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WOMEN AND POKER MACHINE GAMBLING:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF MAGIC, RITUAL, AND EMOTIONALITY



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for the degree
of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology
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“Fantasy Fortunes”

An abstract photograph of poker machines, reflecting how a player can become absorbed in a machine, as if in another time and space.

Abstract

Gambling is a phenomenon that has been present in most societies in a variety of forms for millennia. Poker machines are a more recent invention (since 1895), and have only been a form of gambling in New Zealand legally since 1 April 1988 (Grant 1994:289). More recently the poker machine appears to have become a favoured form of gambling for women and a stigma has become attached to women who enjoy playing the machines. Gambling appears to be a socially and culturally acceptable pastime for men, but not for women, as it apparently contravenes socially constructed ideals of womanhood. There have been reported cases of women gambling on poker machines and destroying their lives and those of their families, through embezzling money to feed their habit; the result for these women has been a prison sentence. While I acknowledge that this is a grave problem, which appears to have become more serious since the arrival of poker machines, I argue that this is only one side of the phenomenon.

The other side to this negative discourse, which focuses on the evils of playing the poker machines, is the positive effects that poker machine playing can have for some women, and this is the focus of my thesis. I have interviewed eight women ranging in age from 39-72 and the discussion in my thesis concentrates on the emotions and feelings the women experience and the reasons why they play the machines. I am aiming to portray the subjective reality of the women's lived experience from a feminist perspective using feminist research methodologies, and have undertaken many hours of participant observation in gambling venues around Auckland. Many women will not openly admit to playing the poker machines because of the stigma. Therefore one of my aims was to show that not all women who play the poker machines become pathological gamblers and ruin their lives, in an attempt to begin breaking down this stigma. There are many women who have agency and find playing the poker machines a pleasurable, positive experience, and this is the experience for the women I interviewed.

Dedication

In memory of my mother

Bernice Caroline Calkin

With her, I shared many happy hours

at the Casino and R.S.A.'s

playing the poker machines.

These memories gave me the

inspiration to write this thesis.

Thank you Mum

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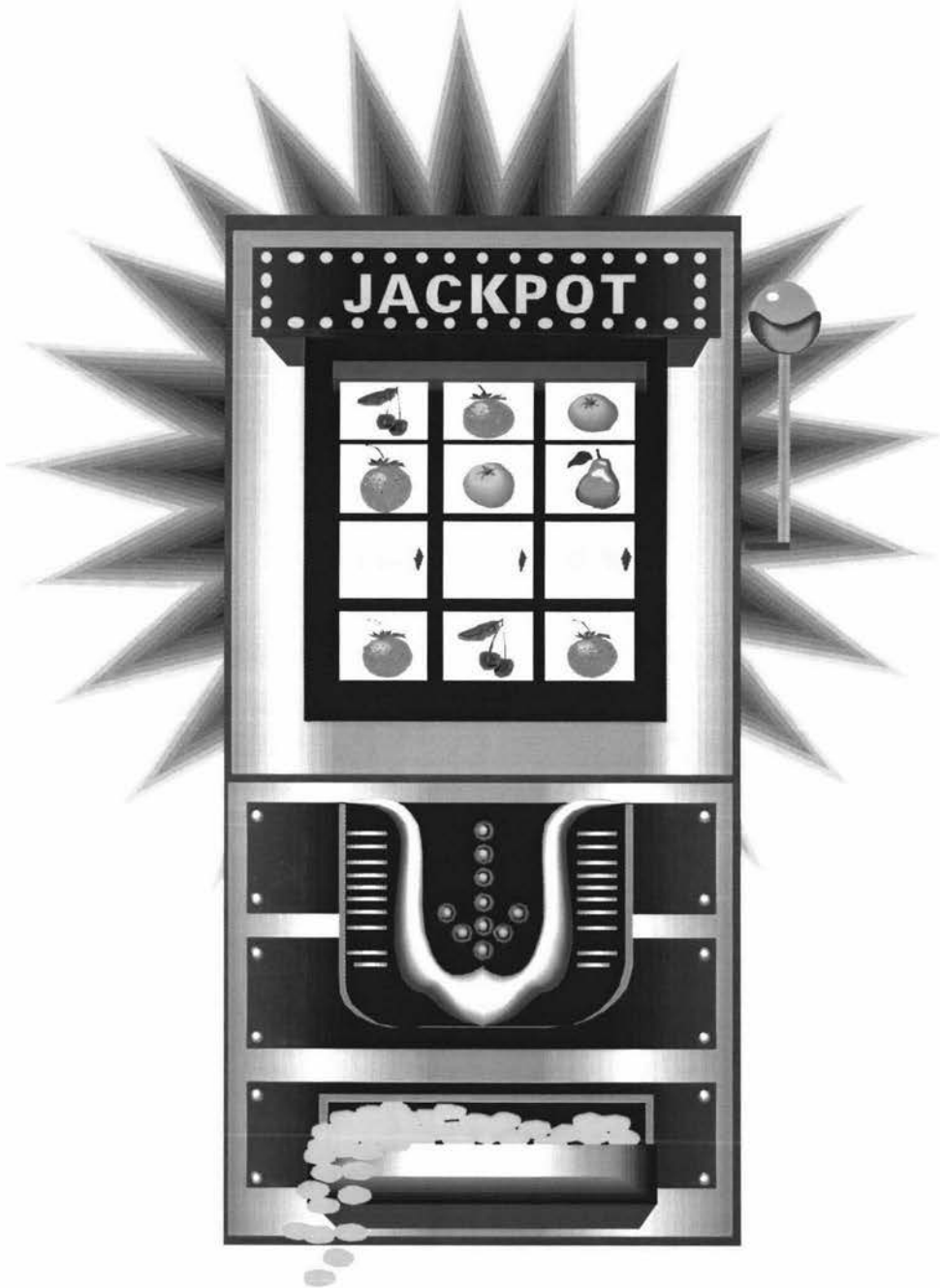
Glossary

- Action card** This card is given to players by the Casino, and each time a player uses a machine they place the card in the slot. Every time the play button is pressed on the machine it collects points and depending on how many points are accumulated, there are corresponding gifts to exchange for the points. The card also enables the Casino to keep track of the amount of money a player spends and the number of his/her visits to the Casino, along with other information. (These cards were previously called Gold Card or Lucky Stars Card).
- Sky City Casino** The Auckland Casino which opened on 2 February 1996, shortly after the Christchurch Casino which was New Zealand's first Casino.
- Casino** Generally refers to the Auckland Sky City Casino unless otherwise stated.
- Club** A local R.S.A. Club.
- Hooked** A colloquial term used by poker machine players to describe when a person becomes so attracted to the machines they want to play all the time.

Hot and Cold	Terms used by poker machine players to indicate when a machine is ready to pay out (“hot”) or is not paying out (“cold”).
Hungry or Empty	Terms used by players when the poker machine is taking money all the time and not giving back very much in return, as winnings. It may mean the machine has just paid out a jackpot, or is near the start of a cycle and not due to give a big prize back to a player for a while.
Jackpot	The Casinos and pubs have their machines linked to a jackpot which is an amount that accumulates until a pre-set time when it will be won by a player. The Casino has many different jackpots running. R.S.A.’s usually have a maximum of \$1,000 and other venues have varying types of jackpots.
Multiple-Pay Machines	“Machines that pay out on more than one line depending on how many coins are played” (Scoble 1994:168).
Pakeha	Non-Maori person, New Zealand born usually from European descent.
Payline	“The line upon which a player is paid at slots. Generally corresponds to the number of coins played” (Scoble 1994:168).
Pokies	A shortened version of “poker machine” affectionately used amongst players, generally only in New Zealand and Australia. The pokies are called slot machines and fruit machines in other parts of the world.

Pub	A local public house, hotel or bar, some of which have poker machines.
Reel	“One of the loops inside a slot machine upon which the symbols are painted” (Scoblete 1994:170).
R.S.A.	Returned Servicemen’s Association.
T.A.B.	Totalisator Agency Board.
Video Slot Machine	“The use of a video display to simulate the spinning of reels” (Scoblete 1994:173)

Part A



Introduction

“Even if gambling were altogether an evil, still on account of the very large number of people who play, it would seem to be a natural evil...Thus it is not absurd for me to discuss gambling, not in order to praise it, but in order to point out the advantages in it, and, of course, also its disadvantages, so they may be reduced to a minimum” (GERALAMO CARDANO, LIBER LUDO ALEAE (Circa 1530), cited in Campbell 1976:218).

Introducing a “game of chance”

The quotation above describes the focus of this thesis in relation to women and poker machine gambling. For the women I have spoken to during my participant-observation and interviewed over the time of researching this thesis the advantages of gambling outweigh the disadvantages. It is my intention to argue that poker machine gambling, in some instances, is actually beneficial to the health and mental wellbeing of women. As well as confirming their autonomy, it is an important link in their social interaction with other people, both women and men. While I acknowledge that for other women poker machine gambling can have devastating consequences, this group is small compared to the large number of women who appear to gain much pleasure from the social and recreational activity of poker machine playing. Some women do not see playing the poker machines as “gambling” because of the pleasure they derive from the pastime, seeing it rather as entertainment and a chance to go out and mix with other people who enjoy the same activity.

With media attention focused on the negative aspects of women and poker machine gambling, it is my intention through writing this thesis to portray a more balanced picture. Every aspect of culture and society needs to

have balance and currently the portrayal of women gamblers is unbalanced, as I discovered when I spoke to people about my research. They immediately thought I was writing about problem or compulsive gambling and told me a tragic tale about someone they knew who was a “problem gambler”. While this is serious, the women I have interviewed have confirmed to me that for them, there is more to playing the poker machines than pushing a button and wasting money. While they acknowledge that they sometimes go over the limit they have set themselves, they generally know when to stop playing and walk out the door. Judging from the many conversations I have had with women, as well as those I interviewed formally, it seems that this applies to the majority of women who play the poker machines.

Most of the women I interviewed enjoy the “one-on-one” connection with the machine and often treat it as if it were anthropomorphic. They rub the machines and talk to them, hoping that these ritualistic actions will magically induce a win. The feelings and emotions that the women experience while playing, along with the energy that is shared by fellow players is, generally positive. All the women I interviewed explain that it is the feeling of excitement and the unknown, whether or not they will walk away with a new car or \$1 million - that keeps them going back to play time and again.

These feelings and emotions will be explored further throughout this thesis, along with the women’s experiences and views on the “magical” notions of luck. I call it magical because luck appears to be an unexplainable phenomenon and Mauss (1972:144) states, “Our ideas of good and bad luck, of quintessence...are very close to the idea of magic itself”. The women I interviewed describe luck as a “feeling” or their “intuition”. The literature I have reviewed about luck also discusses the concept of “hope”, with many players hoping for a big win, while others just hope for any kind of win. The women in my research also spoke of hope, some for the big win, others hope just to win their money back. It is my intention to show that women can enjoy

playing the poker machines solely for the purpose of relaxation, or socialisation, or to forget their problems for a while.

It is important also that women play the poker machines without judgement by other members of society. There is a stigma surrounding poker machine gambling that needs to be eradicated. It is hoped that in time women will be afforded a right of choice without condemnation for choosing to play the poker machines. As many of the women I interviewed have strongly emphasised to me, it is their money, they have worked hard for it, and therefore they should be free to spend it how and when they choose. Playing the poker machines is a chance for women to connect with other women who share a common interest.

Therefore, in presenting this thesis it is my endeavour to enter into the discourse of gambling from a different perspective, namely a positive one. I will show that the women I interviewed along with myself as an insider have agency when it comes to playing the poker machines. The interviews with the women gamblers have been analysed to show the uniqueness of the "self", as well as presenting each woman's lived experience and world view of poker machine gambling as their subjective reality.

The phenomenon of gambling

There have been many theories on gambling, but the one I prefer is a definition that views gambling as a ritual that is separate from the everyday world of mundane experience. Within this phenomenon there is "chance" (Reith 1999:1). Gambling, or more specifically poker machine gambling, is a ritual because the women I interviewed have their own special way of playing the machines which incorporates symbolic activity and a set of beliefs. They treat them as anthropomorphic with some women speaking to the machine and asking to share its energy. A number of women perform some form of ritualistic action before, during and/or after play. They each have their own understanding of how the machine is programmed, and hope through these

ritualistic actions to be able to manipulate the programme of the machine to give a favourable outcome.

The phenomenon of gambling covers a range of activities from lotteries, raffle tickets and horse racing, through to casino games such as roulette and poker machines. Therefore gambling is not a unitary phenomenon because although varying degrees of chance and monetary gain or loss link different activities, they differ in the amount of control that human participation has over the outcome. There are also variations in the amount of social interaction involved with each of the games (Haywood et al. 1989:140-142).¹

Poker machine gambling is known as a “game of chance”, and the concept of “chance” has been recognised by Caillois (1962) in relation to his theory of games and is referred to as *alea*. *Alea* is described by Caillois (1962:17) as, “All games that are based on a decision independent of the player, an outcome over which he [or she] has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary” (cited in Lynch 1990:193). Caillois (1962:17-23) believes there are four main classifications for games in general,² all of which apply to the various gambling games, including poker machines. These various classifications of play can be applied separately or in combination with one another, depending on the game (Caillois 1962:17), but in relation to poker machine playing the classification of *alea* would generally stand alone. However, in some instances there is the possibility of *alea* being juxtaposed with *ilinx* (vertigo), because with *ilinx* there is a submission not only of the will but also of the mind. Players allow themselves

¹ For example roulette involves interaction with other players and the croupier, whereas there is no human interaction involved in the play of a poker machine. Some interaction may occur with the person beside the player or the attendant at the casino or gaming venue, but no other interaction is necessary to play the game.

² These classifications of play are *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *simulation* (mimicry) and *vertigo* (*ilinx*) with *alea* being the most applicable characteristic of poker machine gambling (Caillois 1962:17-23; Caldwell 1974:17; Haywood et al. 1989:148; Herman 1976:210; Lynch 1990:193; Martinez 1983:123; Reith 1999: 3).

to drift and become overwhelmed by a feeling of being dominated by a strange power (Caillois 1962:23, 78; Herman 1976:210; Martinez 1983:123). This is a feeling shared by some of the women I interviewed, who use the poker machines as an escape from reality; they lose themselves in the machine to avoid their problems. This is described by Martinez (1976, 1983:56) as the “here and now” mood. In this mood players having a pleasurable experience, focused solely on the machine, and what is happening in the “here and now” (Kusyszyn 1984:137; Martinez 1976, 1983:56-58).

Gambling is an ever-present reality in western and non-western societies as we begin the twenty-first century and today there is the opportunity to gamble in cyber-space with this increasing rapidly as people become more familiar with computers, the Internet and an increase in opportunity. A cyber-café in Queen Street, Auckland is advertising global gambling as part of its services to Internet users.

Gambling as a social activity

The phenomenon of gambling has been a social activity of people in most societies through all periods of time (Grant 1994:11). According to Wykes (1964) and France (1974) gambling is “virtually a universal phenomenon in human societies” (cited in McMillen 1996:6; Reith 1999:1). Non-western people were gambling and taking risks long before the idea of poker machines and casinos arrived. An exception seems to have been the Australian Aborigines who did not gamble prior to the arrival of the settlers in 1788 (Lynch 1990:193), Maori people in New Zealand before European settlement (Best 1976:22)³ and some Pacific Island cultures (North Health 1996, cited in Abbott & Volberg

³ The Maori played a game called *karakia* which involved trying to influence luck by reciting charms in games that required skill. This was the closest Maori came to gambling (Best 1976:22). In a recent newspaper article it was indicated that Maori people are aiming to overcome alcohol, drug and gambling addictions by returning to the spiritual aspects of their culture to help overcome these addictions. In this article the Maori people of Whangaruru Harbour are “stressing that people can be something, and teaching them about the links to the land, the sea, their ancestors and God. When they go out on the waka ama, the young people learn tribal lore... They say *karakia* (prayers)...” (Simon Collins, *Weekend Herald*, 22-23 July 2000f:A7). The term *karakia* while appearing to have two different meanings is in essence the same thing, both prayers and charms are used for influencing the lives of the people.

2000:25). Gaming boards and dice have been retrieved from excavations in Crete, Egypt and India. Having bets on horse races is not a modern tradition either, as the Hittites in 4000BC raced and bet on horses (McMillen 1996:6).

In New Zealand in the early 20th century there were illegal card games being played and placing bets on horse racing was common place. Pakapoo⁴ was the first lottery in New Zealand and was introduced by Chinese miners. Both Chinese and European people played Pakapoo until it was discontinued in the 1950's (Grant 1994:157-158). Most of the gambling practices were almost exclusive to men, with women predominantly being the anti-gambling lobbyists until about the 1960's. Since then women have begun to play housie⁵ and more recent research indicates Casinos are becoming the favourite gambling places for women (Abbott & Volberg 2000; Grant 1994:12).

There is a stigma imposed by certain religious denominations on gambling where it is viewed as a sin and a waste of time and money, which could be better spent elsewhere. The Protestant Church, for example, holds such a view, and followers generally believe in the Protestant Work Ethic.⁶ Gambling is distinguished from other forms of play or leisure because it is entangled with moral and ethical issues and is seen as a social problem that needs to be controlled. These moral and ethical issues have recently been discussed in a thesis written by Elizabeth Kiata-Holland, from Auckland University, entitled "*Looking for Lady Luck. Women's Gambling in New Zealand*". Elizabeth applies the theories of Erving Goffman and his frame analysis, juxtaposed with Michel Foucault and his theories on power and resistance. These theories have been applied to argue that women gamblers use moral

⁴ Pakapoo originated in the Han Dynasty in 187 BC with the original prizes being Chinese items from their shops but as the game became popular monetary prizes were introduced. This gave Chinese shopkeepers power in the community and encouraged business for their shops (Grant 1994:157).

⁵ Housie is traditionally a recreational pastime favoured by women (Phillips 1999:224).

⁶ The Protestant Ethic as it is often known comes from the belief widely held in the post-war industrial period that gambling is "easy money", and that a denial of the work ethic will ultimately threaten production (Brenner & Brenner 1990:50; Haywood et al. 1989:138; Weber 1976 [1904-5]; Rosecrance 1988a:32-7; Miers 1980; Turner 1965, cited in McMillen 1996:13).

rules to self-regulate their gambling behaviour, which both disrupts and maintains notions of femininity and social order (Kiata-Holland 2000). One of the ways in which the condemnation of gambling originated was through the strength of Protestantism in western capitalist societies (Weber 1976 [1904-5]; Rosecrance 1988a:32-7; Miers 1980, cited in McMillen 1996:12-13). If the proletariat went out gambling instead of working, this would threaten the financial aspirations of the petite and haute bourgeoisie in a capitalist society.

The social construction of a woman's role in society

In western society there are expectations about how a woman should behave and socialise. Gender differences between women and men imposed by society, culture, language, and ethnicity are passed down through tradition from generation to generation (Moore 1988:13). Traditionally in New Zealand it was culturally and socially acceptable for a woman to attend a cooking class or card evening, but not so acceptable to enter a T.A.B and place a bet, and young women were discouraged from going to hotels and bars. Women were encouraged to learn what ingredients it took to master the recipe for the roles that would eventually make them a "good wife" and "good mother". Women in most societies and cultures are depicted as the nurturer, the caregiver, the wife and mother, with her role being in the private domain, giving of herself to others, often without consideration of her own needs and desires. But should the woman enter what is perceived to be a man's domain or the public domain of drinking, gambling, T.A.B.'s, Returned Servicemen's Associations or the Casino then new issues appear around the whole meaning of gender roles in society (Smith 1991:78). Traditional attitudes are still prevalent in respect to the way in which women poker machine gamblers are portrayed by the media, particularly women who have become problem gamblers and are now serving prison sentences because of crimes committed to finance their gambling habits.

The Casino is a place Goffman gives as an example of an institution that is designed to create action (Caldwell 1974:20; Goffman 1967; Haywood et al. 1989:148; Martinez 1983:120-123). This allows women to display their

individuality and show they have agency when they choose to gamble, which generally goes against all the social and cultural constructs of the roles of a woman. The theory of “self”, “individual” or “person” is important for women as it gives autonomy, action and moral worth (Moore 1988:38).

Emotionality and purpose of the poker machine

The emotions and feelings of women poker machine players who choose to take a risk on a “game of chance” is the main focus of this thesis. It became apparent that playing the poker machines gave the women I interviewed and other players discussed in the literature a range of both positive and negative emotions, as well as some unexplainable feelings which I have determined as “magical”. These ranged from the excitement of winning through to feelings of guilt. There was the anticipation of the unknown and it was this unknown factor that gave the players a lot of excitement, the chance of a win. Some women saw playing the poker machines as a chance for social interaction while other women played in order to avoid feelings of loneliness and isolation. Other women played for relaxation and a chance to escape from the daily routine.

Encompassing these emotions and feelings are aspects of gambling that I have described as “magical”. Belief in anthropomorphic characteristics of the poker machine, is a way of knowing for some women. They believe they can alter the programme of the machine by rubbing it, talking to it and there is a dialogue between machine and player. The player attributes features such as “hot” and “cold”, “hungry” or “empty” and when the player has had a win, the machine will tell the player that they are “a real winner”. The theories of Guthrie (1993) regarding the anthropomorphism of machines is discussed and related to other magical phenomena such as “luck”. Luck plays a big part in the beliefs of the women I interviewed, and is combined with other phenomena such as fate and destiny. Time, space and money become illusionary in a gambling environment, with money becoming devalued and time and space

irrelevant to some poker machine players. All these phenomena will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

I have chosen to look at the emotionality of gambling from the phenomenological perspective, as opposed to the neurophysiological or neuromuscular. These other two perspectives look at the emotions from the level of electrochemical activity in the nervous system, or emotions through the bodily responses to a stimulus, producing an emotion (Izard 1977:48). From this phenomenological perspective positive emotions have a tendency to enhance a person's sense of well being and therefore instigate and/or sustain constructive interactions with other people, situations or objects. Negative emotions are sensed as toxic and hard to tolerate and instigate an avoidance of non-constructive interactions or situations (Izard 1977:49). These emotions and feelings in relation to the women I interviewed, will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

Norman K. Denzin (1983), (1984) approaches emotion from the social phenomenological perspective, discussing how emotion as a form of consciousness is lived, experienced, articulated and felt, believing that people live their emotions (Denzin 1984:1). These ideas will be followed through in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, when the stories of the women I interviewed will be discussed in relation to the epistemology and emotionality of their subjective experience.

Poker machines, also known as slot machines in America, fruit machines⁷ in Britain, were first known as one-armed bandits because they were

⁷ The fruit machines in Britain differ slightly from the slot and poker machines. While they still pay money, they are situated in amusement arcades and are accessible to children. They usually cost around 10p to play and return a maximum of £2. The slot machines and poker machines are only available to adults in Casinos or clubs (Walker 1992:79). This allows for children to experience gambling at a young age. Whilst some would prefer children to have more innocent methods of play, Fischer (1990, cited in Walker 1992:79) studied children and fruit machine playing, only to discover that it was not monetary gain that was important. But playing the fruit machines provided a similar social function as non-gambling games such as marbles. It gave the children self-esteem and recognition among peers if they could show there was some skill possible in playing the fruit machine and the acquisition of skill gave status with the social group. However Fischer recognised that heavy use and attempts to beat the machine could be a cause for concern (Walker 1992:79-80).

initially run by crime rings (Delfabbro 1999; Dickerson 1996:154; Valerie Grant, *The New Zealand Herald*, 3 August 1999:A15; Lynch 1990:192), are referred to as either poker machines or “pokies” in this thesis. Today the poker machines are very attractive to play, with music, free spins, comical games and many features that the original fruit machines or one-armed bandits did not have. So what makes these machines so attractive to women? Are they a symptom of life in the 20th/21st century, a way of avoiding loneliness, a stress release and/or an escape from reality? (Bloch 1951:217). These are some of the questions that have been answered by the women I interviewed and will be discussed further in Part B of this thesis.

Gambling has been around for thousands of years in some shape or form, so why is it seen as ignominious for women to gamble or even to enter a casino? It seems acceptable to buy a Lotto ticket, but to enter a Casino is frowned upon, although both are games of chance and involve paying out money to possibly gain money or, much more likely, lose money. Perhaps it is because of the apparent increase in both younger and older women gambling on the poker machines, with reported incidences of retired women gambling away their life savings becoming sensationalised news items. Men gamble away their life savings as well⁸ but society is more scandalised when a woman gambles away her money. It comes back to how society perceives the role of a woman, both young and old. Older women tend to be idealised as the kind grandmothers whose role it is to take care of their grandchildren, while younger women are seen as the nurturing mother and wife. So when they go out gambling with their friends, it is not accepted by the wider society. However, from my research it is apparent that some mothers and grandmothers are able to combine time with their children or grandchildren and the Casino. Often the children or grandchildren, who are of the legal gambling age of 20, will accompany the woman to the Casino and this allows

⁸ An elderly man I spoke to at the Casino in 1997 when the Casino had only been open for a year told me he had spent \$30,000. He was at the Gold Card (now Action card) counter claiming two watches and using up some of the points he had collected over the year. His words to me were “I might as well get something for the \$30,000 I have spent here”.

for socialising together, fulfilling the needs of both groups of women at one time.

