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An Appraisal of the Impact of the Depiction of Gambling in Society on Youth

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Abstract Youth are currently growing up in a culture where gambling is legal, accessible and widely supported. Although minors are largely restricted from regulated gambling, the greater incidence of problem gambling amongst youth than adults suggests that the perception of gambling as a harmless entertainment activity is inaccurate. Gambling is widely portrayed in the media often in an inaccurate or exaggerated way that normalizes gambling and may encourage youth to participate. Wagering on sporting events is becoming intrinsically linked with these competitions and gambling-themed toys and games are widely available and targeted at children and adolescents. Gambling is often presented as providing significant social and economic benefits and the increased availability of gambling venues heightens youth's awareness of gambling opportunities. The depiction of gambling in society requires examination with efforts made by key stakeholders to present a balanced portrayal of the odds of winning and risks associated with gambling in an effort to reduce the emergence of gambling-related problem amongst adolescents.

Keywords Youth · Children · Adolescents · Gambling · Media · Prevention · Society

Introduction

Today's youth are the first generation to grow-up in a society where gambling is legal, easily accessible, and in most cases government supported. Governments throughout the world view gambling as a relatively easy way to increase revenues with only minimal attention being paid to the individual and societal costs. Gambling is rarely presented in a realistic way. Rather, gambling is presented either very positively with few, if any, references made to negative consequences or accurate probabilities of winning with gambling depicted as socially rewarding, or very negatively, resulting in viewing gambling problems as so severe that individuals have lost their homes and families. International studies demonstrate that the majority of individuals approve of gambling. In the USA,

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national opinion surveys on gambling have recorded approval ratings of 60–65% since the late 1990s (Gallup 1999). Canadian surveys found that only 3% of respondents viewed heavy gambling as a very serious problem, (Ferris et al. 1996), and while the majority of respondents were aware of the negative consequences and believe associated problems have increased, the majority still indicated that gambling was an acceptable activity (Azmier 2001). In an Australian sample, the majority of respondents also approved of moderate gambling, supported the legalisation of some forms of gambling, believed that their friends and family would not disapprove of them gambling, but also indicated that there is too much gambling in society today and laws are needed to limit gambling opportunities (Moore and Ohtsuka 1999).

The perception of gambling as an innocuous behaviour with few negative consequences is supported by findings that children and adolescents frequently gamble for money with their parents and other family members (Gupta and Derevensky 1997), with many reporting their parents purchase lottery tickets for them as gifts (Felsher et al. 2004). Studies conducted in Canada, the USA, the UK, Australia and New Zealand have found that between 60% and 80% of youth aged 13–17 gamble at least once each year, 10–36% gamble at least once a week and 3–5% may be problem gamblers (Delfabbro and Thrupp 2003; Derevensky and Gupta 2000; Dickson et al. 2002; Fisher 1993, 1999; Gupta and Derevensky 1998; Moore and Ohtsuka 1997; Shaffer and Hall 2001; Sullivan 2001; Volberg and Moore 1999). Research also indicates that the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling among youth is two to four times higher than the adult population (Delfabbro and Thrupp 2003; National Research Council 1999; Shaffer and Hall 2001).

The acceptance of gambling as a harmless form of entertainment vastly underestimates the risks involved. A survey of 8th graders in Delaware found that youth who gamble were 50% more likely to drink alcohol, more than twice as likely to binge drink, more than three times as likely to use marijuana and other illegal drugs, and almost three times as likely to get into trouble with the police, be involved in gang fights and steal or shoplift (Delaware Council on Gambling Problems 2001). Problematic gambling among adolescents is associated with increased behavioural problems including delinquency and crime, substance use and abuse, disruption of relationships, truancy from school, impaired academic performance and work activities as well as poor psychological outcomes, including low self-esteem, depression, poor coping skills, and self-harm, suicidal ideations and attempts (Delfabbro et al. 2006; Derevensky 2008; Derevensky and Gupta 2002; Griffiths and Sutherland 1998; Gupta and Derevensky 2008; Ladouceur et al. 1994; Volberg and Moore 1999; Winters and Anderson 2000).

