

Outbursts, Discipline, and Wake-Up Calls: Gendered Emotionalities in Men's Gambling

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ABSTRACT

Within gambling debates and research, emotions are associated with irrationality, loss of control, and problem gambling. Simultaneously, they have a complex relationship to masculine positions, which are said to be connected to both stoicism and aggressivity. Using interviews with Swedish men gamblers and feminist and critical theorisations of emotions, this article discusses experiences, negotiations, and performances of emotions within men's gambling. The article demonstrates that emotions and control were entangled themes in the research, but discussed as separate by the interviewees, who used emotion work in order to navigate their own experiences in relation to larger discourses about gender, health, and 'sovereignty' in relation to gambling. The article expands feminist research about gender and emotions by providing in-depth, detailed discussions about men's emotionalities. It also contributes to gambling research by integrating problematising perspectives on emotions and to research about the production of gendered emotionalities under capitalism.

Keywords: gambling, gambling behaviour and gender, masculine positions, emotions, emotion work

INTRODUCTION

Emotions have a 'bad rap' in gambling debates and research as they are primarily associated with irrationality, loss of control, and problem gambling. Simultaneously, emotions are fundamental to gambling; when buying a lottery ticket, the price does not pertain to the slip of paper but to hopefulness and excitement (Nicoll, 2019: 67). Despite the complex role of emotions in gambling, problematising approaches which deconstruct the rationality/emotionality dichotomy and see emotions as embodied *and* discursive (Wetherell, 2012, 2013) have hardly been used, a gap addressed in this article.

Emotions have a similarly complex relationship to gender. White men have long been connected with rationality and control, ideas which co-exist with ones about men as aggressive and competitive and with emerging ideals of allegedly progressive emotionality in men (de Boise and Hearn, 2017; Lloyd, 1993). Given this complexity, an improved understanding of men's lived experiences of emotions and how they relate to them is crucial. Men's experiences of gambling provide an opportunity to better understand these issues. Also, as a multibillion-dollar industry, closely linked to contemporary forms of capitalism which interpellate us to feel (Gill and Kanai, 2019), gambling is highly political and of interest to feminist scholars.

Using interviews with Swedish men gamblers as well as qualitative analysis using feminist and critical theorisations of emotions, this article asks how emotions were lived, performed, and negotiated in men's gambling. I demonstrate that, while seen as separate by the interviewees, emotions were entangled with rationality and control. Emotion work was used to navigate feelings, which were understood in relation to larger discourses about risk, health, and 'sovereignty' in gambling. The article expands feminist research about gender and emotions by providing in-depth, detailed discussions about men's emotionalities. It also contributes to research about the production of gendered subjectivities and emotionalities under capitalism, and to gambling research by integrating problematising perspectives on emotions.

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EMOTIONS AND GENDER

Emotions and affect have been subject to intense discussions during the last decades. Theorists within the 'affective turn' see affects as embodied sensations, intensities, or forces which circulate beyond discourse (Massumi, 1995), and some have accused feminist and discursive research of focusing too much on emotions, rather than on affects, and on social, cultural, and discursive aspects while discarding embodied sensations. In fact, feminist research has long been interested in embodiedness and emotions (Hemmings, 2005). Moreover, the distinction between emotion and affect within the turn is based on views of bodies and psyches that are contested within psychology and neuroscience and by constructivist researchers (Wetherell, 2012, 2013). It also may reproduce dichotomies such as inner/outer, body/intellect, and nature/culture, thus reducing the complexity of social and embodied emotional processes while also overlooking decades of feminist critique of such dichotomisations (Reeser, 2017).

In this article, I follow the feminist formulation of emotions as political, discursive, *and* embodied (for example see Wetherell, 2012, 2013; Ahmed, 2014). As Wetherell argues, 'it is the discursive that very frequently makes affect powerful, makes it radical and provides the means for affect to travel' (2012: 19). I use the term 'emotions' rather than 'affect' in order to emphasise this composite understanding. This approach, making use of feminist theories, rejects views of emotions as solely irrepressible forces from within the body, *or* as solely discursive. Instead, emotions are seen as produced and circulated through culture, discourses, and within and between bodies (Ahmed, 2014). Moreover, they may be stable, pervasive, idiosyncratic, or unusual (Wetherell *et al.*, 2020).

This approach enables the study of 'how forms of feeling come to be conceivable, how these are articulated and legitimated, and open to further elaboration or repression' (Wetherell *et al.*, 2020: 15). One way of understanding such processes is through Hochschild's (2003) groundbreaking theories about 'emotion work', which outline how feelings are lived and shaped in relation to power. Using a view of emotions as embodied and discursive (2003: 28), Hochschild studies female flight attendants who are required to placate passengers by smiling from the heart; they should not only display certain gendered emotions but are expected to actually feel them. Emotion work is guided by 'feeling rules', which establish 'the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges' (Hochschild, 2003: 56). Feeling rules are connected to capitalism in several ways; not only are workers' feelings shaped and exploited (Hochschild, 2003), but capitalist systems also operate through 'intimate psychological governance', interpellating us to become subjects who feel in certain, gendered ways (Gill and Kanai, 2019: 132; Goedecke, 2023a).

