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Views on luck and winning, self-control, and gaming service expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse Australian poker machine gamblers

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Views on luck and winning, self-control, and gaming service expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse Australian poker machine gamblers

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Abstract

Despite an increase in social diversity in recent years, the role of culture in gambling cognition and behaviour is not fully understood. Qualitative interviews examined subjective views of Australian poker machine (electronic gaming machine) gamblers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. A total of 49 Australian poker machine gamblers from CALD backgrounds (20 Chinese, 15 Vietnamese and 14 Greek Australians) were interviewed regarding their views on the concept of luck and winning, self control, subjective meanings of gambling and gaming venue service expectations. The current findings showed that the majority of poker machine gamblers from CALD backgrounds believed that the payout of poker machines occurred randomly. Luck was defined, therefore, as being at the right place at the right time when the poker machine pays out. However, a small number of interviewees maintained an optimistic view about achieving gambling wins by using a certain system. While experienced gamblers and those with secondary school qualification or lower regarded poker machine gambling as a random potluck, a few young players with university education subscribed to a more elaborate endorsement in favour of their own systems to win on the poker machine. Australian CALD gamblers valued friendly professional service from gaming venue staff (e.g., courteous customer service, affordable, quality food and drink, personal greetings using first names) but disliked intrusive or over-friendly interactions. Implications of the findings on the role of superstition and cognition on gamblers' beliefs are discussed.

Keywords: Culture and gambling, Electronic gaming machine (EGM) gambling, Poker machine gambling, Illusion of control

Introduction

Gambling research literature suggests that culture influences gambling behaviour (e.g., Raylu & Oei, 2004) and that gamblers use different explanatory frameworks or schemas (e.g., Ohtsuka & Ohtsuka, 2010). Further, culture and gambling has attracted researchers' attention in recent years partially due to the globalisation of the commercial gaming industry. In the past few decades, accompanied by the ascendancy of the Pacific Rim economies, a large proportion of casino patrons have tended to come from countries in Asia Pacific Region. Liberalisation of gaming licensing in Macau has placed the city on the top

of the list of major commercial gaming destinations in terms of annual gaming turnover. As the proverbial prowess in gambling among Chinese and other Asian people has been noted, a putative link between culture and gambling behaviour or cognition has been proposed. Recent research reports also show that gamblers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia show significantly higher prevalence rates of problem gambling (e.g., Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority, 2000). Gambling has been identified as a possible public health issue that new Australian communities are likely to face (Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority, 2000).

Anthropologists suggest that culture predisposes some cultural groups to engage in gambling more frequently than others due to their cultural beliefs. Papineau (2005) argues that the Chinese notion of luck is unique as it is predetermined (fixed) and not under volitional control. However, the Chinese believe that they can decipher the cyclical changes of luck by the Chinese celestial calendar or oracles, allowing them to take advantage of high tides of luck. In contrast, psychologists have mainly focused on cognitive distortions such as illusion of control and the gambler's fallacy – an over-estimation by individuals of their ability to foresee gambling outcomes, and have suggested that cultural factors may further contribute to cognitive distortions. Among theories concerning culture and gambling cognition and behaviour, there is a range of positions that uniquely emphasises the role of culture. Some researchers subscribe to the view that cultural influence on gambling behaviour is the most important component in the construction of the meaning of gambling (Papineau, 2005), whereas others identify culture as a substantial component that add to the universal mechanism of forming behaviour (Ohtsuka & Ohtsuka, 2010).

Commerce, business, and the accumulation of wealth are often said to be central to the Chinese culture, although they are surely universal aspirations of all people. Western scholars have been mystified by the apparent relative neglect of a spiritual or religious world in Chinese culture (e.g., Bodde, 1942). In fact, the Chinese word “religion” is an imported coinage from the Japanese language to represent the *Western* concept of organised religions (Goossaert, 2005). While organised religions were historically encouraged and used as a means of achieving the Chinese national unity, Chinese folk religion (中國民間信仰) or Shenism (神教) was often vilified as superstition (Goossaert, 2005). Although these indigenous practices and beliefs are labelled as “folk” religion, Chinese folk religion, such as the Kitchen God, *Zao Jun* (灶君),¹ and the God of Wealth, *Cáishén* (財神)² have survived as an integral part of Chinese cultural observance, particularly through ancestor worship, involving prayers for good fortune and good health in the Chinese New Year and seasonal festivities. As Papineau (2005) suggests, the Chinese folk religion has a pragmatic material focus on prayer for wealth, prosperity and luck, which may encourage Chinese to gamble. However, the observance of Chinese folk religion does not necessarily mean that the Chinese believe that they can “control” their luck.

