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## Parents and adolescents discuss gambling advertising: A qualitative study

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## Parents and adolescents discuss gambling advertising: A qualitative study

### Abstract

The study specifically aimed to explore:

1. How socio-cultural factors may influence the meanings individuals construct about gambling.
2. How different audience segments (in this case parents and their children) interpret messages about different types of advertisements in different ways.
3. How the framing of messages about gambling may influence perceptions about the risks and benefits associated with different types of gambling products and services.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Provide detailed qualitative information about how different audience segments interpret the messages they see in gambling advertisements.
2. Strengthen understandings about how different gambling advertising strategies may influence gambling attitudes in different audience segments.
3. Inform future studies on audience perceptions of gambling advertising and marketing strategies.

### Keywords

qualitative, adolescents, discuss, gambling, parents, advertising, study

### Disciplines

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# RESEARCH REPORT

## Parents and adolescents discuss gambling advertising: A qualitative study

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October 2014



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2011, Australia has witnessed a rapid increase in the amount of gambling advertising for some forms of gambling products in community spaces. Most obviously has been the proliferation of advertising for wagering products within professional sport. Concern has been raised from the community, academics and governments about this specific type of advertising, with questions raised about the long and short term effect on the gambling attitudes and behaviours of some population subgroups – in particular young men and children.

**Most gambling research focuses on individual gambling pathology, with very limited research exploring the broader socio-cultural and environments factors that may lead to gambling risk and harm.**

Marketing is one of these factors, and has been shown to play an important role in stimulating consumption patterns in other products which related to key public health issues (such as tobacco, junk food and alcohol). However, our current understanding of how different audience segments interact with gambling marketing remains limited.

In a review of current research into gambling marketing, Binde (2014) argues that while the absolute impact of gambling advertising on gambling behaviour and excessive gambling is difficult to measure, it is important to understand the relative impact of different types of advertising on different population subgroups. In particular, he argues that these types of studies provide important information in developing harm prevention and ‘responsibility’ guidelines to counter forms of marketing that are potentially more risky for some population subgroups. Binde goes on to argue that two ‘high priority’ areas for further research should be to explore the self-rated impact of gambling advertising; and self-report perception of gambling advertising.

The following qualitative study (with 59 adults and 61 of their adolescent children living in metropolitan Melbourne) presented in the report responds to some of the information ‘gaps’ highlighted by Binde in his report. It aims to provide qualitative preliminary information about how parents and children perceive and respond to different types of advertising for a variety of gambling products and services.

The study specifically aimed to explore:

1. How **socio-cultural factors** may influence the meanings individuals construct about gambling.
2. How **different audience segments** (in this case parents and their children) interpret messages about different types of advertisements in different ways.
3. How the **framing of messages about gambling may influence perceptions** about the risks and benefits associated with different types of gambling products and services.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Provide **detailed qualitative information** about how different audience segments interpret the messages they see in gambling advertisements.
2. Strengthen **understandings** about how different gambling advertising strategies may influence gambling attitudes in different audience segments.
3. **Inform future studies** on audience perceptions of gambling advertising and marketing strategies.

Families were recruited by a market research company based on SEIFA deciles to ensure that we included parents and children from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The study was conducted in family homes, and had two stages.

1. The first phase collected quantitative and qualitative information about gambling attitudes and behaviours. Parents and their children were interviewed separately about their socio-demographic factors, their attitudes towards different types of gambling, and their beliefs about the risks and benefits of gambling. We separated parents and children to ensure that parents had no undue influence over children’s responses. We asked a range of socio-demographic questions (e.g. age, gender), followed by questions on continuing scales about perceptions of the seriousness of problem gambling as an issue for the state of Victoria (0 = not at all serious, and 10 = one of the most serious issues); and who they thought was responsible for problem gambling (0 = the gambling industry, 5 = a combination of the gambling industry and individuals, and 10 = individuals).

2. We then interviewed parents and children together. To stimulate discussion about advertising, we showed parents and children five different advertisements which either directly, or incidentally depicted gambling. We were interested in how the parents and children discussed and responded to the advertisements as a ‘family unit’.
- Advertisements were used to prompt discussions about participants’ perceptions of different types of gambling products and services, as well as the different messaging and framing techniques used to sell these products. We selected a variety of advertisements to represent advertisements for a range of different products that were framed in different ways. These included:
- Advertisements that directly promoted gambling products or services including two advertisements for sports betting products and services, and one for a lottery.
  - An advertisement that incidentally depicted gambling. This advertisement was for a casino entertainment complex, but which showed gambling incidentally depicted amongst a range of entertainment activities offered in the complex.
  - Finally, we included an advertisement for a racing carnival. While this advertisement did not depict gambling, we included it to explore whether participants inherently associated an advertisement for the sport of horse racing with gambling activities.

After each advertisement was played (in a random order), parents and children were engaged in a discussion about the advertisements that they had viewed. They were asked a range of questions that explored their perceptions of the framing and content of the key messages in the advertisements.

We asked specific semi-structured questions, but also followed participant’s thoughts as they emerged. Thematic analytic techniques were used to identify the key themes to emerge both within and across parent and adolescent narratives.

It is important to note that this study is comprised of a small sample, and as such cannot be generalisable to large population subgroups. However, it is hoped that this research will provide information that will be able to be followed up and explored in further, more detailed, studies.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Socio-demographic and gambling characteristics

- Parents were mostly mothers (n=47) with a median age of 48 years (range 30 – 60 years). Just over half of the adolescents in the sample were boys (n=33), with a median age of 16 (range 14-18 years).
- Two-thirds of parents had completed high school or tertiary education (n=48) and most had an income of less than \$100,000 per annum. The sample was distributed equitably across socio-economic SEIFA tertiles – low, medium, and high.
- Many parents in this study had gambled at least once in the last year on activities such as lotteries (n=33), wagering on horse races (n=24) and community raffles (n=13). Some adolescents stated that they had participated in gambling activities, although these mostly comprised informal activities with family members and friends.

## The causes and consequences of problem gambling

The quantitative analysis revealed that both parents and children perceived problem gambling as a serious issue for the state of Victoria.

Parents and children had similar perceptions of the causes of problem gambling. However, adolescents perceived that problem gambling was caused by a combination of the gambling industry and individual behaviour (mean 5.1), while parents' responses were slightly skewed towards the gambling industry being the leading cause of problem gambling (mean 4.4).

When asked to assess what was the best way to reduce problem gambling, both parents and adolescent responses leaned towards more regulation of the gambling industry (parents mean 5.8 and adolescents mean 5.9).

## Discussions about gambling in social networks

The majority of adults stated that they had discussed gambling at home with their children and/or partner. While three-quarters of adolescents had discussed gambling, they stated that these discussions were typically outside of their families, with school peers and friends. Parental discussions were primarily focused on the 'risks' associated with gambling.

## Conceptualisations of risks and benefits

Whereas parents were more aware that gambling was an activity that had risks and benefits, some adolescents perceived that gambling would lead to positive outcomes.

For example, some adolescents described gambling as a 'system' or 'payment' or 'investment' made to get more money back. Parents and children also differed in the language used to define gambling.

