

# Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience

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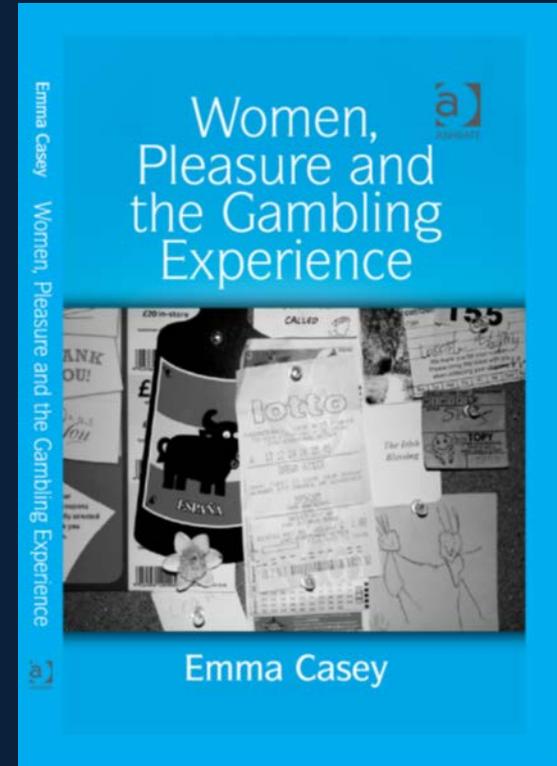
# Introduction

- Economic and Social Research Council funded project; *Gambling and Households*
- Choice of research method; Mass Observation Archive
- Critical account of the data using an extension of Bourdieu's account of social and cultural capital
- Point to 'emotional capital' as possible theoretical advancement

# Gambling as 'Positive'?

- Alternative approaches to studying gambling
- One which focuses on normative, everyday gambling practices
- Explore key methods to achieve this
- Deeply qualitative methods – Mass Observation Archive, Sussex University
- Perspectives to consider the intersections of key identity practices and how these inform gambling behaviour

# Gambling as 'Backdrop' to British Cultural Landscapes



# Martin Parr – Gosforth Races



# From the Spectacular to the Mundane

- Shifts as spatial and demographic
- Gambling as normative domestic practice; interlinking with broader identity practices
- Shift has not been given much attention or critical thought
- Incorporate broad range of social theories to understand these shifts

# Why Mass Observation Archive?

- MOA established in 1937 by anthropologists Madge and Harrison to explore mainstream, popular, everyday activity
- Opposed dominant emphasis on positivism instead seeking to reveal normative practices and routines
- Researching gambling challenging given its status as morally sensitive and taboo

# MOA as Method

- Very few 'Directives' on gambling
- 50% response rate; 214 detailed responses
- Questions about personal experiences of gambling and patterns of expenditure
- Lots of detail and self-reflection especially about families
- How do we 'describe the description' (Uprichard, 2013); how can it be coded and analysed; how can we make sense of the data; who do the 'Observers' write for?

# MO as Method for Researching Gambling is not new

- Welfare reformer and social researcher Seebohm Rowntree worked with MO to collect data for study of 'Mass Gambling' in York
- Orwell – tradition of exploring the hitherto overlooked and taken for granted cultural practices of working class people (men)
- Gambling and secondary poverty

# Rowntree's 1947 Study

'I think you will find that the working class woman goes in for it more, because it makes all the difference to them to get just that little extra which they have got no opportunity if gaining otherwise. They are more anxious than men to get that little extra really, because usually their husbands only allow them the low amount for housekeeping and there is none left for themselves.' (FB54)

# Importance of Gender

- Avoid un-gendered accounts of gambling
- 2007 project for the Gambling Commission on gender and gambling
- Need more about families and inter-personal relationships
- More about gender within context of recent dramatic technological changes
- Problematise traditional ways of explaining gambling; daydream, escape, protest for example. From what? And within what contexts?