Others have suggested that excessive gambling among Asian immigrants to Western countries such as USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand may be related to maladaptive coping strategies to deal with adjustment stress. For example, Au and Yu (1997) argue that casino tables offer a stage on which newcomers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds can re-enact a lost glory of the past and indulge in an imaginary grandeur unfettered by the disappointing readjustment of life goals and living standards which migrants from CALD background often have to face. Blaszczynski and Nower's (2002) pathways model of problem and pathological gambling identifies three distinct

groups among problem gamblers. The three groups go through distinctively different trajectories of problem gambling development. Interviewing treatment-seeking Chinese gamblers attending a self-help group, Chan and Ohtsuka (2011) reported that the majority of problem gamblers in Hong Kong had started gambling in their family when they were young, and that they developed entrenched gambling habits by young adulthood. They also reported that Chinese problem gamblers often lack attachment to significant others (Chan & Ohtsuka, 2011). It has been suggested that emotionally vulnerable gamblers, either chronically depressed or anxious, are at risk because they may gamble to cope with depression or anxiety.

Anthropological field studies of Trobriand Islanders in Papua New Guinea in early years (Malinowski, 1954) and American professional baseball players (Gmelch, 2006) provide intriguing observations that rituals and cultural beliefs may be an attempt to regain primary control in a situation where little control over the outcome is possible. If this anthropological insight is applied to the context of modern commercial gaming, so-called cultural influence on gambling may also be related to gamblers' general sense of control over their lives. As Au and Yu (1997) suggest, new immigrants may participate in gambling as a coping strategy, albeit a maladaptive one, to deal with adjustment stress during migration. Further, for some new migrants, loss of primary control may further contribute to the maintenance of cognitive distortions and superstitious beliefs. Casinos may also attract migrants from CALD backgrounds as "a safe haven" where they can participate in social activities with minimal language skills, and more importantly without fear of being harassed or treated poorly (cf., "Oasis" in Loughnan, Pierce, & Sagris-Desmond, 1998). The interview therefore includes questions regarding the gaming service expectation of CALD gamblers.

Psychologists in particular have been intrigued with cognition concomitant to gambling. Heavy gamblers and problem gamblers exhibit many different types of cognitive distortion (e.g., Delfabbro, 2004; Keren, 1994). Research suggests that the extent of such cognitive distortion is a risk factor of developing problem gambling (Ladouceur & Walker, 1998). Since cognitive distortion leads to decision making errors that aggravate problem gambling, cognitive behavioural therapy that addresses faulty cognitions has been proposed as an effective method of problem gambling treatment (Ladouceur & Walker, 1998).

There are two positions as to the reason why gamblers develop such cognitive distortion. The majority of researchers subscribe to the view that cognitive distortion develops as people gamble heavily and that such "incorrect" cognition in turn encourage them to gamble more. The opposing view is that the consequences of prolonged gambling, such as financial losses and the loss of control over their gambling, necessitate people to justify their actions and behaviours using more and more elaborate explanations (Coventry, 2002). Research of decision making processes reveals that a subjective observation of the data and heuristics, a short-cut of decision making, rather than an objective and methodical evaluation of the dataset, are frequently used in complex situations (e.g., Tversky & Kahneman, 1971, 1974).

In conclusion, psychological research into gambling has focused on the role of gambling cognition: how cognitive distortions encourage gamblers to continue gambling. Of course, not all gamblers from the same cultural group necessarily follow the same gambling trajectory. While some gamblers lose control over their gambling quickly,

others do not. Therefore, it is essential to investigate protective factors such as resilience as well as the risk factors of gambling.

This article aims to explore culture influences on gambling behaviour, focusing on subjective views of gamblers and types of different explanatory frameworks. Our previous research mainly focused on gamblers who participated in casino table games (Ohtsuka & Ohtsuka, 2010). In this article, we have extended our research by interviewing recreational electronic gaming machine gamblers who frequent suburban gambling venues such as bars, hotels³ and social clubs.

Method

Participants

A total of 49 poker machine gamblers from CALD communities, 20 Chinese (7 Male, 13 Female, Age $M = 46.8$ years, $SD = 25.5$ years), 15 Vietnamese (10 Male, 5 Female, Age $M = 34.0$ years, $SD = 9.0$ years) and 14 Greek (3 Male, 11 Female, Age $M = 68.9$ years, Age $SD = 6.53$ years) gamblers, were recruited for interviews at the electronic gaming machine venues (See Table 1 for demographics). The participants were interviewed in languages of their choice (English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese or Greek) in an atmosphere respectful of their social and cultural values.

Material

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to guide the interviews with gamblers from the three CALD communities (Chinese, Vietnamese, and Greek). Three CALD community groups were selected because a large number of these CALD community members live in Melbourne and represent CALD groups that migrated to Australia in different decades after WWII. The interview guide for poker machine gamblers from CALD communities was developed, taking into account of the findings from interviews with gaming venue employees and dimensions of the Cultural Competency Framework (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989).

