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Comfortable Risk: An Analysis of the Gambling Participation of Mature Women

by

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## **Abstract**

Mature women represent a significant and growing demographic of gamblers in Canada. To date, research on gambling has primarily focused on problem gambling among young males. While this research is important, it fails to address not only mature women as a demographic but also the important role that non-problem gambling plays in the lives of these individuals. In this thesis, I present findings from 19 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with Canadian women above the age of 45 who regularly participate in various forms of recreational gambling. Using Stephen Lyng's "edgework," Robert Stebbins' Serious Leisure Perspective, and R.W. Connell's notions of emphasized femininity and gender regimes, this research examines the role that gambling plays in these women's lives by interpreting gambling participation as a form of voluntary risk-taking. Findings from the interviews suggest that recreational gambling that these women participate in closely conforms to other voluntary risk-taking activities. Additionally, this research helps illustrate that many of the women in this research are motivated to continue gambling because it provides an important means of socializing with their peers as well as an important avenue for displaying femininity.

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## **Dedication**

*For Matthew,*

*Thank you for your unconditional love, patience, and support.*

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Purpose of the Study**

Mature women gamblers represent a significant and growing demographic of gamblers in Canada (Li, 2007). Emerging sociological research is pointing to the notion that the risk factors associated with gambling do not affect all demographic groups similarly. Researchers suggest that the characteristics of both gambling activities and environments may make mature women an especially vulnerable subgroup of gamblers (McKay, 2005). Mature women tend to develop problems associated with gambling at a faster rate than males (Petry, 2002), and the outcome of these losses tends to be more problematic due to limited retirement incomes (McKay, 2005). As a consequence, the gambling participation of mature women constitutes a unique form of voluntary risk-taking activity that has the potential to compromise the economic well-being of participants.

Even though gambling is increasingly considered a risk-taking pursuit, there is a growing body of research that has begun to explore the functional role that recreational gambling plays in the lives of mature women (Desai, Maciejewski, Dausey, Caldarone, & Potenza, 2004; Phillips, 2009; Potenza, Maciejewski, & Mazure, 2006; Preston, Shapiro, & Keene, 2007). For many women, gambling represents an important leisure activity that provides an opportunity for socialization and an escape from day-to-day stressors. The purpose of this study is to examine why women gamblers choose to participate in gambling-related activities when these activities have the potential to compromise their long-term economic well-being.

This study examines the perspectives of 19 women aged 45 and older who recreationally participate in gambling-related activities. In particular, this study explores insiders' viewpoints with regard to how notions of risk are negotiated by these women in order to allow for their continued participation. Further, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role that gambling plays in their lives, an examination of gambling as a gendered leisure activity is also presented.

In addressing these two aspects of gambling participation, this thesis draws on three distinct areas of sociological analysis – risk, leisure, and gender. The ways in which these women make sense of the risks they face while gambling is especially relevant because it sheds light on larger issues of the risk-taking experience. By better understanding how these women rationalize the risks they face while participating in this leisure activity, insight is gained not only into the decision making process in high-risk environments, but perhaps more importantly, it helps us better understand the motivations underlying voluntary participation in higher-risk activities. In addition, through exploring gambling as a gendered leisure activity, a better understanding of why certain women choose gambling over other, less risky, leisure activities is explored.

### **Scope of the Study**

This thesis contributes to the growing body of research on gambling participation. Through examining the recreational gambling participation of women aged 45 and older by way of a risk-taking perspective (e.g. Lyng, 1990), this research brings us closer to better understanding the complexity inherent in voluntarily participating in risk-taking activities. Furthermore, this research makes a valuable contribution to the study of leisure

participation. By exploring gambling participation as a leisure activity (e.g. Stebbins, 2007), insight is gained into why the women interviewed for this research choose to participate in gambling and how this activity affects their overall well-being. Lastly, this research contributes to understanding gender (Connell, 1987, 2002). By examining gambling environments as gendered spaces, insight is gained into why the participants are attracted to gambling-related activities.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis begins with a review of the literature drawing on three areas of gambling research – risk behaviours associated with gambling, gender and gambling, and the elderly and gambling – this chapter provides an overview of research relating to the gambling participation of women aged 45 and older. As well, this chapter discusses prominent gaps in the literature and how the research conducted for this thesis contributes to a larger understanding of gambling participation.

Chapter Three explores the theoretical framework developed to guide the analysis of the interviews conducted for this research. Although Stephen Lyng's (1990) theory of edgework is selected as the primary theoretical framework, Robert Stebbins Serious Leisure perspective (2007), and R.W. Connell's (1987, 2002) notions of gender regimes and emphasized femininity are also explored in this chapter.

The research design employed for this thesis is explored in the fourth chapter. This chapter begins with an outline of the research questions guiding this project as well as an in-depth account of the research methodology employed for both the data collection and the analysis of the information collected in the interviews. This chapter also includes

an overview of the ethical considerations that informed the recruitment and interview process, as well as a brief discussion of my role as a researcher.

Chapters Five and Six present the dominant themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data. Chapter Five explores the gambling experiences of the participants, specifically exploring the roles of both leisure and gender in the gambling participation of these women. Chapter Six uses Lyng's edgework model to explore the participants' discussion of risk as it relates to their gambling participation. Overall, the aim of these two chapters is to explore the themes that emerged through the data analysis and to explore the ways in which this research addresses the established literature.

Finally, chapter Seven provides a discussion of the findings explored in chapters Five and Six as they relate to both the established literature and the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Three. Specific attention is devoted to the ways in which the gambling participation of the women in this research conforms to Lyng's theory of edgework, and how the specific characteristics of gambling venues attract and maintain gambling participation. This chapter concludes by revisiting the central research objectives, assessing how this research contributes to the established literature, limitations of this research and, lastly, explores possible avenues for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The research related to gambling participation is abundant and addresses many wide-ranging issues. However, for the purposes of this literature review, I will map out the literature in the four substantive areas that best address the behaviours associated with gambling participation of women aged 45 and older. These areas are: risk behaviours associated with gambling; gender and gambling; the elderly and gambling; and, lastly, elderly women.

Before I begin the literature review, I should clarify a few important points. First, even though for the purposes of this project I am sampling women aged 45 and older<sup>1</sup>, I am nevertheless including an examination of the literature that pertains to elderly and senior gamblers. I have chosen to include this aspect of the literature because many of those I have interviewed for this research are retired women over the age of 65. Also worth noting is that while I have attempted to organize this literature around dominant themes – risk, age, gender, and gambling, there is undeniably a degree of overlap between these areas. The overall aim of this literature review is to explore the scope of the research in these areas and to clarify the gaps within the existing literature in order to provide a concise introduction to the literature presently available that pertains to my research topic.

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<sup>1</sup> The decision to sample women 45 and older will be discussed in detail in the methodology section.

## **Risk Behaviours Associated with Gambling**

Risk-taking behaviour and gambling are an important area of study for social science researchers. In particular, the notion that there is a “clustering” of risk-taking behaviours associated with gambling is becoming a significant aspect of gambling research. This section of the literature review will explore the current research related to risk-taking behaviours and how it relates to gambling participation. I will begin by defining some important concepts, and from there I will explore this “clustering” of behaviours as it relates to specific risk-taking behaviours and how demographic variables interact with these behaviours.

There are two key sets of definitions that will guide this section of the literature review, including problem<sup>2</sup> and recreational gambling, and risk-taking behaviour. In the gambling literature, there has been a clear demarcation between habitual gambling, which comprises nearly 95% of the population, and problem and pathological gambling, which account for the remaining 5% of the gambling population (Deverensky & Gillespie, 2005 p. 9).<sup>3</sup> Scholars define problem gambling as individuals’ gambling practices that have led to compromises, disruptions, or damage to personal, family, or vocational pursuits (Lesieur & Blume, 1991; Volberg & Wray, 2007). Recreational gambling is understood as gambling participation that does not interfere with the functioning of the everyday lives of those who regularly gamble (Desai, Maciejewski, Dausey, Caldarone, and Potenza, 2004 p. 1672).

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<sup>2</sup> Problem gambling is also referred to as compulsive or excessive gambling. This should not be confused with pathological gambling, which refers to severe problem gambling.

<sup>3</sup> The most recent estimate of the proportion of pathological gamblers in the Canadian population 1.2% to 1.9% (Ladouceur, 1996).

Unlike the clear differentiation between problem and recreational gambling, the notion of risk is far more difficult to define. Risk is typically understood as the probability of (physical) harm due to external processes or factors in the environment (Beck, 1992 p. 4). Yet, the voluntary assumption of risk inherent in risk-taking behaviours, such as gambling, is slightly more complicated. Giddens (2006) defined this voluntary assumption of risk as “the active courting of risk.” In *Fate, Risk and Security*, Giddens (2006) argued that this form of risk is unique because individuals make the conscious decision to engage in certain risk behaviours despite the probability of physical or emotional harm (p. 42). While he contends that voluntary assumption of risk can become compulsive when it is no longer controllable, such as in the case of alcohol addiction, he nevertheless argues that the participation in voluntary risk activities stands at odds with conventional notions of risk because individuals purposefully seek out these experiences rather than avoid them (p. 43). It is this notion that individuals *choose* to participate in activities with an inherent degree of risk, in spite of the likely negative consequences, that will guide the understanding of risk-taking behaviours in this review.

When notions of risk and risk-taking behaviours are combined with gambling participation important and interesting trends emerge. Specifically, within gambling research there is an extensive literature which documents that the same individuals who are problematic gamblers are also those most likely to participate in other forms of risk-taking behaviours such as the consumption of alcohol, tobacco smoking, and drug use (Currie, Hodgens, JianLi, El-Guebaly, Wynne & Chen, 2006; Parke, Griffiths & Irwing, 2004; Welte, Barnes, Wieczorek & Tidwell, 2004). Perhaps the strongest, most extensively documented relationship in the literature is that between alcohol consumption

and gambling behaviours. Welte, Barnes, Wiczorek, Tidwell, and Parker (2001) found that the likelihood that an individual has either current alcohol dependence or is a problem gambler increases by a factor of 23, when either behaviour is present. While seemingly remarkable, this finding was corroborated by the work of Stewart, McWilliams, Blackburn, and Klein (2002) who also found that those who frequently gamble are more likely to consume alcohol while gambling than while participating in the research project's control activity, viewing a movie (p. 833). Thus, this finding provides evidence that gambling and alcohol use do not exist in isolation from one another.

However, while alcohol is strongly linked to gambling behaviour, the nature of the relationship between substance use and gambling participation remains relatively ambiguous (Stinchfield, Kushner & Winters, 2005). Rush, Bassani, Urbanoski, and Castel (2008) argued that while there is a strong relationship between gambling and substance related problems, they found that this relationship increases markedly as severity across the substance spectrum increases. This means that for those who are substance dependent, there is an excessive prevalence of gambling problems that essentially corresponds to a threefold increase when compared to the general population (p. 1853). Thus, it can be expected that the more severe an individual's problems with gambling the more likely it is that he or she will abuse other substances. Further, Potenza, Steinberg and Wu (2005) found that high rates of alcohol use and alcohol use disorders are reported in samples of problem gamblers (p. 234). As a result of the strong relationship between alcohol use and problems with other substances, such as daily tobacco and drug use, the authors suggested that problem gamblers demonstrate greater

problems in other areas of their lives which is likely a result of impaired impulse control (p. 234).

This relationship between simultaneous drinking and gambling was further explored by Welte, Barnes, Wieczorek, and Tidwell (2004). Similar to Baron (1999), Welte et. al. (2004) were interested in better understanding the nature of this relationship, but instead of researching the consequences of the simultaneous participation in multiple risk-taking behaviours, Welte and colleagues were interested in determining the underlying characteristics of gamblers who consume alcohol while gambling. What is unique about their study is their finding that the likelihood that an individual will participate in both behaviours simultaneously differs significantly by gender. Specifically, they found that men were more likely to consume alcohol while gambling than were women (p. 1405), meaning that men are more likely to adopt reckless behaviours while participating in gambling.

Other researchers have found that the relationship between risk-taking behaviours and gambling differs significantly by gender (and age). Perhaps the most prominent and established association has been with adolescent males. The overarching rationale for studying adolescent males and gambling in many of the articles is that gambling problems may be more frequent in youth than in adulthood (Barnes, 2009) and males are consistently at a greater risk for developing gambling problems later in life than females (Derevensky & Gillespie, 2005 p. 9; Volberg, 1994 p. 240). Therefore young males are not only more likely to have gambling problems than the rest of the population, but these problems are likely to persist later in life.

When the focus is broadened to include women, other important trends in risk-taking behaviours and gambling are established. One important finding in the literature is that while men are generally more likely to abuse illicit drugs and alcohol in conjunction with problem gambling than are women, women problem gamblers, on the other hand, are far more likely to experience more psychological problems than their male counterparts (Potenza, Steinberg, McLaughlin, Wu, Rounsaville, & O'Malley, 2001). Expanding on Potenza et al.'s (2001) finding, Boughton and Falenchuck (2007) sought to better understand how the experience of problem gambling differs by gender. Through conducting a mail-in survey, the researchers reported that women were more likely to suffer mental health issues while engaging in problem gambling than men. Specifically, they found that depression and anxiety were most commonly associated with women who were problem gamblers than males. Moreover, they reported that many women in their sample had experienced past struggles with problematic behaviours such as "smoking, binge eating and compulsive shopping" (p. 331). Yet, perhaps the most pressing of the concerns was the finding that almost half of the women reported suicide ideation and nearly a third of the sample had attempted suicide (p. 331). Thus, this work has indicated that not only does the nature of the clustering of risk-taking behaviours differ by gender, meaning that women may participate in other behaviours aside from the conventional drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse, the consequences of problem gambling may be far more severe for female problem gamblers.

Further, when age is added as another dimension to the relationship between problem gambling participation and risk-taking behaviours, other important and interesting trends emerge. Perhaps the most important finding is that as individuals who

participate in gambling age, they are less likely to report daily tobacco use, and illegal drug related problems (Potenza, Steinberg, Wu, Rounsaville & O'Malley, 2006 p. 247). Given that this finding stands in contradiction to much of the established literature on the sociology of gambling, in that one could hypothesize that the longer one gambles the more likely one is to begin to adopt more risk-taking behaviours, Potenza et. al. (2006) put forward multiple hypotheses that could account for their findings. Of these hypotheses, the most compelling are: selective mortality and generational differences. The authors argue that it is likely that individuals who participated in co-occurring risk-taking behaviours, namely drug and alcohol abuse, along with problem gambling, were likely to have died earlier in life than those who did not participate in these risk behaviours (p. 251), and effectively self-selected out of any study. Secondly, the authors argue that older adults today grew up in a time when there was less social acceptance of using illicit drugs. Specially, they suggest that because adolescence is considered a critical period for the onset of drug use and drug dependence, their findings could reflect the difference in drug availability and acceptance during the adolescence of those who are now elderly (p. 251).

However, what has not been addressed by the vast majority of the research on risk behaviours associated with gambling is the nature of the relationship that those who are non-problem gamblers have with other forms or risk-taking behaviour, in spite of the fact that nearly 95% of gamblers, gamble as a recreational activity (Derevensky & Gillespie, 2005). In a study which aimed to identify the health and well-being correlates of recreational gamblers, Desai et. al. (2004) compared samples of past-year recreational gamblers and non-gamblers in the older and younger age groups (p. 1672). Through

conducting a multivariate analysis of a telephone survey, the researchers concluded that older adults are less likely to suffer negative health effects from substance use than their younger counterparts (p. 1676). In a similar study, Potenza, Maciejewski & Mazure (2006) analyzed past-year recreational gamblers for gender differences. Perhaps the most important of their findings was that past-year female recreational gamblers were more likely to report past-year drug and alcohol use than female non-gamblers (p. 51). This means that controlling for age and gender, there is a connection that persists between gambling and risk behaviours.

When older women are the primary sample for studying alcohol consumption, important relationships between alcohol use and other risk-taking behaviours are revealed. Ganry, Baudoin, Fardellone & Dubreuil (2001) determined that there is a positive relationship between smoking and alcohol use among elderly women. Comorbidity and alcohol use was further explored by Epstein, Fischer-Elber & Al-Otaiba's (2007) work which found evidence that women who are substance abusers have a greater number of comorbid conditions than men (p. 36). Specifically, they found that older women who are alcoholics are not only more likely to abuse drugs, but they are also more likely to suffer from anxiety disorders (p. 36). Further, unlike men, women in their analysis were also more likely to drink in isolation and to do so in response to a depressed mood (p. 37). Therefore, when looking at risk-taking behaviours as it relates to age, gender is an important factor in assessing how individuals are likely to psychologically react to the effects of problem gambling.

## **Gender and Gambling**

While young male gamblers are considered to be one of the groups in the population most likely to develop problems related to gambling, it is especially important to avoid neglecting the relationship between women and gambling-related activities. In this section, I will explore the literature that pertains to gender and gambling, by focusing on the ways in which women's experience and participation in gambling differs from that of their male counterparts. I will begin by exploring the gender differences inherent to problem gambling and then provide an overview of the literature that explores this difference in recreational gambling.

In *A Feminist Critique of Problem Gambling Research*, Mark and Lesieur (1992) argue that the accuracy of gambling research is compromised by the fact that the existing literature in this area has been based substantially on the study of male pathological gamblers, and this focus has ultimately led to the exclusion of women from gambling research. Specifically, they contend that a major concern is the underlying assumption among professionals that "what holds true for male pathological gamblers holds true for females," in spite of the fact that researchers have found that other forms of addictive behaviours, such as alcohol abuse, differ significantly between males and females (p. 549). For this reason, it is especially relevant to explore not only the connection between problem gambling and other behaviours, but also the gender differences in these connections (Hraba & Lee, 1996; Tavares, Zilberman, Beites & Gentil, 2001; Trevorrow & Moore, 1998).

Supporting Mark and Lesieur's (1992) argument that gambling has a different effect on men and women, Potenza, Steinberg, McLaughlin, Wu, Rounsaville, and

O'Malley (2001) established that men and women have different rates of gambling participation. Specifically, Potenza and colleagues (2001) put forward the notion that men and women have not only different underlying motivations to gamble, but also that they have dissimilar problems generated by excessive gambling. Through an analysis of data compiled from a gambling helpline, Potenza et al. (2001) found that female problem gamblers reported shorter durations of problem gambling before contacting the gambling helpline as compared to men, but perhaps more surprisingly they reported significant gender differences in the motivations for individuals to participate in gambling. They found that while males typically use gambling as a means to seek out "ego enhancement through the thrill of competitive risk-taking," females on the other hand, were more likely to report gambling as a means of escaping from distressing problems (p. 1504).

Other analyses that have sought to better understand the motivations of female gamblers are also worth noting. In perhaps one of the earliest studies, Lesieur and Blume (1991) found that more than half of the women who's gambling developed into problem gambling "initially looked upon their gambling as a means of escape from overwhelming problems" (p. 184). Trevorrow and Moore's (1998) work adds another significant dimension to understanding the gambling motivations of women. While they also found that women who developed problems with gambling were often alienated and isolated, they also found that this pattern did not persist when they looked at non-problem gamblers. Specifically, they found that among recreational gamblers, gambling was simply seen as a feasible pastime, like other leisure activities (p. 281). Similarly, Hing and Breen (2001) analysed the gambling participation of women gamblers in Australia. Through data from a telephone survey, they found that isolation, boredom, and loneliness

were among the main motivating factors for women who reported having difficulty controlling their gambling. Therefore, it appears that gambling motivation differs significantly depending on the level of involvement of the female participant.

While it is generally accepted that men are more active gamblers than women (Shaffer, Hall, and Vander Bilt, 1999), the progression into gambling-related problems has also been found to differ by gender (Phillips, 2009). Perhaps some of the most surprising aspects of problem gambling have been revealed when researchers look at the background characteristics that women problem gamblers have in common. Leiseur and Blume (1991) found that women problem gamblers often have histories of difficult childhoods, which often included parents who were alcoholics and compulsive gamblers; the women were also likely to have experienced troublesome marriages and, on a whole, had troubled adult lives (p. 183). Specker, Carlson, Edmonston, Johnson, and Marcotte (1996), reported similar findings. In an analysis of problem gamblers who were seeking treatment, they found that the women in their sample were more likely to have been victims of physical and sexual abuse (p.76). Thus, this work supports the findings that the gambling motivations of women can be linked to avoidance and escape from reality.

Another significant gender difference found in the literature is that while women start gambling later in life than men, women are far more likely to acknowledge their problem gambling behaviours and seek treatment earlier than males (LaPlante, Nelson, LaBrie, and Shaffer, 2005; Leiseur & Blume, 1991). In *Gender Differences in Gambling Progression*, Tavares, Zilberman, Beites, and Gentil (2001), reported that not only did men and women differ in terms of when gambling participation became problematic, with women more likely to develop gambling problem much later in life than men (p.

157), they also found that the rate of progression from recreational to problem gambling differed significantly by gender. Specifically they reported that women had a faster progression into problem gambling, at nearly twice the rate of their male counterparts (p. 155). Much of the established literature that pertains to gambling progression does not adequately capture the unique nature of female gambling.

The comparison between the effects of problem gambling among men and women was also explored by Davis and Avery (2004). While this work concluded that women were more likely to cite the desire to escape from their current situation as a primary motivation to gamble, they also pointed to the idea that structural aspects of society can play a part in potential problems that women can have with gambling. They argued that gambling could be attractive to women because casinos provide a relatively safe place for women to go without a male escort. Further, they contend that the casino environment provides an opportunity for women to exercise choice and limited control through the act of placing bets (p. 64). Therefore, casinos have become places that not only provide women with the potential to improve their economic situations, but also a place for women to combat boredom and loneliness.

Just as researchers have found that women and men have different motivations for participating in gambling, there is also a growing consensus among researchers that the specific type of gambling activity individuals choose to participate in also differs by gender. Petry (2003) found that while men preferred horse racing, card games, and sport betting, women, on the other hand, were more likely to participate in slot machine gambling. Hing and Breen (2001) were also interested in how gambling participation differs by gender. Most notably, they found that the women in their study were more

inclined to participate in “bingo, lotto, lotteries, pools and gambling machines” compared to the males in the sample (p. 57). Expanding on these findings, in a study of self-excluded casino gamblers in Missouri, researchers Nower and Blaszczynski (2006) found that women gamblers cited video poker as their favourite gaming activity within casinos (p. 90). The authors argue that this preference can be attributed to the fact that women are more likely to prefer non-strategic forms of gambling, whereas males are more likely to prefer strategic gambling activities such as black jack and craps.

While Nower and Blaszczynski (2006) argued that women are more likely to participate in electronic forms of gaming, Casey (2008) found that bingo is the only type of gambling where women’s gambling participation exceeds that of males. In a Brazilian study conducted by Oliveira and Silva (2001), it was reported that the women in their sample participated in bingo more than any other form of gaming. They posit that the attraction to bingo lies in the fact that it requires one of the lowest levels of commitment of any other gaming activity (p. 148). O’Brien, Cousins, and Witcher (2004), reported similar findings in Canada. They found that bingo as a gaming activity is especially popular among older women because it requires very little knowledge of the game to play successfully. They argue that since bingo is usually the first gambling activity that children encounter, it is especially attractive to newcomers because they can easily begin without adopting the role of a beginner (p. 127). Further, because gambling participation in bingo is reasonably affordable, bingo not only provides an accessible means of gambling participation, but is also provides women who are looking for a social activity a reasonably affordable afternoon of entertainment (p. 129).

Another important element for understanding the role of gambling in women's lives is to look specifically at the social role it occupies for them. Nelson, LaPlant, LaBrie, and Shaffer (2006), found that men and women differed on how they were first exposed to gambling. They reported that women are more likely to have first gambled with their families, whereas males were more likely to have been exposed to gambling from friends (p. 240). While 40% of those in their study claimed that gambling was an accepted activity growing up, Trevorrow and Moore (1998) found that the women who are problem gamblers were more likely to be involved in social networks in which gambling was a normative activity (p. 263). Specifically they put forward that a high social acceptance of gambling activities among those they know would presumably increase the likelihood that a woman who is feeling lonely or isolated would choose gambling as a feasible activity for entertainment (p. 267). Li (2007) expanded on this argument by noting that while gambling is contingent on the women's social network, socioeconomic status is also an important factor in determining if a woman is likely to choose gambling as an activity. She noted that some of the participants in her study "commented that casinos nearby provided entertainment for poor people who otherwise could not afford to participate in such activities" (p. 632). Li (2007) speculates that the façade of affordable entertainment could be linked to the increasing number of female excessive gamblers from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (p. 634).

Perhaps some of the most surprising aspects of literature on women and gambling comes out of research that has shifted its focus from problem gambling to recreational non-problem gambling. Potenza, Maciejewski, and Mazure's (2005) gender-based examination of past-year recreational gamblers provides insight into the gender

differences in gambling participation. While the authors also reported that males typically begin gambling earlier in life than women, they also found that the men experienced higher maximal and minimal losses, when compared to the women in their sample in the previous year (p. 41). This means that gender differences in gambling participation persist from problem gambling to recreational gambling. In *Working Class Women, Gambling and the Dream of Happiness*, Casey (2008) also posits that in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between women and gambling it is imperative to look beyond the deviant problematic nature of gambling. Through conducting in-depth interviews with working class women, Casey (2008) explored the rationale for women to participate in the National Lottery. In the end, she concluded that lottery participation was not a last ditch attempt for personal and emotional fulfilment, but rather that it provided working-class women with the opportunity to dream of enhancing their lives and to make improvements in the overall well-being of their family (p.122). Thus, Casey's (2008) work demonstrates that gambling participation is not only dynamic in nature, but also that the rationale for participation varies depending on frequency and the type of gambling in question.

### **Elderly and Gambling**

Just as it is necessary to examine the gambling participation of women as separate and distinct from that of their male counterparts, it is equally important to examine how participation in gambling changes as individuals age. Unlike other areas of gambling research, the literature related to seniors and gambling remains significantly underdeveloped. While researchers are currently pointing to the notion that problem

gambling appears to have a differential effect on older individuals than their younger counterparts (Higgins, 2001), there is little consensus in the literature about problem gambling participation among elderly individuals and there is even far less agreement in the understanding of non-problem or recreational gambling among those over 65 years of age. Therefore, in this section, I will explore the literature that best addresses the unique experience of older individuals who gamble with specific attention placed on the seemingly contradictory viewpoints inherent in this body of literature.

Senior citizens, individuals aged 65 and older, in Canada are participating in gambling in increasing numbers (McKay, 2005 p. 35). What sets these older gamblers apart from their younger counterparts is the amount of free time that they can devote to gambling (and other) activities. NcNeilly and Burke (2002) argue that for increasing numbers of retired older adults, gambling is becoming a popular form of recreation and entertainment because this group of adults tends to have fewer parental responsibilities, higher incomes, and lower rates of poverty than their younger counterparts (p. 75). Unlike their younger counterparts, many older individuals have a relatively large amount of free time to devote to recreational activities, such as gambling.

What seems to differentiate older gamblers, however, is gambling participation throughout their lifetime. In a study that examined the age at which an individual first gambled and the severity of gambling and gambling-related problems, Burge, Pietrzak, Molina & Petry (2004) posit that older gamblers who began gambling early in life are more likely to be problem gamblers than their counterparts who began gambling as older adults (p. 1439). While those who did not recreationally gamble until retirement are less likely to develop into problem gamblers, the increased amount of free time and

disposable income available to those who gambled throughout their lives could provide the catalyst that pushes lifetime recreational gamblers into problem or pathological gamblers. Welte, Barnes, Wieczorek, and Tidwell (2002) add further insight into this finding by arguing that although the prevalence of gambling decreases with increasing age, the extent of gambling involvement does not vary (p. 985), meaning that while seniors as a population are less likely to gamble than their younger counterparts, their frequency of play and the size of the absolute value of an individual's wins or losses remains constant as individuals age (Preston, 2007 p. 105).

One convincing reason for the decrease in gambling participation as individuals age was put forward by Mok and Hraba (1991) who suggest that the decline in gambling participation can be attributed to older individuals having less desire to experiment with their self-identity as they age (p. 330). Specifically, they argue that as individuals age their personal self-concepts become more stable and "they become less likely to experiment and turn to gambling for self-presentation" (p. 331). While the authors do not suggest that individuals stop gambling at a certain age, they put forward the notion that individuals simply withdraw from many types of gambling, or simply do not begin gambling, as they age.