Emotionality and rationality have a long history as a gendered dichotomy. Not only have rationality, objectivity, and the mind been connected to white men while women have been connected to irrationality, emotion, and the body (de Boise and Hearn, 2017), but rationality in itself is gendered: '[i]t is not a question simply of the applicability to women of neutrally specified ideals of rationality, but rather of the genderization of the ideals themselves' (Lloyd, 1993: 37). The distinction between rationality and emotionality produces women, people of colour, and disabled and working-class people as irrational, uncontrolled, and more closely connected to the body, thereby reproducing gendered, raced, classed, and ableist power relations.

Men's emotions are a complex area: early feminist critique portrayed men's emotional lives as impoverished, and nineteenth-century stoicism was seen as central to gendered power relations (e.g., Sattel, 1976). Consequently, in popular feminist thought and self-help culture, emotionality in men has been hailed as progressive. This view should be problematised, as men's emotions are neither 'new' nor necessarily progressive (de Boise and Hearn, 2017). With this in mind, the importance of the question of *whether* men are emotional fades; instead, *how* men's emotions are lived, understood, and negotiated, and their significance in relation to gendered and other discourses and power relations are of crucial importance. Men's emotions must be understood not as individual states but as potentially 'fit[ting] into, and circulat[ing] within, neoliberal-capitalist, patriarchal frameworks as a way of maintaining inequalities' (de Boise and Hearn, 2017: 788).

In order to understand this, this article draws upon feminist and discursive approaches to men and masculine positions (Butler, 1990; Edley and Wetherell, 2001; Whitehead, 2002). The relation between 'men' and 'masculine' is by no means linear, but the notion of 'man,' together with 'the male body' constitute 'the central, possibly most stable, reference point for the masculine subject as it seeks to create and realize its own existence' (Whitehead, 2002: 212). Living as a man, and embodying an intelligible masculine position, is connected to certain embodied and emotional experiences which must be made intelligible discursively. In the article, I use the term *masculine positions* to capture how gender was produced, made sense of, and lived by the interviewees (see also Edley and Wetherell, 2001). Emotions are 'one element of a process that temporarily composes or decomposes' such positions, and 'may produce new gender configurations as part of the unending chain of gendered becomings' (Reeser, 2017: 111), and emotion work refers to deliberate or unconscious efforts to feel in intelligibly gendered ways (Hochschild, 2003). Emotions form patterns which 'shape a context or horizon for action, a complex subjectivity and personal history' (Wetherell *et al.*, 2020: 15); that is, they form part of our multi-layered, gendered

selves, our emotional and embodied habits and our attempts to make sense of them. Gambling, where negotiations around emotionality and rationality are central, provides a lens where men's emotionalities, how they are lived, shaped, and understood, and what consequences they have, may be investigated.

GAMBLING, GENDER, AND EMOTIONALITY

Gambling research tends to be dominated by medical and psychological perspectives and quantitative methods (Cassidy *et al.*, 2013; Nicoll, 2019). Like qualitative approaches, gender perspectives are relatively uncommon, and research that does bring up gender often treats it as a variable: Men gamble more than women, and spend more money gambling. Moreover, game choice is gendered, with men gambling more on skill or strategic games than chance games (e.g., Phillips, 2009; Svensson, 2013).

A growing body of research acknowledges that gambling is a cultural and discursive phenomenon which varies across time and space (Cassidy *et al.*, 2013), which may contribute to the production of gendered positions (e.g., Casey, 2008; Scott, 2003). For instance, Cassidy's (2014) research participants (male bettors) deemphasised elements of chance in their gambling while emphasising mathematics, logic, control, and knowledgeability (traits described as unavailable to women). Skill games were not a preference among male gamblers but produced the gamblers as masculine. In a similar vein, Volberg and Wray suggest that:

... the broad range of gambling activities deemed suitable for men coexists with widely accepted views of men as risk takers, innovators, and speculators. In contrast, women in Western cultures are generally viewed as caretakers and nurturers, social roles that are not easily reconciled with many types of gambling (...) views of appropriately gendered behavior vary across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries and further influence the acceptability of different types of gambling for men and women of different groups. (2007: 65)

The gambling forms discussed here (primarily poker and sports and horse betting) are based on a combination of skill and luck. Within them, logic, knowledge (e.g., about sports), and risk are central, which can be expected to connect to normative masculine positions. Importantly, gambling may reinforce *and* subvert gendered patterns (Scott, 2003).

Within the medical and psychological perspectives which currently dominate gambling research, emotions are seen as distinct from control and rationality and associated with problems. For instance, American Psychiatric Association criteria of Gambling Disorder posit that the problem gambler gambles 'with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired *excitement*' and '[o]ften gambles when feeling *distressed*', while failing to '*control, cut back, or stop gambling*' (American Psychiatric Association, 2013: 585, my emphases). The influential pathways model (Blaszczynski and Nower, 2002) similarly argues that problem gambling is characterised by emotive states such as excitement and arousal accompanied with irrational beliefs and illusions of control. Allegedly, children are extra vulnerable to gambling as their brains are 'dictated by their *emotions and feelings*. The *rational* part of their brain has not fully formed' (UK gambling information quoted in van Schalkwyk *et al.*, 2022: 14, my emphases). Emotions are not only associated with problem gambling, but also with gambling badly: 'Although tilt¹ and chasing are closely linked to gambling problems (...) all poker gamblers are likely to *feel intense emotions* and *consequently* lose gambling sessions and money' (Mathieu and Varescon, 2022: 2, my emphases).