From my research there are many young and older women poker machine players who play for pleasure and leisure, and may be referred to as “social recreational gamblers” (Rosecrance 1985b, 1988a:106-21, cited in McMillen 1996:14) or playing to them is a “social leisure experience” (Haywood et al. 1989:138-139). They set themselves a monetary limit and once that has been spent they are content to watch others or go home. It is unrealistic to assume that all women who play the poker machines are going to eventually have a gambling problem. Playing the poker machines can be a pleasurable pastime, one that satisfies the soul for many people and, very occasionally, the bank account.

The end of the beginning to this gambling phenomenon

Many people have discussed the economic downside of gambling and the social problems arising from this. Gambling is seen as a self-defeating irrational behaviour, which leads to financial problems for the individual and society (Rosett 1965; Rubner 1966; Cowan 1974, cited in McMillen 1996:13). Therefore gambling destroys the individual (Simmel 1920; Freud 1928; Bergler 1957; Oldman 1978, cited in McMillen 1996:13) and society (Bloch 1957; Herman 1967, 1976; Peterson 1951, cited in McMillen 1996:13). Problem gamblers ultimately disrupt and destroy not only themselves, but also their families, work relationships and in the case of some, their relationship with society (Dickerson, 1984; Halliday and Fuller 1974; Lesieur 1984; Lesieur and Custer 1984; Lesieur and Puig 1987, cited in McMillen 1996:13). This is only one dimension of the whole gambling phenomenon and one that I acknowledge exists, but it is not the lived experience for the women I interviewed. There are social and economic benefits of gambling, not only for the capitalist investor in the casino or club enterprises, but for the gambler who revels in the experience of social interaction with other people. A monetary value cannot be placed on an individual person’s emotional experience.

The focus of this thesis is to show another side of gambling, that poker machine playing by women can be a positive and pleasurable social experience and that emotionality plays an extremely big part in the whole ritual of play. I am viewing emotion at the phenomenological level where emotion is seen as an "...essentially motivating experience and/or experience which has immediate meaning and significance for the person" (Izard 1977:48-49). Women experience a wide range of emotions, with the positive experiences they gain generally outweighing the negative. It is my endeavour to show that gambling does not necessarily lead to crime and deviance, causing family, work and social breakdowns. I will show that gambling venues play an important role in society giving the members of society, especially women, an outlet for social interaction.

While I acknowledge there are many people, both men and women, who are not in control of their gambling, leading to destruction of their lives, there are many more social recreational gamblers (Rosecrance 1985b, 1988a:106-21, cited in McMillen 1996:14), who fit into a grey area. These people are not just "one-off" gamblers who might play once a year, nor are they at a gambling venue every day. Most of my research participants fitted into this grey area. However, some of the women I interviewed are more than "social recreational gamblers" (Rosecrance 1985b, 1988a:106-21, cited in McMillen 1996:14), who could be viewed as pathological gamblers. However, they do not commit crimes to support their gambling habit, they pay their bills, and because I have interviewed the women, I understand the reasons behind their apparently compulsive behaviour. I would be misrepresenting the lived experience of these particular women, who openly admit they spend a lot of money gambling and call themselves big gamblers, by defining them as "pathological gamblers".

I have set out this thesis in two parts. Part A covers the methodology, and discusses the relevant literature, including the history of gambling, gambling in New Zealand, literature on emotionality, the "self" as a gambler and the magical-religious worldview related to poker machine gambling.

Part B is devoted solely to the women I interviewed. Chapter Four introduces the women as individuals and tells a story of their gambling experiences. Chapter Five discusses the women's epistemology, their worldview of such things as luck; anthropomorphism and omnipotence; time, space and money; fate and destiny. In Chapter Six I discuss the emotions and experiences of these women and correlate these with relevant literature. I discuss the women's feelings and emotions of excitement, guilt, hope and loneliness as reasons they give for playing the poker machines.

The purpose of this thesis is to allow the eight women I interviewed to have a voice and speak about their poker machine gambling from their perspective: gambling as a subjective reality. Because of the negativity surrounding women and poker machine gambling, many women have been afraid to admit they play the poker machines for fear of being judged as mindless "bad" individuals, wasting their money on an illusion. The eight women I interviewed were not ashamed of their playing and I am most appreciative of this fact, because without them this thesis would not have been possible. I hope in future more women will allow themselves a voice and discuss their poker machine gambling without the stigma and guilt that currently surrounds what is a pleasurable pastime for so many.

Chapter One

Methodology

“Feminist fieldwork is predicated upon the active involvement of the researcher in the production of social knowledge through direct participation in and experience of the social realities she is seeking to understand...” (Judith DiIorio 1982, cited in Reinhartz 1992:46).

Methodologies from the dialogical and feminist perspectives

My research methods employ a feminist perspective, with the research focusing on women who play poker machines. It is a study of women for the benefit of women gamblers in New Zealand society, and it is my aim to allow women an avenue for expression of the positive aspects surrounding their gambling. Although I claim to be doing this study about and for women gamblers, this thesis is not an attempt to generalise women gamblers. Rather, it is my intention to give an account of the individual experiences of the eight women I interviewed and to include my own personal experience. I do not claim to represent all women poker machine gamblers.

In keeping with feminist research methods, I have chosen to include myself within the research, placing myself on the same critical plane as the participants. I have undertaken participant observation at various local “casinos”, as well as numerous visits to the Auckland Sky City Casino and a one-off visit to the Queenstown Casino. Elvi Whittaker describes an approach to feminist research that is applicable to anthropology and one that I can relate to. She says, “The separation of the researcher and the researched has no place in feminist methodology... feminism promotes multiple, contested truths... and ethnographic texts that are fragmented and incomplete rather than neat and

polished..." (Barrett 1996:171). In writing this thesis I have undertaken multi-method research. These methods included participant-observation; literature reviews from books, journals and newspapers; video films and TV documentaries; and taped interviews.

My methodology may also be described as "dialogical methodology" because this method, "...rejects the division between subject and object, places the self within the field of investigation, evaluates positionality and power relations, and creates an intersubjective matrix for knowledge" (Callaway 1992:44). I have been involved in various forms of gambling throughout my life, from playing cards for money as a child, to horse racing with family members. More recently visiting the Casino and playing the poker machines with family members, friends and alone, I have been able to conduct this research subjectively and place myself firmly within the research. It is because of this insider knowledge that I developed an equal relationship with my participants, along with a mutual trust. In some cases new friendships were made because of my research. As a feminist researcher this was an extremely important aspect of the research process, because I was not judgmental or critical of the women's reality. It was their lived experience that I was interested in and the meanings they gave to that experience.

The subjective beginnings, aims and background epistemology

My aim in this research is to discover why women gamblers choose to play the poker machines. As a woman gambler myself who enjoys playing the poker machines I am interested to discover what feelings and emotions other women have while they are in the environment of the Casino, club or hotel. I wondered also what gave the poker machines the appeal, drawing the women to them, in preference to playing table games such as roulette. I also wondered what gave the poker machines the stigma they seem to have when associated with women gamblers. Is it the environment in general that is attractive to the woman gambler? Do they feel a sense of "spontaneous communitas" (Turner 1969:132) while playing the machines, a sense of belonging to a microcosm

within the macrocosm identified as society? I was interested in whether the poker machines were the only form of gambling for a woman, or one of many forms. For example, at the Casino did she play both poker machines and table games, have a lotto ticket in her purse and after leaving the Casino call in at the TAB for a bet on a horse? I already knew that five of the women I interviewed played housie regularly, as well as the poker machines. Therefore I wanted to discover any differences and similarities in the patterns of women's gambling.

My reason for choosing this topic comes from personal experience when the poker machines became an escape from reality for me at times of loss, unhappiness and uncertainty in my life. I realise there were other ways I could have dealt with this, but escaping into a world of fantasy and "hope", albeit a false hope of winning, was how I dealt with the feeling of sadness at the time. Also I discovered after the death of my mother that she too had been spending a lot of time at the Casino, unbeknown to me. My mother and I visited the Casino together on numerous occasions, or played the poker machines at R.S.A. Clubs, but I was unaware of the frequency of her visits until after she passed away.

I have a friend in Melbourne who also began playing the poker machines frequently after the death of her husband. She is now 71 years of age, it is eight years since her husband died, and she is still playing the machines and continues to feel guilty for doing so. Betty says that she is aware of the fact that it is not in her best interests to be spending all her retirement savings on the poker machines, but believes that she has become hooked and cannot stop.¹

With all these people around me and myself becoming so fixated with the poker machines, I began to wonder how many other women played the poker machines for the same reasons, and what other women felt was the

¹ It is interesting that for many years prior to her beginning playing she was always complaining to me about her sister and brother-in-law in Brisbane who spend all their money on the poker machines. How awful it was that her sister and brother-in-law had to sell their house and buy a cheaper one because they had no money. But as it has turned out my friend is hooked just like her sister and brother-in-law, but it has not come to the point of my friend selling her house.

attraction of the poker machine? I did not know why I was attracted to them, they seemed to hold an unexplainable fascination. It may have been the possibility of striking that elusive jackpot, the positive messages that the machine showed after a win, (such as “you’re a real winner”), or the music, bright lights, or the fact that I could just lose myself in a machine. For many women there is a tendency to become so engrossed with the machine that they treat it as being anthropomorphic. Many people talk to the machine as if it can hear, and some people believe they can actually manipulate the programme of the machine by placing their hands on the screen or rubbing the screen, sides or front of the poker machine. Some women even ask for help from the spirit world. One of the women I interviewed expressed a belief in sharing energy with the poker machine to encourage a profitable play session.

The search for literature on women’s gambling

I began to research the literature in 1999 and attended a conference held by the Compulsive Gambling Society in July 1999, which focused on compulsive gambling as a mental health issue. I started to look at the literature surrounding this and realised quickly that I was not interested in the psychological aspects of gambling and did not believe that everyone who gambled had a mental health problem. I began searching the library catalogues and gathered some books and journals from the psychological perspective on the definition of compulsive, problem and pathological gambling. These articles did not satisfy me because they were focusing more on the biological reasons as to why people gamble, defining addictions and pathologies. This was not the direction I wanted to take. As it eventuated, the psychological aspect did not fit with the information I gathered from my research participants. I began searching through books and journals from sociological perspectives and found these more closely related to my original question about why people play the poker machines and the emotions they experience while playing.

As I was having difficulty finding material anthropologists had written about gambling I turned to the Internet where I found several articles written by Dr Charles Urbanowicz from the California State University in Chico, California. These have been useful to gain an anthropological perspective on the subject of gambling in general. Also available on the Internet are voluminous amounts of information regarding problem gambling, which would have been helpful had it been the focus of this thesis. The Internet has also allowed me to gain access to a report released in June 2000 produced by the Department of Internal Affairs, reporting on current gambling trends in New Zealand written by Dr. Max Abbott & Rachel Volberg.

The theories I have discovered to discuss the issues of emotionality and self have been from the sociological and anthropological perspectives. The most useful are those of Anthony Cohen, Norman K. Denzin, Rom Harré, Carroll Izard, George H. Mead, and Catherine Lutz. Several theoretical perspectives on gambling have been offered and some of the relevant material I have referred to is from people like Herbert Bloch, Roger Caillois, Edward C. Devereux, Erving Goffman, Tomás Martinez, and Gerda Reith. For the feminist perspective I have found Henrietta L. Moore, and Michelle Z. Rosaldo, helpful in understanding feminist research. I have not quoted from all of these sources, but reading these various theoretical perspectives assisted in my overall understanding of the relevant issues. There are many reports on the impact of Casinos and gambling in New Zealand produced by the Department of Internal Affairs. While these have been based on survey and questionnaire research there are still aspects helpful to my research.

It soon became evident from my interviews that the women considered a connection between poker machine gambling and many different magical and spiritual dimensions. While trying to make sense of the women's gambling and their beliefs I turned to books on spirits and spirituality, rituals and religion. But none of these seemed applicable to the beliefs of the women so I went back to my original proposal and began searching through the literature for theories

of emotion. I found a book by Norman K. Denzin, *On Understanding Emotion* and I felt that I had at last discovered what I needed to make sense of my data. So the focus of my thesis then shifted to emotion, emotionality, self and social interaction. I read further on the subject and compared the literature to my interview transcripts and found the literature related to what the women were saying. I have referred frequently to a book called *Age of Chance* by Gerda Reith, who talks about the magical beliefs associated with gambling. Reith (1999) discusses luck, animism,² fate and destiny, all of which are facets of the data I collected from my interviews and are relevant in relating the literature to my data.

A large amount of research has been done in Australia asking similar questions to mine, observing and interviewing people in R.S.L. Clubs and other venues in Australia which have helped for comparative analysis with my data. Overall there is a lot of literature available on the subject of gambling in general, covering all aspects of Casino, Horse Racing, Lotteries, Raffles and other forms of leisure or activities classified as gambling. However Casinos and specifically poker machine gambling is a recently new phenomenon in New Zealand therefore specific material is as yet unavailable. I hope this thesis will contribute in some small way to the literature on the poker machine gambling phenomenon in New Zealand, specifically the role women play in that phenomenon.

The research process – from participant observation to friendships

As an anonymous participant observer in the poker machine area of the Auckland Sky City Casino, various R.S.A. clubs, hotel casinos and a brief visit to the Queenstown Casino, I endeavoured to gain anecdotal information from fellow players about their experiences of the poker machines. Along the way I

² I prefer the term anthropomorphism because it refers to attributing human characteristics to non-human phenomena, including machines (Guthrie 1993) and is part of cosmological systems connecting human and supernatural domains (Seymour-Smith 1986:13), which is the epistemology of some of the women gamblers, who believe supernatural forces are involved in poker machine gambling.

have enjoyed both the participant and observer roles I have played, and the occasional win added to the enjoyment of my task at hand. About half way through the participant observation I was beginning to wonder why I was so attracted to the machines with most environments being smoky, cramped places. The Casino was the exception where there are smoking and non-smoking areas, but as a non-smoker I found the small poker machine areas in pubs and R.S.A.'s unpleasant at times. If there were a lot of people it was unpleasant with the smell of alcohol mixed with the cigarette smoke. I really began to wonder what on earth I was doing there. But then I would get over that and return for another play on the machines a few days later. As I got further into the participant observation I found I was spending less time at the venue because of the smoky atmosphere and also it was beginning to get expensive, as the losses were outnumbering the wins as was to be expected. However each time I visited a gambling venue I managed to walk out with another piece of useful anecdotal data after striking up a brief conversation with a fellow woman player.

From this anecdotal material I have endeavoured to show that not all women gamble themselves into debt, marriage break-ups or prison sentences. Most of the women I spoke to played the machines for pleasure, always with the hope of a win, but generally played the poker machines simply because they enjoyed them. This was also the reason why most of my interview participants played the poker machines. It was rare to see a woman feed note after note into the machine and walk away with nothing. I only observed this on one occasion at the local pub and I have seen more men do this.³

Another intriguing part of gambling I noticed was that most gamblers you speak to only tell you how much they have won, very rarely do they tell you how much it actually cost them to get that win or how much they have lost.

³ However, it is very difficult to observe something like that at the Casino because it is such a big place and it is difficult to sit and watch anyone for a long time without raising suspicions.

On one occasion the closest I came to finding out the cost of getting the win was when a woman won a \$700 jackpot. She said to her friend next to her that in effect she won \$400 because she had spent the rest that day and the night before trying to win the same jackpot. This example is just one of many where a woman has risked a great deal in the hope of winning. This led me to the basis of this thesis, to ask the question, why do women take this sort of risk, and why on a poker machine?

I held informal interviews based on open-ended questions with eight different women, aged between 39 and 72. The interviews were generally one hour in duration, with only one lasting for two hours. The women I interviewed were mostly *Pakeha*⁴ women, although some were English born but have lived in New Zealand for many years now, with one older woman being part Maori.

Of the eight women I interviewed, none are mothers of young children. Five of the eight women are grandmothers, namely Glenda, Marlene, Olive, Sally and Val. Two of the women have never been married, Dee and Peggy, while Chris is married but has no children. Likewise, I am married but do not have children. Therefore it was difficult to discuss the image of the “good mother” with three out of the eight women. The other women’s responses are discussed in Part B.

I held one focus group that contained one of the retired women I had already interviewed, along with three of her friends, two retired women and one in her early sixties who was still working as a cleaner. Some of the research participants were friends, others were women I was introduced to by friends and relatives. As I had difficulty in getting research participants I used the snowball method. Even then I had difficulty getting further participants. It became apparent that women were very apprehensive to talk about their poker machine gambling. Within the group that the retired women I interviewed

⁴ I use the term “Pakeha” as a general term to refer to non-Maori women living in New Zealand.

belong to, there are several other women who play the poker machines frequently, but they were unwilling to participate.

A paradox however was that one of the younger women said after the interview that she felt as if a weight had been taken off her shoulders. This was because she had been so reluctant to talk to anyone about her poker machine playing before, and she found it beneficial to have done the interview with me. She saw it as a form of therapy, being able to talk to someone who understood what playing the poker machines meant to her, without being judged or ridiculed.

Oral conversations were used for the interviews. Clandinin and Connelly (1994:422) have described these as conversations between pairs or groups of individuals, which give equality to participants and allow flexibility. To hold a conversation requires mutual listening, trust and caring for the experience as described by the other. This approach was used for the small focus group also. Using oral conversations allowed me to listen to how the research participant answered my first question and then follow up with other questions from the reply. I believe this is one way of letting the participant know that you have heard their voice and are responding to what they are saying.

These interviews were generally relaxed and conversational. The interview questions changed dramatically over the course of the interviews. I continued to use my first interview guide (see Appendix B) but continually added questions relating to previous interviews if they seemed appropriate. I had initially based the questions on the Feminist Case Studies methods described by Shulamit Reinharz (1992:164-174) to discover whether all the women participants played the poker machines for the same reasons.

Data analysis and making sense of the “magical”

I have taken a thematic approach to data analysis comparing where possible the anecdotal information received from poker machine players with

the audiotape recorded data from my research participants, along with the relevant literature. This gives variety to the data allowing for some interesting similarities and differences in the comparisons. It will also show the diversity in the experiences of the women gamblers. With the information gathered I have compared the research findings obtained in my literature survey from the overseas studies, with my own anthropological research to see what correlations occurred. There is little explicitly anthropological research done on women and poker machine gambling and the qualitative research to date has been conducted from the psychological, sociological and leisure studies disciplines. Therefore I have used the interdisciplinary triangulation method to incorporate the theories and methods of as many applicable disciplines as possible.

To generate my own theories from the data I have gathered and also to elaborate on, or make a comparison with, existing theories in the literature, I have also used the grounded theory methodology for data analysis. This is also known as the “constant comparative method” (Glaser 1965, 1967, cited in Strauss & Corbin 1994:273) where theory evolves during research and there are continuing comparisons between data analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin 1994:273). My own hypotheses on why women play the poker machines emerged in the course of the interviews and this allowed me to ask questions in further interviews in order to attempt to validate my hypotheses. Therefore the basic question list (see Appendix B) was continually reviewed and changed as the interviews progressed.

I have chosen to set out the thesis with my discussion of the interviews beginning in Part B, Chapter Four, by giving a synopsis of the individual women I interviewed. This gives the reader a brief outline of who each woman was as an individual, to give each one a voice. Each of the women had a special experience of gambling that they shared with me during the interview and, it seemed appropriate to include these stories in the synopsis to show the diversity and uniqueness of each woman’s gambling experiences.

The data analysis in Chapters Five and Six, is the comparison of all the women interviewed in relation to the questions asked. I also have included myself in the research, because as an “insider” it is possible to understand the language used by poker machine gamblers. There are specific words used to describe different aspects of play. For example, if the machine is paying out small amounts of money, the machine may be considered “hot”, or if the machine is not paying out and a player is spending money without getting any back, then the machine may be considered “cold”. These terms and others are listed in the Glossary.

As my research is “insider research” it could be described as “auto-ethnography”, the study of “one’s own people” (Hayano 1983:150, cited in Roseneil 1993:188). As I was already a poker machine player when I began the research, the women I interviewed and I could be seen as belonging to a community. The same methodology of “insider” research was conducted by Sasha Roseneil and her article *Greenham Revisited: Researching Myself and My Sisters*, describes how her feelings and experiences could not be separated from her research, because they provided both the motivation and material for it (Roseneil 1993:186). As a lesbian, feminist and woman who had for years despised her sexuality because of the stigma in her school years, by going to Greenham, undertaking the research and writing her thesis, she was finally able to unite the three parts of herself, her political-self, lesbian-self and academic-self (Roseneil 1993:186). There is also a stigma attached to poker machine gambling which the women I interviewed were acutely aware of, and it is one of the unpleasant sides to poker machine gambling that I would like to see dispelled.

Like Roseneil I believe my data is richer because I was a member of the participant group, rather than just a participant observer (Roseneil 1993:193). During the interviews I would share one of my gambling experiences with my participant, and this appeared to allow them to open up and trust me with a special part of their gambling experience. One or two of the women said they

had not told anyone else about the particular experience but felt they could share it with me. A mutual trust developed, and while other people judged them for their gambling, as a gambler myself the women felt that they were safe from judgement and free to talk about their experiences.

A general aim of feminist research is to attempt to improve women's lives and change the patriarchal status quo (Roseneil 1993:179). This is applicable to poker machine gambling, because gambling per se is seen as a male dominated activity. Therefore, like Roseneil my research is intended, "...to be a contribution to the growing record of the history of women's collective resistance to male power..." (Roseneil 1993:179). It is hoped that this research may contribute in some way to reducing the guilt and stigma some women feel. The feminist principle of researching women's experiences and establishing "...the significance of women's consciousness and everyday life experiences as the material of research" (Roseneil 1993:178) is the basis of the methodological process for my thesis.

A new perspective on women poker machine players

Initially one of my aims was to ascertain whether or not the poker machines had become feminised. That is, has there been an increase in women playing the machines, and do they outweigh the number of men who play? I decided that these facts in themselves were really unimportant. What I did discover was how important the opportunity to play these machines was, to some women. I discovered that the poker machine is not just a piece of equipment that takes all your money and gives you back some, occasionally. The social interaction and companionship that the machines allow for some women is vital to their health and well being. Some women played to gain friendship and companionship; these are things that money cannot buy. However I discovered that there were still many women who played in the hope of winning money, for whom the companionship was irrelevant.

In my view, none of the women I interviewed are pathological or problem gamblers.⁵ In any case I am disinclined to use such terms as they reinforce the stigma I am aiming to remove. I present the women's stories as they have been told to and understood by me. If they are perceived as pathological by others then so be it, but for the purpose of this thesis I do not wish to begin passing judgements on other women's lives. From the interviews with the eight women, I gained valuable new insights into poker machine gambling and my goal here is to elucidate these women's realities.

Conclusions to a "magical" experience

"'Experience', as a term in anthropology, refers to the researcher's experience becoming part of the analysis...and also to the 'lived experience' and multiple realities of individuals in the group being studied" (Callaway 1992:44). Bruner (1984:7) makes a distinction between "life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience), and life as told (expression)" (cited in Bruner 1986:6) and it was my endeavour to express the reality and experience of playing the poker machines for the eight women I interviewed. However, even from the interviews it was not possible for me to capture the women's total reality of their gambling experiences and express it in writing, because as Bruner (1986:7) states, "...expression is never an isolated, static text". This is applicable to both the interview transcripts and my analytical text for this thesis, as well as my own lived experience of gambling. The women were only able to tell me their experiences up to the day I interviewed them, by now they will have had new experiences, and my own experience and perceptions also continually alter. A longer time spent in the field might demonstrate this

⁵ The criteria for what constitutes a pathological gambler have been described as follows: Gamblers take out loans to support gambling habits, often lying on the loan application. They lose their job because more time is being spent gambling or they change jobs to allow more free time to gamble. Gambling becomes more frequent to try and get the money to repay loans; or embezzlement begins to try and get money fast. When gambling becomes pathological sleep becomes disturbed, the gambler becomes irritable and eating is erratic, with some gamblers becoming physically and psychologically exhausted. They also begin to feel hopeless and helpless, with depression and eventually suicidal thoughts being seen as the only solution to their predicament. It is then that hopefully the pathological gambler will seek help (Lesieur & Custer 1984:152-153).

continual process of fieldwork, analysis and writing as each woman's experiences change. A one-year project can give only a small window on women's temporal realities.

There are gaps between reality, experience and expression and this tension is a key problem in the anthropology of experience (Bruner 1986:7). It has been my endeavour to represent each of the women's reality, experience and expression, along with my own in the most appropriate way I could. The research for this thesis has been enlightening for me both as a researcher and a gambler, allowing me to have new experiences and learning a new epistemology of gambling. I was amazed at the importance of poker machines to some women, and how important the Casino was to some women also. Playing the poker machines is like a chocolate box containing rituals, quasi-religious beliefs, emotions and feelings, and when any one of those delights is chosen, it allows some women a feeling of autonomy and a chance to rebel against society's constraints. Writing this thesis has also confirmed my own belief that there is more to the phenomenon of poker machine gambling than simply pushing a button.

Chapter Two

How did gambling begin and where will it finish?

Gambling is “Games of chance or skill in which the participants must risk some form of stake, which they stand to lose or multiply dependent on their success in the game. The gamblers may play the game themselves, or they may simply gamble upon the chances of others or upon the outcome of any given event or activity” (Seymour-Smith 1986:128).