For example, while some parents used the word 'risk', children used the words 'luck' or 'chance'.

Moral discourses were often used to describe gambling as an activity, including the words 'damaging', 'addictive', 'dangerous' from parents, 'illogical', 'bad' and 'wrong' from children.

Financial gain was seen as a clear outcome from gambling for some adolescents, describing gambling as an activity that was 'fun' and 'exciting' activity that gave individuals the chance to 'win big'. Parents were less focused on financial gain as benefit from gambling, and perceived that the main benefits from gambling were primarily linked to social engagement and opportunities.

## Interpreting marketing messages

Three key themes emerged from the data.

### Theme One: The 'feel good' factor

Advertisements that used positive emotive framing techniques were perceived by many participants as giving a compelling message about the product. However different groups of participants responded to these messages in different ways.

For example, women were particularly positive towards advertisements that contained messages about spending time with family members, providing financially for family members, or that they perceived promoted social connectedness.

### Theme Two: Legitimising and normalising

There was concern expressed by some parents in this study that gambling was becoming normalised in Australian communities through advertising and marketing. Most of this concern was focused on the way in which the proliferation of gambling advertising would

normalise gambling activities, particularly as they related to sport, for children.

Many parents believed that limiting children's exposure to gambling products, services, and advertising, would help to reduce the risks posed by gambling.

### **Theme Three: Easy, entertaining and fun**

The final theme that emerged in response to the advertisements, was the perception that gambling was 'easy', 'exciting' and 'fun'. For example, some adolescents perceived that the advertisement for the casino complex portrayed that it was a 'fun', 'exciting', 'fast-paced' place.

Some adolescents stated that this was reinforced with the use of colours and bright visuals within this advertisement. Participants observed that advertisements about sports betting highlighted the ease of accessibility of the product online.

Parents stated that they were concerned that some of these messages may be particularly 'enticing' for some population subgroups.

## **Mandatory warning messages**

This study has shown that while the appearance of longer forms of mandatory warning messages were recalled by participants, very few participants were able to recall the specific information contained in these advertisements.

# BACKGROUND

## Harmful gambling: An important public health issue

Gambling has a strong historical tradition within Australia, and is culturally embedded through national events such as the Melbourne Cup which originated in the 1860s, through to the alignment of gambling with newer events such as sporting matches, including sponsorship arrangements between gambling companies and sporting clubs.

While some argue that Australians love a ‘punt’ and that gambling is a cultural ‘past time’ for many Australian adults (Productivity Commission, 2010), others argue that this is a myth, with most Victorians agreeing that gambling causes harm for the community (Maiden, 2013).

Research shows that gambling products can cause significant harm to individuals, communities and populations. In Australia, about 0.5 – 1.0% of the adult population are classified as having a problem with gambling, and a further 1.4 – 2.1% demonstrate a vulnerability to a gambling problem by engaging in risky gambling behaviour patterns (Productivity Commission, 2010).

It is well recognised that these figures are likely to be underestimated by about 35% (Thomas et al, 2012a) with the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission estimating that problem gambling costs the Victorian community up to \$2.7 billion each year (Dowling, 2012).

While it is illegal for children to engage in formal gambling, some research suggests that children are vulnerable to developing problems with gambling (Messerlian et al, 2005; Delfabbro and Thrupp, 2011; Volberg et al, 2010).

Research estimates that 50% of young Australians participate in gambling by 15 years of age, rising to 76% by 19 years of age, although these studies predate the newer and arguably more pervasive forms of online gambling (Delfabbro et al, 2005).

While many researchers have explored the individual factors and pathology associated with gambling risk and harm, public health researchers and practitioners now argue that it is impossible to ignore the tactics of the gambling industry in the development of harmful patterns of gambling (Adams et al, 2009; Thomas 2013a).

A public health approach to gambling involves looking beyond the individual factors towards investigating and understanding the range of socio-cultural and

environmental factors that may contribute to gambling harm, thus shifting from individual risk factors to the collective health and wellbeing of populations (Thomas, 2013b). In doing so, a public health approach to gambling shifts from focusing on the individualistic understanding of lifestyles, to highlight the role of social environments and policies to address the ‘context and meaning’ of health actions, and the determinants that keep people healthy (Korn et al, 2003).

**In order to move towards a public health approach to problem gambling, research must strike a balance between understanding the individuals causes of (and treatment for) problem gambling, towards a broader understanding of how social environments and policy initiatives may influence behaviours in population subgroups.**

Identifying and understanding the causes of harmful gambling is complex. This is because gambling exhibits many of the characteristics of a ‘wicked’ public health problem, those problems that are characterised by a high level of complexity, and are continually evolving, have many causal levels, and have no single solution that applies in all circumstances (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007; Brown et al, 2010).

The drivers of problem gambling are multiple, diverse and complex. They include personal behaviours and aspects of the physical, economics, socio-cultural and political environments; and are influenced by the role of product choices available to individuals (Thomas et al, 2012b). This includes the role that the gambling industry plays, and how its products and the promotion of its products may influence gambling attitudes and behaviours.

### The role of marketing and advertising

Messages about gambling are everywhere. Formal messages appear on our television and computer screens; at our sporting matches; on billboards and signage; and at our supermarkets and newsagents.

Informal messages are embedded within our socio-cultural contexts and rhetoric, including in our conversations with family and friends, and in popular culture.

While messages about gambling come from a range of different sources, most formal messages about gambling

come from the gambling industry marketing strategies. However, it is important to acknowledge that other messages about the risks and benefits of gambling are also developed within peer and family contexts, and through government campaigns and the news media.

We have extremely limited understanding of the interplay between social contexts and the range of messages that are given about gambling. This includes how individuals 'consume' different types of messages about a range of different gambling products, and how these messages resonate with social contexts and experiences.

Furthermore, how does this influence the way different individuals construct meaning about the risks and benefits of engaging with different types of gambling products?

As new forms of gambling have emerged (Thomas et al, 2012b), so too have the ways in which these products and services can be promoted in numerous media environments (Thomas et al, 2012c; Lindsay et al, 2013).

Drawing upon research findings from alcohol, junk food and tobacco, which suggest that industry plays a significant role in influencing dangerous consumption attitudes and behaviours (Hastings and Saren, 2003), researchers, politicians and community members have expressed concern about the impact of marketing on short and long term gambling behaviours (Aston, 2013).

In particular, has been a focus on the promotion of gambling during sporting matches – sometimes termed the 'gambification' of sporting matches (McMullan, 2011). In 2013, the increase of gambling related marketing was described as a 'tsunami of promotion of gambling products through multiple marketing channels within our sporting matches' (Thomas, 2013a).

Advertising of gambling during sport has emerged as a particular area of concern because of young people's love of, and engagement with sport; their rapid uptake of new technology; their ease of access to online gambling products; the influence of peer and social norms on risk behaviours; and marketing tactics which may not directly target adolescents, but which adolescents consume in their everyday lives (Lindsay et al, 2013).