Gambling is intended as a recreational activity that is popular worldwide and while the majority of individuals gamble in a responsible manner, gambling has also been recognized as an inherently risky activity as some individuals engage in problematic gambling behaviour that causes disruption to their lives. In response to the possible risks associated with gambling prevention initiatives for youth have been implemented (Derevensky et al. 2004). However, little attention is currently being paid to the impact of the depiction of gambling in society, and particularly its impact on youth. As such, the image of gambling (e.g., glamour, excitement, entertainment, consistent winning) depicted in society needs examination. Still further, appropriate guidelines need to be developed and enacted to protect vulnerable populations.

Depiction of Gambling in the Media

According to cultivation theory, the amount of media consumption an individual is exposed to will determine the likelihood that they adopt the messages portrayed as their own

(McQuail and Windahl 1993). It is important to consider the impact of depiction of gambling in the media as entertaining and innocuous, without a balanced portrayal of the risks and possible negative consequences involved. A social learning theory (Bandura 1986) perspective suggests individual learn and model behaviours through observing others in their environment and when reinforced, individuals are more likely to adopt this behaviour. As such, children and adolescents are likely to model behaviour observed by 'significant others' and people they personally value. For example, modelling of behaviour exemplified by popular celebrities playing televised poker, characters in films gambling, or those celebrities and role models advertising Internet gambling sites would likely promote this activity amongst adolescents and young adults. Data from the USA and Australia suggests that childhood exposure to gambling increased the likelihood of gambling in adulthood (Delfabbro and Thrupp 2003; Kallick-Kaufman 1979) supporting the need to regulate the extent to which children are exposed to gambling.

Recent trends in reality television have resulted in numerous shows that offer viewers the opportunity to watch individuals risk and wager large amounts of money. For example, the documentary *Double or Nothing* featured a British man's decision to cash in his assets and bet his entire net worth on one spin of a roulette wheel. In 2005, *Man vs. Vegas* told the real-life story of a gambler who had lost $3 million in Las Vegas, costing him all his assets and marriage, returning in an attempt to win back his losses. These shows depict gambling problems as being rather extreme, resulting in the loss of entire net worth, homes, careers and failed marriages. The result is youth fail to recognize other less noticeable signs of problem gambling (e.g., disrupted relationships, lack of socialization with friends, slipping academic performance, irritable behaviour, etc.) and believe that gambling problems are not applicable to them given they do not own a home, have a job or marriages to lose. This is supported by findings from Australian focus groups with young adolescents (aged 13–15) that revealed that youth dissociated from problem gambling—their primary source of reference being TV sitcoms (Vardon 2007). When asked about potential problems, most reported that it was not an issue for them because they did not have the same level of commitment as adults. Some studies suggest while youth do recognize some of the problems and risks associated with problem and excessive gambling, their perceived invulnerability and belief that problems will come about much later (a temporal issue) acts to psychologically protect them from realizing the severity of their behaviours (Gillespie et al. 2007).

The *Ultimate Blackjack Tour* allows viewers to watch players compete and the show's website invites the public to play an online version of the game as well as receiving "tips from the pros" and be informed about upcoming tournaments. The show *High Stakes Entertainment,* aired in the USA on ESPN, which features "hustlers" gambling $1 million each on a hole of golf, was rated no. 1 in its time slot among male viewers aged 18–34 (Walsh 2007). In the UK, the Independent Television Commission (1995) reported that the televised lottery draw program was the second most popular program watched by children age 10–15 years and the popularity of these shows amongst youth appear to be dramatically increasing (Fisher and Balding 1998; Griffiths and Wood 2000). These shows may be particularly appealing to youth given that this age-group is characterized by experimentation and risk-taking (US Department of Health and Human Services 1994). Research demonstrates that young adults tend to underestimate the dangers associated with risky activities such as smoking and drinking alcohol, perceive themselves invulnerable to negative consequences and have difficulty relating to negative consequences that may happen in the future (Fischer et al. 1993; Fox et al. 1998; Leventhal et al. 1987). Television shows depicting high-stake gambling may encourage youth to engage in similar activities

and gamble as they perceive the benefits; the immediate benefits of excitement, exhilaration, entertainment, and the opportunity to win money outweighing the potential long-term costs (Gillespie et al. 2007).