In this gambling literature, emotionality is pathologised and treated as irreconcilable with control. Underpinning this, I suggest, is the emotionality/rationality dichotomy, where emotions are seen as separate from or as precluding rationality which is associated with control, and where emotionality and rationality are placed in a hierarchy and linked to the mind/body and health/pathology dichotomies as well as gender. These suppositions have not been sufficiently problematised in gambling research in which emotions tend to be treated as located within the individual's psyche or neurochemistry, which underplays their interpersonal and political significance and the ways in which emotions are produced by and produce cultural meanings.

A more developed understanding of emotions as not precluding but possibly co-existing with control and rationality, and as embodied, discursive, gendered, and situated in time and place, is necessary. The emotionality of gambling is produced in relation to larger discourses: 'depression and other mental states connected to gambling should not be understood as located primarily within individuals' but as immanent to 'systems that connect states and subjects within American neoliberalism's social order' (Nicoll, 2022: 143; see also Casey, 2008; Nicoll, 2019). Neoliberalism is the economic ideology of individual choice, which is appropriated and sympathetic to contemporary notions of the clever, strategic and rational (male) gambler. Reith (2007) makes a similar connection

¹ 'Tilt' is when a poker player 'has great difficulty controlling their game through rational decisions, but rather acts very emotionally after having suffered a loss' (pokerstrategy, n.d.).

when she argues that contemporary capitalism produces 'sovereign consumers' of gambling, subjects which should 'consume, (...) give in and abandon themselves to the pleasures of self-fulfilment' while also 'exercis[ing] self-control and restraint' (2007: 40). Connections between gender and emotionalities have been implicitly discussed by some gambling scholars, such as Wolkomir, Cassidy, and Casey: US men poker players displayed aggression and used sexist and homophobic 'needling' to intimidate their opponents (Wolkomir, 2012), men sports and horse bettors in the UK were expected to respond to wins *and* losses with stoicism (Cassidy, 2014), while UK working class women expressed both happiness and fear in their discussions about gambling and winning the lottery (Casey, 2008).

In this article, gambling is regarded as embedded in everyday life and consumption (see also Nicoll, 2019), and as an arena where gendered negotiations about emotionality and control play out. Like many seemingly mundane activities, gambling is highly political; it is a lucrative industry, part of contemporary capitalism, and the ways in which we understand it normalises and de-legitimises certain understandings and subjects (Nicoll, 2019).

Before presenting the methodology, a few words about Swedish gambling are needed: During much of the 20th century, the Swedish gambling market was an oligopoly, dominated by state-owned company *Svenska spel* (Swedish games). In 2019 a license system was introduced; now all gambling operators must be licensed, which includes legislation requiring a duty of protection of their customers. However, even during the oligopoly, neoliberal views, including ideas about individual rather than corporate responsibility, were influential in Sweden, as were medical discourses, framing excessive gambling as an illness (Alexius, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The research draws on in-depth interviews with 14 men, conducted in the Spring of 2021. They were recruited through advertisements posted in online groups (devoted to gambling in general, poker, and sports and horse betting), betting shops, and other venues, as well as through my personal networks, and using the snowball method. The advertisement asked for men aged over 18 who gambled or had gambled but were not problem gamblers.

The interviewees lived in small towns or larger Swedish cities. They ranged from working class to upper middle-class; among the latter, several spoke of working-class origins. 12 had experience of some higher education, all were heterosexuals, most were white, and all but two had grown up in Sweden. Their ages ranged from 24 to 78 (median = 41). Nine had children; nine had (female) partners while four interviewees were single or widowed. While they were racially and sexually homogenous, they were diverse in terms of class and geography.

The interviewees varied in terms of gambling habits, they were occasional, frequent, professional, or ex-professional gamblers. All were mainly engaged in games based on a combination of skill and luck: horse and sports betting and poker (some also occasionally visited land-based casinos and participated in lotteries). Half of them were engaged in multiple forms of gambling, often a combination of sports betting and poker or sports and horse betting, and half of them were engaged in poker only.

The interviews were semi-structured, lasted 35-90 minutes, and were organised around themes like gambling practices, how the interviewee started to gamble, with whom he gambled, and what gambling meant to him. Due to the then ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, 13 of 14 interviews were conducted online. Online interviewing may exclude people without access to and/or knowledge of the relevant technology, but it may also enable people pressed for time or without access to transportation to participate (Roberts *et al.*, 2021). In this case, it expanded the geographical scope of the study but led to, I believe, a slightly younger, more digitally literate sample who mainly gambled online. Consent forms (and prepaid envelopes) were sent out via post. The interviews were carried out by the author, a white woman in her thirties. The gendered dynamic did, I believe, affect the interview interaction. For instance, previous knowledge about gambling was seldom presumed, as interviewees explained accumulated bets and poker rules in great detail.

The audio of the interviews was recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the author, whereby all names and cities were changed, as well as any potentially identifying information. The research was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (no. 2020-05017). All interviewees consented to participate and they were informed that their participation was voluntary and could be aborted at any time.