Even though the rate of gambling participation declines as individuals age, the negative consequences of gambling for older individuals can become significantly more pressing and detrimental as they age. A study conducted by McNeilly and Burke (2000) found that older individuals who gambled at gambling venues reported that they "gambled more than they intended, felt guilty about their gambling, argued over money and gambling, and borrowed money from a spouse or credit cards to gamble" (p. 411).

Further, in one of the few works that examines both problem gambling and older women, McKay (2005) points out that older women who are problem gamblers are in what essentially could be called a double jeopardy. She posits that older women problem gamblers, as a specific demographic, are especially vulnerable due to their “gender socialization around care-giving; poverty; multiple losses; social isolation; physical health problems, including cognitive deficits; lack of leisure alternatives; and historical and/or current abuse issues” (p. 46). Therefore, although gambling can be seen as a meaningful leisure activity for those who feel isolated, problem gambling can have serious long-term financial consequences for women because the time to recover from gambling-related debt is much shorter (p. 43).

The notion that gambling can be detrimental for older individuals was also commented on by Gosker (1999). Like others who are quick to point out that elderly gamblers are especially vulnerable because many start to gamble later in life, she provides a compelling argument that elderly gambling is ultimately growing as a social problem. Specifically, she contends that since many of the elderly today grew up in the great depression where gambling was considered a vice, they are still quite reluctant about participating in gambling and are quite careful with their money. Yet, when one looks forward to when the baby-boomers replace the current cohort of elderly individuals, the author hypothesizes that there will be a significant increase in the number of older individuals who are pathological gamblers (p. 199). Gosker expects that the rates of problem and pathological gambling among older individuals will likely increase as the baby-boomers move into old age.

When attention is shifted away from problem gambling to recreational gambling among the elderly population, many disparate viewpoints arise from the literature. Specifically, within the gambling literature, there are tremendous differences among the researchers who argue that the elderly are an especially vulnerable population and their overall participation has a negative effect on their well-being, and those who advocate gambling as an appropriate pastime for older individuals. We now turn to the literature that both supports and opposes gambling as a recreational pastime.

The literature that is least supportive of gambling among the elderly comes from research that studies the complex relationship between the casino industry and senior centres. As previously alluded to, senior citizens are in a unique position because not only are they one of the fastest growing demographics within North America, they have an abundance of free time and discretionary income (McNeilly & Burke, 2002). This unique combination of time and money and expected population growth has not been left unnoticed by the gambling industry (McKay, 2005 p. 35). Within the last two decades, casinos and other gambling establishments have begun to actively market to senior citizens. Recognizing that casino outings can provide recreational activity for “bored and lonely senior citizens”, the gambling establishments have begun to offer enticements for seniors to visit and, more importantly, spend money in their casinos (Gosker, 1999 p. 198). The enticements include, but are not limited to: complementary chartered bus services to the casinos (Higgins, 2005), buffet meals, slot clubs,<sup>4</sup> coupons, dance clubs

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<sup>4</sup> Many American casinos offer membership in free “slot clubs” as a motivation to continue gambling. While slot club members are provided with various incentives based on their gambling performance, such as complementary drinks, meals, and even hotel rooms, slot clubs also prove to be an important way for casinos to track gambling participation.

(McNeilly and Burke, 2000), discounts for amenities such as accommodation and entertainment (Gosker, 1999), and even medical prescription offers (McNeilly and Burke, 2000). Further, the timing of these special offers usually coincides with the time of the month when seniors receive social security allowance from the government (Gosker, 1999 p. 198). Thus, gambling facilities devote a considerable amount of time and money to attract older participants to their establishments.

It is not surprising then, that this form of marketing has met with a great deal of controversy. Higgins (2005) explores the controversial nature of the relationship between senior centres and casinos. Like other researchers who are concerned with the vulnerability of seniors (Gosker, 1999; McKay, 2005; McNeilly and Burke, 1998), Higgins (2005) is especially concerned about the precarious position that senior centres are placed in when they agree to help casinos organize gambling outings. Similar to other non-profit organizations, senior centres' funding is directly linked to the participation of their membership. Through collecting program fees, senior centres are able to generate money to continue their operations. As a result, the more popular the activity, the more revenue that can be generated for the organization (p. 86), thus, it is truly in the best interest of the centre to provide popular activities that attract as many participants as possible (p. 87). As can be expected, the staff and organizers are placed in a precarious philosophical position in regards to the marketing of casino activities within their centres. While the revenue generated from such partnerships is undoubtedly financially beneficial for their establishments, they are potentially exposing seniors to a risk-taking activity, casino gambling, which could compromise the financial security and emotional well being of their patrons (p. 89-90). Therefore, the influence and financial position of

casinos place those who are responsible for the care of the elderly in a precarious moral and financial situation.

While many researchers are increasingly aware of the negative ramifications of gambling participation among the elderly, increasingly, the literature points to the many social and physical benefits seniors experience as a result of gambling. Specifically, Hope and Havir (2002) suggest that although popular opinion suggests that gambling among the elderly has reached epic proportions, this is, in fact, a fallacy (p. 177). Through conducting a mail survey of participants of a senior centre in Minnesota, they found “no evidence to support the idea that casino gambling activities threatened ... older adults in any way” (p. 195). This allowed them to conclude that the social benefits gambling at casinos offers to elderly patrons far outweighs the negative consequences.

Another impact of gambling that provides benefits to older individuals who gamble is evident when personal well-being is taken into consideration. Unlike the documented relationship between gambling and poor health in the general adult population (Derevensky & Gillespie, 2005), in a study by Desai et al. (2004) 80-90% of older-adult gamblers self-reported excellent health (p. 1676). The authors of this study speculate that the significant difference in the health of the general population of gamblers and seniors who gamble may be attributed to the fact that seniors in poor health may be less mobile making it difficult to participate in recreational activities such as gambling. While this is a seemingly straightforward finding, this conclusion is nevertheless of analytic interest because it stands in contradiction to a great deal of the existing research that explores personal well-being and gambling behaviour, in that gambling can actually be seen as a positive activity.

Further insight into the relationship between gambling participation and the health of seniors is provided by Preston, Shapiro and Keene (2007). They reported that among seniors there is a strong emphasis on continuing to be active until their later years, and one important and significant way for seniors to do so is to participate in gambling. The authors provide support for the argument that seniors who regularly go to casinos are likely to be those who are the most active in their demographic, meaning that consequently those who gamble are likely to be the healthiest among their age group. The beneficial aspects of gambling are further corroborated by the work of Bilt, Dodge, Pandav, Shaffer and Ganguli (2004). These authors argue that gambling for older adults can be seen as beneficial to their mental health because it promotes social integration. They established that when compared to the participants in their study who do not gamble, those who gambled were more likely to believe that they have people to talk to and meet with as often as they liked (p. 386). Among older adults, gambling as an activity can serve as a community activity that brings people together.

O'Brien Cousins and Witcher (2004) also explored the argument that gambling offers social opportunities to otherwise isolated individuals. In this study, the authors suggest that bingo participation may in fact provide older women with:

relief from boredom and loneliness, escape from harassing neighbours, [coping] with mounting chronic conditions that prevented them from dancing or curling anymore, [enjoying] retirement time in a welcoming social environment, [getting] excited with affordable entertainment, [helping] charitable organizations raise funds, and [socialising] with people of all ages in the community (p. 143)

This argument that bingo performs an important role in many older women's lives allowed the authors to conclude that gambling is simply a means for fun-loving seniors to get the most out of their lives by providing them with a positive environment to foster

their well-being.

### **Older Women**

While each of the other sections in this literature review looked at a dimension of gambling behaviour, I have nevertheless chosen to include a short overview of the literature that pertains to older women. The decision to include this body of literature was primarily based on the need to supplement the lack of research that has been conducted on older women gamblers. Specifically, I contend that when older women, aside from gambling, are looked at in isolation, important information about the unique nature of their lives is revealed, which in turn provides insight into older women gamblers' unique experience. Therefore, I have included an examination about their unique social and financial situations, and the brief exploration of the literature that addresses the importance of organized activities in the well-being of older women.

Perhaps the most important information about older women comes from when their life-course is taken into consideration (Olson, 1988). A woman around the age of 70 would have experienced a far different life than that of a woman in her 20's or 30's. A woman who is in the seventh decade of her life would have been born in the 1930s to 1940s; not only would she have likely been born around the depression, she also would have some memory of the Second World War and likely would have come of age in the 1950s. Because of events and the temporal period this generation of women experienced, certain conclusions can be drawn about their life course. It is likely that women of this generation were married comparatively early in life (Harris & Cole, 1980), they were not likely to have been employed outside of their home therefore they likely did not have an

income and savings of their own (Gannon, 1999). As a result, the typical roles of women from this generation were wife and mother (p. 45).

Another important aspect to understanding the experience of older women is that they typically live much longer than men. While not only does this likely mean that a married woman can expect to live at least a portion of her later life as a widow, she may also lose financial security – often women’s incomes are reduced by up to 50% upon the death of their husbands (Hyungsoo, 2006). According to Hyungsoo (2006), unmarried, including divorced and widowed, women tend to be worse off physically and financially than married women (p. 75). The researcher posits that there is a very strong association between financial security and physical health, in that financial instability can cause significant stress that can either initiate or accelerate serious health problems. Another aspect that contributes to poor health among economically disadvantaged elderly women is the poor quality of life they can expect. Not only will the diet of these women likely be adversely affected, in that food with poor nutritional value is typically more affordable, these women will likely be unable to seek costly out-of-pocket preventative medical care (p. 77).

Isolation is also a pressing concern among elderly women. As previously alluded to, women on the whole are likely to outlive their male spouses because not only do women typically live longer, it is also not uncommon for women to marry older men (Olson, 1988). Yet another aspect contributing to social isolation of elderly women is the steady loss of their friends and family due to death and geographical movement (p. 106). Therefore, it is not unusual for women who were surrounded by a large social network in their youths, to experience increasing loneliness and social seclusion as they age.

Based on the general life course of older women, it is therefore not surprising that day centres play a central and important role in lives of older women. Ron (2007) explored the difference in self-esteem among elderly individuals who regularly attend day centres. The researcher found that the self-esteem of elderly women who regularly attend day centres was significantly higher than those who receive home-care. The basis of the findings lies in the fact that regular attendance connotes a fixed schedule outside of the woman's home where she can expect not only to provide a meaningful contribution to the centre, but also to socialize while attending this type of facility (p. 1105).

Ron's (2006) sentiment that socialization is important for the well-being and self-esteem of older women was also explored by Adams (1986). Through looking at the relationship between friendship networks and the psychological well being of older women, the researcher reported that women who participate in recreational centres and other types of volunteer organizations were more likely to have larger, denser, and more engaging social networks (p. 69). Yet what differentiates Adam's (1986) work from other research is that she found a significant difference between the elderly women who were employed for the majority of their lives and the women who were not. Adams (1986) was able to conclude that women who worked most of their lives were more likely to have a more challenging time making friends in their later years compared with women who spent much of their adult life engaged in local clubs and volunteer organizations. According to Adams (1986), the differentiating factor between these groups is the ease with which the women were able to consider others as friends, and thus she speculates that the more willing one is able to make new friends through social organization, the more likely an individual is going to report a higher satisfaction in life. Thus, women

who did not work outside of the home were more likely to be involved in larger social networks by way of various social and volunteer commitments outside of the home. As a result, it is speculated that women who were not employed outside of the home have an easier and more successful adjustment to retirement than their employed counterparts.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Having reviewed the research in risk and gambling, gender and gambling, elderly and gambling, and lastly older women, I will now consider some of the limitations of the current body of literature, and how my study of older women gamblers will address these gaps. First, there is a need for research into gambling from the perspective of older women who actively participate in this activity, as most established research of gamblers uses males in their early twenties as their primary sampling frame. While studying gender as it relates to gambling is increasingly commonplace, more often than not, when female gamblers are taken into consideration it is typically for gender comparison (Mark & Lesieur, 1992). Consequently, there is a significant lack of literature that looks specifically at the female experience of gambling which, in effect, greatly limits our understanding of their experiences.

Second, there is a gap in the literature that explores the forms of risk-taking behaviours that takes not only gender into consideration, but also looks specifically at older individuals. As noted, researchers have found that while alcohol and drug use tend to decrease with increasing age, the established body of literature has not looked beyond conventional notions of risk-taking behaviour as it relates to gambling participation. As a result, it is unclear if older women simply do not participate in forms of risk-taking

behaviour, or if the forms of risk-taking behaviours that they participate in differs from the more common activities of smoking, alcohol consumption, and illegal drug use.

Third, another significant gap in the literature lies in the methodological frameworks typically employed in gambling analysis. To date, many, if not most, of the existing studies of gambling and risk-related activities involve quantitative analysis (McKay, 2005). While this method allows for researchers to estimate average behaviours and extrapolate their findings to the greater population, it may also limit our ability to adequately capture the complexities regarding how women understand and experience their gambling and how, why, and to what extent they perceive gambling impacts their lives and the lives of those around them. More importantly, however, very little sociological research focuses on mature women aged 45 and above, and few qualitative studies have examined gambling in the mature female population (McKay, 2005).

By conducting in-depth interviews with women gamblers aged 45 and older, I hope to address the three significant gaps in the gambling literature as it relates to gender, age, and risk-taking behaviour. Specifically I anticipate that by using a qualitative methodological framework, I will be better able to understand the unique lived experiences of women aged 45 and older who recreationally participate in gambling-related activities, and to assess in what ways their gambling participation either stands at odds with or conforms to the conventional understanding of gambling participation that has been put forward by the established research in this area.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework used to make sense of the gambling participation of mature women is informed by three separate and unique theories: edgework by Stephen Lyng, the Serious Leisure Perspective by Robert Stebbins, and R.W. Connell's gender regimes and emphasized femininity. Although Lyng's edgework has been selected as the main theoretical framework for this research, the work of Stebbins and Connell have been introduced in an attempt to capture the complexity of the gambling participation of women aged 45 and older.

### **Lyng's Edgework**

Stephen Lyng's concept of 'edgework' has been selected as the primary theoretical framework for this project. Since the overarching goal of this research project is to better understand the role that gambling plays in the lives of older women, edgework provides the theoretical framework not only to examine gambling participation as a leisure activity, but it also provides the necessary tools for making sense of the risks associated with gambling participation. Through better understanding the role that gambling plays as a voluntary risk-taking activity in the lives of women, it is anticipated that a more holistic understanding of gambling participation will emerge. This section will: investigate the concept of edgework; explore the theoretical foundation of this concept; provide an analysis of the concept and an examination of the limitations of edgework; and, lastly, provide an overview of how edgework can be used to make sense of mature women's gambling participation.

### *Edgework*

Stephen Lyng first proposed the concept of ‘edgework’ nearly twenty years ago in his article *Edgework: A Social Psychological Analysis of Voluntary Risk Taking* (1990). In this article, Lyng (1990) sought to make sense of one of the most important paradoxes of modern life: while as a society there is an increasing emphasis placed on reducing threats to individual well-being, increasing numbers of individuals are actively seeking out experiences that have a high potential for injury or death (p. 851). Specifically, Lyng (1990) points out that “high-risk sports such as hang gliding, skydiving, scuba diving, rock climbing, and the like have enjoyed unprecedented growth in the past several decades even as political institutions in Western societies have sought to reduce the risk of injury in the workplace and elsewhere” (p. 852). It is this central paradox that works as the primary research question for Lyng’s analysis.

In attempting to reconcile this paradox, Lyng discovered that the conventional psychological and sociological theoretical insights are insufficient for making sense of voluntary risk-taking behaviours. Specifically, Lyng pointed out that psychology’s essentially micro reductionist explanation of risk-taking wrongly assumes that the motivations for risk-taking “are constant across time and space” and that sociology’s macro explanations tend to ignore “the internal causal processes that move actors between social structural influences and the actual risk taking behaviour” (p. 110). Lyng argued that it is this disconnect between individual and societal forces that limited a comprehensive analysis of risk-taking behaviours. In order to address the shortcomings of these disciplines, Lyng sought to incorporate the strengths of each perspective in an

attempt to create a theoretical framework that can account for the complexity inherent in this phenomenon.

Through establishing a micro-macro linkage, Lyng sought to make sense of the risk-taking activities that increasing numbers of individuals voluntarily participate in. At the core of edgework is Lyng's conceptualization of risk-taking behaviours as forms of boundary negotiation. He contends that when individuals participate in risk-taking behaviours they are in fact exploring "edges" (Lyng, 2005). These edges are understood by Lyng (2005) as "the boundary between sanity and insanity, consciousness and unconsciousness, and the most consequential one, the line separating life and death" (p. 4). When participating in voluntary risk-taking behaviours, one is essentially attempting to locate the edge by pushing as close as possible without going over.

It is this concept of boundary negotiation that plays a central role in uniting the analyses of disparate forms of voluntary risk-taking endeavours. According to Lyng (1990), edgework activities are united by one central feature: "they all involve a clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or one's sense of an ordered existence" (p. 857). Through reducing voluntary risk-taking pursuits to notions of physical and mental threats to well-being, Lyng is able to unite activities that have previously been thought of as separate and distinct from one another, such as drug use and rock climbing. As a consequence, edgework as a theoretical tool avoids being an activity-specific theory and is relevant to explaining seemingly dissimilar forms of activities ranging from those that are criminal to those that are purely leisure.

### *Theoretical Foundation*

In an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the knowledge related to voluntary risk-taking activities provided by psychology and sociology, Lyng looked to the works of Karl Marx and George Herbert Mead to provide the theoretical foundation to support his concept of edgework. Lyng's rationale for choosing Marx and Mead as the theorists to inform the concept of edgework lies in the fundamental difference in the ways they understand the nature of society. On the one hand, Marx's view of the nature of human interaction is dictated by an emphasis on the impact of the economic structure on the individual, whereas Mead assigns priority to the agency of the individual in society. While many scholars use Marx and Mead as counterpoints to one another by focusing on their inherent differences, Lyng instead chooses to incorporate their theoretical frameworks to create a more holistic understanding of the societal structures that influence the individual decision to participate in voluntary risk-taking.

Lyng asserts that the strength of synthesizing the works of Marx and Mead lies in not only the similarity between the two theorists, citing that they both "assign priority to the role of human action in the ontogeny of self and society" but the different insight into what types of action they assign analytical attention to (Lyng, 1990 p. 886) – Marx is looking at the structure of capitalist society, while Mead's interest is in the relationship between individual agency and the social structure. It is through this convergence and divergence of Marx's macro-level and Mead's micro-level understanding of social behaviour that Lyng is able to "connect the immediacy of the risk-taking experience to the social structures and processes located at the levels of micro and macro-social organization" (Lyng, 2005 p. 5). Lyng's Marx-Mead synthesis is able to incorporate both

a micro-level understanding of individual motivation while linking voluntary risk-taking behaviours to larger structural elements of modern life.

### The Dialectic of Spontaneity and Constraint

The most important aspect of Lyng's Marx-Mead synthesis for understanding the concept of edgework is the dichotomy of spontaneity and constraint. Lyng (1990) posits that the "division of human experience into the categories of "spontaneous" and "constrained" action is one of the most important links between Marxian and Meadian systems (p. 866). It is this distinction that provides the theoretical underpinnings of edgework.

The division between spontaneity and constraint is central to Marx's understanding of modern society. What is unique about Marx's perspective is that he locates the spontaneity and constraint on the macro (societal) level. He asserts that the structure of society is instrumental in influencing the behaviours of individuals. Marx contends that the true self is comprised of two equally important and opposing parts, the spontaneous self and the constrained self. These two aspects of the self are both the product of modern society. According to Lyng's (1990) interpretation of Marx's work, spontaneous or creative action:

is action that develops human powers, that broadens the range of our human capabilities. This kind of action appears phenomenally as "conscious," "purposive," "concentrated," "physically and mentally flexible," "social," "skilful," and

“rational.”(p. 867). Constrained actions, on the other hand, are comprised of the “constraining factors that make up the “realm of necessity.”<sup>5</sup>” (p. 866).

It is important to note that Marx’s notion of spontaneous and constrained actions are united to each other: without the unique constraints placed on individuals, individuals cannot fully engage in spontaneous action.

Mead, on the other hand, locates the difference between spontaneity and constraint at the individual level. Mead envisioned the self as being comprised of two separate and distinctive parts, the “me” and the “I”. According to Mead, the “I” exists only in the immediate reaction of an individual to others (Lyng, 1990 p. 867). Since the “I” only works in the present moment, individuals awareness of their “I” exists only in their memory, therefore individuals will only know how their “I” will react after an act or experience has been carried out. Since individuals are never fully aware of their “I”, they never fully understand nor anticipate the actions of their “I”.

Mead juxtaposes his concept of “I” with the concept of “me”. For Mead, the concept of “me” represents the constrained dimension of the self and involves the “organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes” (Lyng, 1990 p. 867). The I, on the other hand, as Ritzer (2004) explains, reacts to the “me” and it is through the consciousness of the “me” that people adopt responsibility (p. 400). Thus the “me” can be thought of as the deliberate actions individuals undertake in their lives. It is through the “me” that individuals are influenced by societal norms and responsibilities,

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<sup>5</sup> The “realm of necessity” consists of the social cooperation necessary for post-industrial society to operate properly.

which in turn essentially allows them to live comfortably in the social world (Lyng, 1990 p. 867; Ritzer, 2004 p. 400).

### Marx-Mead Synthesis and Edgework

When the Marx-Mead synthesis of the understanding of spontaneity and constraint is applied to Lyng's concept of edgework, important theoretical insight into the nature of voluntary risk-taking is revealed. As previously noted, Lyng asserts that the desire to participate in high risk activities lies in the desire to push oneself as close as possible to the edge without going over. However, what is missing in his concept of edgework is his ability to account for the underlying motivations that lead individuals to voluntarily participate in high-risk activities. Through uniting the seemingly disparate works of Marx and Mead, Lyng's synthesis in edgework provides a plausible rationale for why people choose to risk their lives in various types of leisure pursuits.

Lyng posits that when the two concepts are used to inform the day-to-day lives of many individuals, it is possible to speculate that the forms of employment that individuals are forced to participate in for financial security are essentially disconnecting individuals from their human needs. According to Lyng's interpretation of the work of Marx and Mead, the nature of the work that many people are employed in essentially separates individuals from their fellow community members and results in denying individuals from fully realising a unified sense of self (p. 870). Specifically, Lyng (1990) contends:

The conditions of trivialized, degraded labor that prevail under capitalism lead many workers to view their labor as a purely instrumental activity – a means to upward mobility and community consumption rather than an end in itself. And since work offers none of the phenomenological experiences that define spontaneous, free activity, workers look to leisure time for experience that is self-

determining and self-actualizing. People find in some leisure pursuits a requirement for the types of skills that have been systematically purged from the labor process under capitalist ownership and experience what they cannot in work – an opportunity for action that is conscious, purposive, concentrated, physically and mentally flexible, and skilful. In short, when the social context of constraint is distorted by separation, conflict, and contradiction, people often seek a substitute action in pursuits that offer some of the phenomenological characteristics of such action. (Lyng 1990, p. 870-871)

Thus, since the work that most people participate in for their economic livelihood constrains their actions to such an extent that it does not allow for spontaneity and free action, the nature of their employment results in the inability of individuals to fully realise their human potential.

According to Lyng (1990), the outcome of this suppression is that outside of work individuals look to their leisure time to find substitute activities, namely edgework activities, that better allow them to realise their human needs and desires. Lyng contends that for many individuals “edgework seems to be a desired choice – a way of fulfilling unmet needs – when people have the freedom to spend their time as they please” (p. 871). According to this assertion, edgework activities provide the avenues for achieving the aspects of human potential that are not available to individuals in their work environment. In essence, edgework pursuits are attractive to individuals not only because they are pleasurable activities, but more importantly because they can provide an escape for individuals from their day-to-day lives.

### *Formulation*

At this point the formulation of the concept of edgework will be explored. In this section, the types of activities that can be classified as edgework, the skills that are

necessary for participating in edgework activities, and the sensations associated with edgework activities will be explored.

### Activities

According to Lyng (1990) edgework activities are related to one another by one central feature: “they all involve a clearly observable threat to one’s physical or mental well-being or one’s sense of ordered existence” (p. 857). While according to this definition countless types of activities fall within the concept of edgework, in its truest sense edgework refers to activities that have a possibility of death. Specifically, Lyng contends that when individuals participate in archetypal edgework activities, the failure to meet the challenges associated with the activity means that their mistakes will likely result in severe injury or even death. It is no wonder then that edgework is strongly associated with extreme sports such as skydiving, hang gliding, downhill skiing, and rock climbing; activities like motorcycle and car racing; and even dangerous forms of employment such as police work, fire fighting, test piloting, and even military combat (p. 857)

Even though edgework is associated with death-defying forms of high-risk activity, there are other types of voluntary high-risk activities that also fall into the concept of edgework. As previously noted, Lyng outlines that the edge that individuals negotiate in high risk activities can be defined in many ways, whether that is negotiating the edge between “life versus death, consciousness and unconsciousness, sanity versus insanity, an ordered sense of self and environment versus a disordered self and environment” (p. 857). When edgework is considered in these general terms it becomes

obvious that the relevance of this theory transcends far beyond the traditional application of this concept. In particular, Lyng points out that an increasingly important application of edgework lies in its ability to explain drug and alcohol use and even criminal activities. Lyng (1993) asserts that the same search for self-actualization and self-determination that leads individuals to participate in risk-taking endeavours such as extreme sports can be used to make sense of deviant and criminal behaviours (p. 111). Allowing for a much broader application of edgework as a theoretical tool.

### Skills

Aside from the clearly observable threat to ones' physical and mental well-being that all edgework activities possess, edgework activities are also united in their requirement of "specific individual capacities", or in other words, skills (Lyng 1990, p. 858). As Lyng notes, in order for individuals to negotiate the edge, they must possess the ability to develop and use specific skills (Lyng 1993, p. 111; Lyng 1990, p. 859). Without the use and, more importantly, mastery of a specific skill set, individuals are likely to experience the perils associated with edgework activities.

While Lyng does not specifically define his use of skill or even what such skills entail, he stresses the important difference between the use of skill in edgework activities compared to other forms of leisure activity. He contends that while all forms of leisure activity require the development and use of a specific skill set, he points to home improvement and fishing as prime examples, edgework activities require that the participants possess certain abilities. According to Lyng (1990), edgeworkers are united by specific types of skill regardless of the risk activity, which is "the ability to maintain

control over a situation that verges on complete chaos, a situation most people would regard as entirely uncontrollable” (p. 859). Or, in other words, the skill that Lyng alludes to is the ability of individuals to overcome their fear in situations and focus their attention on the specific actions that are necessary for them to succeed. It is this skill set that Lyng argues differentiates edgeworkers from casual participants.

Much like his use of skill, Lyng does not provide a concise definition of an edgeworker, but he does point out that edgeworkers are those who possess an innate and strong “survival capacity” (p. 859). Moreover, it is this strong survival capacity that Lyng contends unites edgeworkers across different forms of edgework activities. He claims that regardless of divisions of “age, gender, class, race, occupation, and intellectual temperament, edgeworkers are able to unite through their “deep-seated commonalities of personal experience” and that edgeworkers “almost always recognize one another as brothers and sisters genetically linked by their desire to experience the uncertainties of the edge” (Lyng 2005, p. 5).

### Sensations

Like activities and skills, the sensations that edgeworkers experience when they participate in high-risk activities are also central to the understanding of edgework as a concept. Even though Lyng points out that not all activities have the same feeling when individuals participate in them, he argues that the sensations that individuals claim they experience when they participate in various edgework activities are virtually the same. Specifically, Lyng (1990) outlines five specific types of sensations that individuals experience when they participate in edgework activities: (1) self-realization, self-

actualization, and self-determination; (2) alterations in perception and consciousness; (3) sensations of a feeling of oneness with an object or the environment; (4) the experience of hyperreality; and (5) the ineffability of edgework.