Since the launch of televised Texas Hold'em poker with the initial airing of the World Poker Tour in March 2003, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Canada reported significant increases in the percentage of students from grades 7–12 that played cards for money between 2003 and 2005 (Hoskins 2006). According to the Annenberg Public Policy Centre (2005), between 2003 and 2004 there was an 84% growth in weekly poker play among male high school and college students within the USA. Although most young people play for small stakes, the acceptance and habitual playing of poker still poses significant potential risks. The 2006 National Annenberg Risk Survey of Youth found that the symptoms of problem gambling parallel card-playing trends, especially among older male youth (Annenberg Public Policy Centre 2006). There are now numerous worldwide televised poker tournaments and games featuring celebrities wagering high stakes as well as previously unknown individuals winning large sums of money. These poker champions and professional gamblers have taken on celebrity status amongst youth and promoters have rushed to use them in advertisements promoting gambling products and gaming opportunities (most noticeable on Internet wager sites). Poker promoters continue to emphasize that skill and experience are necessary to become a professional poker player. The glamorization of poker and gambling as a way of life is now perceived to be a viable career choice by many adolescents. In a survey of Australian youth, 72% of participants indicated that they had watched TV poker shows, 42% reported finding them enjoyable, and 10% said that they encouraged them and their friends to gamble (Delfabbro et al. 2007). Problem gamblers were found to more likely have watched tournaments (often perceived to be instructive), rated their levels of enjoyment higher, and prompted their own gambling. Poker was depicted as part of a glamorous lifestyle, promote the idea that practice and knowledge increases skill, chances of winning, and encouraging the belief that large payoffs are possible.

Social learning theory contends that youth are heavily influenced by role models and learn vicariously through observing the actions of others. Research demonstrates that young people frequently adopt certain self-images, lifestyle patterns, and purchasing decisions based on observation of individuals presented in the media (Lockwood and Kunda 1997). These vicarious role models can have a significant effect on the career aspirations, educational choices, behaviours and self-views of young adults (Bush et al. 2004). The high profile afforded professional gamblers in the media has promoted the image of professional gambling as a lifestyle and vocational choice for youth. This is supported by the results of focus groups conducted with Australian youth that reveal young people are quite naïve about the true odds of winning, have little appreciation for the negative consequences of gambling, have limited thoughts about problem gambling and that most believe it is possible to make a living from gambling (Vardon 2007). Research also reveals that youth who have gambling problems are more likely to be optimistic about the outcomes of gambling and believe that gambling is a good way to make money than youth without gambling problems (Delfabbro et al. 2007). Recent focus groups conducted by the International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors at McGill University examining poker playing amongst high school students supports these previous findings as they revealed a considerable proportion of the males indicated that they would desire to be a professional poker player upon graduation.

In addition to the widespread proliferation of gambling on television shows, gambling is also portrayed in movies as a glamorous and exciting lifestyle choice and form of

entertainment. The latest James Bond film, *Casino Royale*, portrayed the central character playing in a high-stakes Texas Hold'em tournament in an exciting, masculine, heroic and sexual context with a scantily-clad woman and a martini by his side. This film was the highest grossing James Bond film to date, garnering a worldwide total of $448 million (excluding DVD sales), the 38th highest-grossing film of all time and the 6th highest grossing film of all time in the UK (All Time Worldwide Box Office Grosses 2007; McNary 2006). An empirical review of films produced within the past 20 years films revealed that gambling was generally portrayed as either very positive (the magical skill of the professional gambler and miraculous wins as happy endings) or very negatively (pathological gamblers, cheating, gamblers are fools, gambling is run by organized crime; Turner et al. 2007). There was also a marked ambivalence towards gambling in many films. On one hand gambling venues are depicted as exciting and glamorous places where typically men can attract beautiful women and spies consistently beat the house odds, and on the other hand there are films suggesting casinos are operated by criminals and/or deserved to be robbed (*Oceans 12*). Current movies often confuse the concepts of luck and skill; for example, many James Bond films show Bond playing games of chance (baccarat and craps) as if they were predominantly games of skill. Independent of the game, Bond always relies upon his skill to outplay and out manoeuvre his opponents (Turner et al. 2007).