Introduction

Historically gambling has been a form of leisure activity practised cross-culturally with the exception of the Australian Aborigines, prior to 1788 (Lynch 1990:193), the New Zealand Maori prior to colonisation (Best 1976:22) and some Pacific Island cultures (North Health 1996, cited in Abbott & Volberg 2000:25). These are the only exceptions I am aware of. To gamble a player must voluntarily transfer money, or anything else of value and gamble upon the outcome of some future uncertain result (Devereux 1968, cited in Lynch 1990:193). Poker machine gambling is a “game of chance” and is described by Caillois (1962) as being based on the principle of *alea*¹. *Alea* may be classified as games of chance because, irrespective of which gender you are, or what your age, culture or class is, the outcome of the game will always be the same (Caldwell 1974:17).

¹ “*Alea* presupposes full and total abandon to the whims of chance... *Alea* presupposes the resignation of the will, and it is therefore understandable that states of trance, possession, or hypnosis may develop” (Caillois 1962:73-74). The other games are *agon*, competitive games with the outcome dependent on the performance of the competitor; *mimicry*, games of simulation; and *ilinx*, games bringing about temporary instability such as skiing and diving (Caillois 1962:17-23; Caldwell 1974:17; Haywood et al. 1989:148; Lynch 1990:193, Martinez 1983:123; Reith 1999:3).

Gambling is a cultural activity that occurs in diverse forms in many societies, participated in by many different peoples and classes of the social strata. Even though people have been gambling for over 4,000 years, it still has not met with universal acceptance. Many people still believe gambling is a vice, an immoral habit, while acknowledging that gambling is a big part of most societies (Marshall & Rudd 1996:1; McMillen 1996:6) with New Zealand being no exception. Despite the desire by humans to gamble over many centuries, much has been done through laws, contracts and treaties to curb it. However the desire today is as strong as ever, or perhaps even stronger (Martin 1996:4).

Origins of the poker machine and contemporary gambling games

According to Scoblete (1994:13) and Gros (1996:107) the person credited with the creation of the modern slot machine was Charles August Fey who in 1899 invented the “Liberty Bell” machine in San Francisco.² The Liberty Bell was so named because the highest payout on the machine came when the three-reel display gave three liberty bells in a row (Scoblete 1994:13).

The design of the original machine, according to Dickerson (1996:154, 164) had three drums with fruit and bar symbols painted onto them, not playing cards as gambling on cards was illegal. However, Scoblete (1994:13) details the machines as having card-suit symbols, horseshoes and liberty bells. I can only assume that the actual machine was something along the lines of both these descriptions. The BAR symbol was the “wild card” (or “substitute” as they are called on modern machines) and was responsible for the big payouts. After the coin was put in the slot, a lever was pulled and the drums would spin. When they stopped they would reveal a symbol from each drum

² According to Marshall & Rudd (1996:25-28) in 1895 in the United States, the person who invented the slot machine was a Charles Le Fey. The literature also refers to a Charles Frey (Allcock & Dickerson 1986:53); (Dickerson 1996:154) as the inventor of the slot machine. Although there appear to be variations from book to book on his name and the date of the invention, I believe they are talking about the same person.

in the window of the machine. Specific combinations paid different amounts to the player, dropping the coins instantly.

Contemporary electronic versions of this machine are called “slots” in the United States and by international operators of casinos and clubs, but are more commonly known as “poker machines” in New Zealand. The exception is the Auckland Sky City Casino which calls their poker machines “Slots”.³ A term for the machines which have video screen display is “electronic gaming machine” (Dickerson 1996:154, 164). The slot or poker machine has matured over the years from the three-reel machine whereby the player pulled a lever to activate the reels, commonly referred to as a “one-armed bandit”.⁴ Today the machines are a sophisticated six-reel computer controlled mechanism where the player looks at a video screen and pushes a button instead of pulling a handle. The games have become more complex because of the high number of hours people play the machines. If the machines did not hold the interest of the player there would be a tendency for players to become bored and stop playing, not a good prospect for the economics of the government or the institution (Dickerson 1996:155). However the machine is equipped, with a button or a handle, video reels or spinning reels, it continues to have the appeal to players and with the continual improvements and changes it seems likely to remain an appealing pastime for many years to come.

Many of the games played today are modified versions from centuries ago, especially after the Crusades when gambling was widespread in Europe. Modern gambling games derive from the casting of lots and were inseparable from divination practices. They were also associated with magical-religious

³ In their leaflet on how to play the slots, Auckland Sky City Casino describe the different types of machines as “spinning reel” machines with some of these linked to jackpots; other machines are “video reels” also linked to jackpots and the biggest jackpots; “Draw card poker” machines which allow the player to play an actual card poker game on the machine, against the machine; and there are “Keno” machines where the player selects numbers and plays against the numbers the machine selects.

⁴ The “one-armed bandit” label attached to poker machines is believed to have originated in the United States of America where the slot or poker machines were controlled by organised crime syndicates and were set to pay out only 60 per cent of the money people put into them (Lynch 1990:192).

beliefs about luck and chance and there was no boundary between “secular” games and religious ritual, with the boundary between the sacred and profane becoming a blur (Reith 1999:44). Games popular in the Middle Ages were Roulette, Vingt et Un, Loo, All-Fours, Lotto, Casino, Monte and other forerunners of poker (Asbury 1969, cited in Marshall & Rudd 1996:5). The game of Roulette originated in Egypt but became popular in France and is in all casinos today. Vingt et Un today is known as Blackjack or Twenty-One and was a favourite of Napoleon. Loo was popular with 17th Century ladies and Casino is an old game of Italian origin and like Loo is associated with respectability and gentility (Asbury 1969, cited in Marshall & Rudd 1996:6). One of the oldest gaming instruments is the dice, still used today in games for both children and adults. Ancient societies used anything they could find that resembled a dice, peach stones or sheeps knucklebones known as “astragali”⁵ (Grant 1994:11; Reith 1999:45).

According to Reith (1999:49) cards came into existence and appeared alongside the divinatory use of the arrow about the twelfth century, in the same way that dice became associated with religious ritual, and the casting of lots. Modern cards are derived from Korea and were known as “Htou-Tjen” or “fighting arrows” and were originally used for fortune telling. They were introduced into Europe in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century and into Italy by explorers such as Marco Polo. These Italian cards were known as “tarots”⁶ (Grant 1994:11-12; Reith 1999:49-52). Tarot cards are used in contemporary societies as a method of fortune telling and are seen as a modern day form of divination, a vehicle for connection with the spirit world.

⁵ These “astragali” were thrown and when they stopped were used in the same way in games of chance and early divination ritual, especially the casting of lots. Today dice are sometime still referred to as “bones” (Reith 1999:45; Grant 1994:11, 152).

⁶ Originally for the amusement of children and for fortune telling, the symbols became Christianised and began to be used for games of chance. The cards were then modified to represent the social and political milieu sometimes with representations of mythical figures or contemporary heroes. The most common are the heraldic cards that are still in use today, this replaced the Italian one with images of the chivalric order it came from. Their pictures were “coers” (hearts) representing the church, “carreaux”

Until gambling houses were introduced, or Casinos as we know them today became popular with royalty and the upper class, gambling in Europe gained and lost popularity. In 1863 Francois Blanc was commissioned by the Grimaldi family to build a casino in the principality of Monaco, because Prince Charles III of Monaco believed that it was the only way he could earn money from the 368 rocky coastline acres. Francois Blanc was a crooked stock market player who had already built successful casinos in Luxembourg and Baden-Baden, Germany (Rudd & Marshall 1996:8). Casinos are still permitted in Europe today and Britain legalised gambling in the 1960's, as fund raising for the churches through games like bingo. However loopholes were found and private clubs began to offer games of chance and by the end of the 1960's there were a thousand casinos in Great Britain (Messick and Goldblatt 1976, cited in Marshall & Rudd 1996:8).

Nineteenth century gambling in New Zealand

Gambling in New Zealand arrived with the European settlers and Chinese miners. It began as a leisure activity on board the ships bringing the colonisers to New Zealand. Although immigrant ships had rules forbidding gambling, the different ships enforced the rules to different degrees (Grant 1994:15-18).

By 1836 Kororareka in the Bay of Islands was home to over a thousand immigrants, sealers, whalers and ex-convicts who frequented the hotels, billiard saloons and skittle alleys. The men there drank, sang and gambled on card games mostly. There was only one church in the settlement in 1838 and so there was very little religious impact on the various forms of "rest and recreation". There was a visit in 1835 by Charles Darwin who noted that the Maori had quickly become absorbed in the "old world" pastimes of drinking and gambling. However it was to the disgust of the missionaries that the Maori

(arrowheads or diamonds) the vassals, "trefles" (clubs) the husbandmen and "piques" (spades) the knights (Reith 1999:49-52).

were betting on the first horse races in New Zealand held in 1835 (Grant 1994:20).

In the late nineteenth century upper-class men gambled, while upper-class women “fluttered”. Women played whist and bridge in clubs and private homes for small stakes and often just for the fun of it. Men played poker, euchre and vingt-et-un (ponton), with the women being left to object to the long hours of gambling and the large stakes that were put forward by the men. There was a link between recreational gambling and land speculation, both motivated by capitalist greed (Grant 1994:25).

Gold was discovered in Central Otago in 1861 and the population increased to 60,000 in less than two years. Goldmining was hard work and so the miners enjoyed the chance to unwind at the end of the day with drinking, dancing and gambling. They gambled most commonly on card games and various games came with the miners from their countries of origin. Whist, loo and vingt-et-un came from England; poker from America; faro from England and America and forty-fives from Ireland (Grant 1994:27). By the mid 1860’s the Chinese miners arrived with their own gambling games of fantan and pakapoo (Grant 1994:28) and this was enjoyed by Chinese and other New Zealand settlers until its demise in the 1950’s (Grant 1994:158).

The mining settlements of Queenstown and Arrowtown were wild, with gambling winnings sometimes spent on prostitutes. Madam Mary Ann Anderson was found to have £700 on her when she was arrested in March 1863 for running a “disorderly house” (Grant 1994:28). From a recent newspaper article it appears that not much has changed over the years, as is evident from the claim that men high on their gambling wins leave the Auckland Sky City

Casino and visit prostitutes in Auckland (Phil Taylor, *New Truth & TV Extra*, 11 December 1998:unknown).⁷

The first lottery associated with New Zealand took place in London, as lotteries were not allowed in New Zealand according to the British rulers of the time. The first lottery was held in 1838 by a group of London capitalists who established the New Zealand Company to take advantage of “waste land” in New Zealand and establish a new society based on the Edward Gibbon Wakefield plan of systematic colonisation (Grant 1994:155). The land was purchased by lottery and gave the colonisers some quick cash in order to carry out their plans. The first settlement was in Wellington, with further lotteries being held by the New Zealand Company to settle Wanganui in 1840, New Plymouth in 1841 and Nelson in 1842 (Grant 1994:155). The Art Unions were the next form of gambling. New Zealanders initially subscribed to the London and Glasgow Art Unions to support local artists and possibly win a painting, sculpture or other work of art. New Zealand artists began their own Art Union in the 1850’s (Grant 1994:158).

Gambling in New Zealand : Twentieth century and beyond

In the early 1900’s the Catholic and Protestant conflict flared in New Zealand because of the Catholic Church wishing to use lotteries to raise funds for the church. The Catholics believed that the matter of lotteries was one for individual choice as spiritual issues were more important than moral crusades. The Protestants opposed by saying that all unearned income was falsely obtained in the eyes of God (Grant 1994:170). Lotteries were illegal in New Zealand until the outbreak of war in August 1914 when they were used to raise money for the military effort. The Prime Minister of the day, William Massey, passed a Bill in September 1915 allowing for lotteries to raise patriotic funds.

⁷ Chairman of the Compulsive Gambling Society, Dr Peter Adams believes that sex has the same emotional effects as gambling, the anticipation, the ritual, the euphoria and the letdown afterwards! (Phil Taylor, *New Truth & TV Extra*, 11 December 1998:unknown).

Many different lotteries were organised over the period of the war for the various causes. The biggest lottery of the time was held on 3 August 1915 and it was the Tramway Boy's Art Union (Grant 1994:173-175).

Lotteries and raffles of many variants have continued over the years. The "Golden Kiwi" ticket was followed by the "Golden Kiwi Mammoth" which went on sale 6 July 1964 with its profits supposedly going to the elderly (Grant 1994:228). "Kiwi Jackpot" and "Kiwi Super" replaced the Golden Kiwi and the Golden Kiwi Mammoth in September 1974 (Grant 1994:237). These were followed throughout the 1970's with many variations such as "Pot O' Gold" and "5 Plus 5" raising funds for Olympic athletes and any number of worthwhile causes (Grant 1994:240).

The game of Lotto which is still being played today, is understood to be played along the same principles as Pakapoo (Grant 1994:247). Before the introduction of Lotto into New Zealand, there was a large amount of deliberation by the governments and opposition from religious groups of all denominations. Lotto had been successfully introduced in Victoria, Australia and was called "Tattslotto" after the company running the Lotto called Tattersall (Grant 1994:247). On 22 July 1987 the first Lotto shops opened their doors for business in New Zealand (Grant 1994:258). The very first lotto game grossed almost \$2 million and had a first division prize of \$359,808 (Grant 1994:259). This game has continued to grow successfully and most weeks the first division is around \$1 million, or if there is a special occasion such as Mother's Day or Father's Day the jackpot may be \$3 million and sometimes even \$5 million. The last Golden Kiwi ticket draw was held on 12 July 1989 (Grant 1994:261) and it seems Lotto is now the most popular gambling game played by New Zealanders. According to Abbott & Volberg (2000:130), 73.1% of males and 72.2% of females have played Lotto in the last six months, compared to 17.3% males and 10.9% females who play the poker machines in other venues apart from the Casinos. Their figures also indicate that 11.2% males and 10.0% females surveyed play the poker machines in the Casinos.

Instant Kiwi tickets (or scratch tickets as they are commonly known) were introduced in 1989 (Grant 1994:267) after Lotto, and although they are still around, Lotto appears to be the most popular form of gambling.

The gaming machines began to arrive in New Zealand in the early 1930's. While these were the American-made "fruit machines" they were deemed unlawful because they were seen as an exercise in chance rather than skill (Grant 1994:288). However the ban did not last long and machines continued to arrive in New Zealand and were put in specially built parlours at the back of milk-bars, where children would spend their pocket money or money they had taken from the Sunday School collection (Grant 1994:288). The newer more sophisticated machines arrived in the 1960's and with the introduction of the "one-armed bandits" in clubs in New South Wales, the push was on to bring them to New Zealand for the entertainment value for club patrons. Old Australian machines were finding their way to New Zealand anyway and being installed in social clubs and sports clubrooms (Grant 1994:288).

The imported machines continued coming, despite the fact that they were still illegal in New Zealand. By 1987 there were approximately 5,000 illegal machines and on 1 April 1988 they were finally legalised for playing in clubs, RSA's and hotels (Grant 1994:289). At that time there was a limited payout of \$100 and 78% of the turnover had to be paid out in prizes, after expenses the rest had to go to the local community. By 1989 there were 6,000 machines in 2,000 outlets and they had turned over \$80 million (Grant 1994:289). The number of poker machines has rapidly increased and today there are estimated to be 15,600 machines. It is estimated that last year (1999) people spent \$3 billion, won back \$2.6 billion and lost \$400 million (Simon Collins, *Weekend Herald*, 15-16 July 2000a:A1).⁸

⁸ According to Thomas (2000:30) figures as at last July indicate there are now 18,420 poker machines installed in 2,200 sites, costing gamblers \$4 billion.

The ultimate in gambling venues has to be Casinos and the first one opened in New Zealand in Christchurch in 1995, followed by Auckland Sky City on 2 February 1996, with two more in Queenstown, one opened last year and another one still under construction. The future of gambling appears to be only limited by the imagination. In New Zealand we already have access to Internet Gambling connecting with Casinos in America, including Native American run Casinos. The Auckland Sky City Casino is considering a venture with the Adelaide Casino, which includes Cyber Casinos (Karyn Scherer, *The New Zealand Herald*, 24 February 2000:C1), so it is unknown where the future of gambling will be. For now, there appear to be enough gambling options around to satisfy anyone who has the desire to gamble.

Media portrayals of women gamblers

The portrayal of women gamblers in the media is problematic, in that it focuses on the women who have gambled using money they have embezzled, borrowed or used instead of paying the family bills. Some of these women are now serving jail sentences. Other women such as the so called "gambling grannies", have apparently gambled away their children's inheritance or all their life savings and now find themselves living on the pension (Karen Burge, *The New Zealand Herald*, 20 February 1999a:unknown, *The New Zealand Herald*, 27 February 1999b:unknown; Cropp 1998; Henger 1999; Ian Stuart, *Evening Standard*, 4 February 1995:12; Thomas 2000:32). The reason I see the media portrayal as problematic is that it only focuses on the negative aspect of poker machine gambling. This form of leisure enjoyed by so many women is being portrayed as deviant behaviour because of the few women who have found themselves with serious problems. It could also be argued that the reported instances of women who gamble to excess are being sensationalised by the media, because they are women! Dire tales greet us on the evening news about another baby being left in the car to die, while its mother is inside playing the poker machines. I was living in Melbourne when the Casino first opened there, and the Casino had a serious problem with children and babies being left in

cars while the parents (mother, father or guardian) were inside gambling. I have heard from a friend in Melbourne that these cases are not so common now in the Casino carpark, but at local gambling venues they are still reported periodically, and the woman has usually been playing the poker machines. However, it appears that this is not a new phenomenon for New Zealand because parents, usually mothers, were reported to be leaving their children in cars or on the stage of the hall, in the 1970's while they were playing housie (Grant 1994:139).

The women I interviewed agreed that it is easy to get "hooked" on the poker machines and expressed a need for self-control. There was general agreement amongst them that playing the poker machines is an exciting and pleasurable form of entertainment, but you must set yourself a limit on the amount of money you take to play with and when that has gone, "either watch other people or go home". Many of the women expressed a wish that they could continue playing, but realised that it was unrealistic and stopped.

Another reason that the media portrayal of women poker machine gamblers is problematic, is that it reconfirms the role of women as being the "good mother" or "good grandmother" by sensationalising women's actions when they do not fall within those society constructs as acceptable for women. The media articles emphasise in either large headlines, or large spreads all the details of the woman's gambling problem. While this can have a useful effect in showing the repercussions of problem gambling, it also adds to the stigma imposed by society on women gamblers who do not have a "problem". A two-page article in *She & More* magazine by Amanda Cropp gives the different experiences of two women. One woman lost her job, car and relationship because of her gambling problem, while another professional woman who gambles to escape her failed relationship feels secure in the Casino where no-one judges her and she does not have a gambling problem (Cropp 1998:55-57). While this article shows both a negative and a positive experience of poker machine gambling, the emphasis of the article was on the negative.

The same sort of negativity applies to older women who gamble, they have been given the nickname “gambling grannies”, (Karen Burge, *The New Zealand Herald*, 20 February 1999a:unknown, *The New Zealand Herald*, 27 February 1999b:unknown; Henger 1999; Ian Stuart, *Evening Standard*, 4 February 1995:12). Newspaper headings like “Granny loses all on pokies” (Karen Burge, *The New Zealand Herald*, 20 February 1999a:unknown); or “Gambling’s no way to supplement super” (Karen Burge, *The New Zealand Herald*, 27 February 1999b:unknown), reinforce the stigma and the feelings of guilt some women have about taking part in a leisure activity they find pleasurable.

The reasons given by the media for women becoming hooked on poker machines are the same reasons the women I interviewed gave for playing, some of which are escape, excitement, the thrill of winning and to avoid loneliness. However in the media these reasons are not deemed good reasons for women to play the machines. To reinforce these negative beliefs further, Problem Gambling agencies have a set of guidelines to assess whether a person is a problem gambler, and the reasons above are listed in these guidelines. If however, these were to be accepted as the sole reason women become addicted, then the women I interviewed (and myself) would all be problem gamblers, which all the women and myself dispute.⁹

A recent series of articles on gambling appeared in the *New Zealand Herald*. One week covered compulsive gambling entitled “Hooked: the problem gambler” (Simon Collins, *Weekend Herald*, 22-23 July 2000e:A15). I was interviewed for this article, but once again my interest in the positive aspects of gambling was limited to a few paragraphs, mixed in with the negative. While I acknowledge that it is important to have discourse on the subject of problem gambling, I argue that there would be benefits if gambling could be viewed by

⁹ Some of the signs of a problem gambler are: using gambling as a way to escape from problems, relieve depression; dreaming about past wins; increased expenditure on gambling; consistently exceeding spending limit; chasing losses; unsuccessful attempts at stopping gambling; lied to conceal gambling; borrowed money to gamble; lost jobs, relationships, etc; or committed crimes to feed gambling habit (Cropp 1998:57).

society from a more balanced picture. There is no escaping the fact that women do gamble and play the poker machines and many of them enjoy it, therefore I would like to see them be able to enjoy it and be able to discuss it openly with non-gamblers without being judged. It would also be beneficial if the media would cease to sensationalise those few women gamblers who gamble to excess. They no doubt have experienced enough shame from their actions, without it being published and discussed exhaustively by the media.

Compulsive gambling - fact or fiction?

While problem gambling, also called “pathological” or “compulsive” gambling, is seen by many people as a serious “addiction”,¹⁰ it is not the focus of my research. However, because of the stigma attached to women poker machine gamblers and the negative media portrayal, I wanted to discuss some of the definitions of a problem gambler in order to make sense of this stigma. The reasons why poker machines specifically are so “addictive” are difficult to define and my research participants gave reasons such as:

- (i) the ability to lose yourself while playing the machine (escape);
- (ii) you know if you have won or lost immediately (instant gratification);
- (iii) the machines are programmed to give small wins which keeps you playing in the hope that the big one will come up soon.

Pathological gambling is defined as a “behaviour disorder in which an individual becomes progressively unable to resist the impulse to gamble” (<http://www.funkandwagnalls.com/encyclopedia/low/articles/g/g009000149f.html>).

Another definition from the National Council on Problem Gambling Inc., Washington defines Problem Gambling as “... gambling behavior which causes disruption in any major area of life: psychological, physical, social or

¹⁰ I have used the word “addiction” because that is how it is classified in psychological research. The most common term for this amongst the women I interviewed and other poker machine players is “hooked”.

vocational. The term "Problem Gambling" includes, but is not limited to, the condition known as "Pathological" or "Compulsive" Gambling. It is "...a progressive addiction characterized by increasing preoccupation with gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop, "chasing" losses, and loss of control manifested by continuation of the gambling behavior in spite of mounting, serious, negative consequences" (<http://www.ncpgambling.org/>).

Many psychological and psychiatric classifications of problem gambling are that it is a "disease", like an addiction to alcohol or drugs (<http://www.aswexler.com/whatiscg.html>). It may however, be alternatively argued that gambling is not the disease, but rather the symptom of an underlying social or emotional "dis-ease" within the individual. By this I mean that the individual may have suffered a trauma in their lives and has turned to gambling to try and relieve some of the distress in their lives. They are trying to add some excitement to their lives to counteract the trauma, or escape from the distress temporarily.

However, problem gambling is only a problem for a portion of the men and women who gamble and most people enjoy many forms of gambling without it becoming a problem. A recent report delivered by Abbott & Volberg (2000) found that approximately 50,000 New Zealanders over 18 years of age currently experienced some gambling problems, with between 58,000 and 107,700 adults experiencing gambling problems at some point in their lives. They found that while problem gambling appears to have decreased since their last research in 1991, there are currently more women, they are older and more affluent than previous research, seeking help for problem gambling (Abbott & Volberg 2000). Whether this is because men will not seek help, or acknowledge that they have a problem or because there are genuinely more women problem gamblers, is not clear. A social cost of compulsive gambling is crime, with

gamblers turning to crime to finance their addiction.¹¹ As well as this crime, the cost to the gambler's family is devastating, with incidences of child and spouse abuse, to financial ruin, marriage breakdown and the destruction of so many lives (Denis Edwards, *New Truth*, 1 November 1996:8).

Problem gambling is an issue that is prevalent in all societies that have gambling. It is a world-wide phenomenon, including the tribal casinos run by Native American people. It is a part of the social cost of gambling that has been incorporated into societies like Las Vegas and over time, it will become clearer how to incorporate these issues into New Zealand society also.

Conclusion

Gambling has been a phenomenon of most societies for millennia. What is classified as gambling has changed over time and the games played have evolved into the games of our contemporary world. The human desire for risk taking has not changed and taking a risk on a chance has stood the test of time. It is apparent that a belief in some sort of spirit connection, divination and a belief in luck have been carried on through the generations of human beings. According to Devereux (1968), "...historically gambling developed out of various religious and medieval practices used by man to cope with the problems of uncertainty and fate" (cited in Caldwell 1974:17). It appears that contemporary reasons for gambling are little different as the women I interviewed also used gambling as a way of coping. These reasons will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Why people gamble and compulsive gamblers continue to gamble has been answered in many ways over the years. Freud believed that "compulsive gambling was a form of play indulged in by men who didn't want to grow up"

¹¹ In an article entitled "Problem gambling can start with a raffle ticket", Peter Phipps who is a lay minister and co-ordinator of an inter-church problem gambling education programme believes there is an indication that burglaries, muggings, armed hold-ups have all increased within the 8km radius of the Sky City Casino in Auckland since it opened, because offenders are trying to get money close to where they are gambling (PA, *Wanganui Chronicle*, 29 June 1998: unknown).

(Heineman 1994:xx). A theory of why people gamble compulsively according to Dr Robert Custer is that every person "has four basic emotional needs: affection, approval, recognition, and self-confidence. When these needs are not met, a person feels inadequate, rejected, helpless, and overwhelmed by life" (Heineman 1994:xxi). This theory has been supported by compulsive gamblers themselves stating that the wins made them feel powerful, omnipotent (Heineman 1994:xxi).