The claims of self-realization, self-actualization, and self-determination are perhaps the most important sensations for understanding the edgework experience. Lyng (1990) maintains that in its purest sense, edgework activities elicit instinctual actions. Individuals are not acting out of extensive thought and effort, they are simply letting themselves go and relying on whatever actions come naturally in order to navigate risky situations. Essentially, it is this “letting go” that Lyng argues leads to a purified and magnified sense of self. As he notes from an interview with a skydiver, “I wasn’t thinking at all – I just did what I had to do. It was the right thing to do. After it was over, I felt really alive and pure” (p. 860). In extreme cases, Lyng argues that if edgeworkers are able to overcome a dangerous experience through instincts alone, they feel confident in their ability to deal with any threatening situation (p. 860).

The second sensation central to edgework is the notion that edgework experiences “involve alterations in perception and consciousness” (p. 861). According to Lyng (1990), as individuals who participate in edgework activities approach the edge, they experience changes in how they perceive space and time. Specifically, Lyng points out that at the height of their experience, “their perceptual field becomes highly focused: background factors recede from view, and their perception narrows to only those factors that immediately determine success or failure in negotiating the edge” (p. 861). Further, Lyng contends that when the individuals experience a narrowing of their perception of time as it passes significantly slower or faster than it would in day-to-day life. He points

out “sky divers experience 45 seconds of free-fall as an eternity, while rock climbers sense many hours on the cliffs as “just a few minutes” (p. 861).

Building on the notion that time and space are altered through edgework experience, the third sensation that Lyng outlines is that “oneness” with an object or an activity. Lyng (1990) argues that when edgeworkers approach the edge, they experience a sense of “cognitive control over the essential “objects” in the environment or a feeling of identity with these objects.” In particular, Lyng points to when motorcyclists or pilots feel a oneness with their machines, they feel as though they are not instructing the machine to achieve a desired outcome, they are connected to the machine so that it operates through mental control (p. 861)

The fourth sensation put forward by Lyng (1990) is the notion of “hyperreality.” Similar to “alterations in perception and consciousness” and “oneness,” Lyng points out that as he or she approaches the edge, the individual experiences a heightened sense of reality. Specifically, he contends that when participants are participating in edgework activities they feel more alive and, in essence, human, than they do in their day-to-day lives. It is this sense of hyperreality that compels individuals to continue to participate in the edgework experience; it allows them to experience a life other than their day-to-day existence.

The last prominent sensation that Lyng (1990) explores is the ineffability of edgework activities. Lyng contends that many practitioners of edgework activities report the inability to assign words to the magnitude of the sensations they feel as they approach the edge. He also notes that some edgeworkers believe that language should not be used to make sense of their sensations in high-risk activities because it can potentially

contaminate their subjective experience (p.862). As a consequence, Lyng suggests it can be especially challenging to get edgeworkers to provide an accurate account of their experiences.

### *Limitations of Edgework*

Even though edgework is a very useful theoretical tool for making sense of voluntary risk-taking activities, there are certain limitations to edgework that limit its overall applicability. Perhaps the most obvious and relevant limitation of edgework lies in Lyng's overall neglect of gender and age. Even though Lyng (2005) argues that the strength of edgework activities lies in its ability to unite "people separated by divisions of age, gender, class, race, occupation, and intellectual temperament" (p. 5), he provides little theoretical evidence to support this claim in his work. It is only in his first essay regarding edgework that Lyng (1990) begins to address the relationship between gender and edgework. He notes:

Males are more likely than females to have an illusory sense of control over fateful endeavors because of the socialization pressures on males to develop a skill orientation toward their environment. Insofar as males are encouraged to use their skills to affect the outcome of all situations, even those that are almost entirely chance determined, they are likely to develop a distorted sense of their ability to control fateful circumstances. Hence, edgework may attract more males than females because the male skill orientation may lead them to underestimate the risks involved. (Lyng 1990, p. 872)

Unfortunately, this brief explanation of gender socialization does little to explain the difference in the participation of men and women in edgework activities. The reader is left with the understanding that as a population young males are the most likely to

participate in edgework activities, yet there is insufficient insight provided by Lyng into why this relationship exists.

Regrettably, Lyng's explanation of the relationship between age and edgework is also insufficiently dealt with. Rather than considering age as an important aspect, or even perhaps determinant, of voluntary risk-taking endeavours, Lyng merely provides a short explanation. He explains:

My informal observations of various edgework groups generally corroborate the findings of others (see esp. Bernard 1968) that edgework is more common among young people than among older people ... Although the characteristics of edgework give rise to an illusory sense of control over the fateful aspects of the endeavor, it is likely that age plays a role in its emergence as well. As many commonsense observers of young people are aware, adolescents often harbor an abiding sense of their own immortality. Thus, if the illusion actually is, then young adults are good candidates for edgework since they are particularly susceptible to this illusion. (Lyng, 1991 p. 1536)

While he is able to point out that young people are more likely to participate in edgework activities, nowhere in his work does he consider why certain edgework activities attract individuals of different ages, or even how perceptions of risk may evolve as individuals age.

These shortcomings of edgework were succinctly addressed by Miller (1991) in her commentary regarding Lyng's article on edgework in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Among other criticisms,<sup>6</sup> Miller points out that Lyng's arguments concerning gender and age:

have an ad hoc quality that stands in sharp contrast to the precision and sophistication that generally characterise the essay. They also seem ill grounded empirically. One immediately is moved to ask: If men have a skill orientation

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<sup>6</sup> Miller is also very critical of Lyng's use of Marxism and his neglect of socioeconomic status. See Miller (1991) for a detailed critique.

toward the environment, what do women have? And what about the fact that the young have little in common with the world of work? Moreover, do the young more than the adult experience the same social psychological phenomena described by Lyng? (p. 1532)

Miller then proceeds to argue that perhaps the reason that Lyng has difficulty in accounting for gender and age is because he simply “did not look for empirical evidence for it” (p. 1532). Miller notes that Lyng’s work, first and foremost, looks to explain extreme forms of voluntary risk-taking behaviour rather than moderate voluntary risk-taking.

What, however, is important to note is that even though Lyng neglects gender and age, it does not mean that edgework is any less capable of shedding light on these dimensions. Miller (1991) briefly touches on how it is that edgework is thought of as a means of escape from the alienation that individuals experience in their day-to-day lives, rather than as a theory of extreme activities, edgework becomes a far more powerful theoretical tool. Miller rhetorically makes this point in the above excerpt when she asks, “do the young more than the adult experience the same social psychological phenomena described by Lyng?” Therefore, the absence of gender and age should not necessarily be thought of as critical limitations of edgework, but rather as a gap to be addressed in our understanding of how edgework can be used to make sense of how individuals cope with the difficult situations they find themselves in.

### *Specific Application for this Research Project*

As noted, the central aim of this study is to better understand the experiences of mature women gamblers. Based on the review of the literature it is possible to contend

that many women experience alienation in their day-to-day life, and as a consequence it is important to look to forms of voluntary risk-taking, most notably gambling, to examine how it can be used as an escape from the routinization of their lives. Further, the sensations and skills that Lyng outlined as essential to edgework are as applicable to gambling as other more conventional risk-taking endeavors, such as skydiving and motorcycle racing. Based on a careful consideration of edgework, one can maintain that this concept can provide the theoretical tools to begin to make sense of how, and more importantly why, increasing numbers of mature women are regularly participating in gambling.

### **Stebbins and Connell**

In an attempt to address the limitations associated with Lyng's edgework, two additional theoretical frameworks will be employed – Stebbins' Serious Leisure Perspective and Connell's emphasized femininity and gender regimes. Stebbins' Serious Leisure Perspective is a framework designed to make sense of how individuals participate in leisure activities, and what these activities contribute to an individual's life; Connell's work examines the relationship between gender and social institutions. It is anticipated that by incorporating these two frameworks, a more comprehensive understanding of the role of gambling as a leisure activity and a greater understanding of the relationship between gambling and gender will emerge.

*Stebbins' Serious Leisure Perspective*

The Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP) is a framework is designed to provide a unique way of looking at leisure activities and how people participate in them. First and foremost, this perspective focuses on how the leisure activities that are available to individuals differ from one another both in the nature of the participation and how it contributes to the well-being of the individual. This emphasis on the relationship between individual well-being and leisure allows researchers the ability to look beyond how leisure activities, as a single type of entity, impact the individual, and to better understand the different aspects of leisure activity that are available to individuals in the North American context and how these contribute to an individual's life.

In order to make sense of the enormous scope of leisure activities that are available to individuals, Stebbins's created a framework to organize and classify leisure activities.<sup>7</sup> Stebbins (2007) defines this perspective as a theoretical framework that bridges and synthesizes three different aspects of leisure activity - serious leisure, casual leisure, and project-based leisure (p.1). The goal of this perspective is to provide a systematic way of classifying and explaining forms of leisure activity<sup>8</sup> within the context of North American society. In doing so, Stebbins demonstrates not only how activities differ from one another, but also, more importantly, how each form of leisure activity contributes, in a unique way, to the overall well-being of the individual.

Perhaps most useful for this analysis is Stebbins' differentiation between serious and casual leisure. Serious leisure is defined as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur,

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<sup>7</sup> Refer to Appendix A for diagram of the Serious Leisure Perspective.

<sup>8</sup> Leisure is defined by Stebbins (2007) as forms of uncoerced activity engaged in during free time.

hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience” (Stebbins, 2007 p. 5). While this aspect of leisure does not represent the majority of leisure participation in North American society,<sup>9</sup> it does, however, represent the most intense level of leisure participation in Stebbins’ perspective, meaning that for many participants of serious leisure pursuits the activity constitutes a substantial and meaningful part of their lives.

While serious leisure is defined by the attention it demands from its participants, whether that be in terms of time, skill, and motivation, in order to competently take part in the activity, casual leisure is quite the opposite. Casual leisure activities require little, if any, special training, and they are inherently pleasurable and accordingly offer participants immediate and intrinsic rewards. As a result, the scope of leisure activity is incredibly large and wide-ranging and includes all forms of leisure activity that do not fall under the other aspects of Stebbins’ framework, serious and project-based leisure (Stebbins, 2007). Consequently, casual leisure activities are by their very nature accessible to nearly all individuals and are participated in at a far greater rate than serious leisure pursuits.

The very fact that nearly all individuals participate in some form of casual leisure activity makes casual leisure, as a distinct category of leisure participation, especially difficult to study. Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in the fact that casual leisure

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<sup>9</sup> In reality, Serious Leisure is only a small aspect of leisure participation. As discussed in detail later in this chapter, Casual Leisure represents the greater part of leisure participation.

accounts for an incredibly wide-ranging array of activities, and as a consequence it becomes particularly challenging to unite so many disparate forms of leisure participation under one category. In an attempt to minimize confusion and increase consistency and cohesion within casual leisure, Stebbins (2007) categorized all casual leisure activities into eight different types of activities. These eight categories include:

- Play (including dabbling, dilettantism)
- Relaxation (e.g., sitting, napping, strolling)
- Passive entertainment (e.g., through TV, books, recorded music)
- Active entertainment (e.g., games of chance, party games)
- Sociable conversation (e.g., gossip, “idle chatter”)
- Sensory stimulation (e.g., sex, eating, drinking, sightseeing)
- Casual volunteering (e.g., handing out leaflets, stuffing envelopes)
- Pleasurable aerobic activity [Stebbins, 2007 p. 39.]

Through categorizing these activities into subgroups, it becomes possible to pinpoint the location of each form of leisure activity that falls within the confines of casual leisure. Again, however, like other aspects of the perspective, it is important to note that these activities do not necessarily exist in isolation from one another. Rather, it is likely that two or three of the activities are participated in conjunction with one another. Therefore, many casual leisure pursuits are comprised of different types of activities (p. 39). For example, a passive activity such as reading a book may also be a relaxation activity for the participant.

### Benefits and Drawbacks of Casual Leisure Participation

Although it may appear that the different types of leisure activities may have little in common with one another, Stebbins (2001b) points out that all forms of leisure activity share one central property, and that is that they are all hedonic activities (p. 305). In *The*

*Costs and Benefits of Hedonism: Some Consequences of Taking Casual Leisure Seriously* (2001a), Stebbins explains that all casual leisure activities “produce a significant level of pure pleasure, or enjoyment, for those participating in them” (p. 305). In other words, individuals choose to participate in casual leisure activities because they can be certain that their participation will elicit sentiments of pleasure and enjoyment.

Aside from the hedonistic aspect of casual leisure, Stebbins (2001b) outlined five benefits or outcomes of casual leisure. The first benefit Stebbins (2001b) identified was serendipity. He defined serendipity as “the quintessential form of informal experimentation, accidental discovery, and spontaneous invention” (p. 305). Therefore, he argues that through participating in a casual leisure activity, individuals may gain new insight and knowledge into other areas of their lives. Another benefit of casual leisure is the notion of edutainment. This benefit occurs when one gains knowledge as a result of participating in a form of casual entertainment. The third benefit outlined by Stebbins is the concept of regeneration or recreation (p. 306). This benefit is used to explain the benefits that can be derived from taking part in activities that are above all, relaxing. Fourth, Stebbins outlined the importance of developing and maintaining personal relationships (p. 306). He argues that through participating in casual leisure activities with other individuals, participants will experience a sense of intimacy and interaction with other participants, which can be very satisfying. The last benefit Stebbins outlines is the broad concept of well-being and quality of life (p. 306). Simply put, when an “optimal balance” between casual leisure and other aspects of individual lives is met, individuals will likely be more satisfied with their lives in a holistic sense.

Unfortunately, like most activities, there are some important drawbacks of casual

leisure participation that necessitate consideration. Perhaps the most pressing is the fact that casual leisure activities can lead to boredom. Boredom, according to Stebbins (2001b), is likely to occur when a casual leisure activity is simply not stimulating enough to maintain the interest of a participant, and is detrimental to an individual because it is synonymous with an absence of well-being or a low quality of life (p. 307). Another drawback of casual leisure activity is that in some cases it can occupy rather large amounts of an individual's time that could be better put to use (p. 307). A third drawback that Stebbins identifies is that casual leisure activities are unlikely to produce enthusiasts. By its very nature, casual leisure activities require little to no skill for participation, therefore individuals are less likely to identify as enthusiasts because the activity would fail to produce a unique self-identity for its participants. The last downside to casual leisure identified by Stebbins lies in the fact that these activities often do not contribute to the self or the community (p. 308). Since casual leisure activities are less substantial they often do not create stronger communal bonds between participants. Therefore, while casual leisure activities do have important benefits for participants, they are often not as meaningful and important for either the individuals or for the community at large.

#### *Connell Emphasized Femininity and Gender Regime*

R.W. Connell's work on gender regimes and emphasized femininity is as the third, and final, theoretical framework to help explain the gambling participation of mature women. It is anticipated that the inclusion of Connell's theoretical work on gender will help make sense of why the casinos and bingo halls appeal to the women in this research, and how many of these women work to display their femininity within these

environments. This section will introduce Connell's unique approach to gender, present an overview of his concepts of gender regimes and emphasized femininity, and lastly, provide a brief discussion of the limitations of this theoretical framework.

### Gender

R.W. Connell's work on gender focuses on the relationship between power and the social construction of masculinity and femininity. Connell's (2002) work stands apart from other prominent gender theoretical frameworks that focus on either the biological influence or one-on-one social interaction, in that he focuses on what he terms the "intermediate level of social interaction" (p.119). He contends that the conventional nature vs. nurture debate inherent in established theoretical work on gender identity neglects many of the most important social institutions within society, namely the family and the workplace, that are in many ways responsible for gender construction. Connell (1987) asserts that these levels of social organization are, in many ways, the most important aspects of arenas of gender construction in society. He contends that the power dynamics within these social institutions help define conventional notions of masculinity and femininity within the larger society. It is this primacy that Connell places on the relationships within intermediate level social institutions that influence gender construction which unites most of Connell's work on gender. Even though Connell has published on wide-ranging issues within gender construction and identity, for the purposes of this research his concepts of gender regimes and emphasized femininity will be explored in detail.

### Gender Regimes

Central to the importance that Connell places on the role of social institutions on the construction of gender is his concept of gender regimes. Connell (2002) defines gender regimes as the gender pattern arrangements within an institution. He contends that gender regimes act as an intermediary between individual agency and the larger social structure of gender relations. According to Connell, each social institution is comprised of a unique gender regime that allows for the institution to perform functionally. Each organization has its own set of specific pattern in gender relations arrangements which determine “who is recruited to do what work... how social divisions [are] organized...how emotions conducted... and how institutions relate to others” (Connell, 2002 p. 53). It is these specific patterns in relations that, in turn, help determine the ways in which “people, groups, and organizations are connected and divided” (p. 54).

What is important to note about gender regimes, is that they are not simply a reflection of the broader social patterns within society. Although Connell (2002) links gender regimes of particular organizations to the larger social structure by contending that gender regimes tend to correspond with the “overall gender order”, he also points out that many gender regimes they depart established notions of gender relations (p. 54). He posits that this discrepancy between the overall gender order and the gender relations within a gender regime can lead to significant changes within social institutions. While not all institutions change together, Connell notes that some lag and others quickly change, larger societal changes often happen in one institution and “seep” into other sectors (p. 54).

### Emphasized Femininity

According to Connell, the structure of power relations within an organization has a strong influence on the production of gender. He contends that the nature of the power balance between genders in institutionalized setting works to determine how specific forms of masculinity and femininity will materialize. In particular he asserts that the most important contributing factor in creating gender power imbalances is the nature of the jobs men and women are most commonly assigned to. Connell points out that men are typically employed in positions that allow for a degree of solidarity in the work place, with professionals occupying the top of the continuum and unqualified manual labourers at the bottom. He notes that women, on the other hand, are often employed in positions that reward technical competence, “the social presentation of attractiveness, social skill and interpersonal compliance,” such as a personal secretary or a nurse. Connell (1987) posits that these employment differences have a profound effect on the gender roles within institutions. He contends that the gender differences become embedded in distinctive aspects of certain occupations. In an attempt to illustrate the striking difference in gender roles Connell points to the relationship between professional employment and the construction of gender, noting:

Professional employment has been structured historically as a form of masculinity: emotionally flat, centred on a specialized skill, insistent on professional esteem and technically based dominance over other workers, and requiring for its highest (specialist) development the complete freedom from childcare and domestic work provided by having wives and maids to do it (Connell, 1987 p. 181).

According to Connell, the professional environment creates distinct forms of gender construction. It is important to note that this strong relationship between professionalism

and masculinity impacts many diverse areas of life ranging from specific skill sets to how workers socialize with one another.

The form of professionalism outlined by Connell also has a strong impact on the construction of female identity. According to Connell, the form of masculinity produced in a professional environment ultimately leads to the subordination of women. He asserts, “femininity is organized as an adaptation to men’s power, and emphasizing compliance, nurturance and empathy as womanly virtues, is not in much of a state to establish hegemony over other kinds of femininity” (Connell, 1987 p 183). Therefore, just as men are socialized to be dominant and emotionally flat, women are expected to adapt to this dominance by demonstrating submissiveness and compassion.

The result of this specific power imbalance, the dominance of men over women, has led to what Connell has coined “hegemonic masculinity” and “emphasized femininity.” According to Connell the specific power imbalance discussed earlier leads not only to how gender is constructed, but also to how it is performed. Hegemonic males, according to Connell (1987), in many ways represent the archetypal strong male, such as the “film characters played by Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone” (p. 185), in that their social ascendancy is achieved through their presentation of power and force. Emphasized femininity is, in many ways, an adaptation to men’s power, and consequently this type of gender construction is “performed, and performed especially to men” (Connell, 1987 p. 188). It is this form of performance that constitutes the major focus of many of the popular women’s magazines and movies. Through practicing this form of femininity, women are able to better able to conform to accepted notions of gender performance.

## Summary

At this point, I will provide a brief summary of this chapter and determine how Lyng's Edgework, Stebbins' SLP, and Connell's notions of gender regimes and emphasized femininity will be used to make sense of the gambling participation of the women in this research. As previously noted, Stephen Lyng's Edgework has been selected as the primary theoretical framework to guide the analysis of the interviews collected for this research. The rationale for choosing edgework lies in its ability to make sense of gambling as a risk-taking endeavour and to better understand why the women in this research are motivated to continue participating in an activity that has the potential to compromise their long-term economic well-being. Unfortunately, as previously discussed, there are several drawbacks associated with Lyng's edgework that limit its ability to fully make sense of the topic at hand, namely its inability to differentiate between different types of leisure activity and its significant neglect of the relationship between gender and voluntary risk-taking activities.

As a consequence of the limitations associated with edgework, Stebbins' SLP and Connell's notions of emphasized femininity and gender regimes have been introduced. Stebbins' SLP has been chosen for its ability to make sense of gambling as a leisure activity. Through making use of the concepts of serious leisure and casual leisure, a better understanding of gambling as an activity can be established. In particular, through using both serious and casual leisure it is possible to better understand why the women in this research are attracted to gambling-related activities and how gambling-related activities

differ from the other forms of leisure activity that are available to women aged 45 and older.

Additionally, in order to address the limitations associated with edgework as it relates to gender, Connell's notions of gender regimes and emphasized femininity have been included in the larger theoretical framework guiding the analysis for this research. Although Lyng briefly introduces notions of gender as it relates to edgework in one of his early publications (see Lyng, 1990), the relationship between gender and the risk-taking experience is largely unexplored. Through introducing the work of Connell, a better understanding of the role that gender plays in gambling participation can be established. Specifically, through using his concept of gender regimes it is possible to begin to assess of how casinos and other gambling facilities are structured as a gendered spaces, and how this structure influences the gambling participation of the women in this research. Further, through using his notion of emphasized femininity a better understanding of the relationship between of personal presentation and gambling participation can emerge.

Therefore, the goal of this theoretical framework is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the interviews conducted for this research with women aged 45 and older. Through using Lyng's edgework along with the work of Stebbins and Connell, it is anticipated that a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon at hand can be established. In particular, these three theoretical frameworks enable an in-depth analysis of the accounts of the women in this research.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In generating data for this research, I have drawn from 19 in-depth interviews I conducted with women above the age of 45 who are recreational gamblers. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the research design utilized to conduct these interviews. This chapter includes: an outline of the research questions used to guide this research; a review of the sampling procedures; a summary of the recruitment process; an examination of the ethical considerations that informed the recruitment and interview process; and a discussion of my role as a researcher.

### Research Questions

The overall goal of this research project was to explore the gambling experience of women above the age of 45. Using Stephen Lyng's theoretical framework of edgework as a primary context from which to begin to interpret gambling-related activities, as well as consideration of the available literature on behaviours associated with gambling, female gamblers, and older gamblers, two sets of research questions were formulated to guide this research project:

- *First, does older women's participation in gambling conform to conventional male-dominated notions of gambling? If not, what other types of activities are these women participating in?*
- *Second, what does gambling mean to the older women who participate in gambling-related activities? What role does it play in their lives?*

## **Research Methodology**

Even though many, if not most, of the existing studies of gambling are quantitative (McKay, 2005), qualitative methods have been used to address these research questions. While quantitative methods allows for researchers to estimate average behaviours and apply their findings to the greater population, this method of research is limited by its ability to adequately capture more of the complexities regarding both how women understand and experience their gambling. Specifically, quantitative methods are limited in their ability to determine how, why, and to what extent women perceive the impact of gambling on their lives and the lives of those around them (p. 45). In order to begin to understand the complexities inherent in the decision-making processes that take place in the realm of gambling, qualitative research methodology has been utilised.

Since knowledge of the gambling participation of mature women is relatively limited, in-depth interviews were conducted in an attempt to explore how woman above the age of 45 understand and interpret their participation in gambling-related activities (Mason, 2002 p.15; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008 p. 147). While there is some confusion as to what can be defined as an in-depth interview (e.g. Johnson, 2002; Mason, 2002; Palys, 2003; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008), for the purposes of this research project, in-depth interviews are understood as using primarily open-ended questions to have participants reconstruct their experience regarding the topic under study (Seidman, 2006 p. 15). This approach to data collection offered me, the researcher, access to the ideas, thoughts, and interpretations of the female participants and their experiences with gambling (Reinharz & Chase, 2002 p. 222), as a means of attaining an understanding of their experiences.

### *Sampling*

The individuals selected for this research project, are Canadian<sup>10</sup> women above the age of 45 who self-identify as recreational gamblers.<sup>11</sup> The decision to sample women aged 45 and older, as opposed to only sampling seniors aged 65 and above, is that by keeping this wide age range (45+ years) I had the potential to capture up to three generations of women. This broad age range allowed for a better understanding of the dynamic nature of the lived experiences of older women (Wenger, 2002) and better allowed for an understanding of gambling trends that both persist and change as women age. Further, by not limiting the study exclusively to problem-gamblers or non-problem gamblers, but simply to women who self-identify as recreational gamblers I not only facilitated the recruitment of women, but I compiled a broader and more comprehensive collection of accounts to analyze (Reinharz & Chase, 2002).

From May 2009 to March 2010, I interviewed 19 women. While the majority of the women interviewed are residents of Calgary, due to the challenges I encountered in the recruitment process and the nature of snowball sampling, I interviewed women from both British Columbia and rural Alberta. Even though there is a significant geographic dispersion among the participants, I argue that since this research sought to address the experiences of mature woman gamblers, the differences in provincial gambling practices and legislation do not pose significant concerns to the validity of the collected data.

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<sup>10</sup> Initially my goal was to interview only women who lived in the city of Calgary. Since I encountered difficulty in recruiting participants, the decision was made to broaden the geographic region to Western Canada.

<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this research project, gambling has been defined simply as the act of playing a game of chance for money. This definition includes all games played in the casino as well as lottery and bingo participation are included in this research project. Additionally, recreational gambler is defined as an individual who participates in gambling activities at least three times per month.

Although the women had to fulfill two key requirements to participate in this research project (first, that they were above the age of 45 and, second, that they were recreational gamblers), there was still significant variation among the participants. Perhaps most notable was the variation in the age range. The women ranged in age from my lower limit cut-off of 45 years to 87 years of age. The nature of the gambling participation of these women also greatly differed. Not only did the frequency of their gambling participation vary, their gambling activities, their motivations to continue gambling, their monetary expenditures, and the social nature of gambling varied greatly among my sample.

**Table One: Characteristics of Sample**

Participant*	Age	Preferred Gambling Activity
Patricia	56	Slot Machine
Daisy	51	Lottery**
Janice	49	Lottery**
Nancy	58	Slot Machine
Shirley	63	Slot Machine
Barbara	87	Slot Machine**
Maggie	59	Slot Machine**
Mary	83	Bingo
Susan	72	Mah-Jong**
Carol	54	Scratch Ticket**
Judy	45	Slot Machine
Kay	52	Lottery**
Sandy	74	Slot Machine
Joyce	73	Bingo**
Dorothy	81	Bingo
Connie	83	Bingo**
Helen	62	Slot Machine**
Diane	58	Slot Machine**
N=19	Min= 45      Max= 87 Mean=61	Mode= Slot Machine

\*All names are pseudonyms

\*\* Participant regularly engages in multiple gambling activities

### Sample Size

The decision to limit the sample to 19 participants was informed by the notion of saturation. According to Mason (2002), the size of the sample in qualitative research is “dictated by the social process under scrutiny” meaning that there are no predetermined numbers that are used to ensure that an adequate number of respondents have been

researched (p. 134). Rather, in qualitative research the sample size is contingent on both the quality of data that has been collected and the predetermined researcher questions. Mason (2002) argues that as a qualitative researcher, it is important to sample until one has an idea of what is going on within the population and in turn is able to generate an appropriate explanation for it (p. 134). Since the purpose of this research project is to address specific research questions, the objective of the data collection process for this research project was not to generate enough data to fully explain gambling among mature women to make claims about how well this data represents this phenomenon. Instead, the goal of this data collection process was to better understand what gambling means to mature women who participate in it, and to understand in what ways their participation conforms or stands at odds with conventional male dominated understandings of gambling.

As a consequence of sampling until saturation, some of the accounts of the interviewees stood at odds with one another. While the explorations of these contrasting experiences likely would have added another dimension to this research, such exploration would have fallen outside of the scope of this research. In the end, I contend that the 19 interviews conducted sufficiently answered the research questions created to guide this project and allowed for a better understanding of the phenomena at hand.

### *Recruitment*

Because I have limited connections with this population, I chose to employ convenience sampling to begin my recruitment. This form of sampling is defined as essentially accepting whoever is willing to be interviewed (Weiss, 1994 p. 26). While this

is not necessarily the preferred method for sampling due to the inability to predict the individuals who choose to volunteer, this method allowed me to access as many women as possible with the freedom to later determine whether or not their gambling participation is appropriate for the scope of this research project.

