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Gendered understanding of sports betting: Perceptions of shame and stigma among men who bet on sports and their romantic partners

What this research is about

Sports betting has increased across Australia in recent years. The popularity of sports betting has grown because of targeted advertising campaigns and smartphone technology. The former serves to normalize sports betting as a leisure practice, while the latter allows betting to occur in everyday spaces. While previous studies have mostly focused on problem gambling and addiction, a growing body of research has started to explore recreational sports betting as an everyday practice in men's lives.

The purpose of this study was to examine sports betting as a leisure practice. Specifically, this study examined how men participate in social relationships through sport and gambling activities. This study also explored the perspectives of women who share intimate relationships with men who bet on sports.

What the researchers did

The researchers interviewed 20 people living in Australia, including 10 men who bet on sports and 10 current or ex-romantic partners of men who bet on sports. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling starting from the first author's social circle.

Participants who bet on sports were men who used sports betting applications recreationally (i.e., at least once a month) and had been in a romantic relationship within the past three years. Partners were women who were currently dating or had dated someone who bet on sports within the last three years. All participants were heterosexual. Most were white (95%). The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 32 years old. Most participants lived in South-East Queensland, Australia.

What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to examine sports betting as a leisure practice. Specifically, this study examined how men participate in social relationships through sport and gambling activities. This study also explored the perspectives of women who share intimate relationships with men who bet on sports. A total of 20 people living in Australia were interviewed. Participants included 10 men who used sports betting applications recreationally (i.e., bet at least once a month) and were involved in a romantic relationship within the past three years. The remaining 10 participants were women who were currently dating or had dated someone who bet on sports within the last three years.

The findings highlight how men who bet on sports expressed shame and stigma towards particular forms of betting (i.e., betting alone and specific types of bets) and problem gambling. This helped legitimize their own betting practice and position themselves favourably in the masculine hierarchies of betting. By contrast, women viewed their partner's pursuit of sports betting with understanding and indifference, provided that it was at a recreational level.

What the researchers found

The researchers used the work of Elspeth Probyn to help analyze the interviews. Probyn's work was used to highlight how shame was directed by men who bet on sports towards particular forms of gambling (i.e., betting alone and specific types of bets) and towards problem gambling.

The researchers initially expected that women who were romantically involved with men who bet on sports would often discuss shame and stigma. Instead, most women viewed their partner's pursuit of sports betting with understanding and indifference, with little shame or stigma directed towards it. Furthermore, most women did not express shame or stigma towards people who bet alone.

By contrast, men were much more likely to express shame and stigma towards forms of sports betting they deemed shameful. They discussed how older men who bet alone in pub-TABs exemplified 'shameful' sports betting. TABs are physical spaces where people can bet. Most male participants emphasized the importance of betting as a social activity. By doing so, they reinforced the stigma around loneliness and ageing by representing older men who bet alone as the sad and shameful aspects of sports betting. Furthermore, participants legitimized their own betting and underscored their youth through their connection to peers.

Men who bet on sports discussed how they used group message chats to engage in the social aspects of betting, even if they bet from their own homes. In this way, group chats helped men distance themselves from the idea of 'betting alone.'

Men also expressed shame towards specific forms of betting. For example, men who did not bet on races often stigmatized those who bet on horse or dog races. Some participants felt that horse and dog race betting was associated with being an older 'solo-bettor.' Other participants felt that horse and dog race betting was seen negatively by women. However, only two of the women who were interviewed mentioned any dislike for this form of gambling.

Problem gambling and addiction were also mentioned by the participants. Women were mostly concerned about gambling's addictive nature, rather than about stigma or shame. By contrast, men's responses were more likely to involve shaming those who had gambling addictions. Some men who bet on sports justified recreational gambling by separating essential expenses (e.g., rent) from their occasional gambling

spend. In stressing the social and unproblematic aspects of their sports betting, they positioned themselves favourably in the masculine hierarchies of betting.

How you can use this research

Practitioners can use this research to inform how they discuss shame and sports betting with those who seek help.

About the researchers

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Citation

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