in part to the particular dynamics of interview encounters themselves, but were not reducible to these, involving much wider sets of relationships and enduring social patternings. We have sought to demonstrate that such broader patternings and relationships are discernible via to QSA precisely because of the affordances of temporal distance, and the opportunities to bring such data into conversation with subsequent evidence, theorisations, and social and cultural developments.

PRE PRINT VERSION

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PRE PRINT ON

[i] The study was led by Professor Gill Valentine, Dr Kahryn Hughes was Co-Investigator, and Dr Charlotte Kenten conducted the interviews.
[ii] Essentially, a 'synthetic' approach might be contrasted with a more conventionally 'analytical' one (though the distinction is not without its limits) in its involving a focus on inter-relationships, emergent orders and gestalts,

diachronic patterns, in a word, upon *integration*. By contrast, analysis linguistically connotes *reductionism* — the practice of reducing some 'thing' into 'its' component parts and comparing these. Of course, many people use the term 'analysis' (us included) to refer more to the former mode of apprehension than the latter, and in a sense, the precise term itself is not as important as the forms of engagement that we intend this distinction to foreground.

PRE PRINT VERSION