The recruitment for research participants was set in motion by strategically placing flyers around the city of Calgary.<sup>12</sup> This began in May of 2009 by visiting 25 local senior centres. At each of the centres I placed a recruitment notice on their main bulletin board and verbally provided additional information about my research to the organizers of the centres. During this time period I also placed recruitment notices in various convenience stores with an emphasis on 7-11's.<sup>13</sup> In sum, I visited in excess of 20 convenience stores in all quadrants of the city to ensure maximum visibility for potential respondents. Additionally, I placed notices in a woman's outreach centre, a bingo hall, and various churches that hold bingo nights, community centres, grocery stores, and restaurants and bars that house Video Lottery Terminals.

An especially difficult area to place recruitment notices was the local casinos. Early in the recruitment process I approached managers at every local casino for permission to place a notice in their establishment and all managers refused my request. As a consequence, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission was contacted on my behalf by Dr. Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot and I was granted permission to have my flyer posted in their booths in casinos around Calgary.

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<sup>12</sup> Refer to Appendix B for a copy of the recruitment notice.

<sup>13</sup> The rationale for selecting 7-11's as opposed to other convenience stores is because each location has a community bulletin board above, or in close proximity to, lottery stations.

Even though a significant effort was made to circulate recruitment notices around Calgary, it was met with limited success. While many of the notices appeared to generate interest,<sup>14</sup> few individuals contacted me for an interview. As a result, when I began the second stage of my recruitment process I chose to provide \$20 in remuneration to those who participated in this research. The rationale for this decision was twofold. First, I anticipated that if I offered a monetary incentive I might attract individuals who otherwise may not have contacted me. Secondly, since the women I interviewed have busy schedules, I wanted to provide a meaningful exchange for their time.

The second stage of my recruitment process was comprised mainly of snowball sampling, meaning that I began with a few respondents and I used their connections with other women who recreationally gamble to generate a larger sample (Palys, 2003 p. 145). This form of sampling proved to be the most effective means of recruitment and generated the majority of the data in this research project. Unfortunately, like all forms of sampling there is a significant drawback to using snowball sampling. The main danger is that the initial respondent is likely to generate other respondents who have similar experiences with gambling. In an effort to curb this effect, I consciously tried to start several “different snowballs in several different niches” (Palys, 2003 p. 145) to ensure that I captured as many different gambling experiences as possible.

Further, in another attempt to counteract the selection bias associated with snowball sampling, the last phase of my recruitment process involved placing

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<sup>14</sup>A week after a flyer was placed I went back to the establishment to see if any of the tabs on the flyers with my contact information were removed.

advertisements in a local newspaper.<sup>15</sup> In November of 2009, I placed two advertisements in their Life section. Although there was a considerable monetary expense associated with this form of advertisement, I was able to recruit respondents that I would have otherwise been unable to contact through the other forms of sampling.

Overall, the recruitment process for this research project was unexpectedly difficult. Although I anticipated some difficulty in obtaining participants due to the fact that I had limited social connections with mature woman gamblers before undertaking this research project, I quickly learned that many women were reluctant to participate in a research project that focused on gambling participation. Through the process of snowball sampling I learned about the unwillingness and, often, refusal many respondents experienced when they approached their fellow gamblers about participating in this research project. The most common concern respondents expressed was their difficulty in adopting “gambler” as a self-identifying characteristic. It could be hypothesized that the women who participate in gambling as a recreational activity, yet refused to take part in this research project, may associate a stigma with the term gambler. Nevertheless, the recruitment process required far more time, money, and ingenuity than I expected when I began data collection.

### **Representativeness and Generalizability**

Since I have chosen to rely on convenience and snowball sampling, it is important to recognize that the findings I produce may not be generalizable to the larger population

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<sup>15</sup> Copy of advertisement placed in the Calgary Sun is available in Appendix C.

of mature women who gamble. Since a significant portion of my recruitment relied on convenience and snowball sampling my research could underrepresent those who have few social connections, and as a consequence the results of my research project may not be able to take into consideration the unique beliefs and experiences that are associated with those who have a limited number of social contacts (Weiss, 1994 p. 29). Essentially this “volunteer bias”<sup>16</sup> potentially limits the overall generalizability of the data collected for this research project.

It is, however, important to re-iterate that the goal of this project does not involve generalizing findings to the larger population of gamblers. As previously noted, the decision to stop interviewing was based on the notion of “saturation,” meaning that the data collection was premised on the importance of collecting enough information to address the research questions. Therefore, while it is important to keep in mind the larger population of gamblers in Canada, the notion of generalizability is not as important in this interview research as it would be in quantitative work. Nevertheless, in the end, every effort was made to counteract biases that could result in an inaccurate interpretation of the gambling participation of mature women. While the collected data is not necessarily representative of a population or generalizable, I contend that in spite of these limitations the information collected for this project provides important insight into the lives of mature women gamblers. It is anticipated that these finding will be analytically

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<sup>16</sup> Volunteer bias is understood as the idea that “ the people who volunteer to participate in research are often different in a number of ways from those who don’t. Thus, if we select a random (and hence representative) sample of some population, not everyone participates (as is usually the case), we cannot simply generalize the results from the sample who participated to the broader population unless we have some understanding of how, it at all, those who participated are different from those who don’t.” (Palys, 2003 p. 439).

important for those who are also interested in studying either the dynamic nature of behaviours associated with gambling or gambling among mature individuals.

## **Interviews**

Within the interviews, emphasis was placed primarily on the types of activities and behaviours that mature women gamblers participate in. In attempting to gather this information, insight was also gained into the lived experience of mature women gamblers, allowing for a more in-depth understanding of mature women's gambling participation. Even though multiple topics were outlined in the form of an interview schedule,<sup>17</sup> the interviews were open-ended and semi-structured meaning that the nature of the questions allowed for in-depth answers and the interviews did not follow a strict interview plan in order to allow for flexibility during the interview (Palys, 2002 p. 176), allowing for a degree of flexibility in the interview. As a result many of the interviews did not follow the same sequence of questioning. In some interviews, questions and sections were omitted or added when appropriate depending on how a woman answered a question, and the order of the questions also shifted in an attempt to retain the conversational flow of the interview. On a whole, this relative flexibility allowed me to capture the gambling experience of each of the women as accurately as possible.

The topics addressed during the interviews with the women were as follows. For the primary research question<sup>18</sup> I addressed:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interview schedule is found in Appendix D

<sup>18</sup> The research questions are:

- *Frequency of gambling and factors that may influence their participation in this activity.*
- *Activities they may associate with gambling, and activities outside of gambling they regularly participate in.*

For the second research question, I addressed:

- *How/when they made the decision to begin gambling.*
- *How it feels to gamble and reasons why they choose to continue gambling.*
- *Determining how/when they choose to stop gambling.*
- *The importance of control in their gambling participation.*

Overall, interviews were approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length, yet due to the conversational nature of open-ended interviews the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to nearly two hours in length. While the majority of the interviews took place in mutually convenient locations where both the interviewee and I were comfortable (e.g., cafes, restaurants, and my office on campus), and in the homes of the interviewees, there were also 7 interviews that were conducted over the telephone. While telephone interviews are not ideal for open-ended semi-structured interviews due to the limited nature of the interaction between the researcher and the respondent (Shuy, 2002), I maintain that valuable and analytically important information was collected during these

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1. Does older women's participation in gambling conform to conventional male- dominated notions of gambling? If not, what other types of activities are these women participating in?
  2. What does gambling mean to the older women who participate in gambling-related activities? What role does it play in their lives?

<sup>19</sup> For a complete list of questions addressed in the interview, please refer to Appendix D for the interview schedule.

interviews that would have otherwise been lost if I interviewed only the women that I could meet in person.

It should be noted that the shape and direction of the interviews shifted significantly during the data collection process. Initially, I intended to research the types of risk-taking behaviours associated with the gambling participation of mature women. While some women in this study participated in multiple forms of risk-taking behaviours, it quickly became evident that this was not the most appropriate and important aspect of their gambling participation to study. As the interviews progressed other important themes began to emerge, such as the functional role that gambling plays in their lives, the meaning of control in their gambling participation, and the overall importance of remaining active and social as they age.

In response to these emergent themes, the emphasis and tone of the interview schedule evolved through the course of the data collection. Although no significant themes were stricken from the interview schedule, questions about participation in leisure activities and the benefits of gambling were added. Nevertheless, in spite of these changes the general research questions that were formulated to guide this project did not change. What did, however, change was my incorrect assumption that gambling in some way was an inherently detrimental activity for mature women. Once the interview schedule began to align with the nature of the phenomena that the women were reporting, more in-depth and meaningful information began to emerge from the interviews.

### *Limitations of In-depth Interviews*

Even though in-depth interviewing was the most appropriate qualitative method to address the research questions, due to its ability to “provide access to the context of people’s behaviour and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour” (Seidman, 2006 p. 10), there are, nevertheless, some limitations of in-depth interviewing that must be addressed.

Perhaps the most important limitation to in-depth interviewing is what Palys (2003) defines as “reactive bias.” According to Palys (2003) interviewees can very easily be affected by cues that the interviewers emit. As a consequence, in an effort to “do well” in the eyes of the interviewer, interviewees may be influenced to such an extent that they change their answers in an attempt to win the favour of the interviewee (p. 160). While there was certainly the possibility of reactive bias in the interviews completed for this study, every effort was made to create a dialogue and a relationship that allowed for an open and truthful conversation.

Another limitation of in-depth interviewing lies in the relative subjectivity of the respondent. Just as the interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer can create bias in the interview, the relative subjectivity of the responses also must be taken into consideration when using information collected through in-depth interviews. As Gubrium and Holstein (2002) note:

Because the respondent’s subjectivity and related experience are continually being assembled and modified, the “truth” value of interview responses cannot be judged simply in terms of whether those responses match what lies in an ostensibly objective vessel of answers. Rather, the value of interview data lies both in their meanings and how they are constructed. These *what* and *how* matters go hand in hand, as two components of practical meaning making action. The entire process is fuelled by the reality-constituting contributions of all

participants; interviewers, too are similarly implicated in the co-construction of the subject positions from which they ask the questions at hand” (p. 16)

Therefore, similar to Palys (2003) notion of reactive bias, Gubrium and Holstein (2002) stress the importance of recognising that an interview is, in reality, a co-constructed dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. As a consequence, the responses of the interviewee cannot be treated as a truthful recollection of their gambling experiences; rather answers are more likely to be a product of the reality in which it was produced. Accordingly, an effort has been made to not treat the dialogue in the interview as a “true” recollection of experience, but rather as a record of recollections, thoughts, feelings, and opinions as they relate to gambling.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the information collected for this research was an on-going process that began after the first interview. After each interview was conducted, I made short notes to myself about how the interview aligned with other research on gambling, and in what ways accounts corroborated or contradicted the information collected in the other interviews. This process proved to be especially valuable not only because it allowed for a careful consideration of the information that was being collected, but more importantly because it allowed for changes to be made to the interview schedule to ensure that the questions being asked of the respondents captured the most relevant aspects of the respondents experiences with gambling.

Once nearly all interviews had been conducted and transcribed, a more formal analysis of the interview data took place. This process began by printing all of the

interviews and reading them over the course of a couple of days. Not only did this step reacquaint me with specific detail of the interviews that had been conducted, but also by virtue of reading them all in a short period of time I was able to observe larger themes in the interviews. After I had carefully read each interview, I went back through the interviews and took notes on the aspects of the interviews that were analytically interesting. This process allowed me to develop several emergent themes from the information in the interviews, enabling me to approach the data in an organized and purposive way. After the second complete reading of the interviews, I felt that the data had been sufficiently examined and I began to code each interview based on these themes.

Through a process of colour coding, I carefully examined each interview and classified the responses based on these themes (e.g. perception of control). From this process I created a new document with all of the relevant information thematically organized. This document allowed me to carefully consider each one of the themes and determine specific conclusions that could be drawn from the data. The results of this thematic analysis are presented in chapters four and five.

### **Validity**

Similar to the issues of representativeness and generalizability that were previously discussed, the concept of validity is another important concept in research. According to Mason (2002), validity can be thought of as whether the research is measuring what you are intending it to (p. 38). While this may seem relatively straightforward and simple, when notions of validity are applied to qualitative research,

namely interviewing, this concept becomes multifaceted. In short, validity in interviewing refers to whether the information collected in the interviews is accurate to the experiences of the participant (Seidman, 1998). The process of ensuring validity becomes especially complex when one considers that participants' behaviour will be "deflected from its usual course" when participants are in an interview environment (Palys, 2003 p. 204). Therefore, often the nature of the data collection process can compromise the validity of the information collected.

In an attempt to minimize concerns about validity in the interviews, several steps were taken to ensure that the interviews captured an accurate account of the experience of gambling. The first, and most important, step taken to minimize concerns about validity was to interview a relatively large number of women. This allowed me to compare the accounts of each woman to all the other women in order to determine in what ways individual participation conformed to other accounts. Secondly, I carefully considered my role as a researcher and how I may have impacted the nature of the data collected: this is explored later in this chapter. Lastly, I conducted a continuous analysis throughout the data collection process to ensure that the most appropriate questions were being asked in order to best capture these women's experiences.

### **Ethical Implications of Research**

Following the guidelines set forth by the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB), I do not believe that this research presented

any concerns to their mandate.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the sample for this research could potentially be deemed a vulnerable population, because this research sought to address behaviours that have the potential to be stigmatized. However, since I chose not to purposively sample certain types of gamblers, namely problem gamblers or gamblers with concurrent addictions, I believe that those who were willing to share their lived experiences for this research project did not have any significant pre-existing problems with gambling to the extent that it was difficult or painful to share their gambling experiences with me. Further, I argue that because I purposefully chose broad topics to guide the interviews, the participants were at liberty to discuss topics that were most comfortable for them.

Lastly, I have made an effort to keep information provided to me by the interviewees strictly confidential through the use of pseudonyms. This ensures that individuals will not be identified through my research and they will not experience a loss to their reputation due to sensitive or controversial material. Nevertheless, based on the considerations I have set forth, I do not expect that by participating in this project individuals' encountered more harm than anything else they would encounter in their everyday lives.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Aside from the ethical considerations put forth by the CFREB, it is important to acknowledge my role as a researcher during data collection. While the role of the

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<sup>20</sup> The ethical approval from the CFREB is provided in Appendix E

researcher in interview research has been extensively documented by various academics (Mason, 2002; Mazzei & O'Brien, 2009; Valentine, 2007), perhaps the most informative work about the important methodological implications of the role of the researcher derives from ethnographic work. According to Coffee (1999), researchers must recognize the strong relationship between the self and the data collection process (p. 1). She posits that the research process is strongly linked to the emotions and the identity of the researcher, and as a consequence it is important to recognize this relationship when presenting qualitative, specifically ethnographic, research (p. 158). Following Coffee's work, I feel it is important to locate myself in the interview data that I have collected and to carefully consider in what way both my age and my role as a graduate student may have influenced the data collected for this research.

Prior to conducting interviews I recognized that there were unique considerations that as a researcher I must be cognizant of when conducting qualitative research with mature women, namely the interpersonal relationships that may arise from this form of research. Perhaps the most important of these considerations I anticipated was the power imbalance I was likely to encounter (Wenger, 2002). From previous research I anticipated that as a young woman the power would naturally fall in the hands of the women being interviewed. Consequently, when I began the interview process I made a concerted effort to earn the respect of the respondents in an attempt to build trust.

Early in the interview process I discovered that the power imbalance in the interview process was not as clear-cut as methodological texts portray and that my personal characteristics influenced the type of data I was collecting. In previous research I interviewed university students who participate in snowboarding. As a university

student and a snowboard enthusiast, I believe I was able to collect data that an older individual who does not participate in snowboarding could have. This includes reckless and illegal behaviour, substance abuse and near-death experiences. Because I was so similar to the participants, I believe that they were able to transcend my role as a researcher and view the interview as a conversation with a friend. Since my current research project was not progressing in the same way with the same richness of data, I was forced to re-evaluate my role as a researcher and begin to critically examine some of the ways in which I was, unknowingly, influencing the interviews.

Perhaps the most relevant and unexpected complication I encountered was the complex and dynamic nature of the age difference between the interviewees and myself. Even though I anticipated that I would encounter some difficulties regarding the age range I could not have expected the challenges I experienced. As a young woman with a relatively limited life experience, it quickly became obvious that many of the women had very different life-trajectories than I have and as a consequence have very different life experiences than I have had. Therefore, when I asked women to articulate some of the challenges they have encountered as a result of gambling, many of the women framed their answers in ways that signified that because I have limited life experience; I may have difficulty understanding the difficult aspects of their gambling participation.

Another aspect of the power imbalance that I did not anticipate was my role as a graduate student. Even though I made every attempt to deflect the focus from my work at the university, it became very obvious that this was a point of interest for many of the

women.<sup>21</sup> Although some of the women expressed genuine interest in my education, some of the women used my education as way to create distance between their life experience and those of my own. While it is impossible to know their motivations, I hypothesize that perhaps the emphasis on my education stemmed from insecurities regarding scrutiny. Even though I tried to make the women comfortable and at ease, I believe that some women did not explore certain aspects of their gambling for fear that it would reflect poorly on their character.

Even though I feel that my role as a researcher influenced the nature of the interviews in many different ways, I believe that both my age and role as a graduate student were perhaps that most significant challenge I encountered in the interviews. When I discussed these difficulties with my supervisor, she suggested that I shift the way I was approaching the topics at hand. Specifically, instead of simply asking the questions, I was instructed to emphasize that they are experts and that I was there to learn from them. By shifting the emphasis in the interviews, I believe that the power was re-distributed to the women I interviewed. I believe that once I became cognizant of the power dynamics at stake, I began to collect far richer data.

In the end, I do feel as though my personal characteristics influenced, in some way, the nature of the data I have collected. In spite of these challenges I encountered early in the data collection process, it should be noted that I do not believe that the information I collected necessarily stands at odds with the gambling participation that they were asked about. I believe that the women provided as accurate an account as

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<sup>21</sup> The first question asked to most of the women was an open-ended question about their life history.

possible given the conditions of the situation. I do not believe that my role as a researcher should in any way discredit the information; I have simply put forward the notion that the role of the researcher is an important aspect of the data collection process and that much can be learned by carefully considering this effect on the information collected that has been collected for this research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS PART ONE – THE ROLE OF GAMBLING IN THE LIVES OF MATURE WOMEN**

Now that the groundwork has been laid for the analysis of gambling in the lives of mature women, it is possible to begin an overview of the information collected in the interviews. Since the goal of this thesis is to address two central research questions,<sup>22</sup> it is fitting that the analysis be separated into two distinct chapters, each highlighting distinct and specific themes from the interviews. The first chapter addresses the role that gambling plays in the lives of mature women and the second chapter will discuss the relationship between notions of chance, strategy and control in the gambling participation of mature women. The two chapters will portray social phenomena from the participants' perspectives.

The aim of the data collection and the analysis for this thesis is to better understand gambling participation among this group of women. Many of the women in this thesis have dramatically different experiences and understandings of gambling participation. The goal of these chapters is to communicate participants' experiences in an attempt to add another dimension to the understanding of this important phenomenon.

### **Gambling as an Activity**

The women's decision to begin participating in gambling-related activities is perhaps the most appropriate place to begin this analysis. Surprisingly, while some of the topics addressed during the interview were met with little consensus, the transition into

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<sup>22</sup> An overview of the research questions is available in the methods chapter.

gambling participation was remarkably similar amongst the participants in this research. This section will explore why many of the women chose to begin gambling and how their participation has changed over the years.

The most startling similarity among the women is the timeline of their gambling participation. While a few women were introduced to gambling as children, such as Patricia,<sup>23</sup> age 56, who has strong memories of her grandfather taking her to horse races and teaching her how to bet strategically, for most of the women this was not the norm. The majority of the women in this study commented that their first introduction to gambling was with lottery tickets when they were raising their children. For these women, the lottery provided the opportunity to generate income in their household with minimal effort and monetary expenditure. Daisy, age 51, in particular discussed the difficulties of raising children on a limited income and the financial security that could be achieved through winning the lottery, she said:

we were really hard up when my kids were little and um, I have to let the universe have an opportunity to give me money and I wasn't doing anything else where the universe could give it to me. So ah, [laughing], that's my belief system is that well a dollar a week, at that time it was just a dollar a week...so I didn't have any trouble justifying it.

For Daisy, and other women, the lottery provides the opportunity to imagine a life other than their current situation, a life where they no longer have financial worries.

The decision to regularly participate in gambling at the casino and the bingo hall also has a similar trajectory. While most of the women participated in the lottery regularly since their late twenties, many of the women were not exposed to casinos and

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<sup>23</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

bingo halls until their children were in their mid-teens to early-twenties. Many of the women discussed the overall sense of freedom that they experienced when their children became increasingly independent and how this independence gave the women an opportunity to participate in different aspects of gambling. To illustrate, Janice (age 49), who had always bought lottery tickets, did not begin playing the slot machines until her kids moved out of the house. When asked what attracted her to the casino she said, “well, it's because I had time, you know, ... plus I went back to work full time, so you're hanging out with more people who do that kind of thing.” For Janice, the combination of free time and disposable income allowed for the opportunity to play the slot machines at her local casino.

The importance of socialization in beginning to gamble in the casino presented by Janice was also present in Nancy's (age 58) discussion of why she began gambling at the casino. When discussing her motivation to begin going to the casino, she said:

I started gambling just about three years ago when a girlfriend gave me a card for my birthday and it had twenty dollars in it and she said you know I've always wanted to go to the new casino, and I said are you kidding me? I had never been to a casino and surely all the years that I raised my daughter I worked, raised my daughter, worked on my masters' and never had a day to myself. I was really focused on raising my daughter and doing a good job at that. So when the opportunity came along, I thought I should probably try this. It was really a place where I could let the worries of the world go. You know it's so unusual for us to be able to do this. You know I never went to show or clubs or bars, when I was raising my daughter. So really, this was a big surprise for me. I really liked it and then I kept going back.

Nancy's response is especially unique, even though her gambling participation in the casino was brought about through social interaction; her decision to keep going was slightly more complex than responses of many of the other women. According to Nancy, as a single mother she had spent the last twenty years focused exclusively on raising her

daughter. The casino allows her the opportunity to participate in an entertaining activity that is entirely outside of her day-to-day responsibilities.

The use of the casino as a break from day-to-day life was also expressed in Shirley's (age 63) discussion of why she began going to the casino on a regular basis. However, unlike Janice who perceived that she benefited from going to the casino, Shirley's use of the casino as a comfort led to devastating consequences. Shirley commented that she began gambling in the days after her daughter had attempted suicide. She stated that she found it extremely difficult to discuss the situation with those around her. As a means of coping she began to frequent nearby casinos on an almost daily basis. She said, "I didn't appreciate that I was not a well woman, but I was well enough not to make excuses. Nobody will ever hear me say that somebody made me put that money in that machine because, because they didn't, I did it all myself. But, at the end of the day, that was my way of being able to cope and to not have to talk about it." Unfortunately, her use of the casino as a coping mechanism resulted in significant problem gambling. By the time that she realised that her gambling had become problematic, Shirley was over \$150,000 in debt. While she has worked hard to pay off all her debt, she indicated that she still enjoys going to the casino with friends as a social activity.

### **Activities Associated with Gambling**

The relationship between gambling and other risk-taking activities is well documented in the literature. Specifically, researchers have pointed to the idea that gambling does not exist in isolation from other activities, namely alcohol, drug, and tobacco use, but rather that they are all linked together by some commonality that has yet

to be determined.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, as discussed in the literature review section, the vast majority of this research has used young, adult males, who have problem gambling tendencies, as the primary group for studying this phenomenon. One of the main goals of this research is to ascertain if this relationship transcends both age and gender in an attempt to determine if this clustering of activities is also apparent in mature women who recreationally gamble. This section will explore the relationship between risk-taking activities and gambling as described by the women in this research.

Perhaps, one of the most surprising aspects of this research was overall lack of risk-taking among the women interviewed. As stated, even though the relationship between risk-taking behaviours and gambling is well documented, unexpectedly, it was not a prominent theme in the interviews. While a couple of the women regularly drank alcohol, such as Maggie (age 59) who enjoys making creative drinks and regularly drinks in isolation, more often than not, the women expressed their lack of desire to drink, smoke, or use drugs. While they each gave their own rationale for avoiding such activities, nearly all of them were united in their aversion to risk-taking endeavours. Barbara (age 87) perhaps summed up this aversion most concisely when she agreed that she didn't like the effect of alcohol in her body stating simply that she didn't like how "alcohol can cloud your mind." As a consequence of the lack of risk-taking propensities, a concerted effort was made by the researcher to broaden the scope of activities that women associate with gambling to include other, non risk-taking, activities that the women routinely participate in.

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<sup>24</sup> Refer to the literature review for an overview of the relationship between risk-taking activities and gambling.

When the scope of the interviews was broadened to include other activities, it became apparent that the relationship between gambling and other leisure activities was an important aspect of the women's gambling participation. All, but one, of the women in this analysis reported participating in leisure activities that constitute a more important part of their lives than their gambling participation. These leisure pursuits range from dancing, to singing, to avid reading, to volunteer activities. At this point it is useful to consider the work of Stebbins and to demonstrate how his concept of the "Serious Leisure" can be used to make sense of this important relationship. As discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, the *Serious Leisure Perspective* is a framework designed to provide a way of interpreting how and why individuals participate in leisure activities.

Since many of the women report at least one serious leisure<sup>25</sup> pursuit in their lives, it is worth discussing other leisure activities reported by these women. Perhaps the two most common activities discussed by the women, aside from gambling, are bridge and golf. Mary (age 83), an avid bingo player, discussed her bridge participation by saying that, "We have leagues, little they're called, you have 12 teams in the league and through the winter months you meet all the teams and play, take your score, and winners, and we have a wind-up party, we have a beginning party and we have a wind-up party. So we are quite busy." Mary later commented that her bridge participation is an important avenue for not only maintaining friendships, but also for building a larger social network. Susan (age 73) also discussed her participation in bridge but emphasized

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<sup>25</sup> Serious leisure is defined as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience" (Stebbins, 2007 p. 5).

the strategy and skill involved in this card game noting, “when I started to play bridge, a friend of mine, a couple of friends in Ireland play, one told me give yourself two years, another said 10, and a friend who truly knows me said it will take you a lifetime. I really think it is, you know.” While socialization was an important dimension of Susan’s bridge participation, it is the complexity of this card game that provides her with the most pleasure from this activity.

This emphasis on time commitment and skill was also apparent in the women’s discussion of golf. Connie (age 83), an avid golfer, discussed at in length her love for the sport. Connie shared that while she enjoys playing golf, her membership in a golf club provides an important source for social interaction in her life, saying, “golf is my favourite, yeah. We [Connie and her best friend] have lots of friends there, yeah. It’s a very nice social thing.” While the social element is an important aspect of golf for Connie, other women in this research emphasized the importance of honing a new skill. The importance of skill in golf participation was best expressed by Patricia (age 56) who commented that she is attracted to golf because she enjoys learning a new skill. She said:

I started golf last summer and love it, I just love it. I could do it every day, all day every day, I could. I’m very bad at it, but I love it anyways. I love the whole thing, I love the golfing, love the golf course, I love the environment, I love being with friends, I love competing with myself. I’m really bad, but I love getting a bit better every time I go.

While all of these women regularly participate in gambling, it does not constitute the most significant aspects of their leisure participation. According to the women, golf and bridge are important not only because they represent an important aspect of their socialization, but, perhaps more importantly, these leisure activities provide the challenge of learning a new skill set.

This commitment to serious leisure pursuits, however, was not expressed by all of the women in this research. Perhaps the most significant difference amongst the leisure participation of the women was age. Among the younger women who were interviewed who are still employed and have significant family commitments, serious leisure pursuits were not as apparent as the women who are no longer have children at home and are retired. To illustrate, Carol, a 54-year-old mother of a young adult with special needs, discussed the time constraints on her leisure activities. While she noted that she is an avid reader, she also commented that she does not have as much time as she would like to engage in other leisure pursuits. This busyness was also expressed by Judy, a 45-year-old mother of three teens and owner of a busy accounting consulting company, who said that while she goes “to the gym regularly, 4 times a week,” she doesn’t have a lot of time to do leisure activities beyond those she can do with her family such as “walk the dogs, bike ride, those types of things.” While both Carol and Judy are tremendously busy, both noted later in the interviews that they looked forward to a time when they would have more time for themselves.

