

research snapshot

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Understanding the complexity of place and gender in young men's sports betting behaviour

What this research is about

These days, people can bet on sports anywhere using their smartphone. Younger men are more likely than other age groups to bet on sports using their smartphones. The gambling industry advertises sports betting to young men and make it seem like a normal leisure activity. Gambling advertising may encourage young men to gamble more often and make riskier bets. Sports betting is promoted to young men by appealing to cultural values of social status, masculinity, and mateship. Here, mateship refers to bonds between men created through sports betting.

People may suffer health and social problems from risky gambling. Health problems may include anxiety, depression, and stress. Social problems may include money problems, relationship issues, and even illegal acts to fund gambling. Overall, gambling is a public health issue that needs more research. Currently, many gambling prevention and treatment programs hold people who gamble responsible for their gambling behaviour. Few programs and policies recognize that people's gambling behaviour is influenced by where they live and their environments. More recently, researchers working from a critical science approach have discussed how gender and place matters, or not, in gambling.

In this study, the researchers explored how young men's sports betting behaviour is influenced by the places they gamble, their social environments, and gender expectations regarding roles and identities.

What the researchers did

The researchers used a rhizoanalysis approach based on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work. Rhizoanalysis focuses on how people and material objects may

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers explored how young men's sports betting behaviour is influenced by the places they gamble, their social environments, and gender expectations regarding roles and identities. The researchers explored 13 young men's feelings and emotions about using smartphones to bet on sports. The researchers showed how the young men's feelings and emotions, their social environments, and material objects (e.g., the smartphone betting apps) work together to create a sense of certain places as gambling sites or not. Gambling prevention programs could encourage people who gamble to do other social activities that evoke similar emotions that gambling does but are less risky.

interact. The researchers used rhizoanalysis to explore the relationships between people's social environments (i.e., social norms and skills) and material objects (i.e., smartphones, sports betting apps, alcohol). They drew on the notion of assemblages to describe how people's emotions and senses (e.g., sight, sound, smell), their social environments, and material objects might act together to create a sense of different places as sites of gambling or not.

The researchers interviewed 13 young men. Participants were 19 to 28 years old and lived in Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia. All did sports betting on their smartphones. The researchers explored participants' feelings and emotions about sports betting in the interviews. Participants shared personal stories about themselves, the places they did

online sports betting, and the sports betting apps they used. Participants talked about any unforgettable gambling moments they had in the past. They discussed the advantages and disadvantages of using their smartphone to bet on sports. Two participants also reflected on their sports betting experiences using a diary. Ten participants sent text messages to the researchers to share their sports betting experiences as they happened.

What the researchers found

The participants shared that pubs and clubs create exciting and intense social environments where young men feel pride and love. These are places that men show their masculinity and competitiveness by gambling. Pub environments make it seem normal for young men to make risky gambling choices. Young men feel in control, a sense of pride, and a desire to win money when gambling in pubs. Pub environments make young men feel connected to each other and strengthen their relationships. In these environments, young men's capacity to reflect on the risks and harms of gambling seems to be reduced.

In contrast, the young men described how they feel guilt or shame if they do online sports betting around their girlfriends or parents. Some young men said they would stop gambling to keep their relationships with their loved ones. Others hid their gambling from their family. Gambling in the family home environment creates feelings of guilt, which can affect young men's domestic lives and their identities as boyfriend and son. For example, one participant described how a series of lost bets affected how he acted around his family. It also changed how he felt about some spaces in the family home. In particular, he described retreating to his bedroom after losing, a space which could now trigger undesirable memory.

These results suggest that it is important to consider people's feelings and emotions, and the gendered dimensions of sports betting to fully understand the complexity of their gambling behaviour.

How you can use this research

Researchers can use this research to investigate how guilt may reduce confidence and affect risk of

gambling harm. Policy makers can use this research to fund gambling prevention programs that consider how gambling behaviour is affected by social situations and material objects. Gambling prevention programs could encourage people who gamble to do other social activities, like playing sports, that evoke similar emotions that gambling does but are less risky.

About the researchers

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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