Despite the concerns raised about the impact of gambling marketing, there is very limited empirical evidence examining the impact of marketing on the gambling attitudes and behaviours of either adults or children.

**Table One** summarises the small number of studies which have investigated gambling marketing and advertising from 2007-2013, with descriptions about the type of study, the key aims of the study and the key findings.

Studies are predominantly descriptive in nature and fall into five categories: content analyses of advertisements; content analyses of advertising within different community environments; qualitative studies with problem gamblers, adults or children; and small surveys. Very few studies have been conducted in Australia.

A number of studies have explored the way in which advertisements for different types of gambling products are framed. In a study of 920 lottery advertisements, McMullan and Miller [2009] found that advertisements used a range of different appeal techniques: sound effects, which included exploding fireworks; musical overlays with 'spend' themes; and brightly coloured images and texts, arguing that such marketing techniques are used to amplify the excitement associated with potential monetary wins (McMullen and Miller, 2009).

Researchers have also explored the ways in which the marketing of gambling, and particularly sports betting, has become 'culturally embedded' within sport, and the ways in which this may impact on betting behaviours (Thomas et al, 2012c). McMullan (2011, p4) has referred to this as the 'gambification of sport', in which a 'symbiotic relationship' has been created between sport and gambling.

McMullen and others, have also drawn attention to the role of celebrity endorsements, merchandising, and promotional activities linking sporting teams and professional sportspeople, to a range of gambling products.

Some have argued that the cultural embedding of gambling into popular culture and fan loyalty, creates a potential pedagogical effect on young people's understanding of, and attitudes towards gambling.

Derevensky and colleagues (2010) argue that the exposure of young people to gambling advertising reinforces it as a fun, harmless leisure activity, which is clearly associated with an easy way to win money.

A smaller number of studies have examined how specific types of individuals may interact with gambling marketing strategies.

For example, Gosker (1999) explored the ways in which gambling is marketed to older adults and Griffiths and Wood (2002) have raised concerns about the impact of television based gambling advertising on individuals from lower socio-economic communities who, they point out, are more likely to watch television than other groups.

In particular, studies have focused on the differences in the ways in which problem and non-problem gamblers interact with advertising. For example, some researchers suggest that problem gamblers may have a greater awareness and recall of gambling advertising; or state that advertising had played a key role in prompting them to gamble.

However, the evidence is still contradictory. While in some studies a number of problem gamblers give detailed accounts of how advertising contributes to their gambling, others suggest this has no impact on gambling behaviour at all.

### A recent review of empirical research by Binde (2014) into gambling advertising identified a number of clear information gaps in current research.

The review highlights that while research into the impact of gambling on gambling behaviours is challenging, there are a range of studies that would provide important knowledge for policy maker and regulators in providing evidence based responses to gambling industry marketing strategies (Binde, 2014 p6).

Binde highlights that current research may be grouped into three broad grouping – studies on the volume and efficiency of marketing, the impact of marketing on problem gambling, and the content and messages contained in marketing strategies (Binde, 2014, p9).

Binde recommends that two high priority areas for further research should be to explore the self-rated impact of gambling advertising; and self-report perception of gambling advertising (Binde, 2014, p2-3).

**Table One**  
**Select Studies on Gambling Advertising and Marketing (2007 - 2013)**

Authors (year)	Aims and Objectives	Study Design	Type of Gambling Advertising or Marketing Studied	Population Studied	Key Findings
Hing et al., 2013	Investigation of gambling sponsorship in sport and the attitudes/intentions relating to gambling	Online Survey	Sports betting	Football matches	Exposure to gambling promotions during televised sport encourage gambling intentions, with gamblers scoring higher on the PGSI more likely to be exposed to these promotions, view them favourably, be interested in the sponsor's products and be willing to use them.
Kim et al., 2013	Examine the prevalence of advertising during TV poker programs between 2006 and 2010	Content analysis	Internet gambling Online Poker	TV poker programs	Internet gambling advertising increased in 2010 compared to 2006 with marketing appeals featuring references to an educational purpose, a legal disclaimer and a big payout.
Lindsay et al., 2013	Investigation of gambling advertising at sporting matches	Content analysis	Sports betting Keno Lotteries	Football matches	110.67 episodes (SD = 43.89), and 8.72 minutes (SD = 1.29) of gambling marketing per match. Embedded gambling marketing commentary during games.
McMullan et al., 2012a	Analysis on youth perceptions of gambling advertisements	Focus Groups	Not specified	Youth ages 13 to 18	One-third of gambling advertisements were not received by youth. Youngest age cohort (13–14) displayed a social distance from the tone, style or look that many older youth found attractive in the ads. Older youth supported cultural capital of gambling such as social friendship, economic gain and fun and entertainment.
McMullan and Kervin 2012	Examination of gambling advertising and marketing strategies present through online poker websites	Content analysis	Online Poker	International online poker websites	Gambling advertising incorporates graphics, stimulating colour schemes, emotions and incentives to generate excitement attracting consumer interest Promotes beliefs regarding capacity of personal talent and the probability at success of gambling.
Thomas et al., 2012c	Investigation of frequency, length and content of gambling advertising during sporting matches	Content analysis	Sports betting	Football matches	58.5 episodes (SD = 27.8) and 341.1 minutes (SD = 44.5) of sports betting marketing at stadiums; 50.5 episodes (SD = 45.2) and 4.8 minutes (SD = 4.0) during televised broadcasts. Embed sports betting within the game; align sports betting with fans experience of the game; encourage live betting.
Thomas et al., 2012a	Investigation of conceptualisation and responses to gambling marketing strategies	In-depth Interviews	Not specified	Adults	Increasing concern regarding normalising of gambling behaviour socially, and environmentally; incentives for engaging in gambling behaviours; and increased awareness of gambling advertising saturation.

Derevensky et al., 2010	Investigation of adolescent awareness to gambling advertising and their impacts on behaviour	Survey	Not specified	12 to 19 year olds	Almost all youth report exposure to advertising specifically with pop up ads viewed online; 96 % viewed TV advertisements for gambling. Perceived messages from ads: winning is easy; chance of winning is high; gambling is an easy way to become wealthy.
Fried et al., 2010	Examination of gambling advertising exposure and gambling behaviour.	Survey	Lotteries Card games Sports betting Scratchies Online gambling Slot Machines	16 to 19 year olds	Recall of exposure displayed a relationship to gambling behaviour and problem gambling among adolescents.
Sklar et al., 2010	Analyse gambling advertising through print, radio and television media	Content analysis	Lotteries	Underage youth	Nine themes identified with specific appeal to underage youth audiences: Easy money, dream, social status, glamour, regular folks, sports, excitement, humour, youth culture.
Binde, 2009	Investigation of self perceived impacts gambling advertising has to problem gamblers.	In-depth Interviews	Slot machines Casino gambling Internet poker Horse betting Bingo Sports betting Internet casinos	Problem gamblers (current and past)	Gambling advertising triggers impulses to gamble. Advertising not considered the cause of gambling problem for individuals.
McMullan et al., 2009	Analysis of lottery advertising in Atlantic Canada from 2005-2006	Content analysis	Lotteries	Canadian TV	Advertising embedded words, signs, myths and symbols surrounding lottery gambling with little reference to the actual odds of winning. Emotional qualities found in advertising created a positive orientation to wins, winning and winners; and lottery products.
McMullan et al., 2008	Analysis of gambling advertising aired on cable television in Canada	Content analysis	Internet Poker Black Jack	Cable television	Celebrities, excitement, and humour are found to be persuasive techniques to promote online gambling as an entertainment experience in which skill prevails over luck, winning dominates losing, fantasy overshadows reality, leisure trumps work, and the potential for personal change eclipses the routines of everyday life.
Binde, 2007	Analysis of advertising featuring jackpot winners in Swedish newspapers	Content analysis	Lotteries	Swedish newspaper reports	Newspaper articles featuring jackpot winners are structured according to specific themes and cultural topics including wealth as a test of morals and character; the social impact of wealth; the just and good world; luck and the occult.