Heineman (1994:xxii) states that there is no other addiction as easy to hide as compulsive gambling. This may be so but a subject for future discourse may be to try to discover who, apart from psychologists, determines when a person is a "compulsive gambler". While it is true that there are many people in New Zealand society who seem unable to stop gambling and do benefit from help, one could question whether some of those seeking and paying for treatment have been coerced into believing they have a problem. I would argue that all it may possibly take is a return to more community support to help these people overcome their desire for excessive gambling. It has become evident from my research that there are many lonely women in society, who go to places such as the Casino for their socialising and contact with fellow human beings. For some it may be a case of finding another form of entertainment or socialisation that gives them the same emotional satisfaction and feelings that gambling gives them. If psychological theories of gamblers were to be treated as gospel, anyone who bought a lotto ticket on a regular basis would be deemed to be in need of treatment and have a neurological disorder. I believe there is more to gambling than it being a psychological disorder and it is hoped that a glimpse of this will be seen in this thesis.

A factor in the media focus on women's gambling problems is that gambling, while socially acceptable for men, does not fit the culturally and socially constructed image of the "traditional woman". Thus, when there are problems with women gamblers, they are "...over-emphasised and stigmatised" (Ohtsuka, Bruton, DeLuca and Borg 1997:1052). This causes the

women to feel guilty about their gambling, hiding it from their family and friends, instead of allowing it to be openly discussed and any problems resolved.

For most women gamblers however, gambling as a leisure activity provides them with a chance to escape from the pressures of the modern industrial world, from the routine of their everyday lives. Poker machine playing gives hope of a chance to win some money, to allow a small amount of freedom from their mundane routine. The environment where poker machine playing occurs allows women a feeling of safety, both physical and moral, because everyone is there for the same reason: to gamble. There are numerous emotions and feelings associated with gambling and these will be discussed further in Chapter Three and Chapter Six.

Chapter Three

Experiencing Emotionality, Self and a Magical-Religious Worldview

“Emotionality, or feeling, is threaded through the person’s day. It does not just appear at appointed times, in preselected places; nor is it far off. It is with the person all the time, contextualized and interwoven through their thoughts and actions. This world of emotion and the reality it invites is always there, waiting to be entered and embraced (Denzin 1984:277).

Introduction

With gambling, and more specifically poker machine gambling, firmly entrenched as an aspect of New Zealand society, this chapter looks at the literature regarding emotions and feelings of players in New Zealand, Australia and America. Emotions and feelings associated with gambling are many and varied, from the positive ones of excitement and hope, to the negative ones of anger and guilt. This mix and extreme of emotions have been evident in my own interviews and also in the relevant literature. There is a feeling of “hope” for a possible win, and the feeling of “luck” when a win has occurred. “Luck” also plays a part in the choice of machine to play; and “happiness” at being able to play the machines and having a “chance” to win. The experience of these feelings contributes to the reasons women play the poker machines.

There is an association between a game of chance and the superstitions and magical beliefs that surround them. It has been suggested by Devereux (1949), Caillois (1962) and Brown (1994) that, “the greater the degree of chance in a game, the greater the degree of the gambler’s superstition” (cited in Reith 1999:93). “Luck” to many is a feeling but “luck” is also seen as a magical power that can alter the way gamblers play their game.

There was a strong indication in my interviews that women believe that luck, good or bad, is the only influence on whether or not they win or lose. Some of the women I interviewed see the machines as programmed and therefore they have no control over the outcome; it is the power of the machine that controls the outcome of their play. But several of the women treat the poker machine as if it were sacred and anthropomorphic, by performing a ritual before, during and after play, asking the machine to "share its energy", using superstition and magic to try and alter the course of fate.

"Hope" is another feeling that many gamblers have, including the women I interviewed. Hope is unsurprisingly connected with "winning": while some players hope to win lots of money, others hope to win any amount, and there are others who hope to win just to feel as if they are winning somewhere in their otherwise hopeless lives. Hope comes through in my interviews as a strong motivating factor for players, and also in the interviews discussed further in this chapter by Caldwell (1972, cited in Lynch 1990), and Lynch (1990) who interviewed poker machine players in Australia.

One important feeling for women who play the poker machines is a sense of autonomy. The women I interviewed said there is a feeling of empowerment because poker machine gambling is a one-on-one event between themselves and the machine, no other human being intervenes in the outcome of the play at that point in time. They are in control of the amount of money they spend, the time they spend playing, the choice of which machine to play and when to stop playing. However the paradox is that the women are not truly in control of the outcome, because of the fact that the machines are programmed. The only other human involvement with the machine is the person or persons who programme it. Women seem to feel equality with men who play the poker machines, because there is no special skill required by either gender to play the machine. It is seen by women as a "game of chance", and only "luck" or "intuition" stands between the person and the machine.

The sacredness of chance

Games of chance were performed out of the early peoples' captivation with religion. According to Bolen (1976:7) pagan priests would cast "lots"¹ to encourage the deities to reveal the future, to assist their decision making. The practice of drawing or casting lots is called "cleromancy" and is one of the earliest and most basic forms of divination (Marshall & Rudd 1996:1). This was seen to be of sacred significance and a mechanism for expressing the Divine Voice (Reith 1999:15). This interpretation of fallen objects is relative to the word "chance" used in games and foretelling the future today. The word "chance" means the way things fall to us, the fall of the cards or dice, as well as good or bad fortune befalling a person (Martinez 1983:14-15; Reith 1999:14). This definition of chance can be applied to the poker machine in relation to the way the reels fall at the end of a spin.

The throwing of dice was an ancient form of decision making over legal and religious matters. Initially this way of making decisions had to do with a belief in spiritual powers controlling the outcome of the throw or cast, with the lots and dice showing the result but divinity responsible for the outcome or the way they fell (Brenner & Brenner 1990:5; Martinez 1983:14-15). The Greeks had a Goddess of gaming and fortune named Tyche, the Romans had a Goddess called Fortuna (Bolen 1976:8; Martinez 1983:16). The Greeks believed gambling to be a grievous sin but still incorporated it into their religion, expressing this relationship between gambling and religion in some of their myths.² An Egyptian myth tells how there came to be 365 days in the year. It is told that

¹ The word "lot" originated from a Teutonic root *hleut* meaning "the pebble that was cast to decide disputes and divisions of property" (Brenner & Brenner 1990:1; Grant 1994:151). Passages in the Bible reveal that "lots" were drawn to discover God's will in decisions (Brenner & Brenner 1990:2; Grant 1994:151).

² For example, "...three brothers shot dice for the purpose of splitting up the universe among themselves. Zeus won the upper world, Poseidon won the oceans, and Hades lost and became master of the underworld" (Wagner 1972; Puzo 1977, cited in Bolen 1976:8; Marshall & Rudd 1996:2; Martinez 1983:16). Another myth states that "...Palamedes invented the dice and taught his companions how to play craps during the long, boring siege of Troy. He eventually learned the art of trick dice-throwing and was later stoned to death for cheating" (Reid and Demaris 1963, cited in Bolen 1976:9; Marshall & Rudd 1996:2; Martinez 1983:16).

Rhea the Earth and Saturn had a torrid love affair with Rhea becoming pregnant. Mercury secretly admired Rhea and made five new days out of his winnings from the game of dice Mercury had played with the Moon and during that time Rhea gave birth to Osiris and Isis. The five new days were added to the existing 360 and the Egyptians celebrated those five days as the birth of the two deities Osiris and Isis (Marshall & Rudd 1996:3; Martin 1996:3). Even in the Bible there is evidence of gambling although the Jews disapproved of gambling for financial gain.³

In the times of Socrates and Plato the existence of chance and luck was seen more as divine providence or determinism. A person would be lucky because of fated circumstances, the right time or moment for the event to happen. Therefore both luck and chance were seen as being the fatedness of human life and revealed the divine plan that was set out for them (Nussbaum 1986, cited in Reith 1999:17). According to Reith (1999:29) there was a belief by probabilists⁴ of the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century that there was no such thing as chance. Uncertainty was a state of mind, not a state of the world, with "chance" emerging as an epistemological category, a shortcoming of human knowledge. At the time of the Enlightenment there was a belief in purposefulness, with "chance" being seen as human ignorance. The following by Voltaire expresses the thought of the time.

"But there is no such thing as chance. Everything is either a test or a punishment, a reward or a precaution." (Voltaire 1990:191, cited in Reith 1999:29).

Reith (1999:31) claims this belief is deterministic and does not give any room for unexplainable phenomena. Everything had a cause and there was a

³ For example it is told that the soldiers of Pontius Pilate gambled for the clothing of Christ while he was being crucified (Squires 1935; Messick and Goldblatt 1976, cited in Marshall & Rudd 1996:3; Bolen 1976:10). The Old Testament reads that God commanded Moses to divide Canaan by casting lots (Puzo 1977; Messick and Goldblatt 1976, cited in Marshall & Rudd 1996:3). There are more Bible stories of gambling and it is interesting that so many of the people who are against gambling today are religious people.

⁴ The probabilists were people of the Enlightenment who had deep religious conviction and optimism in the infinite potential of human abilities. Gigerenzer et.al. (1989:11) believed that all events were predictable and the probabilities were relative to human knowledge (cited in Reith 1999:29).

belief in universal order. This determinism was subject to some critique during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and “chance” was allowed to be seen as a “neutral phenomenon” because it had by this time lost its original religious meaning as being connected with the divine. With an emerging understanding of phenomena not being subject to universal laws, this led to twentieth century physics and the discovery that the world was not deterministic (Reith 1999:35).

This non-deterministic view has allowed for a contemporary epistemology regarding the phenomenon of chance. As I have discovered, the experience of a game of chance such as the poker machines offer, allows for different meanings and emotions for different women. But I argue that although the game of chance being discussed is non-deterministic, the gambling experience does however have a connection to the divine, or at least to supernatural forces, for many women gamblers. Thus, for these women there is such a thing as “chance” and the chance is connected to the divine.

Emotionality and experience of women gamblers

Emotionality is described by Denzin (1984:58) as, “a circular process that begins and ends with the transactions and actions of the self in the social situation interacting with self and others”. This emotionality of the self and others in social interaction can be seen in people’s actions when they are gambling, or more specifically playing the poker machines. From research undertaken by Rob Lynch (1990), an example of the different emotions expressed by a person playing the poker machine can be seen:

“If I’ve had a winning streak I leave the club feeling elated, wonderful, really on top of the world the next day. But if I’ve had a bad day I go home feeling terrible, I’ve lost that, I could have bought this with it. But then I wake up the next morning and think ‘life’s short, what does it matter?’ I don’t carry any grudge, I could go back the next day (Heather J, 60 years, \$2140 in jackpots, plays 3-5 times a week)” (Lynch 1990:197).

The philosophical approach of Heather J. that “life’s short, what does it matter” is one which Goffman (1967) believes to be an example of how gambling tests a person’s character as they move between the extremes of

winning and losing, and places to test individual characters are rare in the mundane world. Therefore part of the attraction of gambling appears to be the opportunity for laying your character on the line (cited in Lynch 1990:197, Martinez 1983:55).

It is possible that the winning of money, either small or large amounts, provides the player with a sense of having beaten a system in which their life's struggle occurs. They are pitting themselves against fate, with the hope that they will emerge a winner. At the other extreme is an example of the philosophy of one player who loses a lot:

"[I play] to relax and hope to win the pot at the end of the rainbow, which in yourself you know will never happen...we...expect to lose so its relaxation through losing if you like...provided you are losing slowly! (Jock T, 55 years)" (Lynch, 1990:200).

The concept of "hope" plays a big part in the life and beliefs of poker machine players. An example of how players 'hope' for the big win and refer to it when explaining their desire is as follows:

"When I play, I think, I hope I'm going to get it [...] I think positive. If I didn't I'd never go into a club (Betty F, 61 years)" (Lynch 1990:202).

"[There's] a pleasurable sensation that maybe the next pull will give you something nice [...]. [I like] the expectation that you are going to see five in a row. It hasn't happened but you hope it will [...] yes, the gambling spirit that I didn't think I had, but it's there (Penny K, 59 years)" (Lynch 1990:202).

A player who hoped that gambling would take her into the realm of the good life gave her reasons for gambling vs. working:

"Anticipation - you hope you might win. That pie in the sky is the only reason [why you play]. You might hit the jackpot...I'm the gambling type. I think if I am going to get a lot of money it's going to be through gambling. In other words we've cut out work. You'll never get rich by working. You have to win. Doesn't matter how. Who cares as long as it comes through the lottery, lotto or the poker machines? (Heather J. 60 years)" (Lynch 1990:202).

Gambling theorists such as Bloch (1951), Caillois (1962) and Devereux (1968) believe that the poor and working-class people use gambling as a means of attempting to get themselves out of their seemingly hopeless situations. They hope and fantasise about moving to a better class situation through

winning at gambling (cited in Caldwell 1974:17-19; Lynch 1990:202-203), but appear to disregard the risks involved and the possibility of finding themselves more impoverished than they already are through losing all their money to gambling.

In a study undertaken by Caldwell (1972) on New South Wales Clubs the most common reason for playing was relaxation. The players described it as “switching off”, with one player describing playing as “... a form of relaxation, escapism, because instead of worrying...you tend to concentrate on something that doesn’t matter...” (cited in Lynch 1990:199). Players describe how they have led or still do lead busy working lives and the poker machines are an outlet, an interlude of peacefulness in otherwise hectic lives. Some even see playing the machines as compensation for their hard work, using their hard earned money as they choose, having the experience of a chance to win, and being prepared to take a risk on a loss, according to Lynch (1990:199).

Presenting the “self” as a gambler

In some areas of gambling, self-presentation may be a motivation to gamble because some forms of gambling do implicate a desirable identity (Holtgraves 1988:79). This is probably more the case for people who are classed by Casinos and society as “high-rollers”.⁵ This term projects the image that the person is extremely wealthy, either from legal or illegal business practices, and there are both women and men high rollers. However in America the cultural meaning of gambling appears to be ambivalent, with both positive and negative implications. One of the “positive” images of gambling is that it is seen as a form of risk taking. This is positively valued in American society, claims Holtgraves (1988:80).

⁵ “High-rollers” is a term used for people who gamble large sums of money, so much so that there is a special room in the Casinos for high-rollers, everyday gamblers are unable to enter. They are usually given special treatment such as free hotel accommodation and I have even heard of a case where a Casino flew a gambler first class from overseas just to play in the Casino.

Gambling is a way of presenting the self to others in a form that shows that the individual person can make fateful decisions with confidence and competence according to Holtgraves (1988:83). This theory of self identity could be applied to women poker machines gamblers even though their gambling interaction is a one-on-one with a machine.⁶ If a gambler wins this allows their self-presentation to be evaluated by the self and others in a positive way (Goffman 1967; Miller 1986, cited in Holtgraves 1988:87). It seems that there are also positive ways to lose. It is argued that losing can display character and losing with grace and style is a positive action (Goffman 1967; Miller 1986, cited in Holtgraves 1988:87).

Henrietta L. Moore (1988:38) believes it is important to theorise women's actual experience and there is a necessity for experiencing the "self" or "person", through an analysis of gender identity. The theory of "self", "individual" or "person" is important for women as it gives autonomy, action and moral worth, giving women a chance to be autonomous and responsible for their own actions, along with a freedom of choice. Therefore, it might be argued that women who participate in poker machine gambling are doing so because it is their choice and therefore they are prepared to accept the responsibility for their actions. This also allows them the choice to enjoy a game of chance. This belief in their freedom of choice, taking responsibility along with the "self" having agency, was confirmed by my research participants and will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

Kusyszyn (1984:136) claims that, "According to Jean Paul Sartre, a person is the sum total of his or her actions. A person achieves a sense of identity - selfhood - through actions by taking responsibility for these actions. Conversely, where denial of responsibility for one's actions occurs, denial of the becoming of the self also automatically occurs". Not only is this applicable to gambling but a factor applicable to life. Therefore the critics of gamblers it

⁶ Poker machine playing is one of the least social occasions but it can be social if the players choose it to be and this still allows the opportunity for presentation of self to other poker machine players within the environment (Holtgraves 1988:84).

could be argued, want to deny the woman who likes gambling the right and ability to be herself. By judging the woman gambler by their own moral views, the critic is placing an unnecessary stigma on the woman, when really it is her right to act as she pleases and take responsibility for her own actions.

The stigmatised self

There are many negative views of gambling because of the problems connected with some people who gamble. Gambling is separated from other forms of play because of moral and ethical issues, with the frequent assumption that gambling is a social problem that needs to be controlled if not eliminated (Dielman 1979; Newman 1975, cited in McMillen 1996:12). A condemnation of gambling is widespread based on the Protestant belief that gambling is a way to make "easy money" which contravenes the work ethic and threatens production (Brenner & Brenner 1990:50; Haywood et al. 1989:138; Weber 1976 [1904-5]; Rosecrance 1988a:32-7; Miers 1980; Turner 1965, cited in McMillen 1996:13). There is a view of gambling that sees the state as the proper authority on the control of gambling. This is illustrated by studies that present gambling as deviant behaviour or a crime (McMillen 1996:13). Deviance is defined as, "not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions" (Becker 1963:5, cited in McMillen 1996:15).

A social stigma exists in New Zealand society, with some people still seeing gambling and playing "games of chance" as "getting something for nothing". This mentality is seen as undermining the work ethic dominant in society (Brenner & Brenner 1990:50). The person who is stigmatised possesses an undesirable difference from what is expected by other people, who consider themselves to be "normal" (Lemert & Branaman 1997:73). The term "normal" is always a problematic one because everyone has a different definition of what constitutes normality. The stigmatised person becomes that way by actions that do not seem appropriate to other members of a society. A stigmatised

individual identifies him or herself as a “normal” person, but “stigma” is a label imposed by other members of the society.

Younger women today would possibly be less aware of the stigma attached to playing the poker machines or entering a casino, and less likely to see these actions as deviant behaviour. Whilst in the environment of the casino, pub or club, the gambler would see herself as “normal” because she is in an environment where other people are doing the same thing. She may also feel morally safe in the Casino environment because everyone else is there gambling too. Within this social category the individual sees herself as a “normal” person, deserving a fair chance and acceptance by the wider community. It is not until the gambling turns to addiction and the person finds themselves in the courtroom or prison for crimes related to their gambling that the stigma and deviant behaviour can become apparent, with shame, self-hate and self-derogation occurring, claims Goffman (1963:7).

The magic of “lady luck”

“*Better to be born lucky than rich*” is a familiar saying, and one I have used myself on a number of occasions when I have witnessed someone winning. But how do you define luck? The dictionary defines it as something that happens by chance; fortune; lot; good fortune; success (Funk & Wagnalls 1984:385). The word happiness is linked with the notion of the “social good” and is derived from the word *hap* which means chance, fortune, a condition due to random occurrences (Brenner & Brenner 1990:137). The dictionary also describes being happy or happiness as being attended with good fortune, lucky along with the more usual meaning of joyous and contented (Funk & Wagnalls 1984:292).

Brenner & Brenner (1990:137) state that in the German language today there is one word that means both happiness and luck: *Gluck*. I asked my research participants what luck was to them and most thought it was “a feeling”. When deciding on which poker machine to play they chose one that “felt lucky”, sometimes the feeling was “right”, other times it was not right.

Some participants felt lucky when they got out of bed in the morning and decided to go to the Casino and generally, they said, on these occasions they would have a good day and win something. Other participants thought the feeling of luck was "woman's intuition"; something in their mind was telling them to play the poker machines and often when this happened they would win. A few of the women I interviewed had lucky charms or objects they felt would bring them luck, such as bracelets from their mother or feng-shui money charms.

According to Reith (1999:169) gamblers will have lucky coins, clothes or toys that they are sure will help them to win. Other gamblers have borrowed items and things such as four-leaved clovers, a traditional symbol of luck borrowed from Irish culture. There is a casino in Las Vegas that resembles a museum of "luck" with 15,000 four-leaved clovers in a special enclosure, which is surrounded by horseshoes and "lucky" leprechauns. Other gamblers have a belief that luck is contagious, coming from other people who have just had a win. Poker machine players will often encourage winners to touch their machines to pass on their luck and often just the presence of a perceived "lucky person" is enough, states Reith (1999:168). Other players have told me that seats are often thought to be lucky, as are certain types of poker machines with players returning to the same seat in a casino to play, while others will merely seek out the same sort of machine, in another location. There is a belief held by some friends of mine that Chinese people are lucky, although there was no contagious benefit for me on a recent visit to the Casino with a Chinese friend. My friend won about \$200, but unfortunately his luck did not rub off on to me!

Gambling has been viewed as serving the same function in the present day as the magic and ritual of the past (and present in some cultures), where there is a belief that the unpredictable contains infinite possibility for good fortune. Frequent gamblers appear to believe in "superstition" (Bloch 1951:217). There was a clear belief by some of my research participants in superstition and magic; a reliance on intuition and that the poker machine was

more than a machine pre-programmed for them to lose their money on. This was one of the most fascinating insights into gambling that came to light in my interviews.

Reith (1999:174) claims that the worldview of gamblers is a complex one. The gambler is enmeshed in a world of magical participation with the efficacy of "luck" coming from within, and then in opposition is the power that comes from the outside determining the course of the game. It is this complex interplay and the wider implications for the gamblers' life in general that could be seen as the religious dimension of gambling. Luck as a religious experience, is described by Mario Puzo:

"A winning streak inspires belief in your own infallibility...What non-gamblers do not know is the feeling of virtue...when the dice fall as one commands. And the omniscient goodness when the card you need rises to the top of the deck to greet your delighted yet confident eyes. It is as close as I have ever come in my life to a religious feeling. Or to being a wonder-struck child" (Puzo 1977:134, cited in Reith 1999:175).

Why risk your luck on a poker machine?

The attraction of the poker machine to people is something researchers are still trying to determine. Caldwell (1974:16), who was one of the early theorists who tried to discover the motivation for playing poker machines, described the playing of machines "as the epitome of non-skill gambling". He goes on to say,

"The player has to insert a coin and pull the handle. There is no way that he can influence the outcome. The poker machine (slot machine) not only determines the result, but pays out in the event of a win. The banker, the Cabinet Minister, the housewife, and the labourer are all equals before the poker machine, for skill and experience count for nothing" (Caldwell 1974:16).

Poker machine playing is one of the few activities in life where everyone is equally empowered (or disempowered) and it is possible that this is one of the reasons poker machines attract women. It may be a sub-conscious awareness in women that they have the same opportunity to win at this game as men have. Also women from any area of society are equal, working-class women are the same as their middle class counterparts, with a possible variant

being the amount of money each can afford to gamble, but each has the same opportunity to “win”.

Caldwell (1972b:122f, cited in Lynch 1990:194) gives the following explanation as to some of the reasons why people are prepared to take the risk of losing valuables and/or money on poker machines:

1. “...there is a great deal of visual and auditory appeal about the process;
2. ...an air of excitement exists [around the machines] largely because of the admixture of sounds;
3. ...for many people, the dull routine nature of their jobs or home situation may not allow for much excitement or stimulation[...]. And [the machines are] a way of injecting some unpredictability into what are otherwise very predictable lives;
4. ...the player may be drawn to the ‘rapidity with which a bet is made and determined’ (Goffman 1967, cited in Lynch 1990:194) on poker machines;
5. ...within the sphere of gambling the poker machine is a great equaliser” (Caldwell 1972b:122f, cited in Lynch 1990:194).

Another study undertaken by Dickerson, Fabre and Bayliss (1986) of Canberra poker machine players showed that most people (61 per cent) played the poker machines for entertainment and to be sociable, with 38 per cent of people playing to win money. Only a small percentage played to forget their troubles (6 percent), for something to do (10 percent), and 5 percent played for excitement (cited in Lynch 1990:194).⁷

Conclusion

The attraction of gambling, especially poker machine gambling, is that it is an activity where people feel extremes of emotions, from excitement at a win, to despair at a loss. They play in the “hope” to “win” money, some play with the hope of getting themselves away from the mundane life of work or domestic responsibilities and into another space where they can relax, enjoying life at last. There is a feeling of excitement within the environment of the

⁷ These are psychological explanations for poker machine gambling and overlook the class and cultural contexts of poker machine players and the social and economic context within which such gambling occurs (Lynch 1990:194).

Casino or gambling venue, because of the mixture of different sounds and the conversations of people (Caldwell 1972b:122f, cited in Lynch 1990:194). For other people winning is not important, it is the social interaction they enjoy and the pleasure at being able to play a game of "chance" where they do not know at each push of the button or pull of the handle, what the machine will give them.

For some the action of gambling is a chance to present to oneself and others a desired image or identity. Goffman believes that:

"...gambling provides an arena for the display of character...gambling allows for the self-presentation of prestige and competence based on something as random as a favourable outcome or simply displaying appropriate expressive behaviours. Further, because negative outcomes can be easily justified or discounted, gambling as an arena for self-presentation is almost a sure bet" (cited in Holtgraves 1988:89).