The distorted images of gambling portrayed in films generally fail to provide the audience with portrayals of responsible gambling. The positive portrayal of gambling and its associated glamour and excitement in films may encourage youth to engage in risky gambling behaviour in the belief that this may lead to a similar glamorous lifestyle and reinforce the erroneous belief that they possess the skills to repeatedly beat the odds. Conversely, negative depictions of gamblers as derelicts, impoverished losers and criminals leads to a stereotypic image of a problem gambler that youth cannot relate to, denying the belief that gambling problems are not a risk for them. Research findings suggest that youth with severe gambling problems tend to grossly underestimate the severity of their gambling behaviour (Hardoon et al. 2003) and perceive the benefits associated with their gambling (Gillespie et al. 2007).. Their perception of a pathological gambler is a classic stereotype that bears no resemblance to a teenager, and as a result, most adolescents do not recognize gambling-related problems when they first arise and few seek treatment (Derevensky and Gupta 2002). Youth in focus groups emphasized that stressing the negative impact of gambling only encourages experimentation and risk-taking, especially as gambling is already perceived to be an enjoyable form of entertainment and socially acceptable recreational activity (Vardon 2007).

While regulation is strictly enforced to limit the exposure of children and adolescents to violent or sexual behaviour, few guidelines are in place to protect youth from the depiction of gambling in the media. For example, most international jurisdictions have classification boards (e.g. The Australian Classification Board, the Motion Picture Association of America, and the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board) to categorise films and television shows to be appropriate for certain age groups based on levels of crude language, violence, sex/nudity, or portrayal of substance use, there is no mention of gambling in their guidelines. Similarly, while television shows containing content classified as not suitable for young viewers are restricted to later timeslots, no restrictions are made for the airing of gambling tournaments. Gambling should be subject to comparable regulations as violent and sexual behaviours with efforts made to minimise the exposure of children and adolescents to gambling by preventing television shows portraying gambling from being aired during child and teen viewing time slots and placing higher age restrictions on films

that display considerable gambling content. Furthermore, efforts should be taken to provide a more balanced portrayal of gambling in films and televisions shows including a realistic representation of the games, responsible gambling behaviour, accurate disclosure statements, and a description of the potential risks and negative consequences of gambling.

Promotion of Gambling During Sports Events

Sporting competitions and events are amongst the most popular televised programs viewed by youth, particularly young males. While most youth watch sports for entertainment, as a social and recreational activity, an increasing number of youth are wagering money on the outcomes. Estimates from the National Gambling Hotline are that 48% of gamblers are wagering on sporting events and contests, with 33% of the participants being under the age of 25 (Bickley 2008). A comprehensive survey by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) found that 63% of Division I male student-athletes gambled on everything from the lottery to card games and more than 17% of these students admitted to violating NCAA regulations by betting on collegiate sports (NCAA 2003). Sports pools, lotteries and sports betting are very attractive to youth, especially boys, as they believe that their knowledge increases their ability to accurately predict the outcomes of sporting events (Derevensky and Gupta 2002). Focus groups further revealed that the majority of participants expressed a preference for wagering on events in which they had knowledge and believed they had some control over including sports betting and horse racing (Vardon 2007). Other research suggests that youth believe that sports betting is more "skilful" than other forms of gambling (Delfabbro et al. 2007).

Sports wagering may be perceived as less harmful than other forms of gambling given the affiliation with the healthy aspect of sports and competition. A survey by *Wanna Bet*, an online teen magazine of the North American Training Institute, found high school students feel "betting" on sports is different from "gambling" (e.g., card and casino games, lottery tickets and chance games) (Gurnett 2003).

The recognition of the potential negative impact that advertising of gambling may have is evident in recent UK legislation banning gambling advertisements during timeslots commonly watched by youth (Gambling Act 2005). However, paradoxically, advertisements for sports betting are permitted during the airing of major sporting events, an exemption that sends a message that sports wagering is an acceptable form of gambling. It is recommended that the promotion of gambling during sporting events be prohibited to discourage the association between watching and enjoying sports and wagering.

'Soft' Forms of Gambling

Although government legislation in most jurisdictions prevents children under the age of 18 from participating in regulated forms of gambling (e.g., lotteries, electronic gaming machines, casino games or horses), there are multiple opportunities for them to engage in other forms of gambling and games of chance. For example, in most jurisdictions, minors can enter into wagers amongst themselves, trade promotions (such as prizes won by collecting and entering coupons or entering competitions by mail, phone, or internet), raffles (including charity run lotteries with prizes under $20,000), bingo, football tipping competitions, horse sweeps, and many other activities, often not considered to be forms of gambling. Gambling in any form increases the likelihood of participation in other forms of gambling. What starts off as an occasional, fun activity may potentially escalate into a serious problem.