# Community and government reactions to gambling advertising: the Australian context

While there is extensive regulation around the advertising of some gambling products in Australia (such as gaming machines), regulation has not kept up with the rapid diversification of marketing tactics used to advertise newer forms of gambling, such as online sports wagering.

In 2013, Australian community concern about the proliferation of sports wagering advertising led to an increased media and government spotlight on the amount of gambling advertising during sporting matches, and the potential impact this advertising was having on the 'normalisation' of gambling for children and young men.

In particular, was a backlash to the prolific 'embedded' live odds advertising from bookmaker Tom Waterhouse (TomWaterhouse.com) in National Rugby League matches on free to air television channel Nine.

Part of the political, academic and community concern associated with this type of advertising, was a loophole in Broadcast Codes of Conduct, which prohibited gambling advertising in 'G' rated timeslots but contained an exemption for sporting programs, or news or current affairs programs.

In 2013, the Australian Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform, launched an inquiry into the Promotion and Advertising of Gambling Services in Sport (Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform, 2013).

The inquiry completed on 7 June 2013, had nine key recommendations, the first four of which are particularly relevant for this study:

1. That the government and government agencies review the self-regulatory action being taken by industry with a view to legislating in this area if industry does not make appropriate changes regarding the promotion of gambling products in an environment which includes children.
2. That the government and government agencies review the current exemption of gambling advertising for sporting programs. This review would include processes to ensure an appropriate level of public consultation.

3. That the Australian Gambling Research Centre undertake or commission further research on the longer-term effects of gambling advertising on children, particularly in relation to the 'normalisation' of gambling during sport.
4. That the committee recommends that the COAG Select Council on Gambling Reform work towards nationally consistent requirements for responsible gambling messages to ensure they work effectively as harm minimisation measures to counterbalance the promotion of gambling.

In 2013, amendments were registered to the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (Cwth), relating to the promotion of gambling during sport (Section 8 of the Act) (Australian Communications Media Authority, 2013a).

Once implemented, the ACMA monitors these codes and deals with unresolved complaints made under them.

In particular, these amendments related to the promotion of gambling advertising during sport. These amendments aimed to:

- prohibit the promotion of betting odds from the start until the end of play (there are limited exemptions including for the broadcast of multi-day sports and overseas live sport)
- prohibit commentators from promoting betting odds during play, and for 30 minutes before and 30 minutes after the game
- restrict generic gambling advertisements to before and after play, scheduled breaks in play and when play is suspended
- require gambling representatives to be clearly identified at all times
- prohibit gambling advertising that involves a gambling representative at or around, or appearing to be at or around, the ground at any time
- prohibit gambling representatives appearing as part, or a guest, of the commentary team at any time.

The Code also states that commercials relating to Betting or Gambling or a Promotion of Odds during a Live Sporting Event must not:

- be directed to children;
- portray children as participating in betting or gambling;
- portray betting or gambling as a family activity;
- make exaggerated claims;

- promote betting or gambling as a way to success or achievement; or
- associate betting or gambling with alcohol.

Published alongside this code was research commissioned by the Australian Communications and Media Authority about the public reaction towards sports betting.

This research showed that two-thirds of adults interviews found that the promotion of odds during sporting matches was unacceptable; 62% thought that the promotion of betting agencies during sports was unacceptable; and over 60% thought that the promotion of either odds or betting agencies during sporting programs was unacceptable (Australian Communications Media Authority, 2013b).

While the move to increase the restrictions around gambling advertising during sport was heralded as an important step forward, the government was criticised for not legislating to completely ban all gambling advertising during sport, and relying on industry self-regulation to reduce gambling advertising to 'reasonable levels' during sport.

In an interview on the ABC television program Lateline, Senator Conroy stated that the total legislated ban on gambling advertising during sport was not imposed to ensure a 'balance between the commercial issues and also making sure that gambling ads aren't being rammed down people's throats' (ABC Lateline, 2013).

Future research will be important in assessing the impact that this new code has had on the content, extent and type of gambling advertising on Australian television.

# METHODOLOGY

## Aims and objectives

This study aimed to provide a starting point for addressing the research gaps into how adults and children interact with and interpret the messages in advertising for a range of gambling products.

The study aimed to build a foundation for future research exploring how gambling advertising and marketing strategies impact on attitudes towards gambling products, and subsequently how advertising may influence gambling behaviours in both adults and children.

The study specifically aimed to explore:

- How socio-cultural factors may influence the meanings individuals construct about gambling.
- How different audience segments (in this case parents and their children) interpret messages about different types of advertisements in different ways.
- How the framing of messages about gambling may influence perceptions about the risks and benefits associated with different types of gambling products and services.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Provide detailed qualitative information about how different audience segments interpret the messages they see in gambling advertisements.
- Strengthen understandings about how different gambling advertising strategies may influence gambling attitudes in different audience segments.
- Inform future studies on audience perceptions of gambling advertising and marketing strategies.

## Ethical approval

Ethical approvals for this study were received from the Victorian Department of Justice Human Research Ethics Committee and the Monash University Institutional Human Research Ethics Committee (where the study was originally conducted).

## Methods

### Approach

This study used a qualitative approach to data collection with Victorian family groups (comprised of at least one

parent and one adolescent child). Qualitative research 'draws on an interpretative orientation that focuses on the complex and nuanced process of the creation and maintenance of meaning' (Rice and Ezzy, 1999).

Qualitative research aims to bring a different type of meaning and data to the table by documenting 'the world from the point of view of the people studied' (Rice and Ezzy, 1999).

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because the study aimed to understand the meanings and interpretations that parents and children gave to both gambling, and gambling advertising strategies (Quinn Patton 2002).

### Recruitment strategy

We recruited 59 families selected on the basis of socio-economic status, according to SEIFA (Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage).

SEIFA is a product developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics which ranks areas according to the Census, by relative socio-economic advantage or disadvantage (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). We ensured that the families in this study were distributed across SEIFA quartiles. The sample excluded families who had not lived in Australia for the last five years or did not speak English. Family groups were comprised of at least one parent and one adolescent child aged 14 – 18 years.

A market research company was used to recruit families. This offered two key benefits. Firstly, recruitment companies have access to extremely large databases which are broadly representative of the Victorian community. This allowed the recruitment of families based on SEIFA postal codes.