# Wider Social, Economic and Cultural Contexts of Gambling

- Recent plethora of sociological work exploring particularities of women's experiences of class (eg. Jones, 2012; Mackenzie, 2014)
- Need to understand women and gambling within this literature and also within recent economic context
- Seeking 'value' and 'capital' within a very limited set of options available.

# Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

- Judgements of taste are acts of social positioning
- People are 'alive' in social spaces. They occupy positions within spaces and articulate 'capital' via their everyday practice.
- Capitals are thus resources to acquire a 'habitus' or position within that space
- Capitals reproduce social forms of domination including class and gender

# Economic Capital

- Wealth and income
- Gambling often seen as an attempt to escape poverty. For example:

‘I think I’m more likely to gamble if I have less money...  
Logically I know that is completely stupid, but I suppose it’s just  
because I need the win more.’ (Woman, 29, administrator)

# Economic Capital

- Recent research demonstrates a shift in the language of poverty (JRF, 2013)
- Neo-liberal legacies of Thatcherism in UK has intensified austerity politics, narratives of personal betterment, and enhancement of self which are reflected in gambling discourses.
- More likely to frame gambling as a serious attempt to improve the wealth of the family.

# Social Capital

- Concerns contacts, connections and social networks (Great British Class Survey, Savage et al, 2013)
- High levels of social capital can be viewed as having positive impact on gambling:

‘In my experience of betting in the bookies or at the track with friends, the fact that you have people around you acts as a safety measure – your mates will stop you from doing something really stupid or from misjudging what you’re doing. But when you’re betting at home, alone, in front of a computer, there is no such safety measure.’ (Male, 28, researcher)



# Social Capital

- Syndicates and social capital
- Those with lower levels of social capital might be seen as more vulnerable, especially in terms of middle class assessments of those with low social capital who gamble alone.
- Gambling sometimes used to seek social networks

‘There was something I did a few times... there used to be a programme on TV late at night in which viewers could phone in... I was not expecting to win, but I did it just for fun... I think perhaps the false sense of community, the impression that the presenter was a sort of ... friend ... contributed to a feeling of joining in and belonging.’

(Woman, 54, writer)

# Cultural Capital

- Appreciation and engagement with cultural goods and conversely to recognise when goods do not hold value
- Skeggs (2004) cites survey in which playing the lottery seen as a marker of class
- Gambling often seen as 'tacky' artefacts of working class life and as an activity imbued with 'low' levels of cultural capital

# Cultural Capital

'My husbands' niece is currently in a relationship with a young man whose family made their money from gambling: in an amusement arcade in a seaside resort. The family have branched out into a fish bar ... but it's perfectly clear where their money has come from. Their restaurant is stuffed with fruit machines and other tacky paraphernalia ... Talk about getting your money for nothing.'

(Woman, 41, freelancer)

# Cultural Capital

- 'Getting it wrong'; stigmatisation and surveillance of working class others – Martin Parr; 'revolting' gambling subjects (see also Tyler, 2012)

'These days ... the enclosures and stands of Royal Ascot are becoming increasingly popular with a much less distinguished breed of racegoer. A quick glance across the terraces reveals a sea of flesh and unsightly tattoos – of women in cheap, tawdry dresses.'

- Accounts of 'undeserved wealth' tightens boundaries to mobility by reinforcing middle class paths to wealth as appropriate and deserved.

# 'Emotional Capital'

- Limitations of Bourdieusian account – action is not always about exchange and instrumentality (see Allatt, 1993)
- What about emotion as a form of investment *in others*?
- Bourdieu overlooks everyday use-values which are non-convertible in terms of value, such as 'care'
- Explore moral vulnerability of gamblers and their construction of self in relation to others

# Conclusion

- Austerity has left people in the UK with little choice for mobility and self-improvement
- Various ways of 'doing' class via construction of gambling narratives
- Through everyday popular cultural activities such as gambling, class positions are produced, reproduced and *bonded*