Procedure

Research ethics approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia. Permission to interview poker machine gamblers at gaming venues was sought from venue managers in consultation with gaming industry representatives. Participants were recruited at gaming venues, and interviews were conducted within the gaming premises or in their vicinity. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, but the interviewers were able to alter the order of questions if necessary. The interview questions focused on individuals' self-control strategies, skill assessment, and their views about luck and winning. One of key aims was to explore their beliefs regarding luck and winning in gambling and about their capacity for self-control. In addition, the interviews explored self-control strategies used by poker machine gamblers from CALD backgrounds.

A team of bilingual Chinese and Vietnamese speaking interviewers were recruited to ensure linguistic and cultural competency. Interviewers were trained to ensure consistency across the interview process. The training and support also covered basics of cultural competence, the structure and development of the interview guide, pilot testing of the

Table 1 Basic demographics of interview participants

Pseudonym	Background	Place of birth	Age	Sex	Marital status	Educatin	Language	Occupation
Miles	Chinese	China	25	Male	Single	Tertiary	Mandarin	Postgrad Student
Yvonne	Chinese	China	26	Female	Single	Tertiary	Mandarin	trainee CPA
Kylie	Chinese	Malaysia	21	Female	Single	Secondary	Chinese	Student
Ernie	Chinese	China	24	Male	Single	Tertiary	Chinese	Graduate Student
Cecilia	Chinese	China	24	Female	Single	Tertiary	Chinese	Graduate Student
Imogen	Chinese	China	89	Female	Widowed	Primary	Cantonese	Retired housewife
Louise	Chinese	China	83	Female	Widowed	Primary	Cantonese	Retired housewife
Katherine	Chinese	Hong Kong	87	Female	Widowed	Tertiary	Mandarin/Cantonese	Retired teacher
Rachel	Chinese	Australia	92	Female	Widowed	Secondary	English/Cantonese	Retired secretary
George	Chinese	China	76	Male	Married	Tertiary	English/Chinese	Retired engineer
Jim	Chinese	China	40	Male	Single	Tertiary	Mandarin	Manufacturer/Processor
Lenny	Chinese	China	31	Male	Married	Tertiary	Mandarin	Unknown
Bo	Chinese	China	28	Male	Single	Tertiary	Mandarin	IT professional
Mary	Chinese	China	27	Female	Single	Tertiary	Mandarin	Admin officer
Carmel	Chinese	China	64	Female	Married	Secondary	Mandarin	Retired Nurse
Daphne	Chinese	China	Unknown	Female	Unknown	Tertiary	Mandarin	Business woman
Amanda	Chinese	China	48	Female	Married	Secondary	Mandarin	Business owner
Charlie	Chinese	China	25	Male	Single	Tertiary	Mandarin	Student
Iris	Chinese	China	50	Female	Divorced	Secondary	Mandarin	Student
Amy	Chinese	China	30	Female	Married	Tertiary	Mandarin	Unknown
Lyn	Chinese Vietnamese	Australia	20	Female	Single	some uni studies	Cantonese	Student
Fred	Chinese Vietnamese	Vietnam	34	Male	Single	Tertiary	Cantonese/Vietnamese	Hospitality
Pam	Chinese Vietnamese	Vietnam	39	Female	Married	Secondary	Mandarin/Cantonese/Vietnamese	Hospitality
Bill	Vietnamese	Vietnam	45	Male	Married	Graduate	Vietnamese/English	Business

Table 1 Basic demographics of interview participants (Continued)

Tom	Vietnamese	Vietnam	43	Male	Single	Secondary	Vietnamese	Baker
Dan	Vietnamese	Vietnam	48	Male	Divorced	Unknown	Vietnamese	Unknown
Sam	Vietnamese	Vietnam	41	Male	Single	Unknown	Vietnamese	Fruit picker
Zac	Chinese Vietnamese	Vietnam	47	Male	Married	Secondary	Vietnamese/Cantonese	Student
Tim	Vietnamese	Vietnam	34	Male	Single	some uni studies	Vietnamese	Forklift Driver
Aaron	Vietnamese	Vietnam	28	Male	Single	Primary	Vietnamese	Technician
Helen	Vietnamese	Australia	21	Female	Single	Secondary	Vietnamese/English	Student
Natalie	Vietnamese	Vietnam	25	Female	Single	Tertiary	Vietnamese	Orthoptist
Henry	Vietnamese	Vietnam	29	Male	Married	Secondary	Vietnamese	Logistics
Steve	Vietnamese	Vietnam	29	Male	Single	Secondary	Vietnamese/Chinese/English	Forklift Driver
Thuy	Vietnamese	Vietnam	27	Female	Married	Tertiary	Vietnamese/English	Travel consultant
Irini	Greek	Greece	78	Female	Married	Primary	Greek	Retired housewife
Kiri	Greek	Greece	74	Female	Married	Tertiary	Greek/English	Retired housewife
Sia	Greek	Greece	73	Female	Widowed	Secondary	Greek/English	Retired secretary
Ana	Greek	Greece	73	Female	Divorced	Secondary	Greek/English	Retired translator
Rania	Greek	Greece	73	Female	Widowed	no formal education	Greek	Retired hospitality worker
Tony	Greek	Greece	61	Male	Married	Secondary	Greek/English	Retiree
Tasia	Greek	Greece	55	Female	Widowed	some primary	Greek	Retired housewife
Helen	Greek	Greece	69	Female	Widowed	Primary	Greek	Retired housewife
Sophia	Greek	Greece	63	Female	Divorced	Primary	Greek	Retired housewife
Peter	Greek	Greece	69	Male	Married	Primary	Greek	Retiree
John	Greek	Egypt	76	Male	Married	Tertiary	Greek	Retiree
Jenny	Greek	Greece	62	Female	Married	Primary	Greek	Retired housewife
Carol	Greek	Greece	74	Female	Married	no formal education	Greek	Retired housewife
Vicki	Greek	Greece	64	Female	Married	Primary	Greek	Retired housewife

interview guide and feedback, and ongoing support during the interview data gathering process.

Findings

Transcribed interviews were carefully examined to highlight keywords and concepts. Matrix tables were used to identify common themes and memorable experiences regarding gambling experience and development reported by the interviewees.

Themes identified in poker machine player interviews

Reasons for gambling

Many poker machine players interviewed in the study claimed that the main reason they gambled was to relieve boredom or as a social activity they can do with their friends.

For example, to the question, "Why do you play poker machines?" Rachel (a 92 year old, Chinese female) said: "It is for entertainment, to have something to do with friends, at the same time to fill free time and relieve boredom" as it is a means to "be around people" and participate in social activities. Many poker machine players stated that they gamble on poker machines as a social activity to kill time or to be around people. This view of poker machine playing as a social activity is common among mature poker machine players as well as young ones. They agreed that playing poker machines was a way of killing time and having a bit of fun. For example, Katherine (an 87 year old, Chinese female) said: "It is to pass the time, and to do something in order to have fun. I am 87, I am waiting to die." A similar view was expressed by another mature poker machine player, Louise (an 83 year old, Chinese female): "I am old and lonely. I do not have much to do, but I cannot sit at home the whole day, I'd go mad. To play poker machines is to pass the time." Another older player, Imogen (an 89 year old Chinese female) cited both coping with boredom and a way of socializing as reasons: "I am 89 years old; I have lots of time to fill, so I come here with friends. I do not have much money, but that does not matter."

These four elderly Chinese women had similar reasons for poker machine gambling. They are retired or widowed housewives who completed secondary education or lower. All cited neither monetary gain nor excitement as a reason for poker machine playing. Rather, they played pokies to deal with boredom or as a means to maintain social interaction with friends. For these women, playing poker machines is a social activity that they enjoy and is possibly one of a few excuses for them to go out and socialise. Elderly women of their generation, who were born in China before migrating to Australia, grew up in a society that expected women to look after their family and children as full-time house makers. After their adult children had left their care a long time ago, and for some women, after their husbands passed away, recreational gambling became a way to be socially engaged and to cope with loneliness and the monotony of daily life in retirement.

In contrast to the Chinese elderly women, some male gamblers played poker machines for different reasons. Their main motivation was the thrill and the excitement of winning, enjoying the feeling of control and aiming for financial gain. Male poker machine gamblers interviewed regardless of age or nationality, shared similar reasons for gambling: a quest for excitement and monetary gain. Fred (a 34 year old, Chinese-Vietnamese male) said: "It's not about how much you win or whatever. It's hard to win but when you win, it's a good feeling! Achievement! Yes, achievement, exactly."

Especially, when you win a jackpot.” Sam (a 41 year old, Vietnamese male) believes that the attraction of poker machine gambling is the intense and nervous excitement associated with getting *free* spins. Free spins, which occur randomly during poker machine playing, allow poker machine players to gamble further without increasing their bets, and offer a chance to win back their money. Sam’s testimony validates Walker’s (2004) observations of the role of the Bonus Feature on a “high volatility” poker machine, *Queen of the Nile*. Although free spins are not monetary payouts, they are the next best thing - a chance to win money.

Tim (a 34 years old, Vietnamese male) plays poker machines to win money. He says: “. . . My salary, after paying expenses, I only got about over a hundred dollars left. There is not much I can do with it. But if I bring it in here (poker machine venue), I would have a chance to raise it to a couple of hundreds and with the winning I could buy this and that.”

Rather than playing poker machines for a way to pass time or for social interaction with friends, as was the case for the women, these men seem to be motivated by a desire to win. Both Fred and Sam relish the sense of achievement in winning money or obtaining free spins.

Gambler’s fallacy as a metaphor of life

Peter (a 69 year old, Greek male) believes that, because he has not won most of the time he has gambled on poker machines, the house owes him a win. He is convinced that the odds would dictate that it is about time for him to win. Peter says: “I have lost yesterday, I have lost today, so tomorrow it must be my turn to win, it must be my turn to win soon, I can’t lose again can I?” His comment, however, is a typical example of the gambler’s fallacy, disregarding the fact that each spin of a poker machine is an independent occurrence of a new event. His win probability remains the same – a very small one, throughout his playing session. Gambler’s fallacy often represents a metaphor of hope for working class gamblers. Gamblers believe that tough life and a spell of bad luck will eventually be compensated with a spell of good luck and fortune in the future (Ohtsuka & Ohtsuka, 2010).

Luck and skill/luck and winning

Most poker machine players define luck as playing the right poker machine when it pays out. Conversely, bad luck is when, despite many spins on the poker machine, the credit point balance just plummets. Luck therefore rewards poker machine gamblers for choosing the machine which is about to pay out. Regardless of the difference in gambling experience or history, most poker machine gamblers agree that skill is irrelevant to *playing* poker machines.

However, Natalie (a 25 year old, Vietnamese female), who is a poker machine aficionado with seven years of experience, believes that experience and skill matter in selecting poker machines that are about to pay out, and in deciding when to swap machines. In fact, poker machine players are found to play poker machines *strategically* (Walker, 2001, 2004) and they can tell the differences between “tight” and “loose” EGMs (Dixon, Fugelsang, MacLaren, & Harrigan, 2012). Their strategy mainly focuses on deciding when to move on to the next slot machine as they normally do not stay at the same poker machine for an entire playing session. In fact, it is normal for players to switch poker machines frequently. Poker machine players try to test a poker machine by playing for a short time to see

what happens. If it does not pay out, they will move on to another machine or stay, depending on the player's style. If it pays out or the credit balance starts increasing, the player may stay on until a spell of good luck runs out. Interestingly, regular poker machine players interviewed rejected the naive view that a poker machine which has not paid out for a while is more likely to pay out in the near future.

Amounts of money spent during a typical gambling session

Many of the participants were not spending large sums of money during typical gambling sessions. The reasons for this were twofold; some did not spend vast amounts because they did not have much money to spend. For example, old-age pensioners with a fixed income do not have a lot of money to gamble on poker machines. Often, these mature players were not familiar with available jackpots and choices for poker machine playing. These players normally spend only about \$10 - \$20 per session. It does not matter whether they win or lose because they play poker machines in order to go out, maintain an active life, and socialise with their friends. For example: Rachel (a 92 year old, Chinese female).

Interviewer: "How much do you spend on pokies?"

Rachel: "I do not know exactly, maybe just a few dollars"

Interviewer: "Any jackpots available?"

Rachel: "Yes, I think so."

Interviewer: "You know that there are lines, how did you play?"

Rachel: "I chose 1 cent, 2 cents and 5 cents."

Interviewer: How many lines do you play?

Rachel: "Oh, that's all depends which machine I was on."

Interviewer: "Do you change machines?"

Rachel: "Yes, I do."

Rachel was not particularly interested in winning on the electronic gaming machines. She only spends a few dollars during the session. Rather, she plays for social reasons rather than for money. She stops playing poker machines when she has finished spending her money. It is unlikely that Rachel will develop a gambling problem as her main drive for playing poker machines is to cope with boredom.

Sophia (a 63 year old Greek woman) also plays poker machines to kill time.

Sophia: "Yeah, and I would never leave a bill unpaid."

Interviewer: "Yeah, okay and you were telling me that you play once you paid all bills and expenses...."

Sophia: "I play 1 cent machine with 25 bets, so you're playing 25 cents (on a 1 cent machine), or you could be playing 30 cents, or 20 cents. These are the sorts I play, and I never play high bets, because I play so I can pass the time."

These female poker machine players are retirees who live on their own, and gamble only for small amounts of money on low denomination poker machines so that the modest outlay can last long enough to kill time.

Low denomination poker machines such as 2 cent machines proved to be very popular among the regular poker machine gamblers interviewed in this research project. Both young and old regular players prefer to play on low cost poker machines as a strategy to limit their total gambling expenditure. Even if players play the total lines, bets per spin remain relatively small (e.g., you bet only 40 cents if you play 20 lines on a 2 cent machine.) The following example shows that not only mature players but also young players play poker machines for fun, often without caring particularly whether or not they win or lose.

Kylie is a 21 year old woman from Malaysian-Chinese background with a university degree.

Interviewer: "Was any jackpot available?"

Kylie: "I think so."

Interviewer: "You know there are lines, how do you play?"

Kylie: "Um, I do not know. I just put some coins and pressing away the button. I do not really know anything about poker machines. We were there just to have some fun."

Interviewer: "When the money ran out, do you get more out of an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM)?"

Kylie: "No, I do not."

Interviewer: "Did you win or lose?"

Kylie: "Of course, I lose. But, that is not why we were there; it is not about winning or losing. We were having fun, and we also watch others play."

Kylie believes that she is likely to lose money when she plays poker machines. These are not the words of someone expecting to win and win big whilst playing the machines. Rather Kylie says she only plays for fun and does not know much about poker machines.

However, others bet large sums of money regularly on pokies. These poker machine gamblers could potentially develop problem gambling as they spend relatively large sums of money in the long run. They play electronic gaming machines, not just to pass the time or for social reasons, but because they believe they can win.

Interviewer: "So when you played yesterday, how much did you spend?"

Voula (a 62 year old, Greek female): "I spent \$150 yesterday, yeah."

Interviewer: "And is that typical to other visits as well?"

Voula: "I sometimes spend more, if my husband is here."

Voula spends a larger amount of money on each visit than the Chinese elderly women interviewed who only spend small amounts on each visit. Peter (a 69 years old, Greek male) gambles a lot of money each time he visits the venue and confesses that he sometimes stakes winnings straight back into the poker machine and loses some of his winnings. This is a worrying risk factor of problem gambling.

Peter: "Very rarely. I have won, I have won, and it's very rarely that I have won, but about 8 years ago I won about two thousand and something dollars, and there has been two other times that I have won \$700. On other occasions, \$300, \$250, or \$100, I win those small amounts often but the problem is I keep on playing that so I end up losing it."

Interviewer: "You put it back into the machine."

Peter: "If I do not win a big amount at the beginning, unless I win a big amount so that I can keep some of it to go and buy something, I can't buy anything substantial. So I will keep on playing it; so (if) it's 100 or 200 dollars, I will keep on playing it,"

Interviewer: "And on the occasion when you won \$2,000, what did you do?"

Peter: "The 2,000 dollars I kept it, but the next day I went and played \$200, the day after another \$200, and say, about \$1,000 I used to buy some stuff, to give to my wife, and the remaining I lost again to the pokies."

Natalie (a 25 year old, Vietnamese female) explains how experience works in poker machine gambling:

Interviewer: "Do you think skills matter in playing pokies?"

Natalie: "It does. My boyfriend has more experience in pokies (which is longer than her seven years of experience) and he seems to know. Everytime we have a win, he can. He'll know what to gamble and what patterns will come out. He has gone more (than we do), not just black or red, but he knows how to do suits as well and usually gets them."

Interviewer: "Could you become a better at playing poker machines? If so, how?"

Natalie: "Umm. . . Yes, I guess you just *need to know what to bet* and things."

Interviewer: "So is that experience, do you think?"

Natalie: "Maybe. A bit more than that. I guess it's a bit of luck and experience."

Two mature Greeks and one young Vietnamese poker machine player, all with extensive experience, revealed knowledge of how poker machines work, of available options for players, and likely game behaviours. Nonetheless, they also showed a higher risk profile for developing problem gambling because they gambled more frequently with larger outlays. They were familiar with types of jackpots available and when they have a better chance to win them. They were more confident overall in playing poker machines and believed that they should eventually win a jackpot. While good knowledge of gaming products are helpful for making right choices, it is known that recall of gambling experience may not always be objective. Since gamblers recall wins more readily than losses, they may overestimate frequencies or amounts of poker machine winnings.

Self assessment of skill of poker machine players

Some poker machine players gamble by simply pressing the button and waiting for the outcome. They openly admit that they do not really know how to play. They randomly chose a poker machine and test their luck. They seem to be less concerned about moving to another poker machine. They play until their money runs out or their friends decide to move. This subtype of social gamblers ("Followers" according to Ohtsuka & Ohtsuka, 2010) do not believe that skill matters in playing pokies. If they win, they are lucky; conversely, if they don't win, it was not their lucky day.

Irini (a 75 year old, Greek female): "No, I do not know. Some women say they know how to. They say press certain buttons, do certain tricks, but I don't know anything. I

simply play, but I know that I will lose. But I say it would cost me twenty dollars to go out with a friend to eat and have a drink. I enjoy it so I go.”

Interviewer: “Do you believe that the more you play, the better you would become at playing pokies?”

Irini: “No, I don’t think so. Not at all. I would get worse. The more involved I’ll be in playing pokies, the more often I would want to play, and I’ll become. . .(a problem gambler). I would lose all my money.”

Interviewer: “So you do not believe that the more you play, the more skill you acquire . . .”

Irini: (*Laughs*) “No, no.”

Sophia (a 63 year old, Greek female) agrees that no skill is required in playing poker machines.

Interviewer: “. . . Do you believe if you could improve your play by practice? Do you think players could improve their skill if they play often?”

Sophia: “I don’t believe any skill is involved in playing the game.”

Both Greek women, each of whom had completed only basic formal education, were skeptical of the idea that they could win on poker machines by acquiring skill. They did not think that skill has anything to do with the outcome of poker machine plays.

Skill orientation of poker machine playing and luck as positive emotion

Other players, who classify themselves as “beginners,” believe that both luck and skill matter in poker machine playing. For example, Kylie (a 21 year old, Chinese female) is hopeful to improve her poker machine playing skills to become a better player.

Interviewer: “Do you think skill matters?”

Kylie: “Yes, skill definitely matters.”

Interviewer: “Could you become better at playing poker machines? If so, how?”

Kylie: “I could become better at playing poker machines, if I know more about the rules of how to play, such as minimum bet I can put in, how much to bet each time and so on.”

Interviewer: “What is your view about ‘luck’?”

Kylie: “Luck is very important.”

Interviewer: “Is luck related to winning or losing? Please explain”.

Kylie: “Luck is not necessary related to winning or losing. When things go your way that is luck. It is about feeling good and unexpected (good) things happen to you.”

Interviewer: Do you know how to win when playing poker machines?

Kylie: “Well, I think by putting more money into the machine and relying on luck.”

An experienced player, Natalie (a 25 year old, Vietnamese female), who plays poker machines when she feels lucky, agrees that she can be more confident if she has more money to play with as she can try other machines. Natalie says that persistence sometimes pays but sometimes ends up spending all her money.

Application of “probability” theory in poker machine playing, skill orientation

Yvonne (a 26 year old Chinese female), who considers herself as an average player who loses most of the time but sometimes wins, claims that she has been winning more money since her uncle showed her a probability method to work out which poker machine is likely to pay out.

Interviewer: “Do you think skill matters?”

Yvonne: “Of course, it does”.

Interviewer: “How could you improve your skill?”

Yvonne: “Just like what I told you before, it is the theory of probability. I think that my skill has improved since last year when my uncle showed me his way of playing poker machines by applying probability theory.”

Interviewer: “What is your uncle’s probability theory?”

Yvonne: “Basically, you first use a smaller amount of money, put it in many machines, let them run at least 10 times, then you will feel one of them will give money out. You then put more money in that machine. It works! He always wins. That is what he worked out from years playing in China.”

Interviewer: “What did you mean by ‘feel’? How do you ‘feel’ the machine?”

Yvonne: “That is probability. After the initial trials of more than 10 spins, the poker machine that has not given out any money is bound to give out money. That is what I mean by probability. That makes sense.”

Interviewer: “Um. . . So are you getting better at playing poker machines since he showed you his method? “

Yvonne: “Yes, I have been winning now and then.”

Both players are female university students from a Chinese background. Yet they believed that playing the odds right would enable them to win on poker machines. In this example, a statistical jargon gives an aura of authenticity. Although her “law of *probability*” is more convoluted than Peter’s theory, it is nonetheless a gambler’s fallacy because the historical analysis of spins in the past cannot improve prediction of the future outcomes of random spins. False cognition such as Gambler’s fallacy is a risk factor of problem gambling (Walker, 1992). If gamblers believe that a poker machine will pay out soon if it has not paid out for a while, they are more likely to gamble persistently on the false assumption of an imminent payout. In fact, a high level of interest in games and the system is found to be a risk factor of problem gambling among young people (Moore & Ohtsuka, 1999, 2000). Compared to older poker machine gamblers with little education beyond primary school, younger poker machine players who believe that they can improve their odds of winning by skill and the application of a “system” may be more vulnerable to develop illusion of control beliefs due to their confidence in their intelligence and skills

Control strategies of electronic gaming machine players

Most poker machine players were confident about their abilities to control their gambling within a budget. Strategies often mentioned were to bring a set amount of cash for a playing session, leaving ATM cards at home, limiting the playing time by other activities such as having a dinner, or a drink with friends. Some respondents reported

that they go to play electronic gaming machines with friends or family members. Some players only go to gamble when they are in good mood, happy and calm. Zac (a 47 years old, Vietnamese male) only goes to play when he is happy. His strategy to play pokies well is: "To stay calm and relaxed. You should not get upset, get angry or frustrated because more you do, the worse it gets. The more frustrated, the more you lose." Sam (a 41 years old, Vietnamese male) recalls his past gambling problem as being in a state of "boiled blood." Pam (a 39 years old, Vietnamese female) is philosophical about her prospect of winning pokies: "I am not a lucky person and that is why I don't win money." She believes that the more badly you want to win, the more you lose money in pokies.

Views on the ATMs at the poker machine venues were mostly negative. Whereas some considered ready access to an ATM to be desirable for convenience such as obtaining funds for dining, most respondents recognised potential problems in the repeated use of the ATMs for obtaining gambling funds. One interviewee believed that problem gamblers would not be deterred by drawing funds regardless of how far an ATM is located from a gaming venue.

Views on gaming customer service needs: What they want from gaming venue staff

Friendly customer service was often mentioned by poker machine players as a reason for going back to the same gaming venue, followed by the quality of food and drinks at the bar or restaurant at the venue. Many mentioned being greeted with a smile by the venue staff, small talk, and personal acknowledgement, such as being recognised by the venue staff, as very important factors for them in selecting a gaming venue. Nonetheless, it was a consensus among interviewees that friendliness by the venue staff should remain professional. They welcome small talk but do not expect overly intrusive interaction with the venue staff. Community-based clubs possess a more cohesive customer base of regular customers compared to other types of gaming venues that cater for a wide range of customers.

To summarise, the process of conducting this research project in the culturally and linguistically diverse communities was an invaluable experience and learning process. In particular, implementing a research project in CALD Communities with respect and in a culturally competent fashion requires a lot of consideration and training of researchers. The research process and the obtained data show that poker machine players are demographically diverse. There was no evidence to support a stereotype that gamblers from CALD background prefer the casino over suburban hotels or clubs with electronic gaming machines. Poker machine gamblers who agreed to participate in the interviews were predominantly recreational gamblers with few signs of problem gambling. However, some poker machine players interviewed endorsed a strong skill orientation which is a risk factor of problem gambling. Education, at least for some Chinese pokie players, does not seem to stop them from developing theories regarding how to win on pokies. Further research needs to explore whether education, especially interest in systems and games, may not necessarily serve as a protective factor *if* it contributes to the maintenance of *sophisticated* misconceptions about poker machine gambling. In addition, the interview findings may require further content analysis to investigate whether poker machine gamblers use culturally specific schemas to explain their beliefs (Ohtsuka & Ohtsuka, 2010).

Discussion

The findings of this investigation indicated that the majority of EGM players from CALD backgrounds hold a rather stoic view regarding the possibility of winning money. Recreational EGM players in this study contend that they pay to play on EGM. Despite the fact that some interviews were conducted in the vicinity of EGM venues to ensure high levels of ecological validity, the general views of EGM players were stoic - they regarded gambling bets as user fees to participate in gambling entertainment. Overall, these results were surprisingly rational. Anthropologists and sociologists investigating the rituals and superstitions associated with tribal customs (Malinowski, 1954) and professional sports (Gmelch, 2006) have suggested that the rituals and superstitions are attempts to regain control when the situation allows no control. For example, rituals were observed for deep water fishing but were absent in a lagoon fishing (Malinowski, 1954). For professional baseball players, superstitions and rituals were associated with the actions difficult to control (e.g., pitching) compared to easily practiced manoeuvres (e.g., fielding) (Gmelch, 2006). If this view is applied to gambling, EGM gamblers would be expected to use superstition and rituals more frequently than casino table game gamblers. In Ohtsuka and Ohtsuka's (2010) qualitative study, Vietnamese Australian casino gamblers reported elaborate views on luck and winning. Some Vietnamese gamblers used a culture-specific schema (such as karma) to endorse illusion of control (Ohtsuka & Ohtsuka, 2010). In comparison, the EGM gamblers in the current study did not believe that they could "control" or "improve" a chance of winning in EGM playing. Especially, elderly gamblers regarded EGM gambling as a game of chance whose outcomes are determined randomly.

However, a few EGM players with higher levels of education (e.g., University students) presented more elaborate views about how to "enhance" their chance of winning. While they were able to develop and explain a complex and elaborate explanatory framework about how to increase their chance of winning, they failed to notice faulty logic. While education is a protective factor in gambling, young people interested in games and systems tend to express higher levels of illusion of control (Moore & Ohtsuka, 1999). Hence, future research needs to investigate what makes some educated individuals hold on to erroneous cognition while others do not.

Lastly, the poker machine players interviewed in this study from three CALD background used a universal schema (explanatory framework) to describe their views regarding luck and winning in poker machine gambling. The poker machine players interviewed in the current study define both good luck and bad luck based on the gambling outcome. That is, you are lucky or in luck if you have selected a poker machine that pays out. Conversely, you have had bad luck if you have played on a poker machine which did not pay out. Therefore, for poker machine players, luck is all about selecting the right machine or playing on the right machine at the right time. However, poker machine gamblers have different theories to *test* a poker machine by playing a short period of time. If nothing happens during a dozen spins in this period, some players move on to other poker machines while some advocate staying on. Clearly further research is required to determine if these responses are related to player characteristics or gambling budgets.

Limitations and implications for future research

This qualitative inquiry has investigated poker machine gamblers' subjective views on their gambling behaviour and cognition. Although recurrent themes form a basis for

analysis, idiosyncratic opinions, which do not reflect commonly encountered views, may be present in the analysis. Nonetheless, the aim of this research was to understand *subjective* views in the context of rich background information such as gambling histories and trajectories.

New Australian participants were recruited from the prominent CALD groups in the metro Melbourne area. CALD groups continue to come to Australia over the years and their acculturation experiences have been shaped in different circumstances. For example, community attitudes towards new groups have changed over time. Further, individual differences with regard to their familiarity with the Australian culture may have had an impact on shaping individual acculturation experience subtly different. In addition, personalities and acculturation styles influence (see Berry, 1995, 1998; Berry & Sabatier, 2010, 2011, Sam & Berry, 2010) the levels of acculturation stress within a migrant cohort arriving about the same time (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mon, 1987). Therefore, the contextual and the individual differences should be considered in order to fully understand the informants' views.

Endnotes

- ¹ Vietnamese also venerate the Kitchen God.
- ² Taoism and Mahayana Pure Land Buddhism also venerate him as a god.
- ³ In Australia, most hotels serve alcohol beverages (similar to pubs or bars).

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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