Also central to leisure participation was the emphasis an overwhelming majority of women placed on it as an important component of their lives. What is important to note, is that nearly all of the references related to the importance of leisure and activity relate to growing older. Many of the women expressed concern about the aging process and the loss of skill, mental ability and mobility that is associated with aging. Interestingly, the responses appear to differ by the age of the respondents. Many of the younger participants viewed the importance of leisure as a contrast to some of the people

in their lives such as their parents who are older than they are. Kay (age 52), for example, used her mother as a point of comparison, stating:

My mom's 86 and doesn't have a car. She walks for an hour in the mornings, she walks home, does walkathons, does work. I think it was 5 years ago, when she was 80, her and about 5 of her friends, flew down to the Dominican Republic and made all of these paper things for the kids down there. She's really an inspiration. You know when we go over there now, there's often a note on the fridge that says that supper's in the fridge and she's take herself down to line dancing. She's taking line-dancing classes. Yeah, so she's very active. She's really a great inspiration for all of us and that way we keep active. So my whole family's active.

Kay's explanation demonstrates the importance of staying active by comparing her leisure participation against her mother's active lifestyle.

The older women in this research, on the other hand, compared their leisure activity to their peers. Barbara (age 87), for instance, pointed out that being active in leisure pursuits is important to her because, "if you don't keep busy and keep your mind occupied, I think at this age you really slow down and your friends are either moving to a retirement place or they're getting sick or something like that so we have to try to be active for as long as you can." Barbara stated that keeping busy is a matter of necessity. For her, being active is crucial to maintaining the lifestyle that she enjoys. This importance of staying active was also expressed by Patricia (age 56). Patricia, a nurse, regarding being active, said that it's "very important, and really more important as I get older. The body gets sore and achy and I realize "Oh yeah I've got to keep moving. So I've got to keep active." Like Barbara, Patricia communicated that an active lifestyle is an important part of slowing down the aging process.

## Casual Leisure and Gambling

While nearly every woman expressed the importance of staying active through the participation in leisure activities, it is useful to consider the importance of gambling participation as a leisure activity. Using Stebbins' Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP), it is possible to contend that the vast majority of the gambling participation of the women in this research aligns with his concept of casual leisure.<sup>26</sup> As previously discussed in the theoretical framework, casual leisure pursuits are unique in that they require little, if any skill, and do not require regular time commitment to maintain the ability to participate in the chosen activity. Based on Stebbins' conceptualization of this type of leisure participation, it can be argued that the majority of the gambling participation of the women in this research, especially slot machines, aligns with his notion of casual leisure.

However, what is unclear about the relationship between casual leisure and gambling is why the women in this research have chosen to regularly participate in an activity that has potentially harmful mental and economic repercussions to their well-being. As Stebbins points out,<sup>27</sup> there are a myriad of casual leisure activities available to individuals and most do not have the potential for such severe effects on personal well-being. Therefore, it is important to begin to understand why the women in this research have chosen to frequent both casinos and bingo halls.

While the answers were quite varied among the women, their responses typically involved the importance of the casino's environment. Many of the interviewees stated

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that certain aspects of gambling participation can be considered serious leisure pursuits, namely poker and other card games. It should, however, be noted that this type of gambling participation was only present in a small minority of participants. Notions of casual leisure participation are a most accurate representation of the gambling participation of the women in this research.

<sup>27</sup> This is explored in more detail in the theoretical framework section.

that the casino is an especially hospitable environment compared to other common leisure environments. For example, Nancy (age 58), a medical professional and weekly slot machine gambler, when asked what appealed to her about going to the casino she said:

You know you can go to a church but there's so much attached to it. You can go to a movie but then you just sit in the dark and then it's over before you want it to be. I find it [the casino] very relaxing, you know, when I go with my friends it is a nice relief. You know nursing is a very different profession; we are all inundated with problems and stresses, worries and inappropriate behaviours, or comments. So it's not uncommon for us to go to the casino together. It's just a very nice and relaxing way for us to spend time outside of our work environment.

For Nancy, the environment of the casino offered her a great degree of autonomy in her leisure participation. Not only is she able to determine how long she would like stay in the casino, as there are no imposed timelines related to participation, she is able to go whenever she would like. As she noted, if she has an especially stressful day, she is able to attend the casino whenever it suits her best.

Interestingly, Maggie (age 59) also commented on the difference between movie theaters and the casino when she discussed her mother-in-law's attraction to the casino. When asked why her mother-in-law, her primary casino partner, prefers the casino to other common leisure environments, she noted:

What else is she going to do with it [her money]. When you're 90 something years old, what are you going to shop for? I mean are you going to buy new furniture for your house? You know, so that's why I think the old women are in the casino, it's what they do. She doesn't need anything for the house, is she going to buy clothes? She doesn't need clothes. You know she golfs in the summer, there's not a lot to do in the winter... Movies are like, well by the time you get into the movie it's like 50 bucks by the time you get popcorn, and then you may not even like it... Maybe that's what they like about gambling they know what to expect. They get out of the house, they go to a familiar place, people are all really nice to old people, they likely know people there. You know I'm sure that's why my mother-in-law goes; I know that's why my mother goes. You know my mother goes for dinner, the more

she gambles the more comped meals<sup>28</sup> she gets. And you know, you can listen to good music, you know, gamble a little bit. My mother plays the penny machines, like she's not a high roller, but she's treated well by the people who work there.

Unlike Nancy, Maggie commented on the predictability of the casino. Patrons of the casino can expect consistency in their experience gambling at the casino. Not only can they be assured a pleasant time, as Maggie said, they can listen to music and be treated well; the casino is a familiar place for many of the women.

Slightly departing from Nancy and Maggie's comments, Barbara (age 87) also discussed the differences between other leisure environments and the casino, but she instead focused on the mobility concerns that many women face as they age. In her spare time Barbara helps to organize the monthly social events in her assisted care facility. She argued that when women go to the movies they often have difficulty both walking and comfortably sitting in the small chairs provided by the theaters, noting that, "a lot of them are big ladies and they can't get into the little seats that they have." Barbara further touched on an often overlooked aspect of gambling participation, the notion that many since of the women in this research are socially isolated, the casino provides the opportunity to catch-up with friends. Patricia (age 56) mentioned in relation to going to the theatre versus the casino, "they seem to laugh more, 'cause in the theatre you have to be quiet and you can't talk at all... They like to visit you know, talk about the past, talk about their grandchildren and everything like that. And, you can't do that if you're in a play." Patricia's comment demonstrates that the casino easily lends itself to many different forms of socialization.

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<sup>28</sup> Maggie's mother lives in the United States where frequent gamblers are often rewarded with complementary meals.

### **Positive Aspects of Gambling**

Based on the analysis of why mature women begin gambling, what it contributes to their lives, and why they prefer gambling over other leisure activities, it is little wonder that all of the women in this study spoke at considerable length about why they enjoy gambling. For nearly all of the women, the most important aspect of gambling was the social nature of this activity. It is, however, important to note that the notion of “social” was not consistent throughout the interviews and differed from one woman to the other.

Similar to the way many were exposed to gambling through an established peer group, many of the women commented on how they use gambling facilities to meet with their established group of friends. Janice, for instance, a 49-year-old woman who lives in a small community outside of Calgary, shared how she often uses the casino to have a girl’s weekend with her close friends in the city. When asked what she likes about the casino she said:

And then, every now and then my girlfriends and I, we'll have like a girls night out and we'll do the casino and we'll go blow 3-400 bucks...you know you make a whole weekend of it. You do like to see a show, go for suppers, go shopping. And, if you're winning you have like a few drinks and you get your room and then you go home the next day.

Janice later commented that it was her weekends away at the casino with her girlfriends that helped keep her “sanity in life,” stressing the point that the casino was her time to be herself and to have fun with friends.

Related to Janice experiences, Nancy (age 58) discussed the importance of gambling. For her, the true enjoyment of gambling stems from the fact that she is able to have a regular night out with her close friend and her friend’s husband. Nancy

commented that they usually meet once a week for a meal together at the casino and that once they are done eating the husband gambles alone and the two women are able to catch-up. She said her and her friend usually play their favourite games together, stating:

It really makes a difference to have someone to play the game together with. You lose less money and you also have a lot more time to see what is going on. So we split the pot but we also share the losses. You can have coffee and you can spend a few hours talking and you know talk about things, complain about things and just catch-up.

For Nancy, the casino offered an unstructured environment where she is able to re-connect with her friend and discuss important events in their lives.

Though many of the women remarked how the casino is a place to meet with an established group of friends, many other women spoke of how they used gambling to create social connections. It should be noted that while the respondents often use the casino as an environment to maintain social relationships, surprisingly, many of the bingo players reported using bingo halls to create new social networks. Joyce (age 73), a retired bookkeeper commented on the ability of bingo halls to facilitate establishing friendships compared to casinos by arguing, “you can sit beside a person at slot machines all night and they wouldn’t talk to ya, but in bingo you sit besides the same person all night and they talk to ya. It’s the interaction.” Later, she mentioned she has made a whole group of friends playing bingo, many of whom her family is not familiar with. When discussing how her bingo participation is almost like a secret life, Joyce said, “yeah [laughing], yes. My daughter goes with me sometimes to bingo and I introduce her to all my friends and she goes ‘wow mom, I didn’t know you had that many friends’ and I say ‘there’s a lot you don’t know’ [laughing].” According to Joyce, the bingo hall provides her with the opportunity to go out and socialize with a new group of people.

It was perhaps Dorothy (age 81) who made the most telling statement about the friendly nature of bingo halls. Because of her failing health, her and her husband moved to Alberta to be closer to family for support. Since they had limited social connection in the new area, they looked to bingo as an avenue to create a new social network. When asked about the social aspects of bingo, Dorothy commented:

Oh I met, oh I guess, let me see, yes, I met a few of them. A lot of them I don't know their names. But my husband, the first night we went to Wetaskawin he won the satellite.<sup>29</sup> And, it was \$17,000. Well everybody clapped and of course they banged their dobbers on the table and clapped. And, they came over and shook his hand and some women that we didn't even know and they come over and put their arms around me and "congratulations" and shook Glen's hands and even when we went out after the rest of the bingo, because the satellite comes on in between the middle of bingo and shook his hands when we were going out the door. And then, let me see here, two months before that he won \$7,000 on the satellite. He won the satellite three times. And two months later well the \$17000 was in April ah, and then he won let me see now \$6000 in June and then ah, in 2007 that was 2005, in 2007 he won \$11,000 on the loonie pot, the full pot.

Not only did the friendly atmosphere make for an entertaining evening, Dorothy commented that, in large part, it was the bingo hall and those who frequent it which made an especially difficult part of her life immensely better.

### **Winnings**

Though the social nature of gambling proved to be the most important positive aspect of their gambling participation, not surprisingly, the potential to win, or winning significant sums of money also played a significant role in the women's enjoyment. Mary

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<sup>29</sup> Satellite bingo is a popular gambling activity. Through a satellite up-link, multiple bingo halls, or hosts, can simultaneously stream a single bingo game from a single location. Because many bingo halls participate in the same game, money from all locations is pooled to create a larger than usual jackpot (Satellite Bingo Network, 2007).

(age 83), for example, contended that while the social experience of gambling is important, it is the opportunity to win money that adds the extra bit of pleasure to her bingo experience. She commented:

I don't expect to, you know when I go I expect that I'm going to lose the money and this is my evening out. If you win, it's a plus, and no I don't have big high expectations. I don't think you would go if you expected to win the jackpot every night. Because, when you have all those people, it's about 300 people you're competing with for you to win, it's quite amazing. You just go with the fun, you get close and it's so disappointing when you don't get it but I've been at it so long that it doesn't worry me at all.

Mary went on to further rationalize the money she spends playing bingo by saying that while raising her four children she didn't really go out all that often. Now, when she plays bingo she figures, "well, I haven't spent \$100 on the kids today, I didn't go out for dinner, some people think nothing of spending \$100 for a drink and their meal and you know, we never spend that kind of money you know. You know, we never had it to spend." Thus, the excitement that she experiences when she has the potential to win money reveals the complexity inherent in the reasons why the women are so attracted to gambling.

Even though women like Mary were optimistic about the possibility of winning money, a couple of the women expressed fear when asked about winning the jackpot. Susan (age 73), a small business owner clearly articulated this fear when she discussed the potential of winning ten million dollars. When discussing the potential of hitting the jackpot, she commented, "it's too much and what would you do with it? I am sure that you could do a lot, but it would just, even as a mature person you could lose your wits...it's nice to get up and work for what you have." Although Susan regularly

purchases lottery tickets, she is wary of how a large influx of money could compromise the life she has now.

Daisy (age 51) also expressed concern about winning large sums of money. Like Susan who was concerned about how a large influx of money might disrupt her life, Daisy expressed concerns relating to how a jackpot might affect her family. When asked about why she plays the lottery she said, “I always thought it would be great to win the lottery. But I might re-evaluate that, maybe when I get older I might think that maybe I don't need to win the lottery to give money to other people because everybody is just fine the way they are.” Although Daisy indicated that her main motivation to buy lottery tickets is to have the opportunity to support her family, she realizes that her children are self-sufficient.

### **The Gambling Environment**

At this point it is worth commenting on the unique nature of both casinos and bingo halls. Although the importance of the environment has been mentioned briefly by a few of the respondents, the nature of casinos and bingo halls proved to be one of the strongest and most persistent themes in the interviews. Some women reported that it was the environment that attracted them to gambling, whereas other women reported that the casinos and bingo halls are the strongest detractors from their gambling. It is this overwhelming contradiction in the interviews that merits a thoughtful discussion.

In order to begin to make sense of the importance of the casino and bingo halls as environments, Connell's work on gender regimes and emphasized femininity has been utilized. While an in-depth overview of Connell's theoretical framework is provided in

the theoretical framework chapter, at this point, it is useful to summarize the important aspects of Connell's work. Connell's notion of gender regimes is an important starting point to begin to understand why these environments are attractive to the women in this research. According to Connell, all social institutions are organized around a regular set of gender arrangements (2002, p. 53). The specific gender arrangements of each institution, in turn, determine who is recruited to do specific work, what social divisions are recognized, how emotional relations are conducted and how social institutions relate to one another. It is the specific gender organization of an institution that works to structure how gender is presented within each institution.

Building from the assumption that the organization of the institution has an effect on how gender roles are produced and reproduced in an environment, Connell introduced the notions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. These archetypal concepts can make sense of how people perform gender. Connell (1982) asserts that both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are produced in very specific gender regimes where there is an extreme power imbalance in the institution between the genders. He asserts that when the power rests exclusively in the hands of men, men begin to portray specific characteristics; most notably they become powerful, authoritative and violent (p. 187).

This power imbalance, not surprisingly, has the opposite effect on women. Instead of becoming powerful and dominant, the women become subordinate and submissive. Unlike hegemonic males who are characterized by their power, emphasized femininity is a reaction to this power and consists of characteristics of compliance, nurturance and empathy (p.188). What is especially important to note about Connell's notion of

emphasized femininity is that it is “performed, and performed especially to men” (p. 188). He points to the importance of women’s magazines and Hollywood movies as ways in which women learn how to present themselves as women and stresses the importance of personal appearance among women within this power structure. Both gender regimes and emphasized femininity proved to be important aspects of the women’s discussion of the environments of casinos and bingo halls.

Before analyzing the importance of both the casino and the bingo halls as environments, brief description of these spaces will be provided. While both casinos and bingo halls are unique environments, in many ways unlike most other social environments, they are strikingly different from one another. Casinos, on the one hand, vary greatly depending on the age, location and clientele. They can vary from clean, well-maintained, almost luxurious spaces, to places that are in an overall state of disrepair. Bingo halls, on the other hand, also greatly vary; they are in many ways the antithesis of the glamorous casino environments. While most are separate facilities, many are housed in churches and community centres they are increasingly becoming incorporated in casinos. Unlike casinos, which almost always attempt to portray extravagance, bingo halls are almost austere in nature. Most bingo halls, especially those in churches and community centres, tend to be sparse large well-lit rooms with simple tables and chairs.

Based on these striking differences, it makes sense that both the casinos and the bingo halls, as environments, varied dramatically in terms of the praise each environment received by the respondents. Surprisingly, however, the power dynamics that Connell pointed to in his discussion of gender regimes was not a prominent aspect of the women’s

discussion. What was present in the interviews, however, was the overall importance the respondents placed on the functional role each of these environments plays in their lives.

Casinos, for instance, appeared to appeal to the respondents because they represent an environment entirely different than their day-to-day lives. To illustrate, when asked what appealed to her about the casino, Judy (age 45) commented that she enjoyed the casino because it was an entirely different environment from her normal life. In particular, she commented that this environment, because of the energy she feels in the casino, notes that, “when you are kind of tired or run down it energizes you. And you know you have kind of the interactive part; you know there are tons of people around.” Patricia (age 56) also commented on this notion of the casino as a stimulating environment. When asked what she likes about the casino, she argued that the casino is akin to an adult playground stating, “I definitely like the environment of it. It's like going into an adult playground. There are no kids, there are no cares. You know people are laughing, the bells are ringing and you get the feeling that's kind of stimulating,” and when asked to expand on this notion of the adult playground, Patricia replied:

There's the fact that when you're in there, it almost feels like there is a disconnect with the outside world. When you go in there it's like any other responsibilities are just gone. You don't have to think about what's going on at work, at home, with the family. It's just fun. You can just focus on having fun for 2, 3, 4 hours. It's just really an adult playground.

This lack of responsibility was also expressed by Debbie, who said that she is attracted to the casino “because it's just a way to escape from regular responsibilities. Nothing, nothing, is expected of me when I go there.”

The positive sensations associated with the casino were also expressed by Barbara (age 87), she commented that when she goes to the casino with her friends, there's a

positive attitude that she gets wrapped up in, saying, “you hear all the machines you know, ding ding ding, and that and everything else. And once in a while you'll hear a winner and then the people there think that if they hear a lot of winners, maybe I'll be one too.” Janice (age 49) further commented on the contagious excitement of being around winners noting, “yeah, well when people are winning, it's um like exciting, it's just incredibly exciting.” She further states, “people are really friendly in the casino. If you sit down at a machine, if you don't know how, or if you've never played it before or anything, usually the person sitting beside it will tell you all about it.”

Even though Janice commented on the friendly nature of the casino, this response was far more common among the bingo participants in this research. Dorothy (age 81) commented on the difference between bingo halls and casinos, commenting, “you don't make the same kind of friends at the poker table as you do with bingo because it is a more relaxing game. And then, of course, when the breaks come well then you talk to the people then. But see, there's no breaks in poker and concentration is important.” For many of the women it is the camaraderie that is associated with bingo that motivates them to continue playing the game. Mary (age 83), for example, commented that part of the fun of going to bingo is seeing her “bingo friends” saying, “well there are the people that we keep their seats, so maybe about 8 ladies... one of the couples that plays I used to play bridge with them too, but now it's only bingo. It's such a nice time to be with friends I don't normally see”. But not all women spoke of their bingo friends in such a positive way. Connie (age 83), for instance, said:

Um, people that we've become friends with at bingo, but they're only friends at bingo. Mostly, I don't have anything to do with them otherwise, except we've gone to a birthday party for one of the ladies that sits with us. Her mother is 98 years old,

but otherwise we've never become friends with them, but we're friends with them at the bingo. So we sit together and we tell each other our life stories and we're friends at bingo and that's it.

Connie is clear that while she enjoys the company of the friends she made at bingo, they are really just her friends from bingo.

### **Emphasized Femininity and Gambling Environments**

While Connell's notion of gender regimes did not prove to be a prominent theme in the interviews, the notion of emphasized femininity was an especially important theme in the interviews. Among the interviews, many women expressed the importance of personal appearance when they frequent gambling environments. It is this notion of personal appearance and gambling that this section will explore.

As noted, one of the most important aspects of emphasized femininity is the performance of gender through how women present themselves in public. This performance of gender was especially important to many of the women when they go to the casino. Nancy (age 58), for instance, commented that one of the things she enjoys most about the gambling experience is "getting dressed up." While discussing positive aspects of her gambling participation, she said:

Also, there's something special about it [going to the casino], when I go with my friend I get dressed up, get good food and have a nice time. There are a lot of people who see what I do and they go oh, you're gambling, you'd better call AADAC, and I just don't tell those gals where I am going. I just love that I get to put on something nice and be out with good friends.

According to Nancy, not only is being out with friends an important aspect of her gambling participation, but she also asserted that personal appearance, or her presentation of femininity, is central to her enjoyment of gambling.

Kay (age 52) also commented on the importance of personal appearance. As a single mother with children living at home, she stated that dressing up is an important component of the enjoyment she experiences when she goes to the casino. When asked what she likes about gambling, she said:

Yeah, it's fun, it's something different. We're all moms right, so it's not like we get out as much as we'd like. So that's really the fun part, getting out more, going out some place fun, dressing up, just getting out you know. You know it's kinda cool because when you park you know a golf cart takes you to the building, and you know it's like I didn't know that would happen. Yeah, so it's kind of different.

Like Nancy, Kay spoke of not only the importance of socialization, but also of the enjoyment she experiences when she has the opportunity to dress up.

It was, however, Dorothy (age 81) a recently widowed avid bingo player, who had great insight into the relationship between personal appearance and gambling. When discussing her enjoyment of playing bingo, she shared that getting dressed up is what she enjoys most about going to the bingo hall. She commented that going out to bingo is the only time she has the opportunity to dress up. When asked to expand on the importance of personal appearance and her bingo participation, she said:

Well when I used to go to dances I always dressed up and then when they started going to dances in their jeans, I thought what the? What are they doing with blue jeans at a dance? you know casual wear, your outfit in the evening for dancing, romance you know. Dress up, put something pretty on. Don't wear what you wear everyday. So and the clothes that I wear around the house I wouldn't even dare to wear out shopping. There's nothing wrong with them, that's not my shopping clothes. Dress-up.

According to Dorothy, the act of putting something special on is central to her enjoyment of going to play bingo. Later in the interview, she indicated that personal appearance has been, and still is, a central and important aspect of her life. She said:

I always take pride in myself, when my husband was around I would always dress-up for him. I wanted to make him proud to be out with me. I never went out with sloppy clothes or, you know they were always clean, you know I always tried to look my best and that was for him. Not for anybody else but for him and me too. Because it made me feel good.

For Dorothy, getting dressed up was not necessarily a matter of simply wanting to look nice, personal appearance proved to be far more complex. She alluded to the sense of pride she feels when she is able to present herself to the best of her ability.

### **Negative Aspects of Gambling**

Among the interviewees, negative associations with gambling proved to be far less prominent than the discussion of the positive aspects of gambling. This section will explore what the women in this analysis dislike about gambling and investigate their sentiments surrounding problem gambling.

While the environment of both the bingo hall and the casino proved to be important aspects of what women enjoyed about the gambling experience, surprisingly these environments proved to be one of the most significant detractors from the gambling experience for some of the women in this research. Even though the glamorous environment of the casino was commented on by a few of the women, Judy (age 45) commented that she felt the glamour is deceptive. When asked what she dislikes about the casino, she said:

You should know you look around and it's a really nice place. But, you know, it's not there for you to make money. The environment looks expensive and that's because it is. They're there to make a profit. Someone has paid for the nice environment. You know sure, they give you free drinks and the food is cheap, but you end up paying for it through the gambling.

For Judy, there are no illusions of glamour at the casino, or even winning large sums of money. According to her responses, she is fully aware that the casino is a business that is designed to profit from gambling.

Similar to Judy's aversion to the casino, Carol (age 54) also commented that it is the noise of the casino that detracts from her enjoyment of gambling. In the interview, Carol argued that all the noise bothered her to the extent that it forced her to begin to look for quieter places to gamble. When asked what she disliked about gambling she replied:

The noise. The noise, I hate the noise. The sounds and the noise. It's almost like this clang, clang, clang, mechanical sound, something is happening around you and it gets into my head. And, it just brutalizes me. I feel like I'm exploding, I just hate it. Um, so if we do gamble, we go into the far quiet corners. Or you find a nicer casino where there's more space and higher ceilings, where it's not, like there's a whole different caliber of places. There's very posh and there's very seedy. And, I don't know whether they pay out more or pay out less or whatever, but I go where it's quiet.

According to Carol, she was willing to decrease the odds of winning for the opportunity to gamble in an environment that was quieter. The atmosphere of the casino was also a significant detractor for some of the other women. Helen (age 62), for instance, in regards to casinos commented that, "it's kind of a tacky place in a lot of ways; it's not a thinking person's place. It's just ugly." Helen's aversion to the tackiness of the casinos resulted in going to less a convenient casino that has a more pleasant décor.

Similar to Carol's dislike of loud sounds, some of the women reported that they disliked the smells in the casinos. Even though smoking has been banned by all but one of the Calgary casinos, it was still one of the most significant dislikes among the women in this research. Mary (age 83) noted, "we hated the smoking...That was one of the reasons we didn't go as much to the casino...But, the people who went to bingo, you'd sit

next to them and you know, they'd smoke right in your face and it wasn't that nice. So now, it's no smoking which is nice." Smoking was also commented on by Barbara (age 87) who said that "I didn't like it when there was smoking." But, now that there isn't smoking, she says seeing people who can't afford to gamble the way they do has really started to bother her, noting, "I don't like to see older people go and put a lot of money in and they look as though they can't afford it. They probably have overdrawn their bank accounts, how are they going to pay off all of that, you know?" Therefore, watching individuals gamble excessively is also a significant deterrent to Barbara's enjoyment of gambling.

This relationship between problem gamblers and recreational gambling was expressed by many of the women and for some being around problem gamblers significantly compromised their enjoyment of gambling. Kay (age 52), for example, highlighted the responsibility inherent in participating in gambling activities by saying that she dislikes watching others and, "seeing the money problems. It's destroying lives. It does destroy lives. Because it's not just the person, it's the numbers." This dislike of observing problem gambling was also put forward by Janice (age 49) who commented that she finds it difficult going to the local pub some nights because she sees some of her neighbours gambling to excess, saying, "you see the same people and you know they have kids at home and it's just so sad, so so sad. They sit there and put in hundreds of dollars and there are people who are missing out on their lives and I think that's really sad." Patricia (age 56) also expressed concern about watching those at the casino who may have gambling problems, but managed to put a positive spin on it by saying:

I don't think there's anything I dislike about gambling. Well I do have to say that sometimes I look around and I see people, and they really do not look like they have that kind of money to be gambling. I feel sorry, I really feel sorry for them, because you think if you're really thinking that you're going to win and you're spending that kind of money doing it, I'm sorry but you better think about what you're doing. But, you know, if anything I guess it helps me to keep my gambling in check.

For Patricia, watching other people have difficulty controlling their gambling participation helped her control her own.

Perhaps, one of the most interesting aspects of gambling explored by many of the women was how they make sense of the problem gambling that they observe when they go to the casino. While some of the women had succinct responses when questioned about what leads to problem gambling, a minority of the women discussed the allure of gambling that can eventually lead to problems. Nancy (age 58), for instance highlighted the ease in which one could fall into problem gambling by noting:

I'm very convinced that time passes quite quickly in the casino because of course there are no clocks and no windows, I think it's really easy you know to play on and put the money back in that you win, and then you lose it and then you go you know I haven't won quite enough yet and I want a little bit more so you play on and you lose and pretty soon you've lost what you came with and you've lost your winnings and then you have nothing. I think some people might go oh, well, I'll go back tomorrow and try to win it back and then you realize that you can't, you can't count on winning and you have to be able to lose what you go with. So I think a lot of people get caught up with "I've lost one and I've got to get it back, so I'll play on some more and I'll stay late, play longer." You know you go in there and you hear people on their cell phones going yeah I'll be home soon, yeah I'll be home soon. They're obviously responsible to someone, there's probably someone else at home waiting for them.

While Nancy discussed the problem gambling in relation to her own participation, others approached the topic with more distance. Patricia (age 56), for instance, emphasized the addictive nature of gambling by noting, "it is addictive behaviour I would say.