The material was studied using qualitative and discursive approaches, which entailed repeated re-readings and listenings, copying quotes concerning prominent themes into separate documents, whereafter the interviews, themes, and quotes were re-read and re-evaluated and read together with theories and previous research in a back-and-forth, hermeneutic process (see Potter and Wetherell, 1994). Interviews are based on speech as well as interruptions, inflexions, body language, and other circulations of feeling, and are arenas where the full complexity of emotions can be studied, even if there is a risk of overemphasising talk (while other methodologies may offer better insight into non-verbal aspects of emotions). I therefore looked for stories about emotions as well as emotional expressions, including shouts, enthusiasm, and other changes in intensity.

Below, I discuss emotional narratives, and then go on to discuss different kinds of emotion work. Lastly, I discuss the emotionality of losing control while gambling.

EMOTIONAL NARRATIVES: 'A ZONE OF EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS'

The interviewees' motivations for gambling varied and overlapped; some spoke of a great interest in sports, horses, or poker, some (also) saw it as a social activity, while others gambled in order to earn money. However, all emphasised emotions like fascination, competitiveness, and excitement. For instance, Frank (31), a sports bettor, said: 'I think [placing a bet] is a bit of a *frisson*'.² He was echoed by Torsten (45), who recalled the blackjack gambling of his youth as 'tillating' while he characterised his present-day horse betting as more of a 'quiet suspense' which he shared with his father and brothers.

One of the most overtly emotional narratives came from Kjell (61), a sports and horse bettor. As a child, Kjell used to accompany his stepfather to the horse racing arena, which he described as a 'zone of emotional outbursts (...) the racing tracks, the home straight, and everyone has bet a lot of money (...) it's a great excitement and drama'. As a young man, Kjell had once won a lot of money on the V5 horse races, where one is supposed to pick five winners. He told me about this in great detail, describing the horses of the race and the betting shop where he found out that he had won:

Kjell: I can't remember if I cried but it may well have happened, kind of. It was a feeling of bliss, or kind of, to read in... because at that time one read [the results] in the newspaper, well: 'results from [the local racing track]' and sort of... and this, just going through [the results], shit, 'first, second, third, fourth...' just... and then... close your eyes and take a deep breath and: 'fifth' and just AHH, well it's a, well... it's a big... (laughs) it's a fantastic... (...) and how *satisfied* I am, I can still tell you, can still feel how *satisfied* I was (KG: Yes) that I had... it was a kind of... well, no, it was a feeling of bliss.

This rather incoherent narrative was told with sighs, laughs, and shouts. This was 'one of the happiest days in my life', Kjell said, an 'almost orgasmic feeling'. The moments of reading the results were etched in Kjell's memory in a hyper-real fashion despite having taken place over 40 years ago.

Filip (24), a professional poker player, also held intense feelings. He told me about his first experiences of poker with his friends in secondary school. The stakes were low, but the game and the company were like a 'cocktail of, just, it was great, great fun'. Filip got '*totally stuck*', and when his friend sent him a link to *World Series of Poker*, he sat for hours "*ploughing* through it, as soon as I had time":

KG: It sounds like a falling in love?

Filip: yes, yes, yes!

KG: You kind of fell for it completely!?

Filip: Yes, definitely! And that was... I can say that as much fun as poker was then, *so much fun*, poker hasn't been and won't be that fun again. That was something really, really special. Few things have ever been so much fun.

Filip's enthusiasm when talking about his first encounter with poker was palpable. These strong feelings produced new relationalities and possibilities in his professional and social life (see also Reeser, 2017), shaping his feelings for the game even in his present life as a professional poker player.

Parallel to these stories, there were ones of anger, disappointment, shame, and fear. For instance, Adam (39), a sports bettor and ex-professional poker player, talked about outbursts of anger among his poker playing friends which he associated with 'hits of adrenaline': 'many people with big egos came there [to play] and didn't come back (laughs) because there may be feelings, very easily'. Filip mentioned being scared of losing money at the outset of his poker playing, and fearful to tell his 'very strict' parents about playing poker. Kjell felt ashamed: '[I'm] not entirely truthful about the amounts I've spent (...) [my family] would probably just think that... 'but cut it out, can't you spend your time on something better', something like that'.

Gambling was subject to strong and varied emotions, sometimes lingering long after taking place. Wolkomir (2012) argues that men poker players are seen as more emotional while women players are considered more rational, which she interprets as an inversion of gendered ideas about rationality and emotionality. While my material similarly points to emotional expressivity among gambling men, I suggest that the idea of an inversion reproduces a dichotomous view of emotionality and rationality; being emotional cancels out being rational.

² Quotes have been translated by the author and edited slightly for readability.

I instead suggest that emotionality was *intertwined* with rationality in the gambling narratives. Emotions, both positive and negative, were ubiquitous and not automatically related to a loss of control or poor or compulsive gambling, and rationality and emotionality co-existed. One example of this was provided by Vide (35), an ex-professional poker player. Vide was one of the interviewees who emphasised the importance of being strategic and rational the most. To him, every poker game was a chance to gather information which he then analysed and evaluated. However, he also emphasised the emotionality of gambling:

Vide: it's gut-wrenching to lose that much money (...) you have invested a lot of time and all that time just goes down the drain, time here is translated into money. And to feel that, it's very disheartening. Then there's the opposite (...) there have been times where I've won 300 000 SEK in a day (...) After that kind of gambling session it's not like you can just leave and think about... think about other stuff, you have a lot of... well, a lot of emotional processing that follows.