Secondly, recruitment companies could approach and engage families into the study in a more efficient way than our academic team. After families agreed to be contacted by the research team we provided more detail about the study, and an information sheet. Informed consent was given prior to the interview being undertaken.

All families who participated in the study received a \$100 grocery voucher, commensurate with National Health and Medical Research Council ethical guidelines regarding reimbursement for study participation.

## Data collection

Digitally taped interviews were conducted in the families' own home between July and October 2012. We chose to conduct the interviews within family homes because they provided a more naturalistic setting for the research, rather than, say for example a lab based setting.

Two researchers attended each interview. One researcher led the interview, and the other researcher noted interactions within the family, and how participants responded to questions. Each interview took about 45-120 minutes to complete. Immediately after the interviews the researchers compared notes and discussed their thoughts about the interview.

The interview had two stages:

- In the first part of the interview, parents and adolescents were separated and completed an interviewer assisted survey lasting about 15-20 minutes. This short survey aimed to capture basic socio-demographic information, as well as information about their media engagement patterns and gambling behaviours. They were asked questions about the number of adults and children who engaged in gambling in Victoria each year, and how many of these had a problem with gambling. Finally they were also asked to rank on continuous scales their attitudes towards and knowledge about gambling. This included attitudes about who was responsible for problems with gambling (0 the gambling industry – 10 the individual); how serious a problem they perceived gambling was for the Victorian community (0 not serious – 10 the most serious problem); and solutions for problem gambling (0 more industry regulation – 10 more counselling and treatment services).

- In the second part of the interview, parents and children were brought back together. They were shown, in random order, 5 advertisements for different types of gambling products. Some of these products were directly depicted (e.g. two advertisements for sports betting / online betting products; and an advertisement for lotteries) and some were incidentally depicted (e.g. an advertisement for a casino complex, and for a horse racing carnival). We used each of these advertisements to stimulate discussion about different types of gambling products, and also to discuss the different types of strategies that were used to promote these gambling products. Discussions were open ended and flexible, and were guided by our three key areas of interest: Appeal strategies of the advertisements; Perceived impact of the advertisements on gambling behaviour; Relationship between gambling advertising, sport, and sporting celebrities.

## Data analysis

Each audio-taped interview was transcribed within a week of the interviews taking place. A grounded approach was taken, whereby we looked for themes emerging from the data. (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Pettigrew and Roberts, 2011)

To understand the narratives of parents and children, a constant comparative approach of data interpretation was used. This involved examining the narratives of the parents and children, and reducing the findings to a number of key themes.

In particular, differences were explored between children and parents. In this report, the key themes (and their associated subthemes) are summarised and then presented in more detail under each results section.

# RESULTS

## Socio-demographic

The socio-demographic characteristics of the parents and adolescents interviewed are presented in **Table Two**.

- A total of 59 family groups were interviewed for this study, comprised of 59 parents and 61 adolescents.
- The majority of parents were mothers (n=47) and were in either a married or de facto relationship (n=51).
- The mean age of parents was 48 years (range 30 – 60 years).
- Just over half the adolescent interviewed were male (n=33). The mean age of adolescents was 16 years (range 14 – 18 years).

## Gambling characteristics

- The majority of parents (n=48), and nearly two-thirds of adolescents (n=39) reported that they had gambled. Just over 40% (n=24) of parents gambled at least monthly.
- The most popular type of gambling were Tattsлото (n=33) and betting horse racing (n=24).
- Horse racing was also the most popular type of gambling for the adolescents (n=26) with some of these young people mentioning that they had gambled on the Melbourne Cup horse race. It is important to note that this was generally via sweeps or informal bets with family members and/or friends.
- Seventeen participants stated that they placed either formal or self-organised bets with family members or friends (n=17).

**Table Two**  
**Socio-demographic and Gambling Characteristics**

	<b>Parents (n = 59)</b>	<b>Adolescents (n = 61)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	47	28
Male	12	33
<b>Age</b>		
Median	47.7	16.4
Range	30-60	14-18
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	3	-
Married/de-facto	51	-
Separated/divorced	5	-
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White Australian	36	-
European	19	-
Other	4	-
<b>Education Level</b>		
< High school	11	-
Graduated high school/< Uni degree	27	-
University degree/ Postgraduate qualification	21	-
<b>Household Income before tax</b>		
<\$50,000	14	-
\$50,000 - \$100,000	24	-
Over \$100,000	17	-
No response	4	-
<b>SEIFA Disadvantage Index</b>		
Lower tertile	20	-
Middle tertile	16	-
Upper tertile	23	-
<b>Ever Gambled</b>		
Yes	48	39
No	10	21
Not Specified	1	1
<b>Gambling frequency</b>		
At least weekly	11	-
At least monthly	13	-
At least annually	17	-
<b>Type of Gambling (formal or informal)</b>		
Tattslotto	33	-
Horse Racing	24	26
Raffles	13	-
Poker Machines	12	1
Sports	2	12
Other	13	7

# The causes and consequences of problem gambling

**Table Three** outlines parent and adolescent perceptions of the causes and consequences of gambling.

## Parents perceived that:

- Just over two thirds of adults (mean 68.2) and about a quarter of adolescents (mean 24.6%) gambled;
- Just under a third of adults (mean 30.8%) and about one in ten (mean 11.7%, range 0-50%) adolescents had a problem with gambling.

## Adolescents perceived that:

- Just under two thirds of adults (mean 61.3) and about a third of adolescents (mean 34.5%) gambled
- Just under a third of adults (mean 32.3%) and about one in six adolescents (mean 15.0%) had a problem with gambling.

Parents and adolescents perceived that problem gambling was a serious issue for the state of Victoria (Parent: mean 7.2; Adolescent: mean 6). However, parents and adolescents differed slightly in terms of who they felt was responsible for problem gambling.

- Adolescents perceived that problem gambling was caused by a combination of the gambling industry and individual behaviour (mean 5.1).
- Parents' responses were skewed towards the gambling industry being the leading cause of problem gambling (mean 4.4).

When asked to assess what was the best way to reduce problem gambling, both parents and adolescent responses leant towards more regulation of the gambling industry (Parents mean 5.8; Adolescents mean 5.9).

**Table Three**  
Estimates of gambling and problem gambling in Victoria

	Parent estimates (n=59)	Adolescent estimates (n=61)	Actual rates
What per cent of Victorian adults gamble?	68.2% (9% - 99%)	61.3% (15% - 95%)	73.1%*
What per cent of Victorian adults have a problem with gambling?	30.8% (3% - 80%)	32.3% (5% - 80%)	0.7%*
What per cent of under 18s gamble?	24.6% (2% - 80%)	34.5% (0% - 90%)	77%†
What per cent of under 18s have a problem with gambling?	11.7% (0% - 50%)	15.0% (0% - 75%)	5%†

\* Obtained from Hare (2009)

† National data for young people aged between aged 10 to 24 - obtained from Purdie et al (2011)

# Discussions about gambling within social networks

The majority of adults stated that they had discussed gambling at home with their children and or partner. While three-quarters of adolescents had discussed gambling, they stated that these discussions were typically outside of their families, with school peers and friends.