Research repeatedly demonstrates that individuals who begin gambling earlier in life are at higher-risks of developing gambling-related problems (Fisher and Balding 1998; Griffiths 1995; Gupta and Derevensky 1998; Huxley and Carroll 1992; Winters et al. 1993). Given these findings it remains disconcerting that children often report receiving lottery tickets or scratch tickets as birthday or holiday (e.g., Christmas) presents from parents and family members. It is also not unusual for young children to form partnerships with parents or relatives to purchase lottery tickets and play cards and bingo for money (Gupta and Derevensky 1997). This tacit acceptance of gambling by family members promotes the perception of gambling as an innocuous activity and increases the likelihood of further involvement with gambling. It is important that parents, family members, educators and health providers take an active role in discouraging gambling amongst underage youth and heighten the awareness of the potential risks involved with gambling.

Today, many corporations appear to be targeting children and youth with competitions that approximate the structure of a scratch and win lottery or lottery draw. For example, product packaging may contain a prize, scratch tickets are provided with purchase, or consumers are invited to mail, telephone, email the promoters for the chance to win a prize. Examples of these include Coca-Cola's "*MagiCans*" promotion where consumers could find special cans containing currency from $1 to $500 or coupons redeemable for trips or merchandise and the popular and repeated worldwide promotion of *Monopoly* at McDonalds (McDonald's also had a campaign using a scratch card), where consumers remove stickers from tickets to win instant prizes or find street names, with a complete set winning expensive prizes including motorcycles, holidays, and large amounts of cash ($1 million). These promotions familiarize youth with the concept of trying their luck at the chance of winning prizes, while associating this with positive reinforcement as in these promotions, consumers always receive something beneficial, that is the product they purchase. Unfortunately, there are generally no age restrictions concerning participation. It is possible that individuals experiencing an early big win, a phenomenon that has been associated with increased gambling-related irrational thoughts and the development of gambling-related problems (Monaghan 2007; Walker 1992), may continue to play other forms of games of chance. These promotions also perpetuate the impression of gambling as a harmless activity. It is recommended that companies, particularly those for which youth make up a substantial proportion of the client-base, explore other forms of promotions rather than simulating gambling and lotteries.

Promotion of Gambling to Children

While legislation is commonly enacted prohibiting minors from engaging in most forms of regulated gambling, gambling is concurrently being promoted as an acceptable past time through the marketing of non-monetary 'games' that simulate gambling, online websites, and sale of gambling-related toys and video games. For example, given it is illegal for minors to play Internet poker and casino poker in most jurisdictions, poker kits including tables, cards, and chips, mini slot machines, and electronic poker, roulette and blackjack games are nevertheless sold in toy shops and toy sections in major department stores. Accessing *eBay* and typing in the word 'poker' generally produces at least 11,000 hits with items including collectibles, poker chips, cards, furniture, clothing and accessories, books, movies, video games, etc. The *World Championship Poker*, *World Poker Tour* and *World Series of Poker* are amongst the popular gambling-themed video games available for PlayStation 2, computer entertainment systems, XBox and Nintendo Game Boy. These simulated gambling games allow players to compete against professionals, offer a wide

variety of game play modes, in-game narration similar to that featured on televised poker tournaments, as well as providing in-depth tutorials designed to assist players in "improving" their game. These games increase player familiarity with gambling which may result in problem gambling behaviour given that increased familiarity with activities and products has been shown to reduce the level of hazard perceived, the likelihood of individuals warnings not being read, and can lead to an overconfidence in individual abilities (Wogalter and Laughery 1996). Furthermore, these games may promote illusions of control, irrational beliefs that individuals have the skill necessary to beat the odds, and that winning is easy and only one game away. It is not unusual for adolescents to report playing gambling-related video games to help acquire "the tricks of the trade" (Vardon 2007).