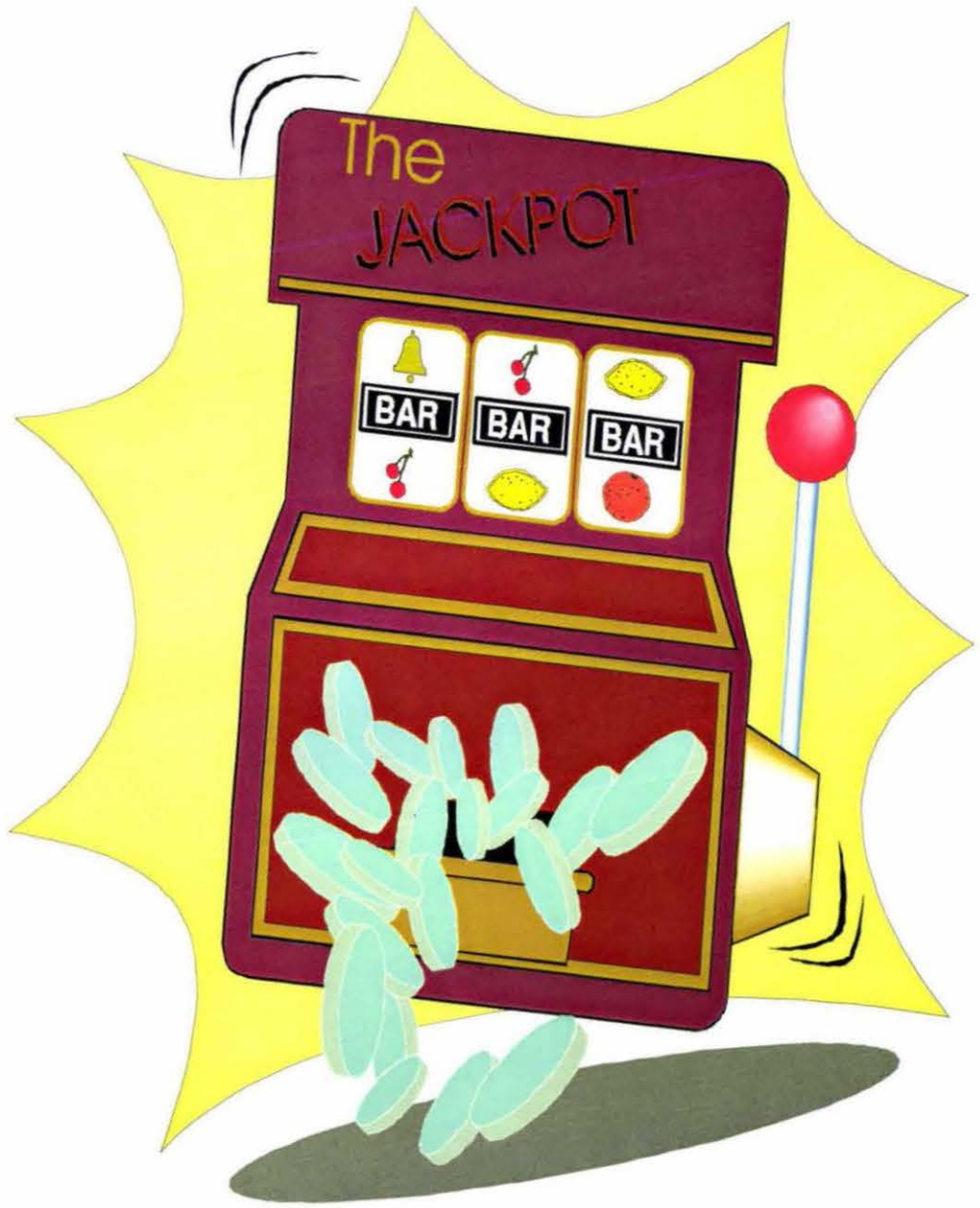
Self-presentation is not the only reason why people gamble but it certainly plays a role in the attraction people have to gambling. A better understanding of the way people present the "self" to themselves and "others" it may contribute to furthering understanding of why and how people gamble (Holtgraves 1988:89).

Gambling allows for people to operate their cognitive-emotional states involving the self⁸. The gambler can experience a temporary release from reality and transport the self into a world of play and fantasy until they are brought back to reality when their money runs out. Within this fantasy the gambler can do, act, feel and think without inhibitions and indulge themselves in emotional pleasures or pain. Gambling is likened to a ritual with each game played to rules but each is still fluid to allow for variations, with the uncertainty and risk involved in gambling contributing to the emotional states experienced by the individual (Kusyszyn 1984:135-136).

⁸ These are pride, courage, self-esteem, self-blame and self-remonstrance. Gamblers can experience the positive emotions of enthusiasm, joy, euphoria and excitement along with the negative ones such as anxiety, fear, disappointment, frustration, sorrow regret and despair (Kusyszyn 1984:135-136).

D.B. Cornish (1978), cited in Dickerson (1996:153), has provided a two stage theoretical model to explain gambling which supports one of my understandings as to why people gamble. The first stage of the model has an individual experiencing dissatisfaction in their lives which leads them to attempt to seek out compensatory activities, one of which could be gambling. If the individual chooses gambling, the particular form of gambling they undertake could depend on availability, gambling behaviour of parents and friends, social class and chance events bringing the individual into contact with that particular form, with availability being the significant factor in a person's choice. The second part of the model proposes that once the form of gambling is chosen the individual learns to use that activity in a way that gives satisfaction whether by excitement, skill, entertainment or escape. The second part of the model is relative to the discussion put forward in Part B.

Part B



Chapter Four

Introducing the “Players”

“I have a friend who enjoys watching people gamble. And she can do this for hours. But what she really enjoys is watching people win. What a great lesson for all of us” (Gollehon, 1994:Quote 57).

Introduction

The women I interviewed and who will be introduced in this chapter are all, as defined by Cotte (1997:380), “recreational gamblers”. They play the poker machines purely as a leisure activity and are neither professional gamblers, nor compulsive gamblers.¹ The motives for gambling experiences are seen by Cotte (1997:380) as, “...learning and evaluating, seeking a ‘rush’, self-definition, risk-taking, cognitive self-classification, emotional self-classification, competing and communing”. These motives apply to the women I interviewed because, as well as playing the poker machines for the chance of winning money, they enjoy the socialising and “communing” aspect of taking that risk. They enjoy the excitement and therefore continually seek the “rush” associated with gambling activity. For most of the women the self-defining and self-classifying becomes clear when they state indignantly that it is “their right” to play the poker machines, and no-one is going to make them feel guilty for taking part in an activity they derive so much emotional and social pleasure from.

¹ The difference can be seen in defining professional gamblers as people who believe they are skilful enough to win money and live off their winnings. Compulsive gamblers may live off their gambling, but are more likely to live *for* gambling. Recreational gamblers are playing for the pleasure and experience of the activity (Cotte 1997:380-381).

Tomás Martínez (1983:54-64) offers a phenomenological understanding of how the self is transformed while gambling, which he relates to the conscious moods of compulsive gamblers. Kusyszyn (1984:137) describes these five different moods which emerge during participation in gambling as: “risk taking, here and now, fantasy, euphoria and mysticism”. The first mood is induced when the gambler prepares to take a risk, and finds the experience pleasurable. This facilitates the player to move onto the second mood whereby the player becomes so engrossed with their present situation that thoughts of the past and future cease to exist, they are experiencing what is happening in the here and now (Kusyszyn 1984:137; Martínez 1976, 1983:55-58).

As a player becomes more deeply involved with the experience, they move into the “fantasy” mood, which generates dreams of what will happen to the player’s life, for example, when they win that elusive jackpot. The player may conjure up a surreal image of their “self”, fantasise about their life after they win the jackpot (Kusyszyn 1984:138; Martínez 1976, 1983:58-60). If the fantasy becomes a reality then the fourth mood will begin, that of euphoria (Martínez 1983:60-62). Maslow determines the euphoria experience as “...the moment when the subject experiences most of his identity, where the real self is closest at hand” (cited in Kusyszyn 1984:138; Martínez 1976, 1983:61).

The fifth mood of mysticism and involvement in ritualistic activities enters into the gambling experiences (Martínez 1976, 1983:62-64). According to Kusyszyn (1984:138) “sacred rituals dramatise identity. With identity, money, and good feelings in the balance, the gambler becomes very serious about the enterprise and shifts into a mystic state”. The move into the mystic state can be described as communicating with forces greater than the self. Although this is not part of the gambling experience for a lot of players, it certainly was one common to four of the eight women I interviewed, and is an aspect of gambling I have experienced also.²

² If a gambler continues playing in order to experience these pleasurable moods, there is the risk of gambling beyond their means, in turn leading to a possibility of pathological gambling. When a player loses this put them into another mood, which is one of possible pain and suffering and this Kusyszyn

From the women I interviewed, whom I introduce below, it is possible to see these moods existing in various forms in their gambling experiences. In relation to the experiences of these women, I would apply the over-arching theme of “escape” to the moods listed above by Martinez (1976, 1983), with the women all playing the poker machines as a means of escaping their normal reality for a short period of time. Poker machine playing as an escape, particularly from “loneliness”, will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

Caillois (1962) has argued that “play” is at the centre of human culture, providing a formal explanation of the importance of games of chance in a contemporary society, but readers are still left wondering why people play them (cited in Reith 1999:4). This is one of the questions I asked women, endeavouring to ascertain through a series of “oral conversations” (Clandinin and Connelly 1994:421-422)³ the different types of emotion felt by the women players throughout the different phases of the play ritual.

I have chosen to introduce the women I interviewed in the following way to allow each woman to have a voice and display, if only briefly, her unique experiences of playing the poker machines. Each woman I interviewed had a story to tell of her individual experience, relating to luck, winning, and her philosophy of gambling, or life.

(1984:138) describes “...as the mythical pinch that awakens him or her from the dream-like existence”. It is unknown how valid these moods are and further research is needed but it is envisaged that if these moods are found to be valid, it would allow for a new method of treatment of gambling and other addictions (Kusyszyn 1984:138).

³ Clandinin and Connelly (1994:421-422) have defined oral conversations as a method of interviewing which allows for more equality between participant and researcher. A conversation involves listening and responding, which will allow for the researcher to respond to answers and direct further questions from these responses. The in-depth probing in a conversation is usually done in a situation of mutual trust, listening and caring for the experience as described by the participant (Clandinin & Connelly 1994). Bearing this in mind I embarked on my interviews and the following synopses are an introduction to the women who gave up their time to speak with me.

Chris

Chris is a married woman in her early 40's and works full time. Chris enjoys many forms of gambling as well as the poker machines, but says she is not a big gambler. She enjoys the pokies because "...you can get a bit of entertainment for about half an hour for \$20..." which she believes you would not get if you played table games at the Casino.

The attraction of the poker machines to Chris is that they provide a form of relaxation. If she gets stressed at work, by calling into a place where there are pokies and playing them for a while, she feels as if she has relaxed, it winds her down after the day. The Club that Chris belongs to is an enjoyable place to go because she has become friends with some of the other women and describes it as "*a little family*". If Chris just wants to play the machines and not socialise, she will go somewhere else and play where she does not have to interact. Chris does not believe there is any interaction at the Auckland Sky City Casino; it is not the place to go if you want to socialise.

Chris has only recently begun playing the poker machines and does not know how she started, perhaps 12-18 months ago she began playing casually. Chris and her husband joined a Club and began to play. They then found themselves getting up at 3am to go to the Casino, and when she was working in the city she would go in early so she could go to the Casino before she went to work. Then her husband suddenly stopped playing and gets annoyed with Chris if she spends \$40 or more, so Chris plays the pokies and often does not tell her husband. She does not play the machines specifically to win money, just enjoys the excitement and anticipation of whatever might eventuate.

Chris has a mixed view on luck, but plays with the spirit of her mother and mother-in-law in mind. Chris says, "*...when I'm losing I think it's my Mum telling me off or my husband's Mum telling me off for playing, and then when I win I think it's someone who thinks it's okay to gamble.*"

Dee

Dee is in her early 50's and enjoys playing the poker machines for similar reasons to those of most of the women interviewed. Dee has some similar ideas about gambling to Chris in that Dee enjoys playing the poker machines because "...you can blob out, you don't have to think or you can think of other things...". Dee views playing the machines as a form of relaxation.

When Dee plays the poker machines she tends to go along with her feelings a lot and uses her feelings when choosing a machine to play, to judge whether the machine feels "hot" or "cold". Although Dee acknowledges the machines are set in the favour of the licence holder, she says she "gets a feeling" when the machine is ready to pay out. Also, Dee gets a feeling about when it is the right time for her to go to the Casino. If she is feeling a bit down she says, "...I'll ask myself should I go to the Casino and sometimes I get the strong feeling, no don't go. I've gone against it and gone and lost. Other times I've gone, not with any thought of winning or losing, but just going somewhere to think about something and I've come out winning".

Where other people would go for a bush-walk to think about their problems Dee goes to the Casino. Using the poker machines to assist in dealing with problems is a big part of Dee's reason for playing. Sometimes she has managed to sort the problem out, sometimes the perspective of the problem has shifted. Other times playing the poker machines has not helped in solving the problem, but Dee has enjoyed herself anyway.

Like the other women, Dee takes a certain amount of money with her to play with and sometimes goes over what she has allocated herself. Dee feels that the Casino is a place to go instead of staying in bed for the afternoon, "...there are people around you and you have the choice of being social or not social...". Even though Dee may have lost on one visit she will keep going back because there is always a chance, "...that next time you might win the \$100,000 car or the \$1 million jackpot".

Glenda

Glenda was part of a focus group and has used a pseudonym. Glenda and Sally are friends who play both the poker machines and housie with Olive and Peggy, the other two members of the focus group. Glenda is a retired woman in her mid to late 60's and enjoys playing the poker machines because it is exciting, "...because you never know what's going to happen each time you press the button". Glenda won \$600 at the Casino when it first opened and a couple of weeks later won another \$400. But she believes that such wins were a set up by the Casino to get people hooked into playing the machines, because she has not had a big win since, only \$40 or \$50.

When I asked Glenda how she felt when she won so much money, she replied that she was so excited, "...on top of the world..." and the day she won \$400 it was her birthday and she was at the Casino on her own. She said that of course she goes back again and gives it all back to the Casino so that she can try to experience that thrill of winning again. Glenda believes the Casino is an exciting place and along with the atmosphere, "...it's the gambling...", that is what Glenda enjoys. As she is going up the escalator toward the Casino she thinks to herself "...this is great!".

She also finds it interesting watching other people and tells the story of watching one Chinese woman who was playing \$45 at a time, Glenda watched her spend \$600 in a couple of minutes, finding it fascinating to watch somebody spend money at that rate. When I asked if she thought that was a waste, Glenda did not think so, believing it was all relative, that \$1,000 to the Chinese woman was probably like \$100 to her.

Glenda goes to play the poker machines for excitement and usually goes home with nothing. She says she is there to play and does not go there specifically to win, until she gets home and wishes she hadn't spent all her money or winnings!

Marlene

Marlene is a retired woman in her early 60's who told me that she enjoys gambling so much that if she had to choose between a partner and a poker machine, she would choose the poker machine! Marlene plays mostly at the Auckland Sky City Casino and often goes to Christchurch just to play at the Casino. On average she will go to the Casino twice a week but has been known to go more often, at times. Marlene says she enjoys going out to the Casino because, *"all your worries have gone... I think it is the energy around you that helps you"*.

Marlene told me a story about when her friend was dying, and it was her friend's wish to go to the Casino everyday until she died. They went every day for a month and it gave them both so much pleasure to be able to share those last few days together doing something they both enjoyed. The Casino staff and management got to know them well and even offered to scatter her friends' ashes in the Casino, instead they scattered them at the racecourse.

When Marlene does not feel well she goes to the Casino and she says the energy she receives from the people around her helps her aches and pains disappear. She also plays housie four times a week and cards, for money on occasions. But her favourite place is the Casino and she has been known to *"...sulk and carry on, thrown myself on the floor, wouldn't talk because the bills had to be paid"* and there was not enough money left to go to the Casino. The social side of the Casino is important to Marlene and she talks to, and sees a lot of lonely people, who share their troubles with her. While acknowledging that gambling really is a waste of money and that she has spent a lot of money at the Casino and other gambling games, she believes it is her choice to play the poker machines and she would not want to spend her money on anything else. Marlene could be viewed by some as a problem gambler, but because Marlene does not keep good health, she enjoys every moment of her life as she chooses. The Casino is an important part of her life, along with her large family. Often Marlene shares her gambling experiences with her family, by going to the Casino together.

Olive

Olive was in the focus group along with Glenda, Peggy and Sally. Olive is still working and so is not yet eligible for the pension. Olive does not go into the Casino very often because it costs her a lot in bus fares, but enjoys playing the poker machines when she can, at the local *Players* casino or other venues around West Auckland. But if she is in the city for another reason Olive will go into the Casino because there are *“so many machines in the Casino to choose from, even the cheaper ones...and you can wander around and see what people are doing”*. It is the excitement of playing the poker machines that keeps Olive going back.

Olive also likes the instant result that comes from playing the poker machines. A player knows immediately after the reels have stopped spinning whether they have won or lost. When discussing the probability of winning Olive says she believes that the machines are programmed to win at certain times and that the operators change the programmes periodically. The machines are for the benefit of the casino operators and will always take more money than they pay out. She acknowledges that there is no way the machine programme can be influenced by players.

When I asked Olive what sort of feelings and emotions she felt when she won or lost, she said it depended on how much. Olive justifies playing the poker machines by saying it is the *“only thing she does”*. She does not go out anywhere else, except to housie, does not smoke, or drink a lot, *“...if you can control yourself then its cheap entertainment really”*.

Olive thinks that everybody plays the poker machines with the *“hope”* of winning and if she was lucky enough to win *“the big one”* she would continue playing. Playing the machines for Olive is enjoyment, she goes to play hoping to win but realistically knows that she probably will not, but there is always the hope.

Peggy

My first oral conversation was with Peggy, who is retired and in her late 60's. She describes herself as a small gambler and finds the experience of playing the "pokies" a pleasurable one. Peggy mostly enjoys playing housie once a week and only visits the Casino on coach trips with the retirement club she belongs to or with friends. Peggy will play the poker machines at other places such as R.S.A. clubs but only when someone else will go along and play them with her. This form of play could be defined as "'social' recreational gambling" (Rosecrance 1985b, 1988a 106-21 cited in McMillen 1996:14), because Peggy will not go out of her way to play the poker machines, but will play them as a form of socialising with other women in her social and peer groups.

I asked Peggy what attracted her to the poker machines? She replied "*...it was the thought of winning a lot of money and it is interesting to do*". Peggy describes herself as a 'mean' gambler because she prefers to play the five cent machines, one line (or credit) at a time, as opposed to most machines which allow a player to play nine lines and a maximum of five credits. While Peggy gains pleasure from playing the poker machines her way, playing the machines at the maximum amount is to Peggy a waste.

When I asked Peggy how she felt when she won any money she said she was always excited about winning anything, "*...very, very, excited, even if its only a little bit, it's still exciting to think you won*". On losing, Peggy is philosophical because she goes to play the pokies prepared to lose. When she goes to the Casino she will spend \$20 and once that has gone she stops playing, usually. Peggy gets a lot of pleasure from playing the poker machines, does not see her way of playing as a waste because it is a pastime to be enjoyed and there is the chance that she might win some money.

Sally

Sally has used a pseudonym and is another member of the focus group. Sally also finds playing the poker machines exciting, and one attraction is that she believes that it does not cost as much to play the pokies as it would on the tables playing games such as Roulette. Like Olive, Sally believes that the poker machines are programmed and that each day the operators have one game, whereby all the machines that play that particular game, are programmed to win. Sally also likes playing the poker machines at the Auckland Sky City Casino and Players, along with Glenda and Olive. Sally and Glenda spend a lot of time playing together, they often have time to spare after housie and will play the machines at Players until it is time for their bus to arrive.

Sally really enjoys going to the Casino, *"It's the atmosphere...you can have a meal there, it's an exciting place"*. Although Sally is sure that a player has to play big to win big, she does not go to the Casino only for the purpose of winning, she also goes to enjoy herself. Often Sally does not have much money to take to the Casino to play with, and if she has a win she tries to take it home, putting her winnings in another compartment of her purse. But she has been known to dip into that compartment!

By going to the Auckland Sky City Casino Sally says she feels safe, *"It's somewhere you can go on your own and be safe...there are not many places a woman can go on her own and feel safe"*. The Casino can be a lonely place also, sometimes other people do not want to speak, but Sally does not mind this, there are still people around for company, even if they do not speak. Sally agreed with Glenda that she would much prefer to be at the Casino on a wet day than sitting at home feeling lonely.

I asked Sally what she would do if she were unable to play the poker machines for one reason or another. She said that she would not miss them, she would probably go and buy some clothes instead.

Val

Val is in her early 60's and recently lost her husband. She finds the Casino is somewhere she can go and forget about the loss for a while. She found she was going to the Casino more after her husband died, although they did go together when he was alive. Val describes the Casino as "*...somewhere that you can go and lose yourself, you don't have to speak to anybody, you can just sit there and watch the things flying around...you can speak to the person next to you... but you don't have to if you don't want to*".

Val is also a recreational gambler, because she does not play very often and because she does not enjoy losing money, she does not spend a lot either. Although Val is not a big gambler she does enjoy it, especially the pokie machines. Val says, "*...I don't know what it is about the pokie machines, but something really gets you... you get that buzz...everything is flashing and all the machines are going and you just can't wait to put that \$2 in.*".

While at the Casino Val has met a lot of other women and she believes that they are there because they are lonely. Val believes women, herself included, enjoy the company of other people and the excitement of the environment is what makes the Casino a popular place. Also, Val believes the Casino is safe for a woman on her own and there is the choice of sitting alone and losing yourself in your thoughts, or making conversation with other women, either way there is no feeling of loneliness.

Although Val admits that she does get hooked once she is in the Casino, she is able to walk away at the end of the day and look forward to the next time she can visit. Once in the Casino, Val says she doesn't stop for coffee or lunch, she just keeps playing and believes that it is her choice to play the poker machines. It is also the one-on-one relationship with the machine that Val likes, allowing her to do as she pleases. Val thinks that most women go to the Casino for the same reasons she does, that is "*...it's just an escape thing and enjoyment...the buzz when you get there...better than sitting at home staring at four walls*".

Conclusion

The women I have interviewed all see poker machine gambling as a positive, recreational and social experience. Val indicated that while she got “hooked” on the machines during her visit to the Casino, she was able to walk away, but could see how easy it would be for other women to get hooked and keep on playing. Some of the women I interviewed saw playing the poker machine as a one-on-one experience, and found being in control of their playing empowering, because there is always someone or something controlling their lives in areas outside of the Casino. This is a paradox because in fact none of the women can control the poker machine because it is programmed, but the women who feel empowered do so because it is an interaction with a machine, not another human being.

Walker (1988) argues that older people play the poker machines not for the hope of winning, nor the excitement, but because it is a legitimate way for them to spend time with their peers. This is more so for women, who tend to live longer than men and are often left alone; with the children having left home they turn to their friends for company and support. He goes on to argue that often the attention of the woman appears to be on the machine, but in fact it is the conversations that are more important than what is happening with the machine (cited in Walker 1992:71). This is an important part of poker machine playing for a number of the women I interviewed. Marlene said that the Casino and other players gave her “positive energy”, and she was able to overcome the health problems she was experiencing at the time just by being in the Casino environment and surrounding herself with positive energy and participating in an activity she enjoys. Val also found an enjoyable part of playing the poker machines was talking to other women players.

During the gathering of data from my participants it intrigued me to discover that many women see poker machine playing as a ritual and believe that people in the spirit world aid them in their gambling. Dee and Marlene felt that the machine could be manipulated by the transference of energy, also

Dee and Chris have been known to ask for guidance from people in spirit. When I asked Chris about lucky charms she said she does not have any. However she does wear her mother's and husband's mother's bracelet, which she believes sometimes helps her to win and if she loses on the machines, she thinks they do not approve of her gambling. Clearly for Chris this bracelet is a lucky charm.

From these conversations it has become apparent that feelings of luck play a big part in playing of the machines, with most participants believing luck to be a mysterious unexplainable phenomenon. Some thought luck was connected with intuition, because when they chose a machine to play they would walk around until a machine "felt right" or felt like the "lucky one". Most connected luck with their feelings. Olive does not believe there is anything that influences the poker machines such as moods, energy transference or lucky charms to help in winning. She believes it is just, *"pure luck, if it happens and if you're luck is in, then you will win, no matter what you are thinking, that's the only way I can put it. It really is pure luck,"* Olive said.

Most of the women I interviewed had some sort of "hope" for the big jackpot but that was not Peggy's reason for playing. She simply derives pleasure from playing the pokies, sets herself a limit of how much to spend and is prepared to lose it, but if she has a win, then it is a bonus. For Sally, there is a hope of winning when she plays but it is more the excitement of playing *"...not knowing whether you are going to win or not...it is the thrill of winning...a win, not a big one, just anything"*. Each time Sally plays she said she goes, not with the expectation of winning, but for the pleasure and enjoyment of going out and playing the machines.

All the members of this focus group described themselves as small gamblers as they only take around \$20 each to play with and generally displayed control by not going over their budgeted amounts. They also discussed the fact that other people could become problem gamblers, but not them possibly because they only gambled small amounts. As all these women

are retired except Olive who is near retirement, they are on fixed limited incomes and are aware of this fact. Dee and Marlene are, at times, bigger gamblers than those in the focus group, but as discussed earlier, in my view, are not problem gamblers. Chris and Val are not problem gamblers either, but may possibly spend more money than the women in the focus group. However, they all appear to enjoy playing the poker machines, not so much for money but for the excitement of the unknown: there may be a winning combination at the next turn of the reels. Marlene says that gambling really is a waste of money, but it is how she enjoys "wasting" her money. She says that she is a gambler and enjoys it because for a short time, all her worries are gone. Marlene feels that it is the energy around her that helps her to put aside her worries, and she says, "*...they are still going to be there when you come back. But at that moment you are free from those things...*". Her grandchildren have nicknamed her "Mrs Casino" because of the amount of time she spends there.