Discussions about gambling were around two themes.

- Gambling products and techniques
- The positive and negative implications of gambling

Some parents stated that they discussed the risks associated with gambling with their children. Most of these discussions revolved around being 'sensible' with gambling, and being prepared to lose money. Parents described a number of different types of strategies to talk to their children about gambling. Advertising for gambling products often prompted discussions about gambling risk:

*'[We will] see an ad about gambling and saying it's a bit of a waste of money. I say [to my kids] if you're going to gamble, be prepared to lose what you're gambling with because the chances of getting it back are very slim.'*

A few parents used personal stories to warn their children of the risks associated with gambling, although many were uncertain about how to effectively talk about gambling to their children.

Other parents used examples of family members or friends who had developed problems with gambling to express their concern about their children and the harms caused by gambling:

*'He assures me all his friends are out there and they go to the TAB and they do sports bets and stuff like that. And he came home one day and won a bit of money and blew it like that anyway but I sort of said to him that's good that you won it but...I have a huge issue with this with my mother, pokies.'*

Some parents also used gambling to educate children on 'chance' and 'odds of winning'.

*'We talk about how it's not a good idea. ...I talk to them about how they think they might win but then they realise they actually don't have much chance.'*

A few adolescents described having positive conversations with their friends about gambling. Some stated that they

talked in their friendship groups about being legally able to gamble, and had developed informal self-directed gambling schemes with their friends:

*'My friends are excited to go to the pokies once they turn 18. We have our own pool of bets that are like 20 bucks if I beat you four times in a row, something like that. That's pretty fun.'*

Some parents spoke about their role in talking about gambling with their children, 'She has the same views as we do, because we discuss it'.

Most of the parents who reported that they were not gamblers, or did not gamble within the home, had spoken about gambling with their children, and the majority of adolescents who had never gambled said that they had formed their views about gambling after discussing it within their family.

## Conceptualisation of the risks and benefits of gambling

### Descriptions of gambling

There were a wide range of descriptions about the positive and negative aspects of engaging in gambling:

**Positive Descriptions:** A few parents described gambling in very positive terms.

For example, one parent stated that gambling was an 'investment in the hope of getting an increased return' while another parent stated that gambling was about being able to live 'the dream'.

Just under half of adolescents defined gambling positively as an activity that would lead to financial gain by 'betting money to win more back'.

For example, a few adolescents described gambling as a 'system' or 'payment' that was made by individuals to 'get more money out of it'.

A few adolescents perceived that an individual would always win their own money and more back from gambling.

**Negative Descriptions:** In contrast, some parents and adolescents described gambling as a negative activity.

Parents spoke about the ‘risks’ involved with gambling, and adolescents described gambling as an activity that involved change.

Parents and adolescents who defined gambling as a negative activity often used moral language and discourses.

Descriptions from parents included that gambling was ‘really damaging’, ‘addictive’ or ‘disruptive’, while adolescents commonly defined gambling as ‘a waste’, ‘illogical’ or ‘wrong’.

**Neutral Descriptions:** Some parents and adolescents were neutral when describing gambling.

For example, a few parents balanced the ‘fun’ associated with gambling with the fact that it could also be a potentially addictive activity.

Some adolescents believed that gambling could have both positive and negative attributes depending on whether an individual was knowledgeable about gambling and could control their gambling behaviour: ‘it can be (ok) if you know what you are doing and you can control yourself and it’s only for fun.’

## Risks and benefits of gambling

Both parents and adolescents acknowledged the wide ranging impact gambling could have on people’s lives, including not being able to buy food, developing depression or experiencing reduced self-worth, losing your job, your house or everything.

‘There’s more risks, you lose your money, lose family, friends, your house’.

Some parents and adolescents also mentioned that gambling could be addictive for some people, although the parents described that this was unlikely to happen as long as you ensured that you only gambled if you could afford to lose the money that you gambled and you set suitable limits that you stick to.

### Parents

Some parents stated that they gambled only to win money. Most of these parents gambled on lotteries, and the phrase ‘you’ve got to be in it to win it’ occurred repeatedly throughout their narratives.

Others stated that gambling was a social activity that they did with friends or colleagues.

Some, for example, belonged to workplace lottery or wagering ‘clubs’. One father described how he coordinated a ‘punters club’ at his workplace:

*‘We’ve got a punters club. There are 17 in the group. They give me \$5 each, each week, they tell me what they want to bet on, and I put the bet on for them because I’ve got an online betting account. There might be something like will Sidebottom [an Australian Football League player] kick the first goal, or something like that.’*

However, a few parents in this study went to lengths to stress that while they gambled, their gambling was only ‘social’ and that they were not ‘problem gamblers’:

*‘My wife prompts me to put bets on. You can bet on just about anything these days. She says, let’s go put a bet on. Or let’s go to the races, which means that when you get there you’re going to have to put some bets on, and I just go along with it. We are not by any means problem gamblers, but social, low-key gamblers.’*

A few parents stated that they gambled for fun, excitement, or escape (n=12). Mothers in particular in this study stated that they played the lotteries to ‘win the dream’ so they would be able to take a holiday or pay off their home mortgage.

Only a few parents, all mothers, said they never gambled. These parents felt that gambling was either a ‘waste of money’ or they reported being morally opposed to gambling.

*‘I don’t gamble because of money. If you haven’t got the money, don’t go out and gamble it. Because I’ve got a big family, so I have to keep it to support my family’*

Parents perceived that boys were more at risk of developing a problem with gambling than girls. For example, some perceived that only boys were vulnerable to problem gambling: ‘whenever you go past the TAB, there’s always men in there’. While some believed that because they had experienced gambling problems in their family, their children may be genetically vulnerable to problem gambling:

*‘Yes, it’s always in the back of my mind, just thinking if some problems are inherited, just thinking are they going to end up like that as well?’*

Conversely, some parents perceived that their children were unlikely to be at risk of problem gambling because it wasn't part of their 'family culture', which they believed meant that their children were very unlikely to be interested in gambling.

### **Adolescents**

Adolescents that were positive about gambling stated that they felt that it was fun and/or exciting, that it involved a prospect of winning money, and that was occasionally part of social activities with family members and friends. One adolescent stated that he gambled because it made him feel more connected to his sporting team:

*'It gives me something to be happy about if my team loses, because I bet against my team. I think that I have a good understanding about soccer to know that I could know the right result. Like an educated guess.'*

A few adolescents described betting with parents or other family members such as older brothers or uncles who would place bets for them on horse racing or sports events: 'When I go to the races, I get my Dad to put bets on for me'.

A few others (mainly boys) described informal betting systems that they had developed with peers and school friends. Similarly to parents, adolescents who stated that they never gambled described gambling as a 'waste' of time or money, or that it was 'stupid'.

These adolescents had a very strong sense of the value of money, and were reluctant to risk what limited money they had on an activity where they believed there was a high risk of losing that money.

