



International Gambling Conference, Auckland 2018

Pocket Picking: Young men and Gambling in NSW, Australia

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- ▶ From an anthropological perspective, I reject views of gambling as driven by a culturally degenerate craving for superficial entertainment, greed and materialism, and irrational or distorted beliefs about the chances of winning. Such views are too often voiced in the public debate and color also some academic works on gambling. Gambling is no more or less trivial or irrational than other activities that fascinate people. Gambling is part of our culture. Gambling taps into human biopsychology, easily evokes powerful psychological processes, and connects with profound cultural meanings. **In this perspective, disordered and excessive gambling emerges as a multidimensional social and individual problem.**

- Per Binde (2016)

Introduction



Bathurst Greyhound Racing track 2008 (left) and 2017 (right)

Outline

- ▶▶ Background – Why gambling and Young men? Why visual anthropology?
- ▶▶ Aims / RQs - to explore the ways that young male gamblers integrate gambling into their lives and make sense of their interactions with gambling industries.
- ▶▶ Method – 'Moving Through Digital Flows' : (Markham and Gammelby, 2017)
- ▶▶ Recorded conversations, participant observation, screen recordings & screenshots of gambling apps and social media pages
- ▶▶ Visual research – making a documentary film
- ▶▶ Findings
- ▶▶ Conclusions
- ▶▶ References

Background

- ▶▶ More than any other country (Businesswire 2015), Australia embraces gambling, spending an average of \$1288 AUD per person per year (The Economist, 2016).
- ▶▶ Sports betting has been booming in Australia since the advent of mobile sports betting. From 2014-2015 losses from sports betting rose 30%, growth that is likely unrivalled in the history of betting in Australia (ABC News 2016).
- ▶▶ Mobile sports betting is heavily marketed, successfully targets young adult males, and has become a leading cause of problem gambling (Hing, Russell, Ohtsuka, 2015)

Background

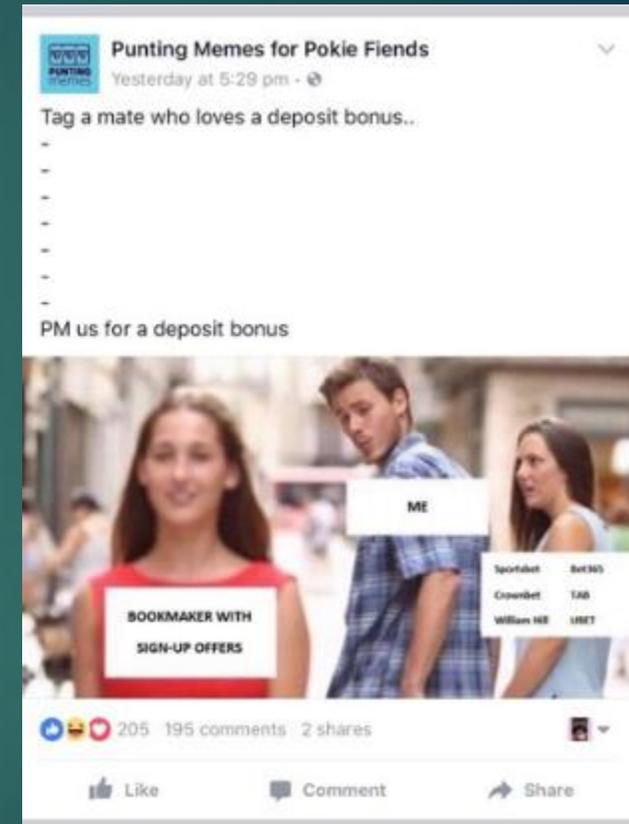
- ▶▶ Calls for gambling research to become more reflective and transparent (Cassidy and Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone and Adams, 2016) and ethical (Kim, Dobson and Hodgkins, 2016)
- ▶▶ Emergence of 'Big Gambling' and supposed state-industry gambling complex (Markham and Young, 2014, 2015; Delfabbro and King; 2017)
- ▶▶ 'Weaponized' gambling and the 'McDonaldization' of gambling (Courtwright 2014)
- ▶▶ Very useful and recent qualitative studies (Deans, Thomas, Daube, and Derevensky 2016a, 2016b; Nekich and Ohtsuka 2016)

Aims/ Research Questions

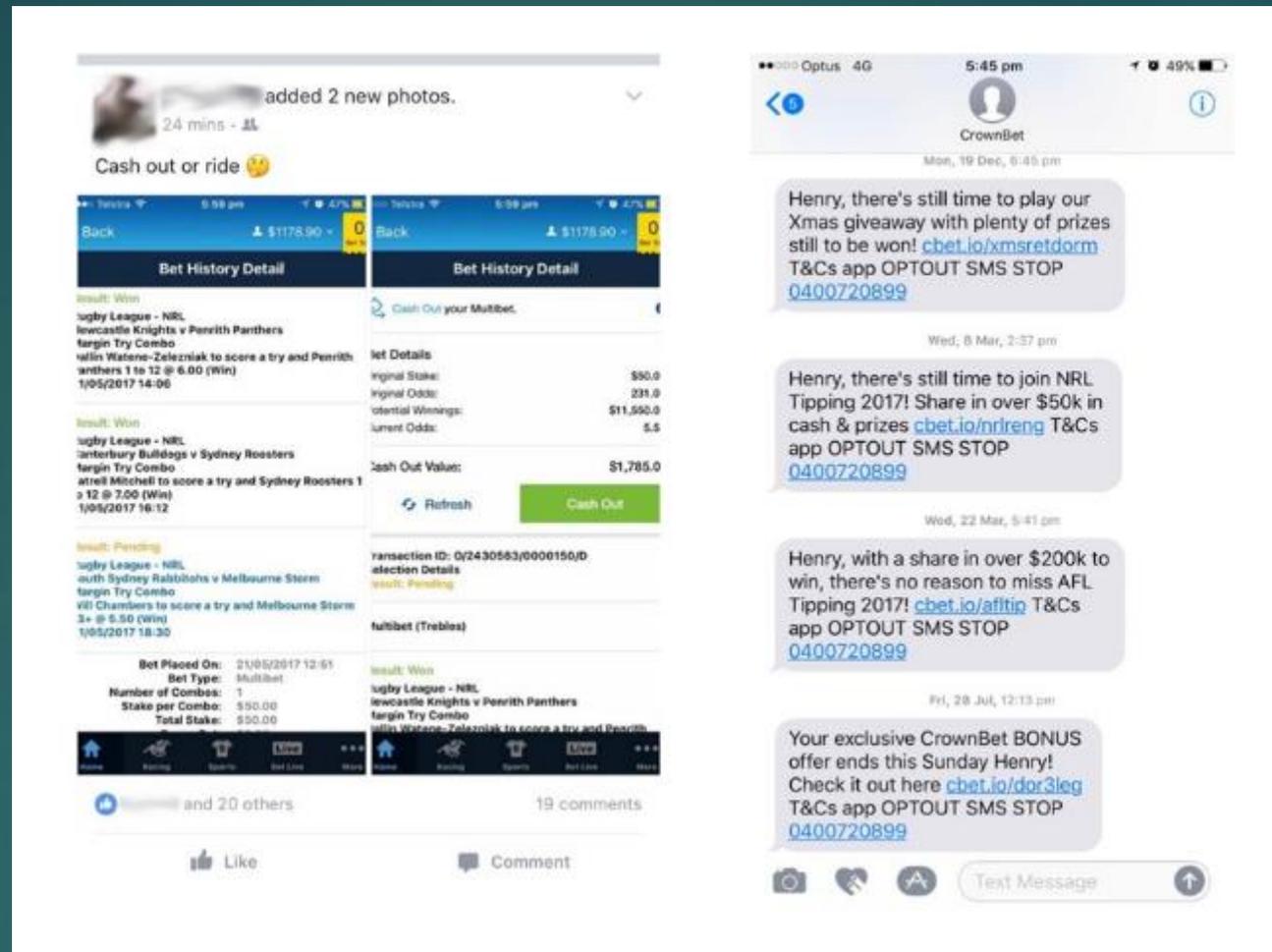
- ▶▶ This visual and media anthropology project conceptualises gambling as a complex multidimensional individual and social issue (Binde 2016).
- ▶▶ The aim of the research was to explore the ways that young male gamblers integrate gambling into their lives and make sense of their interactions with gambling industries.
- ▶▶ Who are these young men? What do they think of gambling? How do they understand the structures that supposedly dominate their lives? How do they understand the risks and stigma associated with gambling?
- ▶▶ How can re-presenting the perspectives of young men aged 25-30 create visually unique knowledge that has potential to reach audiences outside the academy?

Method

- ▶▶ Young Men Aged 25-30 – an at risk demographic / myself as insider
- ▶▶ Exploring a hybrid physical and digital field site – online & offline
- ▶▶ Framed by Markham and Gammelby's (2017) 'Moving Through Digital Flows: An Epistemological and Practical Approach'
- ▶▶ Prelim research: various 'data' collection methods – screen recordings, screen captures, using apps and participant observation



Screenshot of post by Facebook page 'Pokies Memes for Pokies Fiends' in my Facebook newsfeed. The page has over 25, 000 likes and has recently begun offering inducements from betting companies – 'PM us for a deposit bonus'



- ▶▶ Left: A post from a Facebook friend on my Newsfeed boastfully showing his Sportsbet bet slip and asking whether he should cash out of his bet early or risk going further for a greater reward.
- ▶▶ Right : A screenshot from my iPhone messages showing inducement offers from Crown Bet.

Method

- ▶▶ Recorded conversations - Five informants selected for their closeness to gambling, willingness to participate and varying relationships to aspects of gambling
- ▶▶ Conversations not interviews – more personal and reciprocal
- ▶▶ The three filmed conversations became basis for documentary
- ▶▶ Conversations allowed for me to get deep with informants
- ▶▶ These conversations – guided by preliminary research – have been the main source of data analysis for my findings

Visual Research

- ▶▶ Pocket Picking – 30min documentary film made from the visual research and material collected
- ▶▶ MacDougall – ‘film as text’ (1987) – filling in the blind spots
- ▶▶ Unique visual knowledge that can reach audiences outside the academy
- ▶▶ Video is mediatised but more holistically multidimensional than written texts
- ▶▶ These young men have voices and faces, they are not just boiled down to words on a page, statistics and pseudonyms
- ▶▶ Informants are collaborators and their approval and permission is paramount – Trust and Vulnerability

A man in a dark hoodie is seen from the back, looking out of a large doorway in a stable. Outside, a horse-drawn carriage is visible, with a driver wearing a white helmet. The scene is lit by overhead fluorescent lights. A red text box is overlaid on the image.

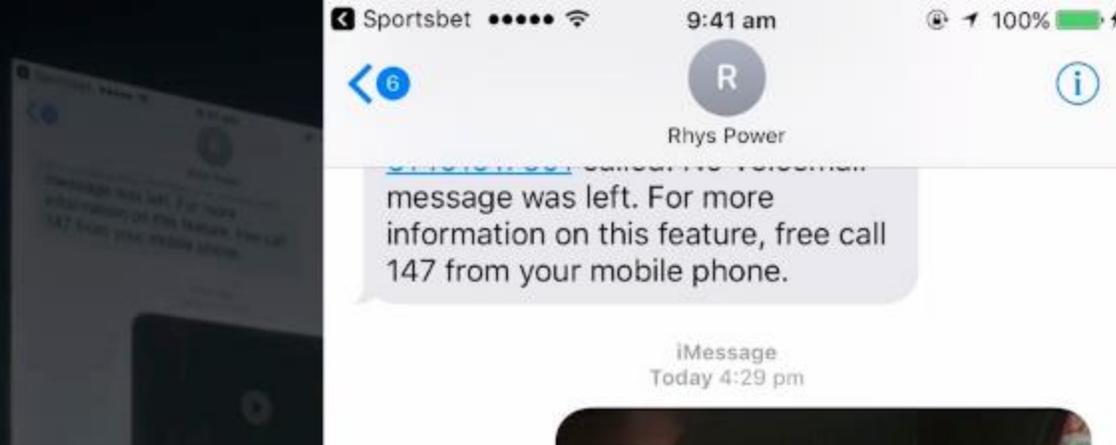
This slide contained an excerpt from the film accompanying this research. Please email henry@manonthemoon.com.au for access to the film.

Gambling Roots and Coming of Age

- ▶▶ Often close to gambling from young age
- ▶▶ Successfully targets young men
- ▶▶ Embedded in peer groups
- ▶▶ Gambling is a coming of age ritual – everyone does it when they turn 18 if not before
- ▶▶ Mobile betting has become quickly embedded
- ▶▶ Concerns for younger generations
- ▶▶ Easy to use, easy to lose
- ▶▶ If you like sport you're probably betting on it too

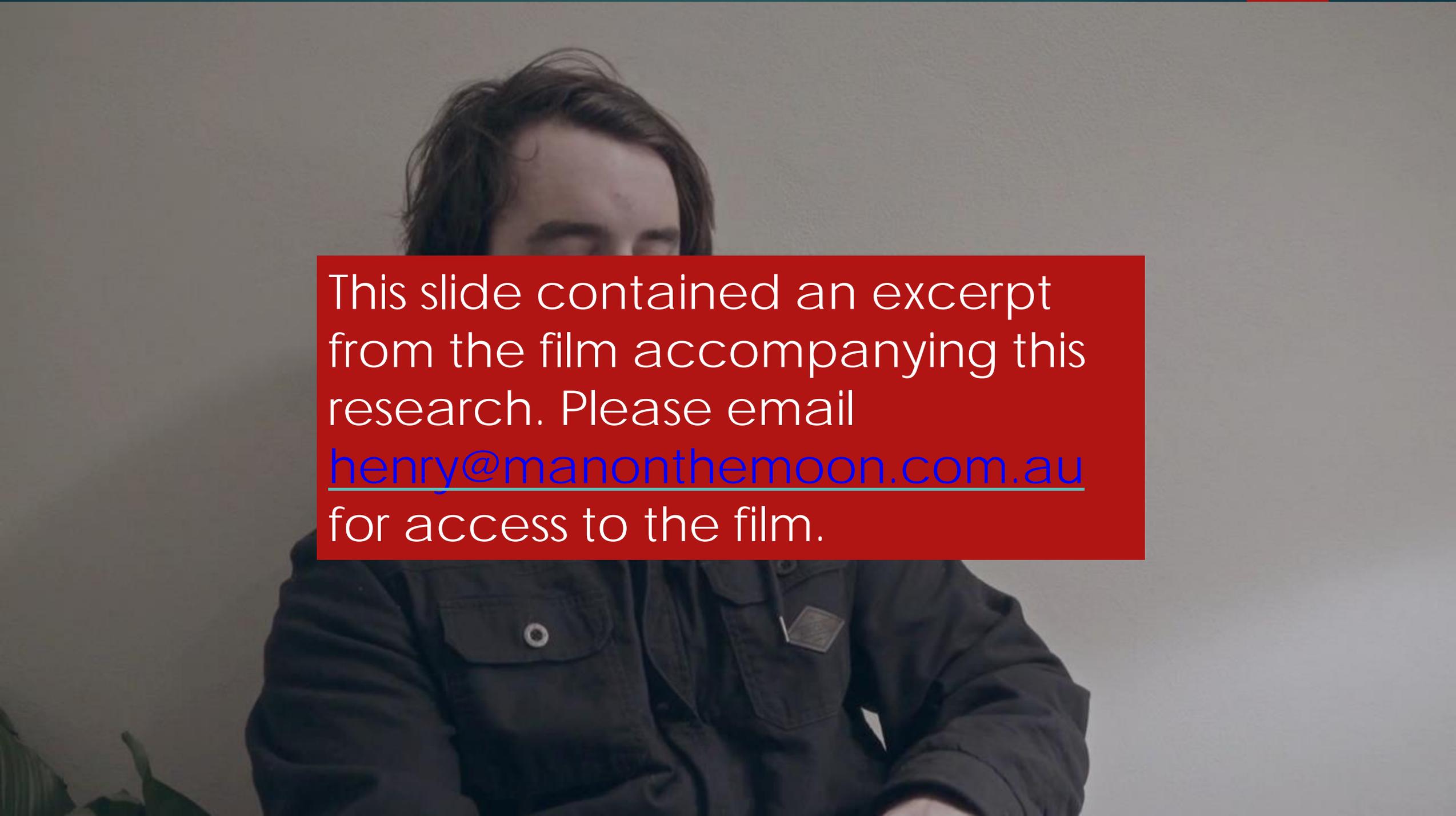
"it's just a natural thing everyone goes 'Oh I can't wait to play the pokies' ... It's a thing. Even my little brother just turned 18, a couple years ago, well a year and a half ago, and that's what he wanted to do, play the pokies when he was 18."
- Mr. Y 1

"...my brother just turned eighteen, he's got Sportsbet, ahmm he's got those mobile gambling applications and that sort of stuff as well, so freshly eighteen, where I didn't, I definitely didn't have that when I freshly turned eighteen."
- Tim 2 (29 years old)



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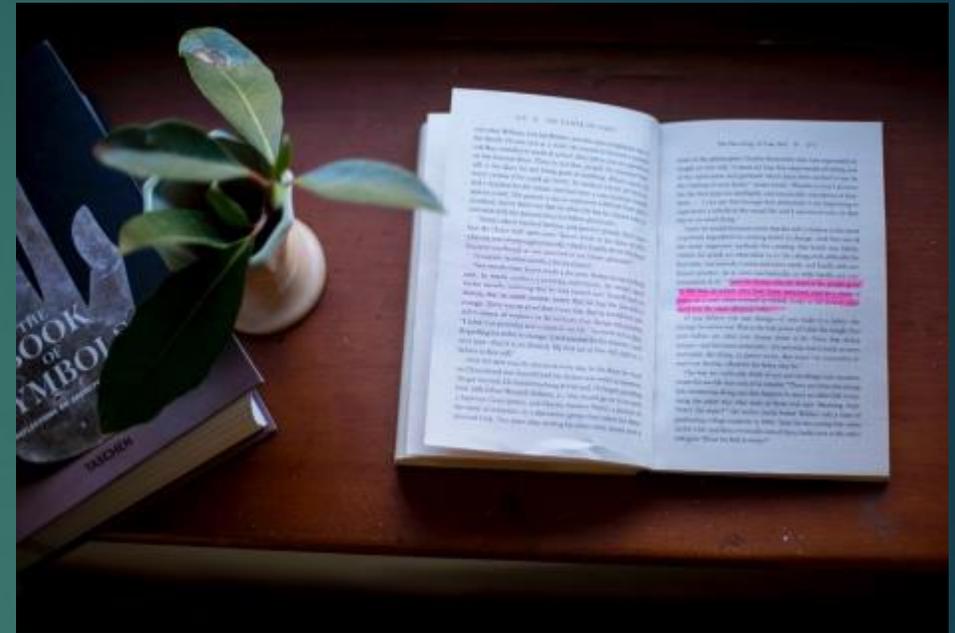
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Invisibility and Surveillance

- ▶▶ Invisibility of the transfer of money
 - ▶▶ Invisibility of habits
 - ▶▶ Invisibility of harm
 - ▶▶ Metadata surveillance by betting companies
 - ▶▶ Individually catered marketing and inducements
 - ▶▶ Companies often ban bettors if they are not losing enough money
- ▶▶ “So Sportsbet you could gamble without anyone knowing. Like if you were at the pub and played the pokies, people knew exactly what you were doing whereas sports bet you could seriously be sitting here blowing more money than the pokies but no one knew.”
– Jayden: 4
 - ▶▶ “They're happy to take your money, but then you can't take it (theirs).”
- Mr.X:3
 - ▶▶ “When it comes down to it. It's all about people making money. They just wanna make money. Australian government wants to make money off us losing money.”
– Joel:4

Conclusions

- Young men critical of structures although they consider their own agency paramount
- Discourse Taboo
- Transparency here is not a two-way street
- More resources should be directed at studying structures and how to minimise access and availability
- Suggest future studies to explore agency, free will and accountability
- Need for reflexive, qualitative research



One of the passages in *The Power of Habit* that Jayden had highlighted in a book that helped him quit gambling– *The Power of Habit* by Martin Duhigg

“Once we choose who we want to be, people grow ‘to the way in which they have been exercised, just as a sheet of paper or a coat, once creased or folded, tends to fall forever afterward into the same identical folds’”

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