Multiple Internet websites that are intended for youth feature gambling-type games, including card games, roulette and virtual gaming machines, allowing children and adolescents to become familiar with these games, thus making it more likely that they will see real-money sites as an acceptable past-time, form of entertainment and an 'easy' way to make money. Recent findings suggest that youth frequently report gambling online due to boredom or for excitement as they perceive gambling as an acceptable pastime (Derevensky et al. 2006). The popular *Neopet* website (which has 33 million members, 70% of whom are below the age of seventeen [Neopets.com 2006]) features gambling-type games including virtual poker, blackjack, roulette, lottery scratch cards and pokies [electronic gambling machines]where cute characters teach children how to play, with children able to gamble online to earn points to feed their virtual Neopet. The widely accessed youth social networking site *Facebook* allows users to gamble without money with applications enabling users to play poker, join an online lottery (in which users can win cash prizes of up to $500 or gift certificates from Amazon and eBay) and play Mahjong, one of the most popular worldwide gambling games. *Facebook* offers these applications in multiple languages and provides instructions to assist users in learning the rules of the games and encouraging them to improve their skills.

The promotion of gambling as a game or recreational activity diminishes the perception of possible hazards or risks involved. Strong distinctions are not drawn between gambling-themed games and actual gambling activities making it more likely that children and adolescents, familiar with gambling games and aware of the rules and practicalities of the game, will cross over to gambling for money without an awareness of the potential negative consequences. It is recommended that these products display visible warnings advising consumers of the risks involved with gambling for money.

Promotion of Gambling as Providing Positive Social Benefits to Society

Gambling is often promoted as a positive socially responsible endeavour. For example, 'casino themed' school fundraisers, charitable *Texas Hold'em* tournaments and gambling on games including bingo, roulette, lotteries, and raffles where the profits go to a charity group. In 2002, charitable gambling constituted almost 4% of the total amount wagered on legalized gambling in the USA (Christiansen Capital Advisors LLC 2003). Furthermore, these activities are often exempt from regulations placed on other gaming operators, including being permitted to advertise to children and allow underage participation. In 2007 a benefit poker tournament for a Youth Center for at-risk children, was be hosted by Nancy Cartwright, the voice of *Bart Simpson* and amongst the other celebrity participant present to play against was Tom Kenny, the voice of *SpongeBob SquarePants,* another popular children's character (LAPD Devonshire Pals 2007). These celebrities clearly appealed to young children and encouraged them to attend the poker tournament as well as presenting

the message that gambling is harmless, good for society, and fun, all of which were represented by popular children's icons. Many youth programs are also funded by gambling proceeds. For example, bingo and raffles, in addition to direct dominations or sponsorship from gaming corporations are not unusual. Charity gambling is often marketed as 'guilt-free' gambling that will benefit others. It is also not unusual for state lotteries in the USA to talk of the lottery funding public education and institutions of higher learning and bingo remains a favourite way of raising funds by Church groups. Similarly, in New Zealand gaming machine trusts frequently fund youth and professional sporting teams and events with monies generated from gambling revenue perpetuating the idea that gambling is beneficial to society.

The promotion of gambling activities to children and adolescents, particularly when associated with social benefits appeals to individuals' empathy for others, is not without risks. Given the high-risks associated with excessive adolescent gambling, gambling activities of all forms should be restricted to those over the age of the legal age in that jurisdiction. Significant care should be placed upon organizations when using gambling activities as fundraisers. Schools should definitely not include 'casino nights' or sports pools as fundraisers.

Gambling is often heralded by private organizations and state governments as providing significant social and economic benefits. Funding provided to cultural and non-profit organizations is promoted as a way in which gambling corporations support activities. While gambling organisations provide considerable funding to charitable causes, this represents a miniscule proportion of their revenues. A review by the Canada West Foundation found that although exact figures are unknown, charitable gaming revenues as a proportion of total revenue derived from gambling has in fact decreased steadily over the last ten years (Azmier 2000). A follow-up report concluded that there had been an increase in promotion of worthwhile causes associated with the spending of gambling revenue, resulting in a gap widening between what is known about the positive impacts of gambling compared to the social costs (Azmier 2001). Promoters of gambling contend that the social and economic benefits of gambling including increased employment and tourism. It is also argued that the social and recreational aspects of gambling strengthen families as they provide individuals with necessary 'time outs' required to maintain healthy relationships. In a report published by the Fraser Institute in Vancouver it is claimed that these benefits far outweigh any social costs (Basham and White 2002). These arguments fail to consider the heightened rate of problem gambling amongst casino employees (Hing and Breen in press; Shaffer and Hall 2002; Shaffer et al. 1999b) and in populations in close proximity to gambling venues (Abbott and Volberg 1999; Gambling Review Body 2001; National Research Council 1999; Productivity Commission 1999; Rush et al. 2007; Shaffer et al. 1999a), the social costs of problem gambling (including lost work time, crime, bankruptcy, financial destitution of families), co-morbid mood disorders and substance abuse frequently found in problem gamblers (Shaffer and Korn 2002; Welte et al. 2001), and the increased likelihood of children gambling if family members gamble (Delfabbro and Thrupp 2003; Gupta and Derevensky 1997). Gambling is also frequently promoted as providing important revenue to state, provincial or federal governments either through direct ownership or taxation. State-run gaming lends an air of credibility to behaviour that might otherwise be considered risky.