# Interpreting marketing messages

## Theme One: The 'feel good' factor

Advertisements that used positive emotive framing techniques were perceived by many participants as giving a compelling message about the product. However different groups of participants responded to these messages in different ways.

For example, women were particularly positive towards advertisements that contained messages about spending time with family members, providing financially for family members, or that they perceived promoted social connectedness.

For example, some mothers perceived that the messages contained within the lottery advertisement about providing for your family highlighted to them that winning the lottery could bring you or your family 'joy' and 'happiness'. They perceived that the advertisement would also resonate with many Australians who wished to achieve the 'dream' of owning their own home:

*'One of people's big hopes and dreams is to win (the lottery).'*

The emotional tie to family created in the advertisement made some parents feel positively towards the advertisement. The phrase 'warm fuzzy' was used to describe the feeling associated with winning the lottery and being able to give your children a better start at life:

*'It gives you a warm, fuzzy feeling that the Dad and Mum are there and they're going to help their daughter out.'*

Similar to parents, some adolescents responded positively to the message that winning the lottery would enable parents to help their children. Even those felt that the advertisement portrayed an unrealistic message about winning, stated that the advertisement gave a 'happy' message about the importance of family:

*'It was kind of happy and they got, they're all happy together like a family.'*

Adolescents perceived that this message relating to be able to provide for families, resonate most with 'ordinary', 'hard working' Australians, who found it more difficult to provide for their families or who had 'worked hard' all of their life to pay off the family home.

Similarly, some parents and adolescents responded positively towards advertisements that highlighted social connectedness and fun times. Furthermore, participants were particularly positive if the advertisement resonated with their own personal experience.

For example, mothers stated that the advertisement about horse racing resonated with their own positive experiences with the Melbourne Cup horse race and associated public holiday. This included spending time with family, having a day off work, and being able to 'dress up' to go to the races:

*'I always love Melbourne Cup day being with your friends and having a good day.'*

While adolescents also had positive responses to the key messages in the racing commercial, the advertisement had different emotive appeals for girls and boys.

While girls spoke about the appeal of the fashion and social aspects of horse racing, some boys were more interested in the horse race itself and entering sweeps with family members and friends. This response was similar to the response associated with the advertisement linking wagering with football.

For example, some adolescents (and particularly boys) who felt positively towards the advertisement, described how the advertisement made them feel excited about the sports game through the footage of the game and the portrayal of the 'fans' experience:

*'It made me feel, I guess, trying to be part of the action like if you want to be a good supporter then bet, like you don't have to just watch it.'*

Finally, some adolescents stated that the range of activities portrayed in the commercial for the casino complex made them aspire to visit the casino when they were older. Girls in particular were positive about the actors used in the commercial, who they described as glamorous, happy, young and beautiful.

## Theme Two: Legitimising and normalising

Some participants perceived that the messages they saw within advertisements reinforced their belief that some forms of gambling were more socially acceptable than others.

For example, the following mother stated that even though she knew that it was highly unlikely that she would win the lottery she still bought a lottery ticket each week as she believed that lotteries were a more socially acceptable and accepted form of gambling:

*'I know statistically it's very hard to win the big prizes and it's delusional, but it's a legitimate form of gambling basically.'*

Again, in relation to the lottery, one adolescent described that the family based theme in the advertisement marketed the lottery as something that could potentially lead to good outcomes for an individuals' broader social networks:

*'I think it's a good way of gambling in one way. It's probably never going to happen but it's, they're sort of saying it is okay, it's a good way of gambling. A better way to gamble. They're giving their child a house. So it's sort of saying they've won money to be able to do that. So it's saying it's okay to gamble.'*

While most parents perceived that despite no direct depiction of gambling in the horse racing advertisement, they did acknowledge that gambling was implicitly associated with this activity. Some used their own personal experiences to highlight that they perceived that even though there was no specific mention of gambling in the advertisement, it still contained a message that legitimised gambling as a 'social' activity:

*'It was all about fun and getting dressed up and making it a nice day out and drinks and, so then obviously because I've been to a Melbourne Cup, once you're there then the gambling...this is made more to be more like a social thing. It's fun, it's a party, it's a get together with your friends... and then while you're there put on a couple of bets.'*

Similarly some adolescents thought that while the advertisement did not directly depict gambling, they perceived that the advertisement was about attending the Spring Racing Carnival and wagering on horses. Much of this knowledge came from their own experience with the horse race, including monetary sweeps at school and with family and friends.

For example, a few adolescents described their schoolyard conversations about gambling on the Melbourne Cup, with others describing how the advertisement associated gambling with happiness and a celebration.

One described that the story told in the advertisement made the event appear 'respectable', while another perceived that it was reinforcing the event as part of Australia's cultural traditions:

*'Just to tell people that Melbourne Cup is coming, and it's a nationwide holiday and that it's a big part of our history and our culture.'*

Some parents described how the advertisement told a story about the day, and would have a broad appeal for individuals from different age groups. One parent stated that the Melbourne Cup was for everyone in the community:

*'Melbourne Cup's for everyone so I think that's why, yeah it's suitable for everyone.'*

While some adolescents were cynical about the messages in advertisements, they also observed that some forms of gambling (such as the lottery) were less risky forms of gambling.

Adolescents perceived it was unlikely that people would develop a problem with gambling from buying lottery tickets. In defining the risks associated with lotteries, one adolescent compared lotteries to other forms of gambling:

*'I doubt that heaps of people sit there and buy hundreds of tickets. So I don't think it's wrong, I just think it's okay. I doubt that many people would sit there and buy a lot of tickets. I think you'd just buy the one and see where it takes you... It's not as addictive to sit there, and sit there like press the button as an example on the pokies. So yeah, it's less addictive.'*

Some parents in this study also identified that the Melbourne Cup was one day of the year when they gambled with their children – either informally through family sweeps, or through placing formal bets for their children at the races or through the local wagering outlet.

*'The kids will cut out the newspaper and we'll do a sweep. And then we might do a bet. That's probably the one time of year that we bet. I just get the kids to give me a number. [To son] You probably don't even know that I've gone to put on a bet.'*

However, some parents and adolescents expressed concern about the role of advertising in normalising gambling.

For example, in discussion about the advertisements about sports based wagering, some parents and adolescents expressed concerned about the role of marketing in normalising the relationship between advertising and sport particularly for young people:

*'...for adults discerningly they can see that as and pick the differences but for kids, young kids, they think that's part of football.'*

While parents perceived that the advertisement was mainly targeted to young men, parents were concerned that the use of professional athletes and celebrities would make the advertisement appealing for young people.

In particular, parents were concerned that children would not be able to differentiate between the advertisement and the sport (football) and were particularly concerned about the use of a well-known sporting team to promote the product:

*'... they're trying to make out that this company is a great company and if you follow us [the team] you should follow that [the gambling company].'*

Similarly, some adolescents strongly disagreed with the association between gambling and sport.

For example, the following participants stated they disagreed with the use professional sports stars to endorse gambling as a normal part of sport:

*'I don't really think it's good for them to be endorsing like gambling or betting companies because that kind of says that gambling's just a part of AFL.'*

### **Theme Three: Easy, exciting and fun**

The final theme that emerged in response to the advertisements, was the perception amongst some participants that gambling was 'easy', 'exciting' and 'fun'.

For example, some adolescents perceived that the advertisement for the casino complex portrayed that it was a 'fun', 'exciting', 'fast-paced' place. A few adolescents stated that this was reinforced with the use of colours and bright visuals within this advertisement.

Adolescents perceived that the advertisement was targeted towards young adults, because of the range of entertainment activities (such as a nightclub) that were promoted in the commercial:

*'I don't think specifically me - I think a bit older than me but not too much older - I still think it was aimed at sort of young people because you wouldn't aim - more towards, like the bit where it turned into a nightclub-type thing, that's where it turned me to realise it was sort of not aimed at older adults and stuff.'*

Others adolescents specifically stated that the fun way in which the advertisement was created made them feel that there were few risks associated with going to the casino complex:

*'Like, it doesn't look risky. It looks like fun, like, yeah, it just looks like a good time. It doesn't look really like you're going to lose a lot of money or spend a lot.'*

The sports betting commercial also had strong positive appeal for some boys and fathers. These participants described the bold use of colours and the strong link with the emotional aspects of sport:

*'It's exciting. It was bringing out those segments of the game, which are exciting to watch.'*

However, a few parents also commented that the advertisement gave an enticing message that gambling online was accessible and easy:

*'I suppose just to entice really, that you can have the returns by making a bet, and I think the situation now is you can bet right through the progress of the game, and I think once upon a time any betting would have been completed before a game commenced, but now you can continue to, you're betting right through a match.'*

## The role of mandatory warning messages

Two advertisements contained a responsible gambling message: 'Is gambling a problem for you? Gambling Helpline is a free counselling service. Call 1800 222 050' and 'Gamble Responsibly'.

Despite the presence of these warning messages, very few parents and adolescents recalled the short message of 'Gamble Responsibly':

*Parent: It was probably in there but because it, if they had writing or something you don't necessarily see it 'cause you're paying attention to what they're saying in the big message so just goes past your eye.*

*Adolescent: I was just trying to concentrate on what he was actually trying to say than to look for a message.*

While about a third of parents (n=22) and adolescents (n=23) recalled seeing the longer message within one commercial, those participants who did see the message reported that the font used was very small and the message only appeared on screen briefly. Furthermore, not one participant was able to recall the message completely:

*Parent: 'I just read responsible gambling and then it went off – it was like a sentence but I didn't read the whole sentence.'*

*Adolescent: 'It's kind of like they're obliged to put it there but they don't really want to.'*

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Before discussing the results of this study it is important to recognise the limitations of the study.

This study had four limitations:

- First this study was conducted in a laboratory-type environment in family homes. These types of studies provide situations of artificially high attention, which may not be reflective of how parents and adolescents interact with advertisements in naturalistic type settings (Hastings et al, 2004).
- Second, the study sample is small, and cannot claim to be representative of all parents and children. It does however provide important information for more targeted research that seeks to develop on the themes that arose within this study.
- Third, this sample was predominantly comprised of families who identified as either White Australian or European. As such, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to other ethnic groups.
- Fourth, this study did not explore the impact of advertising on consumption preferences and intentions. Rather, the study looked at how participants interpreted the messages within the advertisements.

Parents and children in this study perceived that problem gambling was caused by a combination of industry and individual factors. However, many leaned towards increased regulation of gambling products and services as a way of minimising and preventing the harm caused from gambling.

This finding is similar to other findings that show that communities support increased regulation of gambling products and services (Australian National Institute for Public Policy, 2011; Australian Communications Media Authority, 2013).

From a public health perspective, it was encouraging that parents and adolescents were also very socially minded about the causes of gambling harm. They believed that problematic patterns of gambling were at least partly caused by the gambling industry and were supportive of further regulation of the industry.

As has been recently seen in the push to remove the marketing of online gambling within sport, community support for regulation is important in advocating for regulatory and policy change. Engaging the community in further discussions about the causes and consequences

of harmful gambling will be important in formulating a comprehensive public health approach to gambling reform.

What is less clear from this study are the range of factors and agencies that socialise parents and children into gambling beliefs and behaviours, and the influence of different types of factors on consumption intentions.

As described at the start of this study, messages about different forms of gambling are everywhere within modern environments (Thomas et al 2012a). Gambling was discussed within parent and child social networks (including within the family and peer groups) and most parents and children were aware that problem gambling was the result of both individual behaviours and industry tactics.

It was also clear that parents and children had different perceptions of the risks of different forms of gambling within different environments. For example, some parents facilitated informal gambling practices for their children around horse events, but were strongly opposed to the exposure of their children to gambling promotions during sport.

More sophisticated investigations are needed into the broader suite of socio-ecological factors (including industry factors) that may positively or negatively influence the attitudes and behaviours of different population subgroups. This includes how norms towards gambling are created by different social agencies, and how these norms may be targeted or influenced over time.

Importantly further research should draw upon the lessons learned in other key areas of public health and public health advocacy (such as junk food, tobacco, and alcohol) to identify strategies to counter those factors that may have the most problematic influence on gambling attitudes and behaviours – particularly in young people. For example, it was clear from this study that there is very limited awareness or recall of harm minimisation messages placed in advertisements. Further investigation should seek to identify how to increase the visibility and impact of these messages within current advertising strategies, and in particular how to formulate effective, well-funded and comprehensive social marketing strategies free from industry influence, to appropriately inform adults and children of the potential harms associated with gambling products and services (Thomas et al, 2012b).

## The findings from this sample suggest that parents and children interact with messages about gambling in different ways.

However, there was particular resonance between gambling messages that resonated with culturally valued activities or aspirations are more appealing and trustworthy for different groups. In particular, messages about being able to provide for family and friends from lottery winnings, and those advertisements that highlighted social connectedness positively resonated with parents and children.

In some cases these messages were explicitly stated within the advertisement, but it also important to recognise that some participants in this study implicitly connected the information presented in an advertisement with gambling, even when there was no explicit mention of gambling within the commercial.

This finding again highlights the importance of understanding the 'cultural capital' that is created between gambling and different activities within the community, and the role that marketing may play in reinforcing this.

Importantly, this includes the way in which new cultural associations are developed between gambling and community based activities. Of most concern is the relationship between gambling and sport and extent to which certain types of marketing – particular during events or in areas where young people are highly exposed to this marketing (such as at sporting matches, or during televised broadcasts).

In particular, research may focus on how marketing and promotional strategies may embed gambling as a culturally accepted part of sporting matches, and the subsequent influence that this has on the consumption intentions of different audience segments.

## Finally, further systematic research and monitoring is needed into the content of gambling marketing strategies (Binde, 2014).

This includes how the content of advertisements may both directly target certain audience segments, but also how they may influence audience segments that may not be the target of the messages but are still exposed to marketing strategies.

These studies will also provide important information about the explicit and implicit socio-cultural messages contained within advertisements from different sectors of

the gambling industry. This should also include monitoring the compliance of advertisements within different media channels to gambling advertising codes.

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