Herbert A. Bloch (1951) regards gambling as an escape from routine and the characteristics of contemporary industrial life. "Taking a chance" is pleasurable because it destroys the routine of the everyday world (Caldwell 1974:18). Gambling to escape routine and reality was the case for Chris, Dee and Val specifically; the other women did not stipulate whether they played to escape. Gambling is a way for a person to participate in a "ritual" which is separate from work, home or other events in that person's life, and it lets them take a "chance" on winning money. This correlates with the belief of my friend who saw gambling as a chance for a person to win at a time of loss or feeling of loss. He believed that it is not the money that is so important, it is the excitement of winning and the chance to feel like a winner.

Chapter Five

A gambling woman's epistemology

"If I go, with the Casino as the number one priority, "what will I do today?". Casino is number one priority, can't wait to get there. Inner voice saying, "no, don't think you should go today Dee, not a good day to go". Oh too bad! I am going, that's normally the day I lose. The other days...it's a bit of fun and its filling in two hours...so it's a way of filling in time, that's when the luck comes in because I am not going there with any hope in mind" (Dee).

Introduction

The above quotation from my interview with Dee is evidence of the epistemologies about poker machine playing amongst the eight women I interviewed. The women had different ways of knowing which machine was right to play, whether the machine was "hot", "cold" or "hungry". According to Caldwell (1974:25) players attribute the machine with a physical state of being "hot", "cold" or "hungry" because they are powerless to affect the outcome. By applying human characteristics to the machine the player may feel more in control, and better justify their decision of whether or not to keep playing. Some women, such as Dee, had feelings about when it was the right day to go to the Casino, or whether they should simply stay home. Many women believed this feeling was their intuition, a small voice in their head giving them advice if they were unsure about whether or not they should go and play the poker machines, or visit the Casino. Dee believes that on the days she is unlucky at the Casino, her intuition had told her not to go, but she has gone anyway ignoring advice from within herself.

Many of the women treated the poker machine as if it were anthropomorphic, performing rituals before, during and after play. Some women rubbed the machine and spoke to the machine as if it were alive and able to respond to their requests, generally for a win. Dee, Chris, Val and in some instances Marlene, are especially prone to treating the machine as if it were alive, apparently believing that a transference of energy, either from their body or mind, could manipulate the programme of the machine. Dee asks the machine to "*share its energy*" with her before she begins playing, and describes her ritual as "*...I thank it for every time it spits out coins and rub it, give it a little rub. On the sides, cause I normally sit there with one hand holding the side of the machine*" (Dee). The ritualistic behaviour described by these women may be compared to the magical features Malinowski described in Trobriand rituals. In particular the features of, "*...dramatic expression of emotion, the essence of the magical act...use of objects and substances which were 'impregnated' with the recited words, and to which through a 'rubbing effect' were transferred certain potencies. The techniques by which the power of the spell is transferred to the charmed object...*" (Tambiah 1990:73-74).

By holding these beliefs the women are rejecting the law of probability, they are ignoring the fact that the poker machines are programmed and that they logically are unable to be controlled by anything other than the programmer of the machines at the gambling venue. They play hoping to influence a game of pure chance by holding magical and quasi-religious beliefs about luck and the forces of fate and destiny (Bolen 1976:8). There is an "illusion of control" (Langer 1975, cited in Reith 1999:156) where gamblers believe they can influence the outcome of a game of chance by their own efforts. They attribute a win to their skill and effort and a loss to factors beyond their control such as a distraction or bad luck (Reith 1999:156-157).

Haywood et al. (1989:147) describes a popular image of the poker machine player as "that of the obsessive loner, compulsively feeding his earnings to an insatiable bandit". But their research showed that most regular

players of the poker machines did so in the company of friends or relatives, viewing the play as a “social leisure experience” and not merely a transaction of money (Haywood et al. (1989:147). According to Haywood et al. (1989:147-148) there is a need to focus on more than what is seen on the surface in regard to gambling. There is a need to see it as a game of chance, along with the physical and symbolic environment and how much social interaction is encouraged. Each woman will play the game of chance but each has a different world-view, with some seeing symbolism and employing ritual, while others see the machines as functional objects enabling them to play the game, with no symbolic meaning to either the machine or the physical environment.

Belief in the magic of luck

Luck to Dee is, as she states, “*probably her intuition*”. Dee was not sure whether intuition and luck were one and the same or two different things. She half believes in luck and half does not. She told me the story of how one day, about 15 years ago she went to the races and at that stage followed a particular jockey.

“And I had such a strong feeling this particular Saturday that this jockey was going to ride this particular horse...it was an Italian sounding name. I was so positive, that’s all I was going to put my money on, this particular horse because it was definitely going to win. The race prior I had backed a horse and I had got a win, a collect off it, and it was in dollars and cents...and when I was counting through the change...instead of a 20 cent piece was a Lira piece and to me that was just the final, yes that Italian sounding horse is definitely going to win... and the horse won. So that’s what I say is that feeling luck or that intuition that this horse, there was no way, nobody could have told me it wasn’t going to win. I knew that the damn thing would win and getting that Lira coin just confirmed, it was confirmation that you’re right. I mean you get a lot of Pacific coins or Australian coins in our money but very rarely get a Lira piece...So is that luck or intuition, or do I call my intuition luck, or is that my intuition was right so I was lucky?” (Dee).

Chris also believes in luck, but more importantly she thinks about people who are not with her any more and wonders whether they are watching her playing, who’s approving and who’s not. In her mind she talks to her mother and says, “...it’s okay Mum I only want to spend another \$20, I’ll take it out

when you get me up to \$100,... that sort of thing". Chris thinks that when she is losing, her Mum or her husband's Mum is telling her off for playing but when she wins she thinks someone is saying it is okay to gamble. To help her luck while playing Chris wears her mother and husband's mother's bracelets. Chris says, "*...I sometimes think they are with me, and I think sometimes I lose because they don't like me gambling and if I'm not wearing them, sometimes I think they are not seeing me...*".

Val says that she often feels luckier if she stands in front of the machine rather than sits, especially if the machine is paying out. Other times she feels lucky and more relaxed sitting. It depends how she starts off playing, sitting or standing, and "*...if I start off and I am standing, if I just walk past a machine and think oh yeh, I'll pop some in there and it wins I stay standing up*"(Val). Val also does not like going in a different door at the Casino, she always likes going in through the front door. If Val goes in the other door, she thinks "*...I'm not going to win tonight, I've come in the wrong way*". When changing money, she will go to the cashier rather than to a machine and she also has her favourite poker machine game that she feels is lucky. Val also carries a little shell that is her lucky charm, it is similar to one that her mother used to carry and Val calls it a bean. Her mother always told her that if you keep a bean in your purse you would not go short of money. So Val does, and says, "*...if I lost it I would be mortified I think, because its just something that I think, oh as long as I've got that I won't run out of money*".

Reith (1999:168) discusses "lucky people" and states that there is a belief among gamblers that certain people are lucky. These may be people who have already won, and although it is believed that physical touch can pass on the luck, the mere presence of a lucky person is enough for people to believe that luck can be transmitted from one person to another. Marlene has a similar belief that if she is at the Casino "*...and a Chinese guy bumps into you, you're supposed to have a lot of luck...I believe that if people are good you will win, but if there are negative people around you, you won't win*". Marlene had an experience of the

luck of a Chinese man: "...one Chinese guy was sitting next to me...he said "I have lost \$2,000 down the tables, I'm going to go away". He...touched me and he said, "you are going to win as soon as I walk away" and that's exactly what happened. I am a great believer in that".

Luck to members of the focus group, Glenda, Sally, Olive and Peggy was generally a feeling, other than that difficult to describe. Olive said, "...like most of us comment that if your luck is in, it's in, but not being influenced by anything else outside of it...pure luck". Peggy thought it was more of a feeling, "You feel you are going to win today, it's a bit like housie, sometimes you...think I'm going to win today and other times...you think I don't think I'm going to win today and you usually don't when you're like that. Glenda also thought that luck was a feeling, but Sally and Olive said that they have never felt as though they were going to win, but both have had wins at the Casino. Olive and Glenda concluded their discussion about luck with Olive saying that, "...as far as I am concerned luck is just pure luck, if it happens and if you're luck is in, they you will win, no matter what you are thinking, that's the only way I can put it. It really is pure luck". To Glenda luck was, "if you happen to be at the right machine at the right time".

Gambling according to Reith (1999:174) involves a dualism and the world-view of gamblers is complex. Gamblers are in one instance absorbed in the magical power of luck, which they often believe is a feeling that comes from within. In the other instance they are concerned with an external power which lies outside of the self and determines the course of the game. The dualism for the women I interviewed and myself is that on the one hand we have strong feelings in our ability to manipulate the machine, through rituals of energy transference, or talking to the machine. On the other hand, however, we know that the machine is programmed and plays in favour of the Casino or gaming venue. But as is common among poker machine players, it is "hope" that keeps you going back for another try. The hope that maybe this time you can manipulate the machine into letting you win, or the hope that your intuitive feelings have been correct and you have chosen the winning machine. More

important is the hope to experience feelings of excitement, the thrill of a win, or sharing in someone else's excitement.

Time, space and money, the gambler's illusion

When gamblers enter the gambling venue they often become oblivious to time. As Reith (1999:130) describes it, they "...temporarily step out of the real world, leaving their everyday concerns and routines behind...While immersed in a game, gamblers tend to shut out the world around them...narrowing their field of attention to concentrate on the action immediately in front of them". For a large proportion of gamblers time is not important. They enter a venue such as the Casino where there are no clocks and the windows are shaded so it is difficult to distinguish between night and day. For many people, this acts as a release from the pressures of time in the outside world. Val becomes oblivious to time, when she is in the Casino, she says, *"I think it's just the fact that you have no idea of time or no idea of what is happening outside. You can just lose yourself..."*.

For many, the gambling experience becomes more important than time. They get caught up in the excitement of the action around them and their own action, they keep playing on and on, unaware of passing time. This experience Caillois (1962:23, 78) calls *"ilinx"* or vertigo, which is described as an attempt to destroy the stability of perception (cited in Herman 1976:210; Martinez 1983:123; Reith 1999:131). Also with *ilinx* there is a submission of the mind, whereby players feel as though they have become dominated by a mysterious power (Caillois 1962:23, 78). While playing the poker machines at the Casino I have had similar experiences to those described by Caillois. The feeling of *ilinx* is difficult to describe because it is essentially like having entered another world. A player becomes fixated with the screen and time ceases to be meaningful, more so if you are winning. If you are losing, of course, and the money you have allocated yourself has gone, you become aware of the time, because you are no longer caught up in the "dream state", as described by Reith (1999:130). "The 'otherness' of the play world lends to it the quality of an

adventure, while the strangeness of the stimuli inside contributes to the dream-like nature of the experience within it" (Reith 1999:130).

The experience of the illusion of timelessness, for some of the women I interviewed, began as soon as they walked through the doors of the Casino. Val, says that once she gets into the Casino, *"I never really stop, I mean once I am in there I get hooked and I don't stop for coffee or lunch, you know lunchtime has come and gone and I think gosh I am still sitting here"*. Marlene also finds that once she has entered the Casino time is irrelevant, she is focused on the gambling. She has been known to stay at the Casino until the early hours of the morning, because of the positive feelings and energy she gains from the people around her at the Casino and because she has lost track of time.

Many of the women I interviewed have favourite poker machines and feel they have more luck at certain venues, or spaces in the Casino and at certain machines and/or seats at the Casino. Reith (1999:170) describes how these seats or places carry significance for the gambler. The seat or place is not deemed to be interchangeable with another one similar to it, it is unique and possesses luck, and some gamblers become agitated if they cannot have their lucky seat or machine. I have experienced this on occasions at the Casino; people wanting my machine will come back again and again, or they will sit and wait until I have finished playing.

According to Reith (1999:143) *"the experience of space is inextricably linked with the experience of time...in games of chance, the perception of space undergoes a distortion similar to that of time...gamblers are oblivious to the passage of time, to their surroundings and even to themselves"*. This could be applied to Marlene, who goes to the Casino when she is not feeling well. She believes the space of the Casino provides her with positive energy, along with the exciting atmosphere of the space, she can play the poker machines for as long as her money lasts. She becomes oblivious to her ill *"self"* because once she is in the Casino her aches and pains disappear. It was the same for her friend who was dying of cancer. They went to the Casino everyday, it was

Marlene's friend's dying wish. They would go to the Casino about 9.30am and play for as long as they could. Marlene explains that, *"when you are not well and you've got a bit of money, go to the Casino because my friend always said she's always in pain but when she goes to the Casino the pain is forgotten"*. This suggests that for a woman to forget her pain, she has become so engrossed in playing and the social interaction, that she has become oblivious to the time, space and her "self".

Money is another aspect of gambling that takes on a new significance when it is being used for gambling. Many of the women give examples of people they have seen at the Casino gambling away thousands of dollars in just a few minutes. While most of the women I interviewed take their money seriously, because most are on a pension, benefit or low incomes, others at the Casino did not worry about the money they spent. Most of my participants played the five cent machines and Dee generally played the \$1 machines. Peggy describes herself as a "mean gambler", she plays the five cents machines and only one line, which means she spends five cents at a time. She takes \$20 to the Casino and once she has spent that, stops playing. If Peggy won say \$20 or \$30, she would spend half of that and play some more. Glenda has had two big wins at the Casino, \$600 and \$400 and while she took them away, she said she still goes back to try and do it again. So far she has only won about \$40 or \$50. Olive has won \$150 but that is the most she has ever won. Dee has won a few jackpots of around \$700 and Chris the same, at the Casino or local pub.

Glenda tells the story of watching a Chinese woman playing a \$1 machine at the Casino and losing \$600 in a few minutes. *"...I watched one Chinese lady and she had over 3,000 credits on a dollar machine (\$3,000) and she was playing 45 credits at a time, so she was playing \$45 a pop...she lost \$600 in just a couple of minutes. That was fascinating to watch somebody spend money like that...I just thought its all relative you see, the amount of money she has to play with to what we have to play with. It was nothing to her"*. Marlene also tells a similar story

when she watched an Asian man lose \$10,000, *"I was behind him and I was going 'oh! \$10,000' and he turned around and he said to me 'it's nothing, that's nothing'"*.

When Marlene has a win she says she knows that really she should take it home, but does not. She says, *"Well you're hoping aren't you...you are hoping that you are going to win it back...I've won \$300-\$400 there and spent the whole lot and then I think why did I do it, you see, why? But you do it..."*. Marlene has had her photo on the wall at the Casino in the Winners Corner, after she won \$1,800. Marlene probably sums up nicely how money takes on a new value when it is being used for gambling, *"Isn't it silly, we go 'want to go to the pictures'"*. *"'Oh no, it's too dear'" and yet we take hundreds of dollars to the Casino"*.

Many people, including some of the women I interviewed, see playing the poker machines as a waste of money, but they state that it is the way they choose to waste their money. Marlene probably summarises the view of some gamblers in relation to money, by explaining that she believes gambling is a waste of money, at the Casino and in general. She acknowledges that there are children and families suffering because of it, but believes no-one is forcing anyone else to gamble; it is their choice. It is also her choice to play the poker machines, and she wouldn't want to spend her money on anything else.¹

From my research, it is apparent that to some, time, space and money take on a new value where gambling is concerned. They play with good intentions of keeping to a limit, but often go over it and also play away their winnings. It is the excitement of the space in which they are playing that appears to make time irrelevant. To some it is only time and space that become

¹ While there is an assumption, generally from non-gamblers that gamblers play to win money, this is not always the reason. Gamblers in general simply have a desire to experience the excitement of the game they are playing (as discussed in Chapter Six), in this instance the poker machines, with the main goal being to win enough money to allow for the continuation of play (Reith 1999:145). Women like Marlene who may win \$300 confirm this desire, when instead of going home, she will continue playing, because winning has given her more time to feel the thrill of playing. There are exceptions to the rule, when it comes to gamblers playing for excitement rather than money and that is for professional gamblers, who earn their living from gambling and people who cheat. A person will cheat in order to gain a profit and cheating is viewed by Caillois (1962) "as a 'perversion of the spirit of chance'" (cited in Reith 1999:189). By cheating a gambler attempts to take away the risk and the excitement of the unknown. Cheating is impossible on the poker machines.

unimportant, while the gambling money remains real. For women like Peggy, Olive, Glenda and Sally, money is important because of their fixed incomes and their perception of it being a waste to gamble large sums of money. Marlene also is on a fixed income but is more liberal with her money and winnings, because she is, as she admits, *"a gambler"* and gets so much positive energy from the space and people in the Casino.

According to Haywood et al. (1989:148) the older a person is the closer they are to the Protestant work ethic of thriftiness and so would not gamble heavily. This is especially applicable to the four women of the focus group being discussed, Peggy, Olive, Glenda and Sally as they have grown up in times of war and so suffered hardship. In the post-war period they have worked hard and raised families and appear to be very aware of how they spend their money. They are aware also that they are at an age where it is impossible to get a high-income job to replace the money they spend and so are more frugal in some areas. Olive sums up the view of the focus group, that, *"...if you can control yourself then it's cheap entertainment really"*.

Anthropomorphism of poker machines

According to Tylor (1871) the concept of animism indicates a belief that all natural phenomena are endowed with spiritual beings, and this was the basis of the origin of religion (Seymour-Smith 1986:12). Anthropomorphism is the attributing of human characteristics to non-human phenomena (Guthrie 1993; Reith 1999; Scoble 1994; Seymour-Smith 1986:12-13) and this is a concept which may be usefully applied to the non-human phenomenon of a poker machine.

Reith (1999:165) states that *"...slot machines are notoriously subject to the most extreme forms of animistic - and even anthropomorphic - belief, as is apparent in the attribution of human characteristics to them"*. Hersant (1988:10) states that *"...they [slot machines] assume human traits, like the greedy mouth, the pot belly and the sphincter from which spills a diarrhoea of*

coins" (cited in Reith 1999:165; Walker 1992:68). Players talk to their machines, claim the machine knows what they are thinking, develop a rapport with the machine, also believe it to have an aura and guard it jealously from other players (Reith 1999:165).

From my participant-observation it is clear that there are many people who perceive the poker machine as human-like and can hear what they are saying to it. The poker machines "answer" the players, by initially wishing the player "good luck" before they begin. Following a win, the machines gives messages to them, saying things like "you're a winner", "well done", or "let me see you do that again", all messages that indicate the machine is in a dialogue with the player. A designer of electrical appliances states that "products must deliver emotion..." (Brown 1989, cited in Guthrie 1993:133) with the poker machines a good example of this. The messages on the screen are positive, encouraging the player to keep playing in the hope of winning and it is this positive wording that helps make the player feel good about themselves and their playing. While the women I interviewed had mixed feelings about treating the machine as anthropomorphic, some women like Dee, Chris and Val did admit to having at times, done such things in the hope of attempting to control the outcome of the spin.

Dee is not sure whether she talks to the machine as if it were alive. She says, *"I don't know whether I talk to it as if it was alive, just sort of saying would it share its energy with me. I don't get any particular feeling of yes/no, its just me asking can I share its energy and sit down. And when it starts to play I thank it for everytime it spits out coins and rub it, give it a little rub. On the sides, cause I normally sit there with one hand holding the side of the machine and so I always give it a rub and say thank you"*. By asking to share energy Dee is assuming that both the machine and herself have energy to share. She holds the machine and thanks it for what it gave to her and this would seem to confirm the attribution of human characteristics, and Dee's belief that non-human phenomena can hold energy. Although Dee does believe that the machines are pre-set, she uses her intuition

and feelings in an attempt to pick the machine that is “hot”. Dee attributes feelings of “hot” and “cold” to the machines as to whether they are ready to pay-out (hot) or have just paid out (cold), in which case a player will have to wait until the next pre-set time for the jackpot to go off. Usually a machine that is cold is described as being “hungry” because it will continue to take all your money to “fill it up” until it is ready to “spit out” the coins again. Even these terms relating to the machine can be seen as human characteristics, because if a person is cold they are often also hungry, they need food to keep their energy levels up and feel hot or warm again.

Marlene talks to the machine and rather than rubbing she places her hands on it, because her belief is that by rubbing, you are actually rubbing the luck off. Marlene says, *“I often talk to it and I know when I am going to win because me stomach goes funny...”*. When a friend told Marlene not to rub the screen, instead just place her hands on it, Marlene replied, *“Oh, sorry machine”*, and when she realised she was talking to the machine she said, *“you think god, if people are looking at you”*. However Marlene still interacts with the machine and says, *“...I always pat the machine and tell it how marvellous it is, what a wonderful machine it is, the best machine here, dah deh dah. Always put my hands on it...it’s the energy of yourself on the machine. That’s just me, lots of people do lots of things”*.

Val sometimes tries different things to bring her luck, such as pulling the handle on the machines that still have handles. Also, in an endeavour to win, Val says, *“Sometimes you feel a bit silly and think I’ll talk to it, or I’ll stroke it or I’ll do something...talk to it and say please be kind”*.

Chris combines talking to the machine with talking to her mother in spirit. She says, *“In my mind, without saying it out aloud, I think come on you bastard do something. Come on Mum its alright, I only want to spend another \$20, I’ll take it all out when you get me up to \$100, you know that sort of thing”*.

The women I interviewed in the focus group however, did not admit to any form of anthropomorphism, as the common belief was that the machine

was programmed and no amount of luck, lucky charms or spiritual intervention was going to change the programme. However it was clear from my participant-observation and the examples above that there is a magical belief amongst some women in the power of the poker machine and its ability to share energy in an endeavour to produce a winning spin. I argue that because it could be viewed as a magical belief, many women would feel uncomfortable discussing their own experiences and ways of performing these ritualistic actions, unless they discussed it with another woman whom they knew held the same beliefs.

Anthropomorphism and luck are closely associated because by performing actions such as rubbing the machine and talking to it, there is an indication that the action is done to try and manipulate the machine to give a win. The women doing this are trying to enhance their luck and prove that magical notions of efficacy do exist. A belief in a higher power that is able to determine the play could be seen to be contributing to the gamblers' fate and destiny.

Fate and destiny of a woman gambler

Reith (1999:175) states that many gamblers attribute to a higher power the ways in which gambling games unfold, that they are predetermined in a mysterious way. This power is often referred to as "fate, destiny, fortune and sometimes God". In a quote that is in opposition to the view of the moralistic and judgmental members of society, in advising a friend to take advantage of favourable circumstances, Hoffman describes the powers of fate as:

"Fate, he said, drops hints to us as to the path along which we should seek and find our salvation. The higher power that rules over us has whispered in your ear: if you wish to acquire money and goods go and gamble, otherwise you will remain forever poor, indigent, dependent" (Hoffman 1963:222, cited in Reith 1999:176).

This description of fate could be juxtaposed with the attribution of intuition to the women's way of knowing which poker machine to play, or even

in the case of Dee, whether she should go to the Casino or not, on any given day. Also, a belief in fate could be attributed to the women like Chris, who ask for help from the spirit world to enable them to win. For many women, who do not conceive of a higher power having any influence over their play, they would juxtapose fate with luck. Olive for example states, *"...as far as I am concerned luck is just pure luck, if it happens and if you're luck is in, they you will win, no matter what you are thinking...It really is pure luck"*. Or Glenda who states, *"If you happen to be at the right machine at the right time"*. Once again an attribution of luck determines the fate of play and whether the machine pays out or not.

For Dee her fate and destiny comes from her intuition. Dee says that, *"In my experience when I have been playing the machine...if I'm on a particular machine that I feel is not going to pay out I will shift...because I feel the poker machines are set...and when a machine is ready to go, you get the feel, I get the feel that it's going to go. So in part it's unskilled, but there is also that other fact...of knowing to stay on the machine or leave it"*. Dee has also had feelings about going to the Casino, she says, *"...I'll ask myself should I go to the Casino and sometimes I get a strong feeling, no don't go. I've gone against it and gone and lost..."*.

Reith (1999:176-178), cites Devereux (1949:981) who argues that gamblers question their destiny, asking questions such as "will I win?" or "am I the lucky one?". According to Reith (1999:177) the answers to the questions are seen in the outcome of the game, "with winning a sign of approval, and losing, disapproval". This could be applied to Chris, who thinks that sometimes her fate is determined by spiritual powers. She states that, *"When I'm losing I think it's my Mum telling me off or my husband's Mum telling me off for playing and then when I win I think it's someone who thinks it's okay to gamble"*.

According to Martinez (1983:58-60) as a player becomes more deeply involved with the experience, they move into a "fantasy" mood, which is one of the five moods Martinez applies to the experience of gambling. The fantasy mood allows the player to conjure up a surreal image of their "self" and

fantasise about their life after they win the jackpot, allowing the self to have a sense of special power and control over destiny (Kusyszyn 1984:138; Martinez 1983:58). In a game of chance Reith (1999:178) argues that winning is seen as "...confirmation that the player is favoured by destiny". As Olive states, "...if your luck is in, it's in". A quote from the novel by Auster describes this luck as "the music of chance" (Reith 1999:178) and the "fantasy" mood of Martinez (1983) could be applicable to this quote also:

"Once your luck starts to roll, there's not a damn thing that can stop it. It's like the whole world suddenly falls into place. You're kind of outside your body and for the rest of the night you sit there watching yourself perform miracles. It doesn't really have anything to do with you anymore. It's out of your control...everything is in harmony....everything turns into music." (Auster 1990:137 cited in Reith 1999:178).