Particularly if you win some, it's really hard to stop because when you do win you know

your brain is just pumping out the endorphins, and it's like seriously addictive.” Shirley (age 63) also emphasized the addictive nature of gambling, but instead related it to other addictive behaviours, she noted:

Oh because you, you [long pause] it's a mechanism to cope, but you think that you've put so much money into it and you think that you're going to win it back. You know it keeps going and going and going. It gets worse because it builds and unless you've ever been there and done that then you know people don't relate very well. If you're weak and out of control then, why don't you get your shit together and blah blah blah. But, it's so different, gambling is so different than alcoholism, or somebody that has a sex addiction, or watches too much TV, or reads too many books or you know everybody, I think has an addictive personality and it's what you do with it and what's socially acceptable and what isn't.

According to these women, gambling is a potentially addictive activity and it should be treated as such.

Another important negative aspect of gambling among the women were the government regulations that surround gambling. In particular, Helen (age 62), an avid slot machine player, disliked how the government regulated the slot machine pay out. She commented, “I think too you know there is manipulation of the machines and you know without a doubt, there are probabilities which occur occasionally at these casinos which are, well they're provincially regulated in Ontario, on the percentage of payouts, you knew that right?” Then later expressing her frustration with losing money by stating, “I don't know what they are provincially, I haven't done the research on Alberta, but you know you get to a point where things are really locked down and you know you feel this shift in the operations of the machines. And that, I really hate.” This sentiment of regulation was also expressed by Susan (age 73), a choir member, who regularly volunteers at charity casinos to raise money for her organization. She commented that

participating in charitable casinos particularly bothered her while her children were growing up saying:

my son belonged to the Calgary boys choir and some of us parents were very very upset with the fact that an organization like the boys choir was, I don't want to say bending or stooping, but taking money from people who didn't have it, but then on the other hand it's a fact of life it's there so it's a real, it's a real problem. Well it does bother me and if I really felt that strong about it I wouldn't participate. Or, some people opt to not participate and that's okay, if you don't want to do it then you pay whatever share you have to pay for your child to do whatever. That's how it works, if you're not willing to participate, do you think someone else is going to pay for your child to go when you're not willing to do it. Then, you have to cough up the money. It's a lot of money. So then how do you make the choice, it's kind of, it's a difficult decision to make if your morals are that way inclined then you have to make that commitment to pay that extra money.

Susan's answer highlighted many of the issues that a few of the women expressed in relation to gambling. While they sought to profit from it, either through their personal entertainment or through their leisure organizations, many felt as though they were supporting a business that ultimately took advantage of a vulnerable population.

### **Discontinue Gambling**

Since this chapter began with an analysis of why the participants in this study began gambling, it is fitting that it should close with an overview of the women's responses when asked why they would discontinue gambling. Even though many of the women had first-hand experience with problem gambling and have devoted considerable time and consideration to making sense of why individuals develop problems with gambling, interestingly, neither of these aspects of gambling played a role in why women would discontinue participating in gambling-related activities. More often than not, their

answers mirrored their positive sentiments of gambling, specifically the social element of gambling. To illustrate, Maggie (age 83) commented:

If my mother passed away, it would probably cut a lot of gambling out, because it's really kind of boring to go by yourself. And it's fun for us, we meet there and we just talk and eat and do other stuff. And, my husband really doesn't care for gambling, so he wouldn't want to go with me. So if my mother passed away or if my cousin wasn't in the financial state to continue, I probably wouldn't have anyone to go with so I would probably stop gambling. Maybe I'll have to get one of my kids to take me to the casino one of these days. You know for my mother-in-law and myself, that is the only thing we do together just the two of us because nobody else will take her.

Mary (age 83) had a similar response noting:

Probably if I wasn't driving, I'd probably stop because I wouldn't be getting there. And then this week I'm not going, we don't go every week. [Mary's best friend] is going out for a special dinner so we won't be going. I don't usually go if she doesn't go and she doesn't go when I'm sort of away. But as long as we sort of enjoy it and we get to where we don't enjoy it, we won't go. If you're not really having fun at it, why bother?

Both of these women demonstrated that although problem gambling detracts from many women's enjoyment of gambling, it is not sufficient to discourage them from continuing gambling.

Only one woman considered discontinuing gambling in economic terms. Nancy (age 58), a slot machine player who often goes to the casino by herself, commented that she would discontinue gambling only if she was financially unable to do so. She said:

Probably not having the little extra job opportunities to make my spending money, my play money. So if it was just my salary that I could count on for paying my bills. I've got some property in British Columbia and two houses here in Calgary so I can't, I won't, do anything to jeopardize that.

Even though, gambling is an increasingly important aspect of her life, Nancy made it clear that she would never compromise her financial livelihood in order to participate in gambling activities.

## Summary

To briefly summarize this chapter, gambling proved to be an important aspect in the lives of the women interviewed for this research. While many of the women were first introduced to gambling through lottery participation while their children were young, most of the women did not start going to the casino until their children became increasingly independent. Some women in particular commented that once their childcare responsibilities diminished, they not only had more free time, they also had more disposable income that could be used for gambling.

What proved to be especially interesting in the interviews was the relationship between gambling and other activities. While initially one of the main goals of this research was to explore the relationship between gambling and other risk-taking activities – namely alcohol, tobacco and drug use, this relationship proved to be relatively non-existent. What did, however, prove to be an important theme was the relationship between gambling and other leisure activities. Using Robert Stebbins' SLP as a framework to interpret this relationship, it became evident that the gambling participation of the women in this analysis closely aligned with what Stebbins termed casual leisure. For most of the women, their gambling was only one aspect of their leisure participation, but gambling proved to be important to their overall well-being.

Perhaps the most important way the gambling participation of the women in this research positively affected their well-being was the important role it plays in their social life. Several of the women commented that they used gambling to maintain friendships citing that the casino, as an environment, is conducive to re-connecting with friends.

Further, many women commented on how bingo halls facilitate creating new social networks. One woman in particular indicated that she used bingo halls as a way of making new friends when she had to move provinces.

Another important aspect of gambling for the women was the possibility of winning large sums of money. Many of the women commented that while they enjoy going to the casino with friends, the opportunity to win the jackpot is the “icing on the cake”. While a few of the women reported winning large sums of money, often in surprising detail, almost every woman had a distinct plan for what they would do with the money if they hypothetically won. Surprisingly, a few of the women shared the trepidation they feel about winning a significant amount of money, citing that it has the potential for dramatically altering their lives.

Another important aspect of the gambling experience for the women are bingo halls and casinos as environments. The importance placed on these environments was interpreted through using R.W. Connell’s concepts of gender regimes and emphasized femininity. While aspects of gender regimes were not as prominent as one would suspect, this concept along with emphasized femininity helped make sense of the importance some of the women placed on personal appearance when gambling. A few of the women spoke in detail about how the casinos and bingo halls offer them the opportunity to dress up. One woman in particular commented that going to bingo is the only time she is able to dress up and is consequently what she enjoys most about her experience.

Negative aspects of gambling were also explored in this chapter. While these did not prove to be as prominent as the positive factors that many of the women associate with gambling, they are still an important component of the analysis. While many of the

women reported that they especially enjoyed the bingo halls and casinos as environments, many of the women reported that that is what they enjoy least about gambling, citing that they do not like the smoke and the noise. Further, many reported that they disliked gambling environments because they are confronted with the negative aspects of gambling participation when they go into the buildings, namely problem gambling. While some put a positive spin on this, arguing that it helps them keep their gambling participation in check, acting as a deterrent, others contended that it greatly upset them.

Lastly, when asked why the women would discontinue gambling the majority of responses were linked to notions sociability. Although they commented that they dislike aspects of problem gambling when they visit the casino; this was not a significant detractor for any of the women. Many women argued that if they no longer had friends to go to the casino or bingo hall with, they likely would no longer gamble. Only one woman commented on her finances in relation to her gambling participation. She argued that she would stop gambling if she could not longer afford the activity.

## CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS PART TWO - EDGEWORK AND GAMBLING

### Introduction

The gamblers in this study encounter a variety of risks when they choose to participate in gambling. Perhaps the most obvious of these risks is the danger their participation poses to their economic security. The previous chapter analyzed the role of gambling in the lives of these women; the purpose of this chapter is to analyze the voluntary assumption of risk inherent in their participation in gambling activities using Lyng's concept of edgework. On the whole, the goal of this chapter is to make sense of the risks these women face when they participate in gambling, in an attempt to better understand their motivation to voluntarily participate in this risk-taking endeavour.

### Edgework – An Introduction

Lyng's concept of edgework is a useful tool for examining mature women's participation in gambling-related activities. As previously noted, when these women engage in gambling, they are essentially voluntarily participating in a unique form of risk-taking activity. Even though edgework is conventionally used to make sense of extreme sports, such as skydiving and motorcycle racing, this theoretical framework is equally powerful in explaining gambling participation. To briefly summarize,<sup>30</sup> edgework can be conceptualized as boundary negotiation. Lyng (1990), the progenitor of edgework, contends that when individuals engage in voluntary risk-taking activities, they are in fact

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<sup>30</sup> An extensive analysis of edgework is provided in the theoretical framework chapter.

trying to push themselves as close to the “edge” without going over. According to Lyng, “edges” demarcate the boundaries “between sanity and insanity, consciousness and unconsciousness, and the most consequential one, the line separating life and death” (Lyng, 2005 p. 4). Therefore, when one voluntarily participates in risk-taking endeavours she is essentially pushing herself as close to chaos as possible without losing control of her life.

The data collected for this research indicates that the experiences of the female recreational gamblers align in many important ways with Lyng’s theory of edgework. This discussion of the results will explore how Lyng’s formulation of edgework was expressed in the interviews with mature women who participate in gambling-related activities. Specifically, emphasis will be placed on recreational gambling as an edgework activity, how notions of escape are central to the discourses surrounding what attracts women to gambling, how they use “skill” to negotiate the edge between economic well-being and chaos and, lastly, how the sensations the women experience when they participate in gambling conforms to Lyng’s understanding of risk-taking endeavors.

Before an analysis of mature women gambling participation is presented, it is useful to clarify some a potentially misleading aspect of the analysis of the interviews with the women gamblers for this project and Lyng’s concept of edgework. Although it is possible to classify gambling as an edgework activity, it should, however, be noted that just because women actively engage in a risk-taking endeavour, they are not in fact “edgeworkers.” The women in this analysis, as evidenced by their discussion of their

participation in other forms of leisure activity, are not on the whole “risk-takers.”<sup>31</sup> Based on their discussions of risk-taking, it becomes evident that they do not define gambling as a distinct subculture, further the women were very clear that they do not adhere to a risk-taking lifestyle. The goal of this analysis is not to portray these women as extreme risk-takers that seek to push the limits of their boundaries on a daily basis; however, the goal is to determine in what ways their participation in gambling conforms to other risk-taking activities. Lyng’s insight into the nature of this participation will be used in an attempt to gain insight into what attracts these women to pursuits that have the potential to compromise their emotional and economic well-being.

### *Activities*

According to Lyng (1990), all edgework activities “involve a clearly observable threat to one’s physical or mental well-being or one’s sense of ordered existence” (p. 857). This notion of gambling as a threat to one’s well-being is a persistent theme in the interviews, in that nearly every woman recounted, in great detail, first or second-hand knowledge of problem gambling. This familiarity of the dangers associated with problem gambling, is in many ways, akin to many of the dangers associated with other risk-taking activities. This section will explore the accounts of problem gambling the women in this project shared in their interviews.

While nearly every woman in this research presented anecdotal knowledge of problem gambling, these accounts differed greatly from one another. The most common

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<sup>31</sup> The women’s attitudes towards risk are discussed in the first analysis chapter.

of these accounts came from women like Daisy (age 51) and Kay (age 52)<sup>32</sup> who provided in-depth accounts of problem gambling. Although both of these women have no first-hand experience with problem gambling, the effect of the problem gambling has, nevertheless, had a profound long-term impact on their gambling participation. Daisy, for instance recounted her first experience observing someone with problem gambling tendencies, saying:

I remember when my daughter was in kindergarten two women standing there at the door of the kindergarten and we were waiting for the kids to get in and one of them said "oh man, I really blew it last night, I lost \$600 on the VLT's at the bar" and I remember looking at her, and I was making \$11 an hour and our mortgage was like \$400, or under \$400, we lived on about \$600 and she lost \$600 on the VLT's and it was like somebody had punched me in the stomach. Because until that moment I never knew, I honestly never knew, I was so frikin' naive, I never knew that people could be, that that could happen.

What is especially important to note about Daisy's account is that this experience was more than 10 years ago. The notion that someone could compromise their family's financial security through gambling was such a significant shock that it has remained a memorable event in her life. Daisy later remarked that this was an important experience because whenever she starts to enjoy gambling "a bit too much" she thinks of these women, especially what they sacrificed to gamble and she is able to put her gambling in perspective.

Kay had a strikingly similar account of problem gambling. Although the problem gambler in her account was her uncle and the event took place when she was young, she

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<sup>32</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

recounted his experiences with problem gambling with the same detail as Daisy. When discussing the topic of problem gambling, she said:

a distant uncle, on my mom's side did have a gambling problem. He had this beautiful house right on Lake Bonavista, right, and we would go see him and in the summer we used to go barbeque. He owned a number of restaurants in Calgary and one fancier restaurant downtown and then one more casual one. So when we were about, we were young, maybe high school, I remember my mom saying I've got to go over to their house there's problem's with auntie and stuff right, so I said okay. So in one gambling month, he lost the first restaurant and then a month later he lost the second restaurant. And that was their livelihood. And then he lost the house, so all of my cousins moved into their grandmother's garage and that's where they grew-up. They grew-up in the garage. And then my uncle died within a year later. Stress, guilt, pain, among Asians, your home has a lot of honour and your family comes first. So when it came out that he had this shameful disease of gambling. So that was very clear with my mom and dad, that you don't even go close to gambling, this is what can happen.

Unlike Daisy's account, Kay's uncle's problem gambling became a cautionary tale among her household and extended family. Further, for Kay, the story of her uncle losing control of his gambling influenced later many aspects of her life, from her gambling participation, to even how she manages her income and especially how she invests whatever money she has left at the end of the month.

The most extreme of the stories about exposure to problem gambling among the women in this research came from Barbara, an 87-year-old widow. In the interview she recounted in great detail the problem gambling tendencies of her recently deceased husband. She explained that when her husband became terminally ill, he began to gamble approximately \$200 on a daily basis. She stated that she would drive him to the casino every morning and pick him up before supper, contending that it was the only thing he had in his life that made him happy. Although she believes that the medication he was under influenced his style of play, in the end she believed that his gambling was

motivated by a desire to ensure the financial security for herself and her family through the possibility of hitting the jackpot.

Unfortunately, Barbara's husband was not able to recuperate his losses before he passed away. Jean indicated that when she began to think that his gambling was becoming problematic, she attempted to take preventative measures to ensure her financial security after his passing. She said:

I spoke to a financial advisor that we dealt with, and I said Jim, he has a gambling problem and said if ever he comes and asks to you know take some of the money out, I said no and tell me about it. But, he did it, and I'll never understand why they didn't call me. And, after he passed away and I went in and got everything worked out, I said well why didn't you call, and they said you know he took some money from the account and I said, how much? And they would never tell me because they said it was a private thing. And, I said well he's gone now – you know that, but no. So, had they told me, I don't know, I don't know if I could have stopped him, I doubt it, because he just wanted it. He did, he was going downhill all the time and he just wanted to hopefully to win. I don't know if I could have done anything to stop it anyways. I don't know, but it's all water under the bridge anyways.

In the end, Barbara's husband gambled nearly all of the money they had set aside for retirement. As a consequence of his gambling, Barbara is currently working in a grocery store part-time doing food demonstrations. Although she says that she enjoys the work, she did comment that it would be nice to be able to just relax.

The last significant problem gambling narrative among the women came from Shirley (age 63). As noted in the previous chapter, after her daughter attempted to commit suicide Shirley began gambling as a means to coping. Rather than discussing the emotional turmoil she was experiencing, Shirley began to gamble in the casino on a daily basis. When asked how she knew she knew her gambling was becoming problematic, she said:

Because I was borrowing from one credit card to pay off another one. I could see that, you know how people defraud their companies and do whatever they do? I could see that becoming a serious option and it scared the hell out of me. And, I was sick, I knew it was sick, I just didn't know what to do to get out.

Yet, although she was developing problems related to gambling, she commented that she didn't know that her gambling had become a significant enough of a problem to seek help until she saw an ad for an agency that helps problem gamblers in the TV guide. Shirley said:

Well I was reading the TV guide and it said on there that "have you lost your appetite, have you, are you disinterested in your friends, do you not sleep at night, blah blah blah blah.." There were like 8 things and it said that if you have one of these you should contact us because we have a program going on here for. Well, it didn't actually say what they were doing but I checked the list and I had all eight things so I knew I was in trouble.

Although her development of problem gambling came as a shock, surprisingly, as Shirley recounted, recovering from problem gambling was not as challenging as she expected. She said that the relative lack of difficulty in her recovery process was, in large part, because she "hit rock-bottom" and decided that she had no choice but to overcome it. While she did mention that the problem gambling counselling services were useful, to an extent, she said that the path to overcoming it "has to come from yourself." In order to reconcile her debts, Shirley sought employment in a work camp in northern Alberta and worked 12-16 hour days, seven days a week until she had paid off the nearly \$150,000 of debt she had accumulated through gambling.

While individually these accounts reveal an overall familiarity many women have with problem gambling, on the whole they reflect the risks the women assume when they engage in gambling activities. Although few of the women communicated considerable drawbacks they associate with gambling and none significant enough to discourage their

participation, through their accounts of problem gambling they demonstrate an acute awareness of the problems related with gambling when it becomes problematic. Because of this awareness of the risks, economic and mental, associated with gambling participation, it is possible to contend that gambling in many ways aligns with Lyng's account of edgework activities and the risks associated with these endeavours.

### *Aspects of Edgework*

Now that gambling participation has been linked to edgework, it is useful to consider in what ways this activity conforms to Lyng's understanding of risk-taking. As noted in the theoretical framework chapter, all edgework activities comprise three specific aspects of risk-taking – skill, sensations and escape. These aspects are thematically relevant information collected in the interviews with the mature woman gamblers.

### Skill

The first aspect of edgework Lyng outlined is the relationship between skill and edgework. According to Lyng (1990), the use of specific skills is central to the edgework experience, contending that the ability to successfully negotiate the edge is determined by the development and use of very specific "individual capacities" (p. 859). When an individual experiences the perils associated with edgework activities, in other words, goes over the edge, it is likely because he or she did not possess the specific skill sets necessary to successfully negotiate the given boundary.

Unlike other edgework activities, such as skydiving or motorcycle racing, where there is a relative consensus among participants as to the skills required to successfully participate in the given activity and that this mastery of skills is in some way apparent to other participants, gambling appears to be quite different. Even though the notions of skill are a central and persistent theme among many of the participants, there is very little consensus as to the nature of the relationship between skill and gambling. In the conventional sense, skill, e.g. the ability to do something well, was only discussed by one participant, in the other interviews, the notion of “skill” was either far more convoluted or non-existent.

In this study, skill in the conventional sense (e.g. the ability to do something well), was only discussed by one participant. Helen (age 62) who is a retired teacher discussed in detail the use of skill while playing the slot machine. She stated that her love of gambling stems from her desire to “crack the code” of a specific slot machine. She commented that one day she was reading research on computer programming and she believes that she has the intellectual ability to outwit the computer code in a given machine, saying:

Ah, I experience it [slot machine gambling] more like it's a bit of an intellectual challenge when I sit down at a machine... In my opinion, it's not a proper form of raising capital. I think people are quite mistaken if they think like that. And, actually, there are times when I've said to myself when I was standing at a machine I was trying to figure out if I could dominate a wager, at least perceive or understand what I'm doing with it, and I think in the long run I've always said you know it's harder to work the machine than it is working. It sounds so strange right? ... Depending on the length of time you spend at a machine, three hours is really a long time to be sitting, but um, you start to kind of struggle with the machine and you start to see how you can get some paybacks and stuff like that and you know, and if you ask me, for that 17 thousand dollars, I had to work very hard for it. I mean it sounds so strange [laughing], I did, I had to really think and I never really had to drink in a casino or anything like that you know, um, you know with me

everything starts to become hard work.

For Helen, her participation with slot machine gambling is truly an intellectual challenge and as a consequence Helen spends a considerable amount of time and money honing her skills on a given machine. According to her, her participation with the slot machine isn't as much about fun, as it is about working. She has worked to get a better sense of the machine and in her words has truly "struggled" in her attempt to become a better gambler.

Helen later explained, in detail, how she developed specific skills in an attempt to improve her betting strategies. When asked about the use of skill in her gambling participation she remarked:

For example when, well I only know the one game so I can't speak for any other game, but in the game that I like and play, um, there are these princes that look like, oh, I'd say King Tut. And, the way this works is if they put up two of these figures. These are, I play progressive games, so in order to get a jackpot you use these wagering lines and they can be 25 lines, so anyways, what happens is that the game anticipates the players betting style. So when two of these princes come up, a lot of people will often drop out of the game, but actually every single time, it pops. So yeah, so that works really well. Another pattern is, the game's called Cleopatra, so they have these graphic icons that are Cleopatra's, and uh, what happens is usually, well with some frequency, maybe about 60% of the time if one of them comes up, if you don't win anything on that particular wager, but it's really the time to do the opposite of that and wager higher. It's usually then that the winning frequencies starts to appear.

According to Helen, her chosen game of Cleopatra is incredibly complex. In order to deal with the difficulties associated with her game, she developed several betting strategies to ensure that she improves the likelihood of winning significant amounts of money.

Helen was the only woman in the interviews who derived pleasure from mastering a slot machine game. Many of the women spoke in detail about how gambling activities that require a specific skill set, namely card games, are not among their preferred

gambling activities and said that they preferred slot machine gambling because of the relative simplicity inherent to the game. When asked why they prefer slot machines over other types of gambling activities many women spoke of how gambling with cards can be an intimidating environment. Maggie (age 59), an avid slot machine player, spoke of the contrast between slot machines and card games while she was discussing her gambling participation. When asked why she doesn't play card games at the casino, she commented:

I played black jack a little bit, I would really like to learn how to play craps, it just looks like so much fun. I sit there and I watch some of the guys and it's just fun to watch and I never played it because I don't understand it. Like with slot machines, you really don't have to do a lot. But like with card games, there's table etiquette. If you're at the end, and I haven't quite figured this out because I don't play black jack because I don't want to screw everybody else up. But when I play with my cousin and my niece and they go, oh no Debbie, don't hit that, because if you don't make it then we don't win. So you've got to remember what is going on and to take the other players into consideration, and if you don't they will certainly speak to you about it.

According to Maggie, the card tables are a place of uncertainty. The trepidation related to card games she commented on was also expressed by some of the other women. For instance, Kay (age 52) also commented that she avoided card games because she is unsure of how to bet appropriately. When asked to explain her concern, she commented, "if I did something wrong and they lost, you bet they would be talking to me. But you know if I play at a table with people I know, then we can talk and I'm less afraid of making a mistake. I'm just not confident enough to play by myself." For both Maggie and Kay, their overall lack of skill affects how they participate in gambling. Because of their overall fear of playing poorly, these two women are unable to acquire the necessary skills to participate in these gambling activities.

### Strategy and Control

While Helen was the only participant to use “skill” in the conventional sense, when the notion of skill is shifted from specific activities to larger notions of gambling it becomes apparent that the use of skill is central to nearly every woman’s gambling participation. The most apparent use of skill in the interviews is the strategies used by the many of the women to control their money. Although nearly every woman spoke of the strategies she utilizes to control monetary output, these strategies differed greatly from woman to woman. In the simplest form, a few of the women controlled their money through setting firm limits to their betting. Connie (age 83), for instance, stated that to ensure that gambling remains an affordable activity she and her husband set a very strict money limit, saying, “I usually take 40 dollars and my husband takes 40 dollars. If we break 100, we quit, if we lose our money, we quit.” For Connie, setting limits is a simple endeavour, it is about deciding an allotted monetary amount before entering the casino and sticking to it.

However, for other women, the strategies they use to control their money were significantly more complex. Daisy (age 51), for example, explained that she learned how to control her money from her mother, saying:

My mom had taught me that when you're playing poker that you always quit when you're ahead. You don't think "I'm ahead so I'm going to keep playing" you play and you win and then, she made lots of money playing poker she went to, when she was young she would go to the casino, but she would always come out with money. Because, there are ups and downs but when you're winning, you're winning, winning, winning, you keep playing, as soon as you lose three times, you stop and that's it for the day. You're done for the day. Even if she was just in Vegas for two days, she would stop and go back the next day.

Daisy demonstrates the complexity some of the women associate with gambling strategies. Her effort to conserve her money was not so much a matter of simply setting money limits and leaving once they have been met, but rather she looks to the ratio of wins to losses in her time at the casino, regardless of the monetary output.

Unlike Connie and Daisy, other women were not as strict with their monetary allowances. Patricia (age 56), for instance, commented that as both she and her husband near retirement, their limit is beginning to increase. She said that while her limit used to be twenty dollars, her daily limit in the casino is now approaching sixty. When asked why her limit has started to increase, she explained that this point in her life has been the first time where her and her husband have had significant amounts of discretionary income, she said:

Probably because we don't have as many expenses as we used to and I feel like gambling is an activity that brings so much joy to my partner and I, so okay, the limit can be a little bit higher. So then you figure out, well okay, okay, there's nothing else really to do with our money. Really, we've paid off our home, our cars, so what else? So really, it's like a regular monthly expense for us now, like gas and groceries. Like I said, we don't make payments to anything. We don't have grandchildren, to spend money on. Our children are independent and that's about it... well it's not that we have a lot, but we're comfortable and we have no worries. So really why not allocate a hundred dollars every week to the casino. I don't know why not.

Patricia however was clear that if she exceeded her limit, she took on extra shifts at work to compensate for her losses. Even though she greatly enjoys gambling, she recognizes that the inability to successfully control money while gambling can compromise her well-being.

For other women, the skill of controlling money is far more complicated. Diane (age 58) illustrates the complexity inherent in setting both money and time limits for

some women. For Diane, the casino is far more than an entertaining environment; she uses the casino as place to de-stress from the events of the day. As a consequence, setting a strict money limit does not always align with the nature of her gambling participation.

In the interview Diane stated the difficulty she encounters when she sets money limits, saying:

Sometimes I set money limits, you know if you run out of money it's sometimes a good idea to stop. But, sometimes, I'll set like \$40, and that was a quick 15 minutes, and then if I win, which happens more so than not, then I have to take my money out. You know it's like here's your money now get the hell out, I'm not stupid. So I do stuff like that, like if I go over, like if I have money in my purse, and I'm over the limit that I set for myself and if I won, all the better, and if I lost well, then it's bad luck.

Diane's statement reveals that setting limits to gambling participation is not always as simple as determining a specified allotment and sticking to it. Depending on the nature of gambling participation, strategies in controlling money limits can become exceedingly complex.

Of all of the women, it is perhaps Nancy (age 56) who has the most difficulty in controlling the money she spends in the casino. In the previous section Nancy spoke at length about the importance of the casino as an escape from the stresses she encounters in her work as a nurse. When asked how she controls her money, she indicated that she experiences significant difficulty with this aspect of gambling. She commented that because she uses the casino to feel better about life, money limits are often arbitrary, saying:

I might spend no more than around 150, 200 dollars. Except sometimes when I go alone I will spend a bit more. There have been a couple of times when I have been fairly upset about work or feeling uncomfortable about a situation and I did feel quite badly about the money I spent but it's my money and I've earned it so if that's what it takes to make me feel back to normal than that's what it'll take. So

sometimes I can feel bad about losing the money, but I feel like I can justify it. So even though I really try to limit myself, I can't always set a limit, like sometimes I will use my bank card, but if I do that, I won't go back for a while. I try to be very aware of the money I spend. So really I try to be conscious, I look at what I have lost and I look at what I have won when I set my limits.

Even though Nancy's sensations often catalyzed her gambling participation, she is, nevertheless, incredibly conscious of how much she spends while she is in the casino. Later in the interview she commented that while gambling is important for her, she is very careful to limit her spending so that it does not compromise other, more important, parts of her life.