It is paradoxical that the perception of gambling as making important contributions to disadvantaged sections of society is in contradiction to evidence suggesting individuals with lower socio-economic standing spend substantially more disposable income on gambling than those from higher socio-economic classes. For example, the US National

Gambling Impact Study Commission (1999) claimed that lotteries exploit those on low incomes and cited figures showing that lottery gamblers with household incomes under $10,000 wagered nearly three times as much as those with incomes over $50,000. This trend has been similarly documented in several international jurisdictions including Australia (Doughney 2002), Canada (Marshall 1998, 2000), and the UK (Grun and McKeigue 2000). However, these figures are not widely circulated to members of the public, while advertising campaigns that are designed to play upon people's charitable instinct provide an impression of altruism, such as the UK advertising slogan *"Everyone's a winner"* are widely publicized (Griffiths 2005). Furthermore, legitimizing sources, including broadcasts on the respected BBC channel and the promotion of the links between lotteries and charitable causes increases the positive subjective normalization and widespread social acceptability towards these products, which has been associated with a greater likelihood to engage in gambling activities (Wood and Griffiths 2004).

Location of Gambling Venues

Although minors are generally restricted from entering gaming rooms, they are frequently free to spend time in close proximity to these venues. For example, Las Vegas has in the past been heavily promoted as a family-friendly holiday destination. Casinos include family-friendly restaurants, shows, rides, arcade games and shops with often only different carpeting separating the casino floor from areas where minors are permitted. Melbourne's Crown Casino complex has numerous teenage entertainment venues including cinemas, amusement arcades and eateries. The enormous gambling area is located in the center of the complex, highly visible to the teenagers who are prohibited from entering. Given the developmental tendencies of adolescents to take risks and rebel against authority, this likely makes the visible but 'off limits' gambling area even more attractive. Throughout Australia similar situations exist, with children often permitted in hotels and clubs, although not in gambling or bar areas. Clubs often provide child care, inexpensive meals and children menus, child-suitable furniture (e.g., high chairs), junior sporting clubs, and entertainment activities for children to encourage parents to bring children with them while they gamble (Brading 2001). Other venues encourage children to participate in raffles, bingo and competitions. By permitting and encouraging children and adolescents to spend time in close proximity to gambling venues, this increases their familiarity with the activity and may heighten their desire to gamble given it is prohibited and therefore more attractive to risk-taking and thrill-seeking teenagers. The provision of activities that encourage youth to spend time in and around gaming venues may be seen as a form of grooming whereby youth will continue to frequent these venues once they are of legal gambling age. For this reason, in New Zealand and other jurisdictions, gambling venues are prohibited in close proximity to schools, places of worship and community venues (Gambling Act 2003).

Conclusion

Despite the lack of public awareness, youth problem gambling remains a serious problem. This generation of youth is the first that will have grown up with the widespread acceptance, multiple formats and opportunities for gambling, and in an environment where gambling is perceived to be a harmless recreational, entertaining, and socially acceptable pastime activity. The incidence of gambling-related problems amongst youth may be heightened by the depiction of gambling in society, through the glamour and exciting

appeal portrayed in the media including television shows and films, the association between wagering and sporting events, promotion of 'soft' forms of gambling to children, through the promotion of gambling as providing social and economic benefits, and the ease of accessibility. Active efforts should be undertaken by governments and legislators, the industry, and community members to provide a more balanced image of this activity including awareness of the risks involved when gambling no longer becomes fun but enters into the realm of problems. Changes need to be made at multiple levels to reduce the incidence of gambling amongst youth and prevent the development of long-term, gambling-related problems. Education and responsible social policies will help minimize potential harms.

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