However when things do not turn to music, the gambler continues playing, repeats their behaviour until the desired result is achieved. This according to Reith (1999:179) is "the dynamic between fear and faith - gamblers' certainty that they are favoured alongside the simultaneous fear that they are not. The decision of the game is final". Therefore they continue to repeat the action in the face of rejection, which is unlike the behaviour of early diviners when they did not get the answer they required. According to Levy-Bruhl (1966:229) diviners who are trying to get a good omen, will repeatedly try to get the answer they want and when they do, all other omens or answers are negated (cited in Reith 1999:179). And so the gambler continues to play on, until the desired result of winning the jackpot, or winning something is attained. This is where a lot of women gamble until they are in debt and become compulsive gamblers. Marlene says she tends to put back her winnings. I asked her why, was it to win more? She said, "*Well you're hoping aren't you, you hope that you go to another machine and you are hoping that you are going to win it back...*" (Marlene).

Even if the gambler has a win, they are still uncertain about whether or not they will win again, but even with this uncertainty the gambler will test the power of destiny and continue playing, in the hope they will win again. Freud

(1984:275-338) argues that people will repeat activities in order to master the situation (cited in Reith 1999:180). By repeating the ritual of gambling Reith (1999:180) argues that the gambler can see "the creation of meaning and order out of the random operation of pure chance". This allows gamblers to see magical and religious beliefs such as luck, fate and destiny as aspects of an entire worldview and an order of knowledge to make sense of the gambling environment. This magical-religious worldview according to Reith (1999:180-181): "...empowers gamblers in a situation in which they have no real influence or control; providing a means of understanding the situation, as well as a rationale for acting while in it...In the magical-religious worldview...order and harmony reign supreme: but this is an order and harmony of a *sacred*, not a 'rational' kind".

Conclusion

Two distinct beliefs are discussed here and co-related with the beliefs of the women I interviewed. Firstly, magical beliefs; Malinowski states that magic is, "...'objectively' false but that it was 'subjectively' true to the actors" (Tambiah 1990:81). This description of magic is applicable to the beliefs of some of the women I interviewed, because the women believe they each have the efficacy to manipulate the machine. Luck is what is subjectively real to the individual woman. Time, space and money take on illusory qualities also, with time and space becoming irrelevant to some women, and money appears to have a new value, or is sometimes devalued. These could be seen as magical conceptions of objective realities.

The second system of belief is the quasi-religious view that sees there being a power outside of the self, a power that has moral and metaphysical properties such as fate, destiny or even God (Reith 1999:159). This world-view can be seen as a rejection of the secular and an adoption of the sacred order of belief (Reith 1999:159). With this quasi-religious world-view in mind, it could be argued that within the gambling environment there is a combining of the sacred and profane. The extremes to which some women believe in help from the spirit world and anthropomorphize the machines could be viewed as

treating them as sacred objects. However these objects are in a profane space, that of the Casino or club where other non-sacred activities are performed.

From my participant-observation, it is quite common to see people talking to the machines and by reading people's facial expressions, one gains some idea of what people are thinking. Signs of frustration on their faces, or the continual banging on the buttons or even kicking the machine, make it possible to assume that the machine is not paying out and the person is losing, (but of course it is impossible to know exactly what their thoughts are). Rubbing the screen or the front of the machine was a frequent observation I made. There were also numerous instances where it appeared that people were talking to themselves, but were also possibly talking to the machine. The magical and quasi-religious beliefs of some women gamblers allow for emotions and feelings to be experienced with this affective dimension of gambling sometimes being viewed as a "religious experience". For some of the women I interviewed these beliefs applied to their experience while playing housie as well as when they played the poker machines.

Chapter Six

The affective dimension of gambling

“Tess of Brooklyn, New York: Do you think it’s blasphemous that I go to church every morning on a day when I go to the casino? I pray to God to give me a big win. I know some religions frown on gambling but I just love to go to Atlantic City and Connecticut to play. You see these? That’s St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes, and the other is the Sacred Heart. I put them both in the tray to give me luck. One on each side. I have a rosary and scapula in my purse. So far I’ve been pretty lucky, at least compared to my friends” (Scoble 1994:149).

Introduction

The above quotation is an example of how some women see gambling as a quasi-religious experience. For many women poker machine gambling allows them space to contemplate, gives them time to reflect on their lives and perhaps even to attempt to connect with a higher power within or outside of their “self”. Because of the lack of skill required to play the poker machines, many women apparently take the opportunity not only to “pray” for a win, but also to “pray” for a resolution to any problems that they may be facing. Some women lose themselves in the machine when they are facing a loss in their lives, using the machines as a way of escaping reality for a short time. I have done this on a number of occasions, and Val says that when playing the poker machines, *“You can just sit there and think about nothing. It definitely is for me, you know I can just sit there and lose myself totally”*. Dee also finds playing the poker machines gives her an opportunity to think through her problems, and even if she is not able to solve them, often her perspective on them has shifted and they are no longer the burden to her they initially were.

There is a sense of transcendence surrounding the phenomenon of gambling, which seems similar to a religious experience. The women gamblers I interviewed experience emotions and feelings present in people who are religious and visit church regularly. There are feelings of hope for some of the women gamblers, the hope to win and be saved from their present situation, while religious people hope for salvation and entry to an euphoric place when they have left this physical world. The ritualistic endeavours undertaken to achieve the desired result are also similar. Just as a churchgoer prays in church, the poker machine gambler, may “pray” to the machine at the gambling venue. A friend and I used to visit the Casino on a Sunday morning and jokingly referred to it as “our church”. There were many other people in the Casino at that time, also “praying” and “hoping” for that elusive release from their everyday routine.¹

For some of the women I interviewed, the emotions and feelings experienced while playing the poker machines were diverse, ranging from loneliness or guilt, to excitement and hope. Other women played the machines for relaxation. Some of the women said their reason for going to venues like the Casino was for the socialising which allowed them to avoid feelings of loneliness. They were able to experience positive emotions and a feeling of belonging to a “community” where they could be their “self” in a safe environment with like-minded people.

Gambling on poker machines and housie

Initially I viewed the two forms of gambling, poker machines and housie, dichotomously - poker machines being an activity for women of all ages and housie predominantly a pastime for retired women. Yet on closer examination there appear to be more similarities to the two games of chance

¹ It is interesting that the Auckland Sky City Casino is across the street from St Matthews-in-the-City Church, also the church I was married in. The church recently underwent a restoration and the Casino was one of the major contributors to the fund. So each time I went to the Casino I felt as though I could justify my losses for that day by saying that I was making a donation to the restoration fund of the church where my marriage was blessed.

than differences, with the venue being the one major difference. Poker machines are usually situated in a restricted area of a club or in venues such as Casinos, whereas housie is played in a hall or old cinema theatre, as was often the case. Both types of venue provide meeting places for women where they feel safe (Dixey 1987:203; Reith 1999:105). For Peggy, Olive, Glenda, Sally and Marlene, poker machine gambling is only one form of gambling they enjoy. These five women also belong to a housie group, which they attend at least once a week, and sometimes up to four times a week. Housie (or bingo as it is often called²) allows for similar experiences for these women as does playing the poker machines.

There is a similar condemnation of this activity, as there is of women who play the poker machines. According to Dixey (1987:200) playing bingo, like playing the machines, does not conform to what is seen as a useful or proper activity for women. Gambling does not fit with the traditional role of a woman, that of wife and mother. The bingo venue attracts predominantly working class women, and this is because there is no large financial commitment (Dixey 1987:201-202).

There are interesting similarities between the early days of housie in New Zealand and current activities of poker machine gambling by women, whereby parents or guardians, usually the mother, would be gambling while their children were left in cars. According to Grant (1994:139), in the 1970's there was a housie "epidemic", with small children being left for hours in cars parked outside hotels and halls while their guardian was inside playing housie. There were also older children roaming the streets causing concern for police and social services. Thus the media hype about children being left in cars

² The terms "housie" and "bingo" will be alternated throughout this chapter only, as the literature being referred to uses the term "bingo" and the women call the game "housie", but they are one and the same game. Housie is the term used in New Zealand and this game involves no real skill and is a game of chance, like the poker machines. Housie was a game of chance popular among servicemen during war time, but was banned in peacetime, but the game was still played at RSA's, lodge functions and private houses (Grant 1994:137). It was illegal in New Zealand until 1959 (Grant 1994:111). Bingo is derived from the late 19th century game of lotto and the games of tombola which was played in the navy, and housey-housey, which was played in the army (Reith 1999:104).

when Auckland's Casino first opened apparently stems from this earlier social "ill". I would suggest further that the current stigma given to women who play the poker machines, the great majority of whom are not child-abusers, has little to do with this activity. I view it as a further attempt to reinforce ideologies about the traditional roles of a woman.

However there are differences between bingo and the poker machines with both games of chance appearing to be tedious and repetitive to non-players. On the one hand players of bingo enjoy the regularity, consistency in knowing what time the games will start or finish, how much each game costs: there is an in-built routine. On the other hand with poker machine playing there is no regular routine; a woman can play the poker machines any time of the day, for any length of time, spend any amount of money; it is her choice.³

Constructing emotionality and expressing emotion

Emotionality is part of a person's day and is "...contextualized and interwoven through their thoughts and actions...people may bring their own emotionality into the world...The person's self enters and is given to the world of interaction through the processes of moral and emotional sociality...The subject's world holds emotion for him (or her)..." (Denzin 1984:277).

With this in mind, I will discuss aspects of emotionality experienced by the women I interviewed. On one hand the emotions can be viewed collectively, because they are experienced at some point by most of the women when they played the poker machines. On the other hand, the emotions are unique experiences for each individual woman, as each woman's "true feelings" are known only to her (Lutz 1986:298).

According to Shott (1979:1320), "The expression of emotion...is shaped by cultural expectations...for people generally seem to vent their emotions...in the ways

³ However there are similar emotions and feelings experienced when women play bingo or the poker machines. Also for the women who carry lucky charms, often they will take the same one to both bingo and when they play the poker machines. There is an element of uncertainty in both games, and so the women are again seeking help from a higher power, in an endeavour to influence their fate and destiny.

prescribed by their cultural norms. ...there is a social framework that modifies the actor's experience, interpretation and expression of emotion...but there is another dimension of affective experience...the construction of emotion by the actor...". I have chosen to discuss four themes because they were the most prominent issues emerging from the interview transcripts. They demonstrate how emotions can be experienced, interpreted and expressed by the actor, but shaped by expectations of cultural and social norms.

"excitement"

The peak time of the gambling experience is when excitement grips the gambler and they become oblivious to time, space and money. This is the experience Caillois (1962:23, 78) calls *ilinx*. It is this state that is responsible for marathon gambling efforts and is referred to in gambling folklore as being responsible for the invention of the sandwich. Lord Sandwich was participating in a forty-eight hour game, and so that he did not have to stop playing his game, sandwiches were brought to his table (Reith 1999:131-132). When people gamble they temporarily step out of the real world and embark on an adventure, which for some can be an exciting endeavour (Reith 1999:130).

A phenomenology of emotion suggests that emotions are experienced by both the mind and the body at once, dispelling the Cartesian model of emotion whereby there is a separate mind and body experience (Mitchell 1997:85). The emotion of excitement is one that is generally experienced as a combined mind and body experience. Most people I have observed winning at the Casino show their feelings through either facial expressions or a bodily activity such as jumping up and down, or throwing their hands in the air. The anticipation and excitement experienced by some poker machine players can be seen in the following quotation: *"I think it's exciting because you never know what's going to happen each time you press the button, I guess because you think you might get a big win eventually...It's the gambling actually, getting on the machines because I can be going up in the escalator and think oh, this is great, you know"* (Glenda).

Marlene won a jackpot at the Casino and had her photo on the "Winners Wall". She said, *"I had a bloody good play and that was exciting because the bells went off, and my photo was put on the wall"*. A similar sort of emotion is expressed when women play bingo, they play in the hope to win some money, but it is the possibility of winning that is exciting (Dixey 1987:207).

The feeling and emotion of excitement is experienced, not only when the women themselves win, but also when someone else around them wins money or a car at the Casino. *"It is excitement...you can play a five cent machine and get a few dollars out and you are as happy as a king...it's just the excitement of getting something out of it. Whether it be a lot or not it doesn't really matter"* (Val). When other people win, she says, *"...I get really excited if someone, like when the people next to you win a car, or get a huge jackpot, yes you do get excited for them. And you think, oh gosh you know, that's marvellous!"* (Val).

Reith (1999:145) states that, "the aim of gamblers is simply to experience the excitement of the game, and so the main goal is thus the indefinite continuation of play". "Win or lose, everyone feels the thrill" (Spanier 1992:13, cited in Reith 1999:145).

"guilt"

Shott (1979:1324) describes the emotion of guilt as a "reflexive role-taking emotion". These feelings take into consideration "...how one's self appears to others...unless expressed empathetically, are directed toward oneself" (Shott 1979:1324). For many women gamblers there is an acute awareness of how they appear to others because of the negative attitudes in society around gambling. There is an ambivalence for Chris: in the first instance she told me that it does not bother her. When I asked her how she felt when someone tried to make her feel guilty for gambling, she replied, *"...I don't think it's any of their business. Everyone has something that someone else doesn't like, so if someone gets enjoyment from something then leave them alone, I have to put up with that with my smoking too"*. But later on in our conversation Chris did admit to feeling guilty when she had been playing the poker machines and had not told her

husband, "...because I don't tell my husband when I go, hardly ever actually and I feel like I am cheating him". Chris then told me how she did not know how to tell her husband she had been playing this particular day, "I thought, how am I going to tell him I won \$700, and I said my car just skidded off the road into the Po because someone was telling me that I had to go and play because I was going to win, and he just laughed". The feeling of guilt that Chris experienced has been described as "negative self-evaluation which occurs when an individual acknowledges that his (or her) behaviour is at variance with a given moral value to which he (or she) feels obligated to conform" (Ausubel 1955:379, cited in Shott 1979:1325).

Denzin (1984:241) suggests, "Through their feelings and emotionality individuals are connected to others. Emotionality is interwoven through the acts that connect a subject to others and to herself. It is in and against emotionality that the subject comes to know, interpret, and understand herself and others". While this appears on the surface to be a touching sentiment for developing human relationships, I would argue that a person can not ever truly understand how another is feeling or how they are experiencing their emotions. This is also the view of Lutz (1986:298-299): "...emotions stand for individual privacy...Feelings it is thought, cannot truly or absolutely be known...except through a decision on the part of the individual who experiences the emotion to discuss it". It is impossible to know what another person is feeling just by observing their behaviour and only an individual can truly know their own emotions. Self-revelation of emotion is problematic because it is often difficult to communicate accurately one's feeling, and emotions are really the "...private property of the 'self' " (Lutz 1986:298-299).⁴

Denzin (1984:242) describes the "emotional imagination" which allows for an awareness of another person's feelings and situation, which then become

⁴ A further problem I envisage regarding revealing one's emotions is in the way they are interpreted by another. As an example, by revealing that they are feeling excited because they have just had a win, an individual is revealing an emotion that can be felt to different extremes depending on the size of the win. The person listening to the revelation would immediately interpret that feeling of excitement in their own way, projecting their own feelings onto the other, which can lead to misunderstandings. When a person explains what they are feeling, the listener interprets that information in terms of their own understandings and experiences.

"...one's own feelings". This form of empathy is evident when Chris describes her feelings of guilt when she is winning and other women are losing. Chris says, "*...if the other person keeps feeding and doesn't win anything and I keep winning I feel guilty, I feel bad. It's quite funny I don't think it's fair that they're losing and I'm winning, I don't like that for some reason*". Chris says that other women feel the same, if they are winning and Chris is losing, they feel guilty for winning. The guilt Chris feels within herself when she loses, she finds herself quickly justifying the loss with a thought like, "*...I earn good money, I'm allowed to, you know and that sort of thing...I'm not going to go for the rest of the week...the next day, oh go on, just \$20*" (Chris).

Therefore I agree with Denzin (1984:242) when he says that we use "emotional imagination" when attempting to understand how another human being is feeling. Ultimately, all one can do is "imagine" the feelings and self-perception of another, as one individual's reality is a different reality to that of the next individual. As Berger & Luckmann (1967:15) say, "What is real to a Tibetan monk may not be 'real' to an American businessman". Each of the women I interviewed has her own subjective reality and concept of "self", her own prejudices, life experiences and other factors that influence the way in which she feels and constructs her subjective reality. Shott (1979:1324) describes this desire to understand an "other's" emotions as "empathic role-taking", whereby an individual places oneself in the other's position, in order to feel what the other feels. But as Bruner (1986:5) states, "We can never know completely another's experiences, even though we may have clues...Others may be willing to share...but everyone censors or represses, or may not be fully aware... of what has been experienced".

Glenda says, she doesn't have anybody who makes her feel guilty for playing the poker machines; rather, like Chris she makes herself feel guilty. "*Nobody makes me feel guilty, I make myself feel guilty. My family, I just tell them I'm going and they say, oh good, okay and just leave it at that*" (Glenda). At the time of the interview Glenda had decided she was not going back to the Casino because she had spent too much last time. The group laughed as she had said

that before, but could not resist the temptation. I understand that Glenda has indeed gone back to the Casino.

These feelings of self-guilt become apparent to the women because of the imposed view of certain sectors of society, on women who play this game of chance. There are impositions placed on women in that gambling is not conducive to the ideological role of a woman as nurturer. Also that gambling is seen as getting something for nothing, and women are perceived as being the gender who predominantly gives and expects nothing in return. Therefore a stigma becomes imposed on some women gamblers, and their self-guilt arises from how they perceive society views them as a woman gambler. This self-guilt is in opposition to the way in which the women present their self to other women gamblers. Presenting their self as a woman gambler allows the woman to be autonomous, gives them a freedom of choice and take responsibility for their own actions (Moore 1988:38). This just highlights one of the dilemmas a woman gambler experiences while undertaking an otherwise pleasurable recreational activity, playing a game of chance.

“hope”

There is evidence that the main reason for women to return to the bingo halls and poker machine venues around the world is that “hope of winning”, but not necessarily large amounts of money. However, for the working class they may be hoping to win enough money to allow them to escape the “...powerful and unknown forces of society, in the same way as the middle-class does (holidays, weekend breaks, holiday homes, solitude, etc)” (Dixey 1987:212). But for others there is the thrill of winning, because it often happens that people do not actually stop playing after they have won some money. They may continue playing in the hope of winning more money, but generally just continue for the fun and excitement (Reith 1999:145).

For the women I interviewed, while they also had a “hope” of winning, they said they did not expect to win and that winning was not their main

reason for playing. Olive says, *"I think everybody does...Logic tells you that it's probably not going to happen but that doesn't stop you from hoping it might...I think the whole thing is enjoyment...that's how I feel anyway, that I go in hoping to win, I don't expect to win"*. For Sally, *"...its just the thrill of winning for me, a win not a big one, just anything"*. Peggy says, *"You'd like the big one but you are happy to get a small one"*. Marlene also lives with the hope, but is philosophical when she said, *"Well, you're hoping aren't you, you hope that you go to another machine and you are hoping that you are going to win it back, but you don't of course"*.

For Val there was another sort of "hope" which she described to me and that was to be able to lose herself in the game on the pokies: *"[The Casino] for me, it's somewhere that you can go and lose yourself. You don't have to speak to anybody, you can just sit there and watch the things flying around [the reels on the pokie] and hopefully, yeah you can lose yourself...when I first lost my husband it was somewhere to go and completely put it out of my mind. I could just sit there and go into my own world."*

The following quote adequately sums up the feeling of the hope for a "win", amongst the women I interviewed. *"The real value of winning is not what you're going to buy with your winnings, but that you won"* (Gollehon 1994:Quote no. 91). The feeling of being a winner was one of the most exciting feelings my participants experienced.

"loneliness"

The similarities continue between poker machine playing and bingo, with women describing how bingo allows them to "get out of the house" and meet in an environment where they feel safe, to have contact with other women, or for social interaction to avoid loneliness (Dixey 1987:204-205).

Wood (1988:185) describes loneliness as an emotion which has been socially constructed. However, because there is no physiological component to loneliness, some theorists believe that loneliness cannot be described as an emotion, claiming that emotions need some sort of bodily involvement, such as tightening of the chest or an empty feeling in the stomach. Wood (1988:187)

also discusses loneliness as a paradox of non-social and social experiences,⁵ further arguing that loneliness involves failed intersubjectivity, with intersubjectivity meaning that which is "...characteristic of a relationship, of mutual experience, rather than of individual experience" (Wood 1988:187-188). Wood (1988:206) concludes that loneliness is at the centre of everyday life.

The women I interviewed described loneliness as a feeling, and that loneliness is at the centre of many women's days. The general consensus was that the Casino was a good place to be to avoid these feelings. As Peggy says, *"You'd never be lonely there because there is so many people, all doing the same thing"*. However Glenda said that she has been to the Casino and still felt lonely because, *"...I haven't spoken to a soul in two hours and I find that a bit isolating, because people are just so busy getting on with the machines, you know they're not there to have a conversation. Somebody might chat next to you or just pass a remark, but generally I don't get into conversations with people"*. In reply Sally commented, *"That doesn't bother me though"* and Olive replied, *"No it doesn't me either but at least there are still people around you which in itself is company"*.

I asked the women in the focus group why they thought women in particular played the poker machines. Glenda replied, *"I think it's loneliness actually that sends people up there [to the Casino]. A lot of women live on their own...I was up there one day on a wet day and I thought I would rather be there, and the lady next to me said "oh, it was such a wet day today I thought I would rather be up here" and that voiced exactly how I was feeling, so that's why a lot of them go"*.

Olive saw the reason as, *"I suppose there would be quite a few women that would go there because of some sort of dissatisfaction somewhere along the line, younger ones fed up with being home looking after their kids...or the old man's always out on the booze, I might as well go and play a couple of pokies"*. And speaking for herself (and on behalf of the group), Olive said...*"For us, it's just something to do, it's excitement, it fills in a rainy day"*.

⁵ Loneliness is non-social when it is a private experience, relating to separation, a lack of sharing or isolation. It is social when the loneliness is felt in a problematic relationship. There needs to be an understanding of what constitutes a social relationship in order to know that something is missing (Wood 1988:187-188).

Dee and Val also saw going to the Casino as an activity that fills in a rainy day, avoiding staying at home alone. Val said, "...there would be more of a mental health problem if women stayed at home staring at four walls, instead of getting out and going to somewhere like the Casino". Dee says that the Casino is "...a place to go, where you can be on your own if that is how you feel, rather than going to bed for the afternoon...there are people around you, you've still got the choice of being social or not social. If you don't feel like being social, you are still there amongst a crowd, but you are on your own doing something that you enjoy".

Marlene also saw the Casino as a place to avoid feelings of loneliness and she says, "...loneliness is a terrible thing...you have to get out and speak to people...I think we have to talk, and I believe that people that are around us will give you energy...because when you've been busy playing bingo you forget your aches and pains and it's the same with the Casino. It's the energy, the right kind of energy".

Emotionality of the individual and collective "self"

The "self" has been a large part of anthropological discourse for many years now and continues to be a topic for debate among anthropologists at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Many theorists have offered their opinion on the subject of the "self" from the perspective of the individual "self" in relation to culture and society: Anthony Cohen, Ralph Turner and George H. Mead are three of many. In Cohen's (1994) view, the self is not a narcissistic "self", rather an autonomous individual, who has experiences and thoughts unique to that "self". Ralph Turner has described the individual as a "basket of selves" (Cohen 1994:11), with a "self" being taken out of the basket to fit with the situation the individual is in at that time.

Michelle Rosaldo and Charles H. Cooley, offer perspectives on the relationship between the self and emotions. Rosaldo (1984:150) suggests that both the self and feelings are shaped by society and through the use of culture specific terms. Cooley (1965:822) states that, "The emotion or feeling of self may be regarded as instinctive...". While the "social self" is an idea, or a construction that comes from outside, the "feeling self" is from within, in the

conscious mind of the individual, and is needed to differentiate the individual self from the other and the environment (Cooley 1965:823; Gomes 1991:120).

From a religious perspective the self is juxtaposed to the feminist perspective of portraying women's lived experience, because as Cohen (1994) suggests, Pietism⁶ explicates the creativity and agency of self. It denies orthodoxy and "...makes personal experience the very foundation of its beliefs" (Stromberg 1986:16, cited in Cohen 1994:18). The members of a church are congregants insofar as they assemble in a common place, but the faith is transformed through individual experience and personal interpretation of the doctrines. No matter how powerful or strict the regimes are, "...no Church or religion can legislate for a uniformity of experience and meaning" (Cohen 1994:19). Unlike other forms of religion that believe the "self" is part of God, or Buddha or a Brahman, Pietism allows for agency of self. It may be an irony, but the experiences of some women playing the poker machines can be compared with the beliefs of Pietism, with the women's faith in the "virtues" of gambling being transformed by their individual experiences.

There is a relationship between "self" and "society" and the "self" as an individual and as part of a collectivity. It is evident that the crowd at a Casino has an effect on the individual, and as Cohen (1994:148) states, "...the explanation of *collective* is to be sought among its *individual* participants".⁷ The women who play housie are also individuals within a collective, and it is possible for the individuals to experience a communion of minds, which Victor Turner calls "communitas" (Cohen 1994:147; Turner 1969:96-97). This applies to the women who play the poker machines with a group of friends or family members, often they will play one machine together, which allows for a

⁶ Pietism is showing devotion toward God, honour and obedience, respecting and revering a Supreme being. Pietism is something that is practiced in the name of religion; undertaking a spiritual, godly act or wish; being in a state of godliness (Funk & Wagnalls 1984:497,500).