### Escape

Central to edgework is the concept of escape. According to Lyng (1990), the motivation to voluntarily participate in risk-taking activities stems from an overall dissatisfaction with employment. Lyng (1990) posits that the employment that individuals are forced to participate in for financial security is essentially disconnecting individuals from their human needs, namely autonomy and creativity. The outcome of this disconnect is that outside of work individuals look to their leisure time to find substitute activities, particularly edgework activities, that better allow them to realise their human needs and desires. Lyng contends that for many individuals "edgework seems to be a desired choice – a way of fulfilling unmet needs – when people have the freedom to spend their time as they please" (p. 871). Based on this assertion, edgework activities provide the avenues for individuals to achieve important aspects of their human needs that are not available in their work environment. In essence, edgework pursuits are attractive to individuals because they are not only pleasurable activities, but more

importantly these activities can provide an escape for individuals from their de-humanizing day-to-day lives.

This relationship between escape and edgework is another prominent theme in the interviews. For many of the women, the motivation to participate in gambling stems from an overall desire to escape from the stressors they encounter in their day-to-day lives.

This relationship between gambling and escape is best represented by Nancy's discussion of her gambling participation. According to Nancy (age 58), a nurse, the main attraction of going to the casino is that it allows her to get away from the stresses of her day-to-day life. In the interview she remarked that she typically goes to the casino after an especially stressful day. She commented:

If something has happened that has upset me during the day, I can go there and just sit there and just relax, I can let my mind wander. At the beginning of September, I had a hard time at work and there was just a lot happening and it was very difficult and so I would go there and spend a few hours at the casino and I would feel wonderful the next day. I felt that I had let go of and felt like I had really been able to work through the issues. You know I could think about what someone had said to me and what had happened at work so I could really just sit there and no one would bother me. You know when I told someone that that's why I go to the casino they said, well can't you do that at home and I said well not so well. Because it's like going back to the same place all the time, I really find that my worries and troubles catch-up with me. I can go to the casino and I feel separate and away from it. Also, at home there's always stuff to do. There's always laundry and cleaning so when I get home I don't really feel like I can really relax.

Further, Nancy expanded on this comment by noting what she likes most about the casino, saying:

I think that my favorite thing [about the casino] is I have the ability to go somewhere whenever I want to or need to so that I can get away from everything. So it's there 24/7 I can walk in as an unknown person and I can sit down and I can have a coffee and there can be activities going on around me but I don't have to be part of it. There have been so many times I have said to myself that I am so thankful that I have a place where I can go and not have any one bother me. No one bothers me. I mean the gals come around and they serve pop or something and

that's the only interaction that you get and it's very subtle. Well I guess I never knew all those years while I had my daughter that there's some place like that where I could go. You know you can go to a church but there's so much attached to it. You can go to a movie but then you just sit in the dark and then it's over before you want it to be. I find it very relaxing, you know, when I go with my friends it is a nice relief. You know nursing is a very different profession; we are all inundated with problems and stresses, worries and inappropriate behaviours, or comments. So it's not uncommon for us to go to the casino together. It's just a very nice and relaxing way for us to spend time outside of our work environment. You know once somebody says something, then you can just let it go. You know why can't we do that in an environment other than a casino, I don't know, but I am sure glad that I have the casino.

Nancy's quote illuminates an important aspect about the relationship between gambling and escape outlined by Lyng. Specifically, her thoughts support Lyng's argument that many individuals use edgework activities as an escape from stressors associated with the work environment. Because nursing is so emotionally taxing, Nancy uses the environment of the casino as a space where she is able to reconnect with herself and work through the problems she encountered during the day.

While Nancy's interview supports Lyng's understanding of the association between gambling and dissatisfaction with employment, there were other accounts that indicate that this relationship is far more complex. This sample of women is unique in that the vast majority of participants were not employed. While some were recently retired, a fair number of the women had very little employment experience or had not worked in decades. The women in this sample who are not engaged in regular paid employment help demonstrate that Lyng's conceptualization of escape persists beyond conventional notions of employment. Many of the women reported similar stressors associated with their home environments and their experiences with retirement when compared to those who are employed. Therefore, regardless of employment status, there is an overarching

desire amongst the participants to escape, which in turn motivated their gambling participation.

This relationship between escape and stressors related to home environments was most noticeable among the women in this sample that have children living at home. Many of the women shared that the most significant advantage they associate with their gambling participation is that they are able to escape the demands they experience at home. Kay (age 52) commented on the importance of the casino as a place to escape with her girlfriends from her daily life stating, “Me and my girlfriends go all the time [to the casino]. We’re all moms. It’s nice to be away from home for the night.” Judy (age 45), a mother who also has children living at home, provided similar comments, saying “you know you make a whole weekend of it. You do like to see a show, go for suppers, go shopping. And, if you're winning you have like a few drinks and you get your room and then you go home the next day.” For each of these women, the casino offers them time away from their homes. Each woman also commented on the importance of having their “own” time when they go to the casino, a time to be with friends and a time to simply be away from their homes.

This trend further persists among the retired women in this research. In particular, many of the women, such as Shirley (age 63), discussed their overall dissatisfaction with retirement. When asked to discuss important aspects of her life, Shirley commented that she uses bingo as a refuge from retirement. She indicated that retirement has been an alienating experience in that she often feels socially isolated, saying, “I hate retirement. It's boring... I would rather be working than be retired”, mentioning later in the interview that she looks forward to bingo every week because she is able to get out of the house, do

something fun and be amongst friends. Other women stated that retirement doesn't offer the mental stimulation that their previous employment had. For instance, Susan (age 73) commented on the lack of mental stimulation when she discussed why she chose to learn how to play Mahjong. When asked what attracted her to this game she said, "We had a wonderful teacher; she made it so much fun. We laughed more than anything and it was really funny and she had written all the rules out for us, it was really very very good. So it was mostly for something to do. You know and to keep us interested, it keeps us busy." Even though her gambling participation in playing Mahjong was nominal, she later said that her enjoyment stems from learning something new.

Perhaps the most significant departure from Lyng's conceptualization of the relationship between edgework and escape in the gambling participation of the women in this research comes from their lottery participation. Unlike casino or bingo gambling, the lottery requires almost no time commitment and is widely affordable. For many of the women, participating in the lottery provides the ultimate escape. Daisy (age 51), perhaps, summarized the escape that lottery provides most succinctly. When asked why she started playing the lottery, she indicated that while her children were growing-up, her and her husband had exceptionally limited finances, saying:

Um, we were really hard up when my kids were little and um, I have to let the universe have an opportunity to give me money and I wasn't doing anything else where the universe could give it to me. So ah, [laughing], that's my belief system is that well a dollar a week, at that time it was just a dollar a week, like it's not gonna its, I don't smoke, you know I don't do anything where I spent money. All of our activities were out in nature; we didn't do the fast food restaurants and such, so I didn't have any trouble justifying it. But that's way back when it was only once a week, it was on Saturdays and then it went to Wednesdays and Saturdays and I had to struggle with that.

For Daisy, the lottery provided her with opportunity for the ultimate escape, economic security. Daisy's remark in many ways illuminates the scope of escape in the gambling participation of many women. The escape is not necessarily significant amount of time away from life's stressors, but by playing the lottery many women are able to escape from financial difficulties by imagining a different life.

Further illuminating the relationship between the lottery and escape is the significant thought most women devoted to hypothetical winnings. Unlike casino games that offer a stress relief, the lottery allowed women to envision their lives as wealthy individuals. Susan (age 73), for instance, remarked that she would take all of her friends on a cruise if she won the lottery and Kay (age 52) spoke in great detail about how she would invest her money. She commented that she and her friend had recently discussed the idea and while her friend mentioned that she would spend the money on a new house, extravagant trips, and a new car, Kay said that she would not spend it, but rather invest it in very specific ways. Kay commented:

They ask why [I would not spend the money] and I say if you invest a million dollars at ten percent, if you find a good place to invest, and that will not be the bank, you get ten thousand dollars a month, and you could live on that. So if you dip into the principle, like if you spend half of it, if you buy the house buy the tips, buy the cars, you only have 5 thousand dollars to live on for the rest of your life. So it makes a difference, yes? So the people who use that money to buy that car, buy that house, it's not smart. I mean I can work for a while so that that interest kicks in. You know I would give it to my kids in exactly that way. The principle would not be touched. The minute you dip into your principle, you've lost that income coming in.

Her vivid description illuminates the thought and effort she had put into what she would do if she won money gambling, suggesting that even the thought of winning the lottery offers her the opportunity to escape and imagine life with a large amount of money.

### Sensation

Another prominent aspect of edgework outlined by Lyng is the sensations individuals experience when they voluntarily participate in high-risk activities. Although Lyng points out that individual edgework activities all elicit slightly different feelings when individuals participate in them, he contends that all edgework activities are united by the sensations individuals experience in these activities. Lyng classifies these sensations into five specific groups: (1) self-realization, self-actualization and self-determination; (2) alterations in perception and consciousness; (3) sensations of a feeling of oneness with an object or the environment; (4) the experience of hyperreality; and (5) the ineffability of edgework. While each of these unique sensations are important aspects of the edgework experience, only three of the five sensations emerged as important themes in the interviews. This section will explore the importance of self-realization, alterations in perception and consciousness and the ineffability of edgework.

### Self-Realization

According to Lyng (1990), notions of self-realization are an important part of the edgework experience for many individuals. He points out that when people are immersed in an edgework experience they come to rely primarily on their instincts, or what comes naturally to them. It is through this “letting go” that Lyng argues leads to a magnified sense of self, specifically arguing that when participants are not deliberately thinking about the actions necessary to successfully navigate a risky situation, but rather just perform the necessary actions through their instincts, individuals begin to feel an increased sense of confidence in their ability to cope with difficult situations.

For many of the women in this analysis, notions of self-realization are an important aspect of their gambling participation, but much like the other areas of edgework, the gambling participation of these women does not fully conform to Lyng's conceptualization of the participation in risk-taking activities. Shirley (age 63), a woman who successfully managed to overcome problem gambling, commented that she is attracted to the slot machine because when she is playing the slot machine it occupies all of her attention, saying, "when I gamble, I don't have to think of anything else."

#### Alterations in Perception and Consciousness

The second prominent sensation outlined by Lyng relevant to this analysis is the alteration in perception and consciousness individuals experience when they participate in edgework activities. Lyng contends that as one approaches the edge, or the climax of the experience, perceptions of time and space significantly change. According to Lyng (1990), this change in perception can take many forms, such as "background factors receding from view", or time passing significantly faster or slower. Nevertheless, when participating in high-risk activities, one is likely to experience the environment in an entirely different way than in his or her day-to-day activities.

This concept of alteration in perception and consciousness was discussed by many of the women. The most common way it was expressed was through changes in the perception of time. Nancy (age 58), an avid casino gambler, commented that when she participates in gambling she has to be extraordinarily careful in controlling her gambling because if she immerses herself too far into the game, she can end up spending far more time in the casino than she would like. She said:

Um, well I have to control it, as I do everything in my life by thinking about the time that I put into it, you know I can spend a really long time at the casino, I can really lose track of time. You know sometimes it's like gee I didn't know that I've been here for 6 hours already. So I have to watch the time that I spend there.

It is this immersion in the game that she has to be keenly aware of. As Nancy points out, if she is not careful the intensity of the game will allow her to lose track of time.

Surprisingly, only one woman who gambles by herself commented on the alterations in perception of time. For many women, gambling with friends not only allowed for increased enjoyment in the evening, but also ensured that they did not lose track of time. For instance, Diane (age 58) commented, “you know it really makes a difference to have someone to play the game together with. You lose less money and you also have a lot more time to see what is going on.” What unites both Nancy and Diane is their reluctance to proceed into this frame of consciousness; both women demonstrated that by losing track of time they could easily lose track of money and, hence, go over the edge.

### The Ineffability of Edgework

The last prominent aspect of edgework that helps shed light on the gambling participation of the women in this analysis is Lyng's concept of the ineffability of edgework. Lyng (1990) contends that because the edgework experience is so intense, participants in these high-risk activities often have difficulty in assigning words to their experience. Because of this inability to articulate these intense emotions, Lyng (1990) comments that it is difficult to capture the true nature of edgeworking, specifically, the intense sensations experienced when individuals approach the edge.

At this point it is important to stress that edgework is typically associated with extreme sports such as skydiving, snowboarding and motorcycle racing. When applied to gambling participation, there are inevitably some aspects of this activity that do not align with life and death experiences. Therefore, it is worth considering that the ultimate goal of gambling activities for many individuals is to win large sums of money. So while gamblers are not necessarily physically risking their well-being for physical excitement, they are risking their economic livelihood in an attempt to win the “jackpot”. It should be no surprise that when gamblers successfully navigate the edge and win large sums of money, they often have significant difficulty in recounting the experience.

The difficulty of verbally articulating the experience of winning a significant amount of money was present in many of the interviews with the women in this research. Perhaps the best example of this difficulty was present in Maggie’s (age 59) recollection of winning a jackpot on a slot machine in Las Vegas. When asked what the experience was like, she said:

It was hilarious, I was like oh my god! I was like holy crap, I can't even describe it. It's like the best feeling ever. It's fantastic. You know, sometimes I worry if people get that feeling the first time they gamble, it just feels amazing, but wins like that like never happen, but when it does, it's like, like, it's amazing! You know it's hilarious and I've never won one like that again. But it was fun.

For Maggie, the experience of winning large sums of money was an intense and emotional experience. As Lyng alluded to, she had difficulty discussing aspects of the experience outside of the intense emotions she had experienced.

The ineffability of edgework was also expressed by Patricia (age 56), an avid casino gambler. Similar to Maggie’s account, Patricia also won a significant amount of money playing the slot machines in Las Vegas. However, unlike Maggie, Patricia was

more successful in articulating the experience. When discussing her experience winning, she said:

Oh yeah. Yes. My mother and I won \$5200 dollars in a machine once. Actually we both put ten dollars into the machine and it came up! All the commotion and fun. It was just great. It was at the end of the night and it came up! You know and all the people who were sitting around us could not believe their eyes! And you know there were so many cling clangs and flashing lights. And you know when you win that kind of money a girl comes over to you from the casino. We didn't even know what was going on and it was what? What is it? What have we won? It was fantastic. It was unbelievable; it was the most amazing experience.

Even though Patricia was able to discuss the situation with a bit more detail than Maggie, the same intensity of emotion emerged from her discussion of the experience of winning.

It was perhaps Kay (age 52) who gave the experience of winning a jackpot the most consideration. When asked about her experiences winning significant sums of money, she discussed the emotions that are associated with this experience. She said:

I don't know if it's really just the adrenaline, you know there's definitely that sense of adrenaline. You know I was at a machine and I put a toonie in and I won. I just couldn't stop laughing because the money kept coming. You know the bucket was full, this was when there was still money in the machines and all I could do was laugh. It was amazing, it was a great feeling. I think if you have control, you can have a lot of fun. So then you have to say, okay, either I am going to put it all back in or that'll be it for the night. You know you have this feeling, I think that you recognize when you have that adrenaline rush and you can't be tempted. Like I say with my kids, oh you can only spend so much time on the games, because there's an adrenaline rush that becomes the addictive part of the game.

Interestingly, for Kay, the intense adrenaline associated with winning large sums of money is a signal that gambling may be bordering on losing her sense of control in an intense and exciting experience. Nevertheless, for all of these women, the experience of winning significant amounts of money was so intense that to this day, they cannot fully articulate the intense nature of the emotions they experienced.

## Summary

The purpose of this analysis chapter is to focus on the ways in which mature women participate in gambling-related activities. The information collected from the in-depth interviews with women aged 45 and older indicates that Lyng's theory of edgework is an appropriate framework for understanding their experiences involving gambling. The link between recreational gambling and edgework is established with the close relationship many of the women have had with problem gambling. As Lyng (1990) contends, all edgework activities are united in their threat to one's physical or mental well-being. Through examining their accounts of problem gambling it becomes clear that the women in this analysis are acutely aware of the threat that gambling poses to their well-being, acknowledging that they understand that at its core, gambling is a voluntarily risk-taking activity.

Once gambling was established as a voluntary risk-taking activity, it was possible to assess the ways in which the gambling participation of the women in this research conforms to Lyng's understanding of edgework. The interviews with these women suggest that they participate in many of the central features of edgework, most notably, their use of particular skills in an attempt to ensure that they do not "go over the edge". Further, this relationship persisted among the women's use of gambling as a means of escaping stressors associated with their day-to-day lives. Lastly, many of the women expressed many of the sensations Lyng associates with the edgework experience when they discussed their experiences gambling, which again helps to support the relationship between edgework and recreational gambling.

Further, it is important to note that edgework is a useful theoretical tool for interpreting the gambling participation of the women in this research. While edgework is typically associated with voluntary risk-taking activities that have a clearly observable threat to one's life, such as skydiving, rock-climbing and motorcycle racing, by widening the scope of analysis to recreational gambling participation, important insights into the nature of edgework are revealed. The women in this analysis are not risk-takers in the conventional sense: in fact they often described an overall aversion to risk-taking endeavours. Yet, in spite of this aversion the gambling participation of the majority of the women conformed to Lyng's conceptualization of edgework – most notably in their discussion of gambling as an escape from the stresses they encounter in their day-to-day lives. Therefore, by using the theoretical framework of edgework to interpret the gambling participation of mature women, important insight into not only gambling, but also other voluntary risk-taking activities is revealed.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

Now that an overview of the data collected for this research has been presented, it is possible to discuss the broader implications of the information collected in the interviews conducted with 19 women aged 45 and older who recreationally participate in gambling activities. The purpose of this chapter is to draw from the information provided in the literature review and the theoretical framework in order to develop an understanding of how this research contributes to the knowledge of the gambling participation of mature women and to the overall understanding of gambling-related activities.

### Central Research Questions

As noted in the research design chapter, two central research questions guided this thesis. These questions are:

- *First, does mature women's participation in gambling conform to conventional male-dominated notions of gambling? What other types of activities are these women participating in?*
- *Second, what does gambling mean to the mature women who participate in gambling-related activities? What role does it play in their lives?*

These questions were formulated in an attempt to address important, and overlooked, areas of gambling research. The purpose of this discussion is to assess how the information collected sheds light on these central research questions. This chapter will

build on the main topic areas provided in the analysis chapters, specifically risk, leisure, and gender, by incorporating the existing literature on gambling participation, as well as the theoretical framework.

### **Risk**

In order to begin to assess the first research question, specifically how the gambling participation of the women in this research conforms to conventional male-dominated notions of gambling, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the established literature. As noted in the literature review chapter, an emerging and important area of study within gambling research is the persistent relationship between gambling and other risk-taking activities. In short, researchers have found that there is a strong link between problem gambling participation and the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs (Currie, et al., 2006). When the gambling participation of women and this clustering of risk-taking are considered in conjunction with one another, important insight into the complexity of the phenomenon emerges. Researchers such as Welte, Barns, Wieczorek and Tidwell (2004) and Engwall, Hunter and Steinberg (2004) have determined that there are significant gender differences in gambling participation, with males more likely to develop problems related to gambling than women. Further, women are more likely to develop mental health issues while engaging in problem gambling than their male counterparts (Boughton & Falenchuck, 2007).

The data collected for this research reveals important information about how women's recreational gambling conforms to conventional, male-dominated, notions of gambling participation. On the whole, the clustering of risk-taking amongst gamblers that

laid the groundwork for this thesis was not a prominent theme in the interviews. While it was expected that many of the women in this research would participate in various types of risk-taking activities, nearly all of the women reported that they do not identify with the term “risk-taker,” in fact most women expressed a dislike for risk-taking activities. Out of the sample of 19 women, only one woman self-identified as being a risk-taker, but it was not in the conventional sense. Helen discussed her risk-taking in terms of the choices she makes in her life. While she was clear that she does not drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, or use recreational drugs, she stated that she often makes business decisions that allow her to define herself as a risk-taker. Further, only one other woman, Maggie, reported habitually drinking in isolation. While she did not self-identify with being a risk-taker, citing that she is largely adverse to risk, she did however comment that she drinks alone in her home on a regular basis.

Since the clustering of risk-taking activities did not prove to be a dominant theme, the emphasis in the analysis shifted from the clustering of risk-taking to an exploration of why the women in this research choose to participate in the risk-taking activity of gambling.<sup>34</sup> In order to answer this important question, Stephen Lyng’s theory of “edgework” was utilized.

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<sup>34</sup> Gambling, for the purposes of this thesis, is considered a risk-taking activity due to its ability to compromise the economic well-being of the participant.

## **Edgework**

As discussed in the theoretical framework and briefly in the analysis chapter, at its core, Stephen Lyng's theory of edgework is an analysis of boundary negotiation. According to Lyng (1990), when individuals participate in risk-taking activities, they are essentially pushing themselves as close to the "edge" as possible. This "edge," Lyng argues, can take many forms ranging from the edge between life and death to sanity and insanity. It is through the negotiation of these edges that Lyng posits that individuals are re-connected with what makes them human. In order to accurately capture this experience, Lyng (1990) classified the edgework experience as consisting of several dimensions, most notably skill, escape and sensations. Each of these dimensions proved to be analytically important aspects of the gambling experience for each of the women in this research.

### *Skill*

According to Lyng (1990), the use of skill is one of the most important aspects of the edgework experience. He asserts that in order to successfully negotiate the edge, individuals must possess and maintain certain skill sets to ensure that they do not compromise their well-being while participating in risk-taking endeavours. While this notion of skill proved to be an important theme in the interviews, the use of skill reported by the women diverged significantly from Lyng's conceptualization. Perhaps the most significant departure stems from the women's choice of gambling activity. Supporting Nower and Blaszczynski's (2006) assertion that women tend to avoid strategic forms of gambling in favour of non-strategic gambling activities such as slot machines; nearly all

of the women in this research participate primarily in non-strategic gambling such as slot machines, bingo, lottery and scratch tickets.

The rationale many of the women provided for choosing non-strategic games over strategic was, first and foremost, attributed to the intimidation they experience in the casino. A few of the women reported that they do not engage in card games, namely poker and blackjack, because they fear “messing up.” They claimed that because these games are so complex, they feel that if they make a mistake other, more experienced, male players will call them out. Further, many of the women who recently began gambling in the casinos, claimed that the rules are hard to learn on the spot and as a consequence they reported that they find these activities relatively stressful.

On the other hand, the attraction to non-strategic gambling activities for many of the women lies in the fact that there is little “skill” inherent to these activities. For many of the women, their transition into both casino and bingo gambling did not occur until their children became independent. As a consequence, many of the women reported that they enjoyed playing slot machine games because there are few rules to master and they easily socialize with their friends while they participate in this activity. Supporting O’Brien, Cousins and Witcher’s (2004) research on bingo, the ease of learning how to play bingo proved to be an important attraction for the bingo players in this research. One woman in particular commented that because there is no skill inherent to this activity, there is no competition when playing with her friends. If players win, it is because they were lucky, not because they are “better” players.

While “skill” in the conventional sense was not a prominent aspect of the women’s participation in non-strategic forms of gambling participation, it was, however,

an integral aspect of the larger scope of their gambling participation. According to the majority of the women, the skill inherent in gambling stems from the strategies many of the women develop to control their money while gambling. In the interviews, the women spoke in detail about the strategies used to ensure their gambling participation does not become problematic. At it's simplest, the women controlled their money by setting firm money limits prior to entering the casino or bingo hall, Connie remarked that she spends \$40 each time she goes to the casino and leaves once she and her husband have reached their limit. Other women shared far more complex strategies ranging from money limits, to time limits and some even developed systems where they quit after a sequence of wins or losses. The women who had the most difficulty in controlling their limits were those who used the casino as an escape. One woman in particular commented that she does not leave the casino until she "feels better." While she claimed that she never gambles to excess, she did point out that she often works extra shifts to recoup her losses.

The accounts of these women demonstrate the difficulty inherent in recreational gambling. Although all of the women greatly enjoy gambling, each woman expressed in detail the strategies she uses to ensure that her gambling does not become problematic. For all women, these strategies related to their gambling are synonymous with Lyng's conceptualization of negotiating the edge. Through maintaining this skill set, these women are able to enjoy gambling without experiencing the serious negative consequences.

*Escape*

Notions of escape were also a central component to the gambling participation of the women in this research. As outlined by Lyng (1990), the main motivating factor for individuals to voluntarily participate in risk-taking activities lies in the fact that the work that individuals are required to participate in for economic security alienates them from their human nature (p. 870). As a consequence, Lyng posits that individuals look to activities where they have complete control over their participation in order to fully realise their human potential. For many of the women in this research, their gambling participation is strongly linked to their desire to escape from difficult or problematic aspects of their lives.

The strongest link to Lyng's concept of escape and the gambling participation of the women in this research lies in the accounts of the women who are currently employed. For women like Nancy, the casino offers her the opportunity to escape from the stressors she encounters while she is at work. In the interview, Nancy said that the casino provides the ability to get away from aspects of her life that she finds difficult to deal with, citing that it is the one place where nothing is expected of her. She can control the interaction she has with casino workers and the other gamblers and, unlike other recreational activities; she can control when she goes and how long she participates. These sentiments were also expressed by some of the other women who work.

What is especially important to note about the relationship between escape and gambling in this research is that it proves to be far more complex than specified by Lyng. While Lyng asserts that there is a strong link between edgework activities and employment, the accounts of many of the women in this research demonstrate that the

desire to escape goes well beyond dissatisfaction with employment. Although many of the women in this research are not employed and a few have not been employed in decades, these women still cited that one of the motivating factors to participate in gambling-related activities stems from their motivation to escape stressful aspects of their lives. This desire to escape was especially prominent among the women who are retired. Many of the women interviewed spoke in detail about their overall dissatisfaction with retirement, commenting that they are often bored with their day-to-day activities and gambling, often bingo, provides them with a regular respite where they can interact with friends and “get out of the house.”

Further, another important divergence from Lyng’s conceptualization of escape is found in the lottery participation of many of the women in this research. Supporting Casey’s (2004) argument that the lottery provides women a way to dream of enhancing their lives, many of the women in this research shared their dreams of winning the lottery. In the interviews, many women spoke in surprising detail about what they would do with the millions they could potentially win and the long-term effects of this large influx of money. While one woman reported how she would invest the money if she won, the majority of the other women indicated that they would use the money to help support their families and friends. These accounts, in many ways, stand at odds with Lyng’s conceptualization of risk. These women are not risking their lives, nor are they in an environment for a set period of time, the lottery participation of these women allows them to escape from their financial situations and imagine life as a wealthy individual.

*Sensations*

Lyng's conceptualization of the relationship between sensations and voluntary risk-taking activities also helps strengthen the association between recreational gambling and other edgeworking endeavours. According to Lyng, edgeworking activities are united in their ability to illicit five specific sensations (1) self-realization, self-actualization and self-determination; (2) alterations in perception and consciousness; (3) sensations of a feeling of oneness with an object or the environment; (4) the experience of hyperreality; and (5) the ineffability of edgework. While the women in the interviews expressed many of the sensations, the ineffability of edgework proved to be the most prominent.

Lyng (1990) explains the ineffability of edgework as the inability of individuals to communicate with respect to their participation in high-risk activities. He points out that often the sensations experienced by individuals as they approach the edge are so powerful and intense; the participants often have difficulty recounting their experiences to other individuals. This notion of ineffability associated with edgework proved to be especially applicable to the accounts of winning significant amounts of money that the women provided. When the women discussed their experience winning money, they became surprisingly animated and took great pleasure discussing this experience. Surprisingly, nearly all of the women who provided an account of hitting the "jackpot," could not begin to articulate this experience and often used a combination of laughter and expletives to communicate their sensations.

Therefore, in response to the first research question, this research demonstrates the complexity inherent in the risk-taking of the women in this research. While these women do not identify with the term "risk-taker," their discussion of their gambling-

related activities closely aligns with Stephen Lyng's conceptualization of the risk-taking experience. The very notion that these women do not participate in multiple forms of risk-taking activities proves to be analytically important to the understanding of the risk-taking experience. While conventional notions of the "risk-taker" are typically associated with young males who participate in extreme activities, such as skydiving, snowboarding, or motorcycle racing, the accounts of these women demonstrate that the desire to escape from distressing aspects of day-to-day life are equally apparent in this demographic. Therefore, it may be worth broadening notions of the risk-taking experience to order to include other demographics.