Notably, winning was just as emotional as losing, and while likening the emotions of poker playing to being on a 'roller-coaster', Vide saw his gambling as highly rational. The entanglement of rationality and emotionality was also evident in Frank's and Kjell's narratives about the thrill of being right:

KG: is [the excitement] the charm of gambling to you?

Frank: yes, and being right about football. That I really know my football (laughs), or better than the betting companies (laughs) (KG: right) So it's that, a bit of excitement, a bit of fun. (...) Winning is the proof that you know what you're talking about.

Kjell: You feel a bit smart if you have nailed, sort of, three-four matches... kind of. Some unexpected odds and then you pat yourself a little on the back and kind of feel a bit good about it (laughs).

Being 'smart', strategic, or rational did not only co-exist with emotionality in these stories, but they *constituted* highly emotional states. As de Boise and Hearn point out (2017: 786, original emphasis): 'to be rational, often, is to, quite literally, *feel* rational'. Rationality and emotionality were entwined, both on a conceptual level (the definition of each was dependent on the other) and on the level of lived experience.

The emotions were presented through speech, and connected to cultural concepts like money or probability theory. However, they were also embodied. Adam associated poker playing with anger and hormones, Vide saw losing as 'gut-wrenching', and Kjell described his win as 'orgasmic'. These are figures of speech, but they also indicate that to these interviewees, the emotions of gambling were located in the body, in surging stomachs, sweaty palms, and the highs of winning (see also Wetherell, 2013). Additionally, the emotions were not only narrated but evoked and performed, especially during Filip's and Kjell's interviews, who were plainly not just telling me about their feelings, but reliving and circulating them (to some extent) to me; I could feel their joy and suspense and I could almost smell Kjell's newspaper.

EMOTION WORK FOR SOVEREIGN CONSUMERS: 'IT'S ABOUT CALIBRATING YOURSELF'

Emotions were central to the interviewees' stories, but they were controversial in the same way as in the gambling debates discussed above. Frequently contrasted with being in control, emotions were not only experienced but handled. The poker players had the most elaborate strategies:

Vide: it's not only about being able to do the maths (KG: No), you have to be sufficiently disciplined to stick to reasonable decisions and keep caring about mathematics or rational decisions.

Vide deliberately analysed both the cards and his co-players: 'it's about calibrating yourself and adapting to how often I am right in my assessment about a person'. He connected winning to rationality and emotional control; the successful poker player did not only know the maths, but kept caring about them even in heated situations. Relatedly, Edvin (60), a poker player, had 'learnt to not get mad but stow [my mistakes] away so that I will recognise them and not make them again'. Hampus (41), a former professional poker player, had similar views: 'you have to read yourself a bit: which are your own limitations, and try to get to know them kind of. Sometimes you go into a tilt mood and that's... You need to recognise when you're on tilt'.

To keep control and continually evaluate one's own gambling are central to cultural narratives of poker. Thus, it is not surprising that it was the poker players that discussed these issues most explicitly. However, the other interviewees also strived not to get 'carried away' while gambling; they emphasised staying within financial and time limits, and not gambling while drunk or on online casinos, which were considered extra dangerous.

These narratives point to the presence of emotion work (Hochschild, 2003) aimed at suppressing anger and emotionality in general in order to remain rational. Relatedly, the concept ‘tilt’, which has been connected to gambling problems and to uncontrolled losses of money within poker research, links emotionality to loss of control (Browne, 1989; see also Mathieu and Varescon, 2022). Being emotional and being in control were thus formulated as distinct and control was equated with rationality and non-emotionality, ideas that made sense in relation to the rationality/emotionality dichotomy and how this dichotomy has been formulated in relation to gambling.

Parallel to the stories about suppressing emotions, there were ones of using gambling to *become* emotional. For instance, Torsten suggested that betting ‘makes the watching experience much more fun’, and Henrik (35), a football bettor and live poker player, similarly suggested that betting intensified the experience of watching football, which could be variously exciting in itself depending on the teams involved:

Henrik: I can’t save a division three game by betting on it but I can make a quarter-final in champion’s league a bit more fun, significantly more fun, by betting on it.

When Sweden’s national football team played, Henrik and his friends felt no need to bet, but other kinds of games were less engaging and needed to be enhanced by betting: ‘[Y]ou have to make it interesting for yourself’, Henrik said. Gunnar (78), a horse bettor, reasoned similarly when I asked him about whether frequent losses could make him lose interest in gambling:

Gunnar: No, you try anyway, it’s fun to be a part of it, for otherwise you wouldn’t watch the horses at all and if you haven’t [placed a] bet it doesn’t matter which horse wins.

To Gunnar, who had gambled for many years, betting rendered the horse races on TV exciting; without it, he implied, the races would become meaningless. Olof (41), a poker player, made a similar argument:

Olof: There needs to be something extra, and that is hard to achieve if you don’t sort of have to *bet* something! You need to feel that something is *at stake* because then you *get a grip* in another way.

Poker without betting money would become pointless; as above, betting was a shortcut to being able to engage with the game.

In these narratives, caring about the outcome of a game or a race did not always come naturally. Instead, the interviewees needed to wager money in order to really engage with the races, football games, or poker. Feeling strongly seemed almost like a duty, or differently put, these interviewees related to feeling rules prescribing emotional engagement, using betting as a kind of emotion work aimed at regulating their emotions (Hochschild, 2003). However, emotionality had to be kept within limits:

Henrik: I’m not sure (...) why I don’t evoke these feelings week after week, because I theoretically could, and bet a lot of money and really AHH! I realise that that’s what problem gamblers do... But I think I have too much healthy self-preservation to put myself in that situation.

The stories about restraining *and* evoking (a reasonable amount of) emotions point to conflicting feeling rules of gambling, prescribing stoicism on the one hand and emotional engagement on the other. Relatedly, the interviewees were engaged in different kinds of emotion work, aimed at experiencing emotions of the right kinds and intensities.

The feeling rules and the emotion work were carefully calibrated and legitimated in relation to various larger discourses (Wetherell *et al.*, 2020). Firstly, both sets of feeling rules made sense in relation to normative masculine positions. On the one hand, emotion work was used to avoid tilt; aggressivity and competitiveness were to be replaced by the position of the calculating machine. This answers very clearly to the connection between rationality, stoicism, and masculine positions (Lloyd, 1993), even if I suggest that the goal of the emotion work was not to suppress emotions but to shape a new emotionality characterised by control, calm, and self-awareness (or feeling rational, see de Boise and Hearn, 2017: 786).

On the other hand, the interviewees felt a duty to engage emotionally with sports and in competitions. Sports and competitiveness are associated with men (Sabo and Jansen, 1998; see also Wolkomir, 2012), and in these contexts, emotional displays are socially accepted, even expected. The interviewees’ emotion work and the contexts it was applied to were thus congruent with normative masculine positions. However, as suggested in Henrik’s story, the emotion work needed to be carefully calibrated, as excessive engagement with gambling was seen as dangerous.

Secondly, and relatedly, the emotion work of gambling was made sense of in relation to the rationality/emotionality dichotomy and to linked discourses about health and pathology. Several interviewees equated being in control with non-emotionality, and even Henrik, who advocated feeling strongly, connected

excessive emotionality with a loss of control. Moreover, in line with gambling debates (above), several interviewees shared Henrik's association between emotionality, loss of control, and problem gambling.

It would seem that the interviewees navigated between two extremes, where the first, a (masculinised) rationality, was preferred to the second, a (feminised and pathologised) emotionality. However, it has already become clear that their experiences were much more complex: (a curated) emotionality was congruent with masculine positions, and rationality was in fact highly emotional.

In an investigation of men's views on health, Robertson suggests that his interviewees navigated between control and release when it came to indulging in, for instance, smoking, unhealthy foods, and risk-taking. While it would be easy to associate control with being masculine, Robertson argues that the balancing between control and release was integral to 'achiev[ing] or maintain[ing] 'healthy' hegemonic, male citizenship' (2006: 185). Relatedly, Reith (2007) suggests that contemporary capitalism produces conflicting expectations of so called 'sovereign consumers' of gambling to indulge in *and* control their gambling, and if they fail, they are defined as problem gamblers. Robertson's balance is comparable to Reith's notion of sovereignty, and the conflicting feeling rules and the emotion work performed by my interviewees can be interpreted as efforts to reach a similar balance or sovereignty, associated with health.

By thinking about the incompatible demands in terms of conflicting feeling rules and the interviewees' efforts as emotion work, it is possible to argue that this balance or sovereignty was upheld using emotion work. Additionally, it is clear that several variants of balance were accessible to them: There was a range of emotionalities that were congruent with normative masculine positions and with being a sovereign consumer of gambling (see also Goedecke, 2023a). Moreover, the balancing should not be conceptualised as a hovering between emotionality and rationality/control, seen as opposites, but as an employment of both, using emotion work, to produce (a variety of) emotional states which made sense in relation to being sovereign and upholding masculine positions.

The parallels between my research and Robertson's (2006) suggest that the sovereign gambler is a masculinised figure (this is discussed more closely in Goedecke, 2023b). The parallels with Reith (2007) suggest that emotions, in the context of gambling, are produced in relation to a global industry arguably aimed at producing and profiting off of feelings (Nicoll, 2019). The emotion work discussed here is arguably connected to and made sense of in relation to interpellations from this industry. This will be returned to below.

CHAOTIC EMOTIONS: AN 'UNHAPPY COLD SHIVER RUNS THROUGH YOU'

Emotion work and control were essential to the interviewees' relationships with gambling. There was not only one but a range of acceptable emotionalities to be experienced while gambling, but there were limits; on this topic, several interviewees told of chaotic and frightening emotional experiences. For example, in the case of tilt, the interviewees' emotions were often connected to their performances in the game. Adam described becoming furious while playing and trying to break his laptop over his knee (luckily, he said, this attempt failed). Olof had a different sort of experience:

Olof: when you gamble for money, and if you've bet quite a lot, relatively speaking (...) You thought you were safe and then it turns out that you weren't (...) Then there's this kind of unhappy cold shiver that runs through you... that you, partly that you've made such an error of judgment and that it was, after all, a bit of money (...) some self-image: 'I thought something but I didn't judge it properly' like, you get a wake-up call, sort of: 'you thought you were good but you weren't'.

Both Olof and Adam described strong feelings surging through their bodies. Olof described surprise, a 'wake-up call', alerting him to the risks he was taking as well as his temporary loss of control. Interestingly, Frank also described a 'wake-up call', one he had experienced at a casino in his early twenties:

Frank: It wasn't good. We had drunk, well, I wasn't completely drunk, but we had drunk too much to make deliberate or good choices (...) and started chasing money. (...) That night, I went to the cash-machine in the casino twice (KG: Wow.) Mm. No good. Chasing money.

After having lost a quarter of his monthly income at the time, Frank made a desperate bet and won: 'I just took the chips, took the money, and left'. Frank described feelings of panic and of financially spiralling out of control: 'it really was a wake-up call: "shit!"'. It was clearly an important night to him, and one that he was not proud of. He seemed to have planned telling this story; before doing so, he asked if it was an appropriate time, and afterwards, he assured me that I was welcome to write about it: '[my wife] knows about it, so it's ok'.

Edvin had a slightly different experience:

Edvin: I was worried last Sunday when I was shut out [from the poker site] because I had forgotten to log out [the day before], when I had put together a small tournament for my friends (...) I wasn't allowed to join... because I had come up to one of these limits, by being logged in for more than 16 hours, but I hadn't played, I had just been [logged] in you know

KG: Aha.

Edvin: And then I felt longing, and then I got worried that I felt longing and disappointment...

KG: Right.

Edvin: ... disappointment not to see friends and not to get to play you know, that's one thing, but it's difficult to keep these forms of longing apart... The urge was there – is it harmful, does it lead to problematic behaviour? I don't think so.

Edvin described a complex string of emotions: urge, longing, disappointment, and subsequently, worry. His emotions indicated to him that he might have lost control of his gambling and developed a gambling problem.

These men's stories were about losing control and about the emotions they experienced when that happened. The interviewees told of losing control of the ongoing game and the wagered money (Adam, Frank) or questioning the idea of oneself as a sovereign, healthy gambler (Edvin), a good poker player (Olof), or a person in control of his finances (Frank). At a first glance, the stories confirmed the idea of rationality and emotionality as extremes and the association between loss of control and strong feelings. However, it is important to note that except possibly in Frank's example, the stories did not resemble the stereotype of emotionality or lacking rationality *causing* financial losses or gambling problems. Instead, the stories were about emotions experienced when losing control.

Being out of control was worrying and intensely embarrassing, as in Frank's story: 'there's this idiotic male pride, in that you can't tell your mates that you've lost that much... So you want to sort it out, right the situation?'. As Nicoll suggests, the problem gambler 'works affectively' (2019: 49) as a cultural figure and is surrounded by gendered, raced, and classed feelings of disgust. The embarrassment, fear, and worry discussed here were related to such disgust; they constituted acute, embodied, emotional reactions which came alive in the telling of these stories.

Emotion work was carefully conducted in order to produce the right kinds and intensities of emotions and to uphold sovereignty and masculine positions. The importance of this emotion work is understood as without it, gambling was a scary and risky enterprise. In these instances the interviewees found themselves, vertiginous, at an abyss where not only money was at stake but the very ideas of health, the sense of being able to judge a situation, and their sovereign, masculine selves. Reeser argues that affect may 'break the hold of masculinity' and 'disintegrate a body, rendering it vulnerable or connected to other bodies', thereby 'overpowering' 'normative masculinity' (2017: 111). In the moments of emotional turmoil, the interviewees' masculine positions temporarily disintegrated.

Control was regained, however: the interviewees spoke of experiencing a 'wake-up call' or of feeling worry, which made them see themselves, their feelings, and their gambling in a new light. A wake-up call evokes the image of having been sleeping or drifting but suddenly being brought back into consciousness. It is an alarm, directing one's attention to the alarming nature of the situation. The emotions discussed here took place in this moment, and were followed by intense emotion work to return to a more suitable emotive state. While Edvin spoke about a multi-layered, emotional-intellectual process where his worry led him to evaluate his feelings, Frank made a desperate bet to 'sort out' the situation and then left without alerting his friends; he redrew his embodied and emotional boundaries, preventing their disintegration, and hid the gendered crisis he had just experienced from his men friends.

The chaotic emotions were productive, and their force reverberated through time; not only were the events etched in the memories of the interviewees, but they produced new relationships and practices (see also Reeser, 2017: 115):

Frank: In retrospect, I'm grateful that it happened, because it became clear that... you need to be careful, you need to be aware that losing money happens very quickly.

Frank's experience had cautioned him against casino gambling, and his relation to gambling was now one of wary respect. Similarly, (the memory of) Olof's 'wake-up call' alerted him, and kept alerting him, of the thin border between order and chaos. The emotional experiences, and their embodied memories produced a lingering awareness of the importance of continued, ever more refined, emotion work while gambling.

Just as emotions circulated between me and the interviewees while telling these intense stories, control was asserted during the interview itself. The very act of talking about these moments re-established them as located in the past, and above all, as educational situations that had been reflected upon and processed emotionally ('[my

wife] knows about it, so it's ok'). In other words, the telling of these stories constituted performances of emotion work and sovereignty *vis-à-vis* gambling, and indirectly, efforts to maintain their masculine positions. Having lost control once, these interviewees produced themselves as seasoned gamblers who could now enjoy the emotionality of gambling in a safe manner.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have used interviews with men gamblers in Sweden to discuss lived experiences, performances, and negotiations of emotions in men's gambling. Using Hochschild's (2003) theories about emotion work and a view of emotions as discursive and embodied (Wetherell, 2012, 2013) and by critiquing the unquestioned use of the rationality/emotionality dichotomy within gambling research, I have demonstrated that emotions were pivotal to narratives about gambling, and that they were linked to, not distinct from, rationality or control, and were controversial and subject to complex emotion work. They were negotiated in relation to the rationality/emotionality dichotomy and ideas about gender, health, and sovereignty in relation to gambling (Reith, 2007).

The article contributed to gender studies by investigating the particulars of how men's emotionalities in the context of gambling are lived and understood. While some emotions of gambling bolstered the production of sovereign, masculine positions, arguably 'fit[ting] into (...) patriarchal frameworks as a way of maintaining inequalities' (de Boise and Hearn, 2017: 788), they could also cause crises. As Reeser notes, emotions may 'compose (...) or decompose (...) masculinity' (2017: 111).

Importantly, the article has demonstrated that a range of emotionalities, congruent with masculine positions, were accessible to the interviewees. This can be connected to the hybridisation of masculine positions within contemporary consumerist culture (e.g., Barber and Bridges, 2017); a variety of such positions are accessible and may be combined in various culturally intelligible ways. This article shows that emotionalities are part of this process. Increased emotionality in men has been seen as progressive (de Boise and Hearn, 2017), and increased flexibility through hybridisation does indicate an increased freedom for men to express and experience new types of emotions. However, more flexibility in men's lifestyles is not the same as crumbling gendered power relations (Barber and Bridges, 2017).

Instead, the range of acceptable and accessible emotionalities on offer for men gamblers should be understood in relation to wider capitalist and consumerist systems within neoliberalism, which increasingly interpellate human subjects on emotional and psychic levels (Gill and Kanai, 2019; Nicoll, 2019; Goedecke, 2023a). Research on such interpellations has so far mainly focused on women's emotions (they should feel confident or in control, often through consumption) (Gill and Kanai, 2019), but I suggest that the emotionalities on offer through gambling and the flexibility in how men may experience these emotions should be seen in a similar light: as encouraged by and profiting the gambling industry. Simply put: A range of ways of relating emotionally to gambling means more potential consumers.

The article has shown the importance of integrating problematising perspectives on emotions and emotionalities into gambling research. It has confirmed the importance of emotions to gambling (as seen in Casey, 2008; Nicoll, 2019; Wolkomir, 2012) but required more focus on the gendered particularities in the significance of these emotions. Additionally, the article has developed Reith's (2007) notion of sovereignty in relation to gambling with a discussion of emotion work as the way in which such sovereignty was upheld.

As mentioned above, Reith (2007) suggests that contemporary capitalism produces the 'sovereign consumer' and that it is the individual gambler, not the gambling industry, who is obliged to:

... temper his or her enjoyment of the thrills of gambling with a prudent awareness of the risks involved, to exercise self-control, to manage losses and, in extreme cases, even to exclude himself or herself from gambling venues altogether—because no one else will. (2007: 40f)

Within the ideology of neoliberalism, individual sovereignty is largely the responsibility of the subject, and with this in mind, the centrality of emotion work to this process is obvious. Emotion work is conducted by the individual, as by and large internal processes where discursive truths shape and are shaped by our personal histories (see also Wetherell *et al.*, 2020: 15). The individualisation of responsibility within gambling has been heavily critiqued by critical gambling scholars (e.g., Nicoll, 2019; Reith, 2007), also in Sweden (Alexius, 2017), and is reminiscent of discussions about health as, increasingly, an individualised concern (Crawford, 2000). It ensures 'business as usual' for the gambling industry, as problems are to be solved by the proposed treatment of errant individuals rather than systemic prevention policies. Applying Hochschild's thoughts on emotion work clarifies aspects of this individualisation; gambling sovereignly was about engaging emotionally with gambling in just the right way; this emotion work was fine-tuned and deliberate, and crucial to avoid risks.

Critical perspectives on emotions are a crucial necessity for gambling research. Instead of pathologising emotionality, gambling research must further investigate the emotional, lived experiences of gambling, which are likely to differ between groups of gamblers (such as men and women gamblers, poker players and lottery enthusiasts) and between gambling contexts. Studying different contexts and using a variety of methodologies, especially those which attempt to go beyond the textual in order to grasp how emotions are lived and embodied in the context of gambling, is desirable. It would be useful to investigate further the emotion work in gambling, in the light of concerns about health, addiction and compulsion; in this process, it is important to avoid interpretations of emotion work that deploy a simple binary between reason/emotion. A next step would also be to study a variety of men, e.g. minority groups. Additionally, more research on how men's emotionalities in gambling are shaped by interpellations to feel from the gambling industry, through advertising, offers, and within games, is desirable, as part of consumer culture and entertainment more generally.

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