⁷ I have experienced this with an elderly woman seeing me have a win, decided that if I can win, then maybe she can too. It encouraged her to continue playing, in the hope that her machine will give her a win also, but unfortunately it did not.

communion of minds all focused on the machine and whether or not it is going to win for them.

According to Hochschild (1998:6) "...emotion is a means by which we continually learn and relearn about a just-now-changed, back-and-forth relation between self and world, the world as it means something just now to the self...the character of the self...is subject to profoundly social influence". There is an assumption that emotions are not felt the same way in each culture and that each culture has its unique "...emotional dictionary, which defines what is and isn't, and its emotional bible, which defines what one should and should not feel in a given context" (Hochschild 1998:7). In turn the impact of these differences in feelings and emotions will alter how the self is experienced in relation to the differing emotions.

Expressions of the "self" and "agency" are also evident in the varying rituals the women undertake when playing the poker machines. The women also match their feelings to the "emotional dictionary" our culture provides and express their emotions in context with the given time and place. In this instance, they will express the emotions that are applicable when gambling on the poker machines.⁸

Just one of the many ways in which the women I interviewed showed their "self" was in the choice of machines they play. It was most apparent from the focus group that each of the women enjoyed playing a different type of machine and for different reasons. None of the women were influenced into saying they liked the same machines as the other. The animated expressions on the women's faces were interesting as well, trying to describe to me the game on the machines. Peggy particularly likes the machines with any sort of birds, because she keeps birds in aviaries. Peggy said, *"I will go for any one that's got birds*

⁸ As an example, the emotion of excitement could perhaps be expressed differently if a woman herself had just won a jackpot, as opposed to the excitement felt when another woman won a jackpot. This feeling of excitement could possibly be expressed differently again to the feeling a woman may have on her wedding day.

on it, I always go for the birds, the canaries, because they tweet". Sally liked the "Mystic Gnome" game and the "White Tiger" game because, "I like the eyes the way they twinkle and I like the way the tiger roars".

Choosing a machine to play is only one part of a woman's self that can be expressed, along with other forms of self expression already discussed. There is also an element of self-control needed when playing the poker machines, and an element of social control within self-control. Social control is a form of self-criticism: "it is the means by which the attitudes of the community or group are incorporated within individuals and influence their thinking and conduct" (Mead 1934:155, cited in Shott 1979:1325). Therefore it could be assumed that some women gamblers exert self-control over how much money they spend, for fear of being seen as extravagant or wasteful by their peers or families. It could be assumed that role-taking emotions such as guilt encourage self-control, and self-regulation is the basis for much of the social control (Shott 1979:1329). This desire to fit in with social norms could be one of the reasons why more women do not gamble to excess.

As discussed previously and on numerous occasions in the newspapers, poker machines appear to be a form of gambling where it is easy to lose self-control. Therefore it is important that a woman is able to set herself limits, if that is the way she chooses to play keeping to her set limit, in order to avoid the devastating situations some women have found themselves in. The last word belongs to the women of the focus group, discussing self-control when it comes to playing the poker machines. *"Even going out for dinner can cost you quite a bit. It is, if you can control yourself, it's cheap entertainment really"*(Olive). *"If you can control yourself"* (Glenda). *"If you know when to stop...it's just an entertainment thing"* (Peggy).

Conclusion

The emotionality of women incorporates many images and clichés surrounding it, from the portrayal of women as the ones who legitimately cry in movies, through to the notion that women are "too emotional" (Lutz

1986:299). There are engendered expectations that men only may experience certain emotions such as anger, while women are perceived to be able to experience the entire range of emotions, more frequently and deeply. Women's emotion is viewed as part of their character (often irrational), men's emotion is viewed as situational, therefore "sensible" (or rational) (Lutz 1986:299-300). While some may view women's emotionality as irrational, I would suggest that it is simplistic and inappropriate to categorise all women as "too emotional".⁹ I agree with Lutz (1986:300) when she states that, "...the gender differences in emotionality are seen in much feminist discourse as constructed by virtue of women's and men's experiences in a particular social world".

For women, having a place to socialise and share their emotionality has always been important. According to Dixey (1987:203) during the early to mid 20th century, English women would gather in places like the community washhouse to talk to each other. The home was usually not a place for women to socialise, as it was regarded as a private family place. Therefore women would go to the movies or find other places to meet, but they would never meet in places such as the pub, or working-men's clubs as it was not acceptable for women to enter without a man. During the early 1960's when there was more disposable income around, bingo halls were set up, bringing together the trend for provision of working-class leisure and building on a history of gambling. It also enabled women to get out of the house and at that time it was often the only place women could go, alone (Dixey 1987:203-204). Similar trends occurred in New Zealand with women's socialising occurring in activities outside the home such as kindergartens, implying their socialising was influenced by the activities of their children, but often a group of women would play cards at each others homes on a regular basis. My aunt hosted weekly card games at her home for many years, so there could have been a difference in women's activities in New Zealand, in comparison with those activities

⁹ It is also apparent that crying is an acceptable emotion for women and men to display in some cultures but not in others. My husband was brought up to believe that "men don't cry", and yet images of Jewish men at the "Wailing Wall" show men crying and sobbing, while I was brought up to think that crying was an acceptable emotion for a woman to display.

Dixey (1987) describes for women in England. However times have changed and while the bingo halls in New Zealand are still popular with older women, there are many other forms of gambling women feel they are able to do alone. The home has also become more of a place for socialising, with women getting together perhaps more often for pot-luck dinners, coffee mornings, where they also continue to play cards and gamble.

Even the ritual of attending church every Sunday morning has been cast aside for many. With extended shopping hours and work pressures, there is not a lot of time for many people to combine their religious aspirations, leisure activities, work and family commitments. With the fast pace of life and personal, social and political pressures on many people, it can at times be overwhelming. Therefore people are looking for a way to escape these pressures, and for the older women I interviewed, it became apparent that their gambling activities can be viewed as a form of resistance to the constraints that have been placed on them throughout their life. Women are rebelling against the attitudes of society and the stigma placed on the poker machines, and reiterated the assertion that they will gamble if they so choose. The younger women are not prepared to fit into the ideologies and prescriptions of society and choose to experience their life according to their own values and not ones placed on them by others. Therefore, if they choose to gamble on the poker machines, like the older women, they will.

None of the women I interviewed told me whether or not they went to any form of traditional church, except Marlene who has associations with clairvoyants and spiritual healers, and we discussed the various Spiritualist Churches around Auckland. Marlene has such a passion for the Casino, and I suggest tentatively that Marlene may consider the Casino, her "church".¹⁰ Marlene has had a psychic friend say to her, "*Hello Marlene, I don't gamble' but she*

¹⁰ From our interview I would assume that she has had many 'quasi-religious experiences' at the Casino, praying for wins and talking with her friends who have passed away. She also socialises at the Casino with her psychic friends and her son is currently dating a clairvoyant, who enjoys playing the poker machines, and every little win they give her.

said *'I wish you all the best of luck in the world'*", and Marlene said, *"I knew I was going to win, I knew I was going to win and I won, I did win"*.

Marlene, like many of the women I interviewed, and many other women gamblers, has strong beliefs in a spiritual life existing on another level from our physical human existence. While women's beliefs vary, there is a general feeling that these spiritual beings can be appealed to for guidance and praying to them will assist us to gain whatever is required. There is a belief that somehow objects such as lucky charms, bracelets or touching another person can affect the outcome of a game of chance. These beliefs are mysterious and various: each woman's beliefs are unique.

Goffman (1967) views gambling as exposing one's self to fate, showing character and qualities such as self-discipline and courage. The fact that gamblers are solely responsible for their own actions gives players a degree of autonomy (Martinez 1983:55; Reith 1999:134). The following statement from a gambler would be true for most of the women I interviewed, and possibly a lot of other women gamblers. The player describes gambling as, "...a replacement of the fantasies [we] have as children...For me, the fantasy in gambling is not monetary. It's a question of fulfillment: being who I really am, doing things well, being involved - just feeling good" (Alvarez 1991:138, cited in Reith 1999:134).

Conclusion

"The processes of identity construction are social, in that institutions in society (such as the family) and ideological values (such as those associated with motherhood) combine to inform the individual about 'appropriate' sex-determined behaviour...Identity can be self-generated, or transformed, in that the individual, enlightened as to the form and purpose of these social and political constructions can struggle to reject them and remake or remould herself" (Rowland 1998:1, cited in Smith 1991:61).

The beginning of the end to a "magical" gambling experience

The above quotation is pertinent to the eight women I interviewed. They have openly claimed that they enjoy playing the poker machines despite the stigma surrounding this activity. By identifying themselves as autonomous women who enjoy playing the poker machines and gambling, they have shed the social, cultural and often, political constructions of how society believes a woman should behave. The women have disclosed their "self" and displayed a transformed ideology of a woman in the 21st century. A rejection of traditional stereotypes allows these women to pursue their desires, and combine their needs with the needs of their family and friends. Previous ideologies and gender roles for women were that they gave so much of themselves that they lost part of their "self" within the lives of others, often their family: indeed women who give more than they receive are often called "selfless".

Ralph Turner says that we are each a "basket of selves" and this container of selves constitutes our individual identity (Cohen 1994:11). Therefore, the self of a woman playing the poker machines is only one part of her whole self. When she has finished playing, that self will go back into the

basket and another self will emerge, depending on which role she is undertaking next. Women like Marlene or Val, who visit the Casino with their children, are combining the gambler role with the mother role, and thereby combining two different “selves”. The experience of these roles will be different because of the relationship they have to the social setting and each other and within any social group there is a collection of complex¹ selves (Cohen 1994:7). Often the women I interviewed will go to the Casino with other women, and play as a group or play together as a family, having an experience viewed by Victor Turner as “communitas” (Turner 1969:96-97; Cohen 1994:147). The women temporarily let go of their individual consciousness and operate on a collective consciousness, for the duration of the experience. Then they will return to the basket and retrieve another “self” applicable to their next role.

While poker machine gambling may appear to be a tedious, repetitive activity, as I have discovered from the lived experiences of the women I interviewed, it is instead a complex one. Playing the poker machines is for some not as simple as placing a coin in a slot and pushing a button. There are rituals to be performed, “prayers” to be spoken, a “higher power” to be consulted before and during play and then thanked afterwards if the “prayer” has been answered. There is also the magic and efficacy of luck to be considered, and choosing the “lucky” machine is not as simple as sitting down at the nearest machine. Each woman has her own way of choosing which machine is right to play at a particular time. Even the emotions and feelings experienced before going to the gambling venue and while at the venue are complex and different for each individual woman. These complexities allow a unique experience of poker machine gambling for each woman.

From my research I have come to understand that not all people who gamble have a mental illness as many psychological reports and media articles

¹ Cohen (1994:7) states that a collection of selves is complex because, “any individual must be regarded as a cluster of selves or as a multi-dimensional self”.

maintain. If all people who gamble had a psychological problem then there should be many mentally ill people in the world today.

Gambling is not only a western phenomenon, but a cross-cultural one as well. The number of Native American Casinos that have been built and running successfully across America proves this. Tainui Maori here in New Zealand were contemplating a Casino venture to be built in Hamilton, but this has been cancelled for the time being, mainly because of pressure from the anti-gambling lobbyists. A visit to the Auckland Sky City Casino and numerous other poker machine venues around Auckland alone will provide evidence of the different cultures that participate in gambling of various kinds. During participant-observation I witnessed many people from the Pacific Islands and Asian regions. Along with Maori, according to the research undertaken by Abbott & Volberg (2000), these ethnicities are the biggest gamblers in New Zealand. Historically gambling has long been an activity in most parts of the world; it is not a new phenomenon and is a feature of society that will continue in the foreseeable future, one that will continue to change and grow with the needs of the gamblers and the imagination of the industry.

Park (1991a:23) states that feminist research needs to be undertaken to view the operation of gender in particular social situations and feminist anthropology needs to be sensitive to women's voices. The concept of "woman" is not a unitary one, with women's status dependent on interrelated factors. I am confident that this thesis has achieved the aims, and exemplifies the qualities of, feminist research.

A possible answer to the question, "Why do women gamble?"

My research for this thesis has shown that women can gamble and enjoy themselves without becoming problem gamblers. A number of my research participants were retired women or "gambling grannies" (Karen Burge, *The New Zealand Herald*, 20 February 1999a:unknown, *The New Zealand Herald*, 27 February 1999b:unknown; Henger 1999; Ian Stuart, *Evening Standard*, 4

February 1995:12) as the newspaper reports like to portray them. As well as the poker machines, they enjoyed other forms of gambling such as housie and lotto for pleasure. They did not play to win money specifically, but if that should happen, it would be a very welcome bonus. I asked the women how they would feel if the poker machines disappeared tomorrow. Most of the women said it would not be the end of the world for them, they would probably go shopping instead. But they would not lose any sleep over it. Marlene may be the exception, because of her passion for the Casino and the social interaction. However, because she enjoys so many other gambling activities, her time and money would probably be shifted to another form of gambling.

While I acknowledge that for some the Casino has been a temptation that has led people into dire straights, people who did not gamble before the Casino arrived, are the minority rather than the majority.² The aim of this thesis has been to show a positive side to gambling and more specifically poker machine playing, which receives criticism from the media and many within society in general.

Most of the women I interviewed saw the Casino and poker machine gambling as a way of satisfying their need for companionship and some saw it as an escape from loneliness. The older women who had grandchildren also spent time with them, with Sally taking care of her grandson on a full-time basis, playing housie and the poker machines in school hours. Sometimes if her grandson goes away for a night and she has the opportunity, Sally goes into the

² A niece of one of my participants had never gambled before the Casino was built and after a while she became hooked on the pokies, spending all her week's wages in one sitting. Various attempts were made by family and friends to curb her habit but to no avail. Although she is not as bad as before, she still visits the Casino on a regular basis with her wages. This woman is married with children and I believe this is an example of one of the negative effects the Casino has had and the temptation it provides to someone looking for more money, company or just some excitement in her possibly dull daily routine. Another one of the women I interviewed told me a similar story about her daughter who will go up the road to pay the bills, but instead catch a bus to the Casino. She has a two year old child and a two year old grandchild, to care for. The children tend to get too much for her and so she heads off to the Casino for some time away from the children. There are many other stories like these, and endless debate about why these women and many like them get hooked on the poker machines. Whatever their reasons, they are at least in an environment that women perceive to be physically and morally safe, and they have the company of other women who are there for their own reasons also.

Casino with friends. Marlene also spends a lot of time with her grandchildren, and they understand that she also enjoys going to the Casino. That is how her nickname "Mrs Casino" came about. The other older women who enjoyed playing the poker machines, did not appear to have any trouble dividing their time between their family and their leisure activities. The younger women, Chris, Dee and myself, do not have children or responsibilities to take care of ageing parents. Although Dee's father is still alive, they visit the R.S.A. together and while Dee plays the pokies, her father plays pool or another activity with the men in the Club.

Dee does not visit the Casino as often as she used to, or would like to, because of her financial situation, but finds playing the pokies at the R.S.A. satisfies her desire to play and socialise with other women. Chris works full-time and so is limited to the hours she can play, and also does not play the poker machines as often as she used to. For myself, being a student limits my time and income, therefore I too have had to decrease the number of visits I make to the Casino; I prefer to play at a local pub, or like Dee, at the R.S.A.

Achieving the aims for women gamblers

This study has aimed to enable women to have a voice and to show that playing the poker machines and gambling can be positive experiences. It has also been my aim to show the diversity of women from all classes and cultures who play the poker machines.

It was also my aim to expose the stigma surrounding women who gamble or play the poker machines, and the on-going battle women have with the culturally and socially constructed aspects of their identity. It is hoped that men and society in general will eventually accept that women have as much right to gamble for entertainment or whatever other reasons they choose. With the changing nature of the private domain of the household, where some men are taking responsibility for housework, childcare and other domestic issues, it is hoped that future attitudes towards gambling and specifically women

gamblers, will change. In time it would be desirable that the public domain of gambling is seen as equally acceptable for women. I hope that eventually women will be seen as “good mothers” and “good grandmothers” and “women gamblers”, because they are able to divide their time between their leisure activities and their family obligations.

The future of gambling

The phenomenon of gambling in its various forms is entrenched in New Zealand society and most other cultures in the world. It seems apparent that in Western societies at least the existence of compulsive and problem gambling is an issue that will continually need to be addressed. There are many forms of gambling that operate within societies that are not normally recognised as forms of gambling. Many people for example, do not view Lotto or Scratch Tickets as gambling and criticise others for betting on race horses, or playing the pokies. There is also the issue of game shows on Television, which are another form of gambling.³

According to Martinez (1983:97-103), the same sorts of emotions are experienced by a person watching TV game shows as a person who gambles at a venue. They feel excitement and anticipation of a possible win and experience fantasies about winning the prizes and imagining how their lives would change. He believes that the people who fantasise most about winning prizes are the ones who can least afford to buy them in reality. For the middle or lower socio-economic classes of all ethnic backgrounds, the game show prizes represent a dream-like lifestyle, one they probably can only ever dream of having. This form of gambling Martinez (1983:103) calls “game-bling”, is

³ People on the shows win prizes of goods and/or money are asked at the end of the show if they are prepared to risk these and return the next week to try and win some more. The most obvious one here in New Zealand is Telebingo, where the contestants in the studio answer questions to win money and prizes, while people at home have tickets resembling bingo tickets, and mark off each number as it is drawn. The number is drawn each time a contestant on the show pushes their buzzer to answer a question. A new game show is being considered by Television New Zealand next year called *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, based on the overseas version which screened for the first time on here on 17 October 2000, but has yet to be confirmed by the Government (Louisa Cleave, *Weekend Herald*, 7-8 October 2000:A1).

also a game of chance, but does not carry the same stigma as poker machines. It is these sorts of inconsistencies surrounding the gambling phenomenon that I find incomprehensible.

As we move into the twenty-first century it is becoming easier for people to gamble. For people who have a computer and an Internet connection there is the ever-increasing availability of on-line gambling, so easy to connect to and very accessible for the “impulsive” gambler, with the danger for more people becoming “compulsive” gamblers. People who gamble on the Internet are known colloquially as “namblers” (Reith 1999:124).⁴ Currently most on-line gambling sites are in the United States, from either western casino operations or the Native American casino operation. But there are discussions underway between the Auckland Sky City Casino and the Adelaide Casino on the subject of a Cyber-casino (Karyn Scherer, *The New Zealand Herald*, 24 February 2000:C1). At this point in time there is no government legislation that I am aware of to regulate this form of gambling. As it is a form of gambling that is difficult to trace, usually being performed in the privacy of a person’s own home, tracing any illegal activity is at the moment difficult. In time there will undoubtedly be some form of control or monitoring to ensure the legality and continued benefit to some sector of society that chooses to gamble in this way.

Another positive side to the poker machine gambling phenomenon is that profits from gambling are being returned to the community. For example, the Warkworth Inn gave \$25,000 to eight community groups through the Lion Foundation, from profits the hotel gained from the poker machines (Lesley Ingham, *Rodney Times*, 17 August 2000:1). Other groups helping children at

⁴ Internet gambling or “nambling” goes beyond any physical boundaries and is played in a giant global casino where individuals can bet without the usual restrictions of a physical gambling space. There is immediate access and instant credit, buying credit from the casino ‘bookie’ and then playing with virtual money. The Internet also has its own ‘currencies’ such as DigiCash or CyberCash, where funds are obtained from on-line banks (McGuigan 1997, cited in Reith 1999:124). All gamblers need for this virtual gambling is a credit card and a computer. Players interact with each other or play alone, this form of gambling links players into a virtual reality, where the outcomes and repeat plays are as close as the click of a mouse or button. Distractions of time, space and money with the gambling experience often becoming more intense than in a physical environment (Reith 1999:124-125). This is a new phenomenon in the diverse array of gambling games and further research and regulations will be required in the future.

risk have bought poker machines to raise funds to encourage these children into sport. Other private trusts have also bought machines to fund children into sports. The Quattro Foundation is one such organisation, which is a group of four mothers who have bought machines and gave \$780,000 last year to amateur sports (Simon Collins, *Weekend Herald*, 15-16 July 2000c:A15). It is hoped that by further promotion of this as a positive side of poker machines that attitudes in society will change. When people see that money gambled on poker machines has been used to further children's education or sports activities, or for the betterment of a sector of society, then it may become more acceptable to the wider population. At present many people only see gambling as lining the pockets of the corporation providing the gambling venues.

It is time the stigma was removed from poker machine gambling and the venues that provide excitement, relaxation and a chance to escape, along with the chance to win some money for the many women and men who choose to visit them.

Further opportunities and questions for future research

As gambling, and poker machine gambling in particular, is a more recent phenomenon in New Zealand than somewhere like Las Vegas, there is an abundance of opportunities for further research. While compulsive, problem and pathological gambling have been analysed from the psychological perspective for many years, the social and cultural perspectives are only just beginning to be regarded. My thesis has barely touched the surface of New Zealand poker machine gambling. With more and more Casinos and poker machines becoming part of our social environment, it is going to become even more important to understand what this phenomenon that attracts so many people, especially women, is about. One important question that could be asked in the future is, "What is lacking in our society that women of all ages have to go to a Casino to find company and to feel some excitement in their lives"? Consideration is especially important for the older women who go to the Casino and play the poker machines until the early hours of the morning, or

even stay all night in some instances. Has New Zealand society become so self-oriented that we no longer care about other people, such as the elderly?

Some further questions that may enable us to explore what is happening within the New Zealand culture and society, around the subject of gambling, are listed below.

1. What has happened to support groups and services for young women and mothers? Do they have to go to the Casino to escape the boredom of routine and experience some excitement in their lives?
2. Do people gamble to excess in order to get some attention from other people, such as friends or family members, or to feel a part of a community?
3. What causes women to become "hooked" on poker machines, and continue until they find themselves serving prison sentences for such crimes as embezzlement?

It is hoped the answers to these questions will be discovered in future research.



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Appendix A

"ALL THAT GLITTERS MAY NOT BE GOLD"

Women Gamblers and Poker Machines: Wheels of Fortune or Reels of Despair?

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, with the possibility of participating in this research study.

I would like to introduce myself. I am a second year Masterate student at Massey University and am currently writing my thesis on the above subject to complete my Master of Arts Degree, majoring in Social Anthropology. If you have any queries regarding this research, please ring me on 415-6344 or 443-9799 ext. 9676

The purpose of this study is to gain as much insight as possible into the reasons why women in particular choose to play the poker machines at the Casino, clubs, hotels, or wherever else the poker machines are available. There are a lot of negative attitudes and some stigma attached to women who play the poker machines and I would like to see if you think these are valid. If there are positive sides to poker machine playing I hope to discover what the people I interview believe makes playing them a positive experience. I am interested in how each individual woman came to begin playing, what it is that keeps them playing, along with their feelings and emotions whilst playing, winning, losing and any beliefs held about the machines.

2.

For your participation in this study, I will take about 1 hour of your time. If you choose to participate, I will make an appointment at a mutually convenient time to conduct an interview with you. Interviews will be audio tape recorded, with your permission. The use of a pseudonym, or your own name (first name only) is a choice for you to make. It is your prerogative to decline to answer any questions. Also, if at a later date you decide not to participate any further in this study, then your withdrawal will be effective immediately and all data gathered to date will be returned to you, if you so choose. If you have any questions to ask about the study at any time, please feel free to do so.

After I have interviewed all my participants, I will be personally transcribing the audio tapes and will send you a copy of the written transcript for your approval or to make any additions or changes to the information, if you feel it is not appropriate. You can be assured of anonymity and confidentiality of any information you provide to me, and it is your choice completely what happens to the audio tapes, after the study is completed.

Thank you again for reading this information sheet and I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards

Margaret Johnson
Phone No: 415-6344/443-9799 Ext. 9676
Supervisor (Anthropology):
Dr. Kathryn Rountree, Phone: 443-9799 Ext. 9690

Appendix B

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS ON POKER MACHINE GAMBLING

1. Do you have a preference for playing the poker machines over other kinds of gambling? Why/why not?
2. What attracts you to the poker machines?
3. Do you play a particular game and/or machine each time you play and why? i.e do you like the games that have free-spins or jackpots or does it not matter?
4. What kind of emotion do you feel when you win and is it different to when you lose? Does it vary on how much you have won or lost?
5. Have you ever played the poker machines at a time when you have a feeling of loss or played to raise your spirits from a difficult period in your life?
6. Do you think the payouts or play functions are affected by, such things as your mood at the time of playing, for example?
7. Do you carry lucky charms that bring good luck or are supposed to bring monetary gains, i.e. Feng Shui money turtles? Discuss "luck" generally.
8. There are a lot of negative attitudes in society around gambling in general, how do you feel when and if someone attempts to make you feel guilty because you enjoy gambling/ playing the poker machines?
9. In literature I have read to date a common reason for people playing the poker machines is based around "hope", hope for a big jackpot, hope to win enough so the person can give up work. Do you play the machines with "hope" in mind?
10. Do you play the machines to win money specifically or do you just enjoy the excitement and anticipation of "winning"?
11. There is a theory put out by researchers that there is an increase in women playing the poker machines. Have you seen any changes in society recently that would explain this or validate this theory?