### **Leisure**

We now turn to a discussion of the second question used to guide this research.<sup>35</sup> As noted earlier, while the first research question sought to address how closely the participation of women aged 45 and older conforms to conventional male-dominated understandings of gambling, namely the clustering of risk-taking activities, the second question was designed to better understand what gambling means to the women in this research and what role this activity plays in their lives. The remainder of this discussion focuses on examining gambling as a leisure activity and the relationship between notions of femininity and gambling.

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<sup>35</sup> The second question guiding this research is: what does gambling mean to the older women who participate in gambling-related activities? What role does it play in their lives?

While the literature in this area of gambling research is not as extensive as the clustering of risk-taking behaviours with gambling, there is emerging research that focuses on the role of gambling in the lives of individuals. Researchers are beginning to assess the unique experience of older gamblers. For instance, McNeilly and Burke (2002) contend that this demographic of gamblers tends to have more discretionary income and fewer parental responsibilities than their younger counterparts. Further, Preston (2007) posits that while the motivation to gamble may shift as individuals age, the nature of gambling participation does not. Older individuals gamble with the same frequency, and have similar absolute values of money spent while gambling, as their younger counterparts. Further, it should be noted that the literature on the gambling participation of older individuals is fairly divisive. As explored in detail in the literature review chapter, some researchers view gambling as an especially problematic activity amongst older individuals (e.g. see McKay, 2005), while others contend that gambling provides many important social benefits to aging populations (e.g. see Preston, Shapiro, & Keene, 2007).

Important to understanding the role that gambling plays in the lives of the women in this research, is discussing why they chose to begin gambling as a form of leisure entertainment. Supporting McNeilly and Burke's (2002) claim that the social and financial situation of older individuals allows for increased gambling participation, the majority of the women interviewed for this research did not begin regularly gambling in the casino or the bingo hall until their children became independent, either emotionally or financially. While a few of the women had participated in the lottery since their 20s and had occasionally gambled in the casino, many women commented that the significant

influx of free time and discretionary income they experienced once their children progressed into adulthood meant that they became able to gamble in the casino on a regular basis.

The nature of their initial exposure to the casino is an important aspect of their gambling participation. For many of the women, the decision to begin gambling was in large part attributed to their peer group. The women reported that their first exposure to gambling came from their friends inviting them to the casino or bingo hall. Further, the relationship between socialization and gambling participation proved to be one of the most important themes in the interviews. Most of the women in this research reported that the aspect they enjoy most about gambling is that it allows them to re-connect with their friends in an environment that is conducive to socialization. One woman in particular commented that she prefers going to the casino with her friends as opposed to going to other entertainment venues, such as the theatre or movies, because there is nothing in the casino that interrupts their socialization.

Interestingly, the relationship between bingo and socialization proved to be especially unique. While the casino was reported to facilitate socialization amongst established peer groups, the bingo hall was reported as an important place to broaden social networks. Two of the women interviewed commented that they enjoy going to the bingo hall because it facilitates meeting friends. One woman in particular commented that the structure of the games allows players to socialize during the breaks and, because everyone participates in the same game, it gives all the participants a common topic of conversation. Further, because it is a non-strategic social game, the woman reported that

there is little animosity amongst the players. Winning and losing is based solely on luck rather than strategy.

Although many of the women were attracted to gambling because of the important impact it has on their social well-being, it is equally important to address why women prefer gambling activities to other, less risky, leisure activities. In order to address this analytically important question, Robert Stebbins' SLP has been employed. As noted in the theoretical framework, the Serious Leisure Perspective, or simply the Perspective, is a framework designed to make sense of the scope of leisure activities available in the North American context and better understand how individuals participate in these activities. To briefly summarize, in the SLP, Stebbins categorizes leisure activities into three separate categories, serious leisure, casual leisure and project based leisure. Although, for the purposes of this research, the differentiation between serious leisure and casual leisure proved to be most appropriate.

Stebbins' SLP, namely his notion of casual leisure, proves to be incredibly helpful in making sense of the gambling participation of the women in this research. In particular, his notion of casual leisure helps account for why these women find gambling-related activities attractive as leisure pursuits. As discussed earlier, the gambling participation of these women, aside from the strategies they use to control their money, is inherently skill free. Further, the unstructured aspect of the slot machines allows for many of the women to regulate their own participation. Because the odds of winning playing a slot machine in a casino does not increase with regular practice or participation, this lack of skill allows for the women to participate whenever they are inclined. However, one important caveat to this assertion is the bingo participation of the

participants. Those who rely on bingo as an important aspect of their socialization report going on a regular basis to maintain the social networks they have created in this environment.

Also aligning with Stebbins' notion of casual leisure is that aside from the benefits of socialization, many of the women reported that gambling, in and of itself, is not an especially rewarding activity. Many commented that playing the slot machines is essentially a boring activity that does not offer a significant amount of mental stimulation. As a consequence, many of the women indicated that they have other, more meaningful and substantial, leisure activities in their lives. While the serious leisure pursuits participated in by the women in this research varies to some extent,<sup>36</sup> many reported that these activities provide far more satisfaction in their lives than their gambling participation. In particular, the women stated that their enjoyment in these activities largely stems from the experience of getting better at these activities through increased participation. Even though there is a significant social component to activities such as bridge and golf, the women reported that their primary enjoyment in these activities derives from the challenges related to mastering these activities.

## **Gender**

The relationship between femininity and gambling also proved to be an important aspect of the enjoyment many of the women associate with gambling. At this point, it should be noted that this research is comprised of a sample of women, as a consequence

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<sup>36</sup> Many of the women interviewed share a love for both golf and bridge.

any comparisons between the sexes that have been made have been drawn from the established literature on the relationship between gender and gambling. Nevertheless, it is worth keeping in mind that the goal of this research is not to generalize to the entire population, but to explore the gambling participation of the women in this research.

There is a growing body of literature that looks into the unique experiences of women gamblers. Perhaps the most extensive literature in this area focuses on female problem gamblers, while this area is discussed in detail in the literature review, it should be noted that problem gambling manifests itself differentially by gender. Specifically, Potenza, et al. (2001) found that while women tend to develop problems with gambling at a faster rate than males, women also have shorter durations of problem gambling before seeking treatment. Further, this research pointed out that the motivations to participate in gambling-related activities differs significantly by gender: men's gambling tends to be motivated by "ego enhancement," whereas women are more likely to report that their motivation to gamble stems from the desire to escape from distressing situations (Potenza et al., 2001).

Potenza et al.'s (2001) finding supports the experience of the only woman in this research who experienced problem gambling. In the interview, Shirley discussed the emotional turmoil she experienced after her daughter attempted suicide. She indicated that she began to visit the casino on a daily basis as a means of coping with her difficult situation, commenting that it was the only place where she could get away from her problems. Unfortunately, within a short time span she incurred a great deal of debt from her gambling participation. Once Shirley realised that her gambling had become problematic, she sought help immediately and worked hard to pay off her debt.

Fortunately, the remainder of the women in this research have not experienced problem gambling and the scope of the gambling participation the women reported is solely recreational. Therefore, a concerted effort was made to determine how notions of gender had influenced the gambling participation of the women in this research.

Central to many of the conversations with the women was the importance the women placed on both the bingo hall and the casino as unique environments. For many of the women, their attraction to gambling stems from their enjoyment of these environments rather than the games themselves. Some of the older respondents spoke favourably of the easy accessibility and comfort of gambling environments, particularly the casino, commenting that it is not difficult to enter these spaces and once participation has begun there is ample room to move around. Many of the other women commented that it is the atmosphere that attracts them. To illustrate, one woman commented that the casino is in many ways a glamorous environment and that by going to this environment she feels glamorous by proxy.

In order to make sense of the relationship between gender and gambling environments, Connell's notions of gender regimes and emphasized femininity were used. Connell seeks to make sense of the relationship between intermediate levels of social interaction and gender socialization. Specifically, he looks at how this level of socialization impacts the power dynamics between men and women and how the degree of power differential between the genders influences the type of gender performances produced and reproduced in social settings.

Perhaps the most important way the accounts of the women in this research relate to Connell's notions of gender regimes and emphasized femininity was in their discussion

of bingo halls and casinos as environments. For one woman in particular, the bingo hall provides her with the opportunity to invest in her personal appearance. Dorothy stated that since her husband passed away nearly a year ago, she has not had the same need, or desire, to dress-up on a regular basis. She said that while her husband was alive, she made a daily effort to present herself in a pleasing manner, but now the only place where she feels compelled to invest effort in her personal appearance is the bingo hall. Dorothy commented that one of the aspects she likes most about going to play bingo is that she has the opportunity to put on her best clothing and jewellery, style her hair and apply make-up in a way that she takes pride in. For Dorothy, the bingo hall is not simply a place to gamble, or even to socialize, but rather it is a place where she is able to display her femininity.

This notion of displaying femininity in a gambling environment was also expressed by another participant. Kay, a single mother with children living at home, commented that what she enjoys most about going to the casino is that she is able to dress-up and go out with friends. She commented that the friends she gambles with are all moms and they often don't have the opportunity to dress-up and make an effort to "look good." She said that her enjoyment in gambling stems from the fact that when she is out with her friends, they are all away from their responsibilities at home and they are able to emphasize the aspects of their femininity that they feel makes them attractive.

Based on the accounts of these two women, it is possible to argue that the casino is not simply a place to gamble, but in many ways casinos are gender regimes. While the women did not openly discuss how the casinos or the bingo halls shape their presentation of femininity, both Dorothy and Kay demonstrate that an integral aspect of these spaces

is the presentation of the self. Both casinos and bingo halls allow these women to take pride in their appearance and, in essence, enable them to openly emphasize their femininity.

Unlike notions of risk-taking and gambling explored in the first research question, the second research question was far more challenging to answer. The difficulty inherent in this question lies in its open-ended formulation. Specifically, what gambling means to the women in this research was complex. While many women suggested that the social nature of both the casino and bingo hall is an important aspect of their enjoyment, other women provided contradictory remarks. For these women, the casino provides an important refuge from the stresses they encounter in their day-to-day lives and, in many cases, their attraction is linked to the notion that socialization is not a required aspect of gambling participation. This contradiction demonstrates the complexity inherent in determining what gambling means to the women in this research.

Further, determining the role that gambling plays in the lives of the women in this research also proves to be challenging to answer. In their discussion of gambling, the women provided important insight into the role of leisure activities in their lives. Since many of the women were unable to participate in leisure activities while they were raising their children, gambling activities proved to be especially attractive leisure pursuits because of the lack of time commitment and skill related to the activities. Additionally, for some of the women gambling occupies an important role as an avenue to express their femininity. A few of the women shared that both the casino and bingo halls are places where they are able to dress-up and display their femininity.

## CONCLUSION

This research began with a desire to better understand the relationship between risk and gambling participation, namely the clustering of risk-taking activities. After an overview of the established research on gambling activities, it was decided that mature women would be the substantive focus of this research. The decision to sample this demographic of gamblers was informed not only by the fact that they are one of the fastest growing demographics of gamblers in Canada (Derevensky & Gillespie, 2005), but also because there is a differential effect of gambling on this population. Specifically, it appears that since many older women are on reduced retirement incomes, the losses related to gambling activities may have an increased detrimental effect on this demographic (McKay, 2005). As a consequence, this research began with the goal to assess the relationship between the clustering of risk-taking activities and the gambling experiences of women aged 45 and older who recreationally participate in gambling activities.

In the end, I found that there is little clustering of risk-taking activities and the gambling participation of these women. As a consequence, this research shifted to attempt to assess why the mature women in this research, who are adverse to risk-taking activities, choose to participate in the risk-taking activity of gambling as recreational activity. Using Stephen Lyng's theory of edgework to better understand the nature of their gambling participation, it is possible to assert that in spite of their aversion to risk, the nature of their gambling participation conforms in many ways to Lyng's notions of the risk-taking experience. Much like the skydivers that Lyng studied, these women, in

large part, use the activity of gambling as an escape from distressing aspects of their day-to-day lives.

Another analytically important finding is the role of bingo halls and casinos as physical environments. Unlike other risk-taking activities that take place in harsh inhospitable environments, such as a mountain cliff or a race-track, the gambling environments proved to be a place of comfort for many of the women interviewed. Specifically, the women commented that much of their attraction to gambling related activities lies in the relative safety of casinos and bingo halls. This supports Davis and Avery's (2004) work that suggests that the motivation to participate in gambling related activities transcends beyond the actual games to the structural aspects of these environments.

Further, while it is generally accepted in the literature that women tend to favour non-strategic forms of gaming (Nower & Blaszczynski, 2006), the women in this research help illuminate the idea that notions of strategy and skill are far more complex than previously thought. Central to almost every woman's experience of gambling is the skill set she relies on to control her money. Lastly, and perhaps most surprisingly, the sensations experienced by the women in this research closely align to Lyng's conceptualization of the emotions edgeworkers experience in high risk situations, further strengthening the relationship between recreational gambling to other risk-taking activities.

In many ways, this research helps illuminate why many of the women interviewed are attracted to gambling. Using both Stebbins' Serious Leisure Perspective and Connell's notions of gender regimes and emphasized femininity, it is possible to gain

insight into what gambling means to these women and the role that gambling plays in their lives. Most of the respondents commented that their attraction to gambling lies in the lack of commitment necessary for participation, sharing that both the casino and the bingo hall are some of the few places where they can either go with their peer group, or go alone. Further, the notion that each individual can set her own budget and choose how long she would like to gamble also proved to be an important attraction. Lastly, personal appearance was also an important aspect of the environment. Some of the women reported that the casinos and bingo halls are an important place to display their femininity, commenting that these environments are some of the few places where they have the opportunity to “dress-up.”

### **Implications**

The overall goal of this research was to better understand the experiences of women aged 45 and older who regularly participate in gambling-related activities. At this point, I turn to the limitations of this study and how this study has contributed to the larger body of research on gambling. Further, this section will also provide some concluding remarks about the research process along with various suggestions for future research.

### **Limitations and Contributions**

Perhaps the most significant of the limitations of this study relate to the nature of the recruitment process. While it was anticipated that it would be challenging to recruit a sufficient number of women aged 45 and older who recreationally participate in gambling

to reach saturation, this process proved to far more difficult and time consuming than initially anticipated. As a consequence of the difficulties associated with this process, both snowball and convenience sampling were employed. This may be potentially problematic for a couple of important reasons. First, because I relied on my personal contacts to begin recruitment, the initial sample of women may not have been indicative of the larger population of mature women who gamble. Additionally, because of snowball sampling recruitment strategy employed it is difficult to ascertain if some of the themes that emerged from the research can be attributed gambling participation of mature women, or if the themes emerged as a result from sampling multiple women from a single peer group. Nonetheless, as discussed in the methodological framework, the goal of this research is not to generalize to the larger population of women gamblers, but rather to make sense of the participants' experiences with gambling. The accounts the women presented provide important insight into this aspect of gambling participation.

An additional limitation of this research associated with the sample, is the size. Although at 19 interviews, saturation was reached, this research may have been strengthened by either a larger sample size or a more specific sample. As noted earlier, the recruitment of participants for this research proved to be especially challenging. In an attempt to collect a sufficient number of interviews, women with a wide range of gambling experiences were interviewed. While the majority of the women routinely participated in slot machine gambling, the overall scope of the gambling participation ranged from bingo to Mah-jong. Although the goal of this research was to assess the experiences of female gamblers, by instead focusing solely on one form of gambling participation, or collecting enough information to make strong conclusions about the

differences in gambling participation by chosen activities, may have strengthened this research.

Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations, there are several ways in which this study contributes to the bodies of research related to gambling, risk and gender. First, and foremost, the chosen sampling frame for this research, women aged 45 and older who recreationally participate in gambling, helped develop a more comprehensive understanding of gambling participation. By focusing on these underdeveloped aspects of gambling research, this study helps add to the broader knowledge of gambling and in many ways also contributes to the understanding of the experiences many women face as they age.

Another important contribution of this research is the theoretical issues examined in this study. By considering gender and leisure in the context of risk, this thesis illuminates the complexity inherent in voluntary risk-taking activities. Specifically, by looking at an activity that is not typically associated with conventional notions of voluntary risk-taking pursuits, new insight into the multifaceted nature of the motivation to participate in risk-taking activities emerges.

Lastly, the qualitative methodology employed for this research helps improve the understanding of the complexity inherent in the gambling participation of women aged 45 and older. Since the majority of the research on the gambling participation of this demographic is quantitative, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the topic at hand. Further, by using semi-structured interview techniques, the respondents were provided enough freedom to express the aspects of their gambling participation they deem most important and, in many ways, this allowed for the

direction of the research to shift in order to better align with their experiences. This freedom, in turn, helped shed light on aspects of this relationship that have been largely neglected.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, this research was an unexpected journey. While initially the goal of this research was to assess the clustering of risk-taking in the context of gambling, during the process of conducting interviews it became apparent not only that the initial goals of this research was inappropriate for making sense of the phenomena at hand, but more importantly that the gambling experiences of women aged 45 and older are far more complex than initially anticipated. As a consequence, new areas of interest emerged, namely the relationship between gender and notions of leisure participation. Although the scope of this research project did not allow for these areas to be explored in all their complexities, they help raise important questions about the role that gambling plays in the lives of these women and why it proves to be an attractive leisure pursuit.

In the end, this research has not comprehensively answered the two research questions initially laid out, specifically the notion of what gambling means to the women who participate in gambling-related activities. This research, however, helps better identify many analytically important aspects of the gambling experience of this demographic that have yet to be explored. If provided with the opportunity to carry out additional research in this area of sociology, there are certain aspects of this phenomenon that necessitate further examination. In particular, working from the finding that the gambling experiences of the women in this research closely align with Lyng's notion of

the risk-taking experience, it would be worthwhile to research other risk-taking activities these women may be participating in. Further, working off of this notion, it would also be beneficial to assess other, less researched, demographics and assess how they escape from distressing aspects of their day-to-day lives.

Another avenue for future research would be to assess one gambling activity in detail. Based on the information collected for this research, it appears that the bingo participation of the women in study is functional aspect of their lives. Therefore, it would be useful to conduct more in-depth research into the unique role of bingo halls in the lives of women.

Further, an area of gambling research that necessitates further research is the role of the social in gambling participation. It would be valuable to conduct research on peer groups to assess how they influence gambling participation, how they use gambling to maintain their friendships and potentially how they ensure the members of their group maintain control while gambling. This research could help inform why individuals are attracted to the casino and how these groups help regulate gambling participation.

Nevertheless, this research provides important implications for the understanding of gambling participation. The idea that recreational gambling, for nearly all of the women, constitutes an important and functional role in their lives helps diffuse the stigma associated with gambling. Due to the emphasis on problem gambling, there has been a neglect of the positives attributes relating to the gambling experience. This research, in many ways, demonstrates that the gambling is an important aspect of the lives of many individuals in society. If more emphasis were to be placed on the experiences of those who are able to successfully participate in gambling activities on a regular basis, more

insight into the complex nature of the gambling experience, even potentially problem gambling may be revealed.

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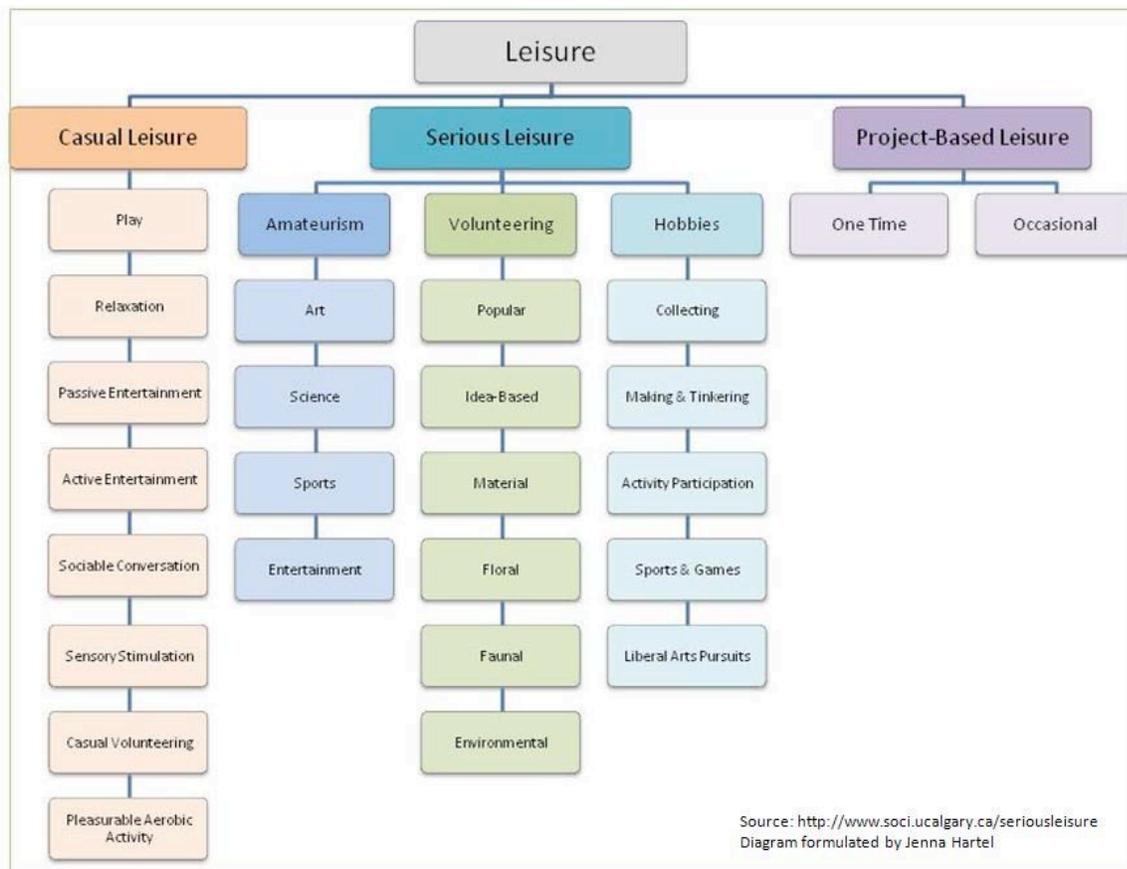
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## APPENDIX A: DIAGRAM OF THE SERIOUS LEISURE PERSPECTIVE



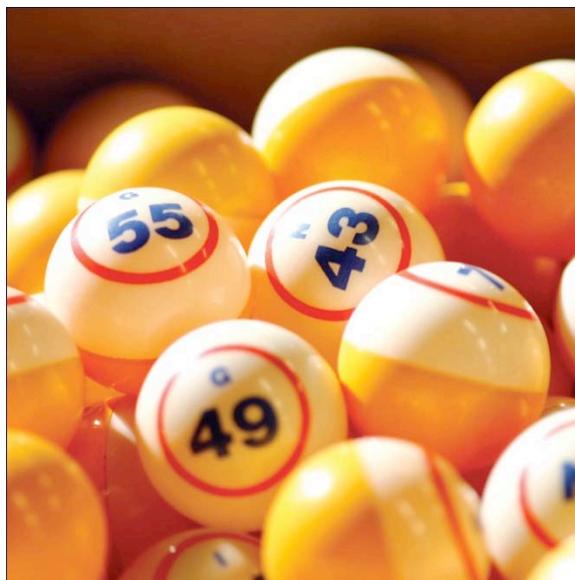
Source:

Hartel, J. The Serious Leisure Perspective Diagram Retrieved September 21, 2009, from <http://www.soci.ucalgary.ca/seriousleisure/index.htm>

## APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT NOTICE

# Women and Gambling

Paid Research  
Participants  
Needed!



*Are you a woman aged 45 or older who actively participates in gambling?*

I am a graduate student at the University of Calgary studying the behaviours associated with gambling among older women for a graduate thesis.

I am looking for women aged 45 or older who regularly participate in gambling activities to take part in a semi-structured hour-long confidential interview about their gambling experiences with me.

\$20.00 in compensation will be provided for those who participate in the study.



Supervisor  
Dr. Erin Gibbs Van Brunshot  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Sociology

(403) 220-6505  
[begibbsv@ucalgary.ca](mailto:begibbsv@ucalgary.ca)

If you are interested in taking part in the interview, please contact:

Lena Rinquist  
[larinqui@ucalgary.ca](mailto:larinqui@ucalgary.ca)  
(Subject: Research Project)  
Telephone: 403-220-6505

**APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT NOTICE USED FOR THE CALGARY SUN**

<b>WOMEN &amp; GAMBLING</b>		<b>Paid Research Participants Needed</b>
<p>Are you a woman aged 45 or older who actively participates in Gambling?</p> <p>I am a graduate student at the University of Calgary Studying the behaviours associated with gambling among older women for a graduate thesis.</p> <p>I am looking for women aged 45 or older who regularly Participate in gambling activities to take part</p>	<p>in a semi-structured, hour-long, confidential interview about their gambling experiences with me. \$20 in compensation will be provided for those who participate in the study.</p> <p><b>If you are interested, please contact: Lena Rinquist</b>  <b>larinquist@ucalgary.ca</b>  <b>(Subject: Research Project)</b>  <b>Phone: 403-220-6505</b></p>	
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY</b></p> </div>	<p>Supervisor            Dr. Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot            Faculty of Social Sciences            Sociology</p> <p>(403) 220-6505            begbhsv@calgary.ca</p>	<small>0600-SP04-078</small>

## **APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **Interview Schedule**

- Before we start, can you tell me about yourself?
  
- Aside from gambling, what other sorts of leisure activities do you participate in?
  - What leisure activity would you say is most important in your life?
  
- How important is it to you to stay active in your life?

### **Personal Involvement in gambling**

- What is your level of ability?
  
- What games do you typically play?
  
- How and when did you make the decision to begin gambling?
  
- How long have you been involved in gambling?
  
- What first attracted you to gambling?
  
- Where do you typically gamble?
  
- Do you typically gamble with a group of people or by yourself?
  - If participation is with a group, who is it with?

## Research Questions

- How often do you gamble?
  - Is the frequency of your gambling more often certain times of the day, days of the week, times in the month?
- How does it feel to gamble?
  - Have these feelings changed over time?
- What do you like about gambling?
- What do you dislike about gambling?
- Why do you choose to continue gambling?
- What sorts of benefits do you expect from gambling?
- Are there certain things or activities that influence how often you gamble?
  - Explain
- “How important is the idea of control in your gambling participation?”
- Do you have any ideas about why an individual may develop gambling problems?
- What are any activities that you relate to gambling?
  - Do you think these activities impact your participation in gambling?
- Do you feel like you sometimes have difficulty controlling your gambling?
  - If so, is there anything you can think of that influences your ability to control your gambling?
- Has your participation in gambling ever been an issue for your friends and family?
  - If so, has their concern changed the way you participate in gambling?
- Why do you think people develop problem gambling tendencies?
- How or when do you know when to stop gambling?
  - Is this reason constant or does it change depending on when you are gambling?

**Closing Remarks**

- In the future, what would you see as a reason for why you would discontinue gambling?
- Is there anything we have not talked about which you think is important to understand your gambling participation?

## APPENDIX E: ETHICS

UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

MEMO

**Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)**  
**Research Services Office**  
**Main Floor, Energy Resources Research Building**  
**Research Park**  
 Telephone: (403) 220-3782 or (403) 210-9863  
 Fax: (403) 289-0693  
 Email: [csjahrau@ucalgary.ca](mailto:csjahrau@ucalgary.ca) or [rburrows@ucalgary.ca](mailto:rburrows@ucalgary.ca)

**To:** Lena Rinquist  
 Department of Sociology **Date:** June 30, 2009

**From:** Dr. Kathleen Oberle, Chair  
 Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board

**Re:** Approval of Modification for: Older Women and Gambling: An Exploration of the Behaviours  
 Associated with Gambling Among Women Aged 45 and Older  
 Original Approval Date: June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009  
 File No: 6078

The Certificate of Institutional Ethics Review issued on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009 continues in force and extends to the modifications as set out in your email/memo dated June 29<sup>th</sup> 2009. Your request to offer \$20 as remuneration to your participants, having revised recruitment and consent materials to indicate this compensation, is approved as described.

You should attach a copy of the documentation you provided in order to request the modification, together with a copy of this memorandum, to the original Certification in your files.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Oberle, PhD, Professor  
 Faculty of Nursing  
 Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board

Cc: Dr. Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot