Swedish machine gamblers from an ethnographic perspective

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Abstract

This article presents an ethnographic analysis of the biggest money-maker in Swedish gambling, namely, the state-owned electronic gambling machines, called Jack Vegas machines. The focus is on (1) social dimensions of the game and (2) various gambler types that develop in the Jack Vegas environment. In the section about social dimensions, there is a discussion about social interaction between gamblers and between gamblers and staff/owners of restaurants with the machines. There is a kind of sociality in Jack Vegas environments, but also feelings of irritation and frustration among the players. The text discusses the gambling types developed by Sue Fisher and, to some degree, Robert Custer and relates them to the Swedish ethnographic findings. But the article develops new gambler types as well. The gambler types developed by previous researchers in academic and empirical contexts need to be revitalized and further developed in new gaming environments.
Key words: ethnography, gambling machines, social dimensions, gambler types

Purpose of the study

Swedish gambling research has a relatively limited scope. One gambling research group led by Sten Rönnberg carried out quantitative studies measuring the extent of gaming and pathological gambling in Sweden (Rönnberg et al., 1999). The research of Rönnberg and others is limited in that they focus heavily on addiction and not much on the social environment in which the gaming is carried out. Dow Schull (2002), Svensson (2005), and Volberg (2001) have criticised gambling research because it has individualised gambling problems at the expense of this social environment. My ambition has been to rectify this by studying gambling (with a focus on regular gamblers) in relation to the social and cultural environment. I have chosen this perspective to try to fill a vacuum in Scandinavian gambling research. I have pursued my research in the same spirit as Sue Fisher (1993) when she carried out her ethnographic studies on gambling machines. Fisher worked part time in an amusement park arcade in which there were fruit machines and other games. While she worked, she made contact with and interviewed a range of young gamers she observed in action.

The object of investigation in this article is the interaction around and interaction with the state-owned gambling machines, called Jack Vegas, the biggest form of gambling in Sweden with regard to both turnover and revenue. During 2003–2004, I spent a lot of time observing participants in Jack Vegas settings and interviewing gamblers. What type of sociality does the Jack Vegas environment create? What types of gamblers develop in these environments? These are the core questions in the article. Before discussing these questions, I need to give some crucial information about the Jack Vegas machines and the methodological design of my ethnographical investigation.

Jack Vegas machines

Electronic gambling machines, called Jack Vegas (or video lottery terminals or VLTs), are the game form with the highest net revenue in Sweden. These machines are organized and run as a stated-owned industry. In 2004, the games had a turnover of (the equivalent of) almost $1 billion US, thereby establishing this form of gambling as the most lucrative in Sweden.

In 1979, Jack Vegas's predecessor, the classic slot machine, was outlawed in Sweden. Critics had argued that it caused compulsive gambling and social disadvantage and that 'gamblers are afflicted with financial destitution' (Månsson & Larsson, 1976, p. 22). However, the government's public investigation, entitled *Vinna eller försvinna* (SOU, 1992) (approximately 'Win or be gone'), prepared the way for the reinstitution of gambling machines in Swedish gaming rooms. This time they were to be monitored by the government-owned and controlled company AB Svenska Spel, whose principal owner was the Swedish Ministry of Finance. The government was deemed better able to guarantee security and monitoring responsibilities than other parties. In 1995, a parliamentary decision made the government-owned gambling machines possible, and Svenska Spel immediately began marketing the machines to Swedish restaurants with liquor licences.[1] Since a liquor licence implies an age limit of 18 years, underage gamblers would not be allowed entry, so these restaurants would be allowed to host the Jack Vegas machines. The parliamentary decision established a national distribution ceiling of 7,000 machines and a per-restaurant limit of 5 machines. Early on, to kick-start the project, cooperation had been initiated with North American gaming terminal producers (including the Canadian global game provider Spielo and the American IGT) in an effort to generate income for public service organizations and the government. Once the terminals were distributed, players quickly latched on, and success was declared.

The Jack Vegas terminals differ from slot machines, which have a coin slot to receive change and a handle that makes the wheels spin, in that bills or coins are inserted, and a game is selected from the terminal's touch screen. Inserting 100 Swedish kronor, or about $14 US, lets you play 20 games for a maximum bet of 5 kronor, or about 70¢, and 100 games for a minimum bet of about 1 krona, or 14¢, per reinitiated game. The most you can win per game is about 500 kronor, or $70, and when this amount is reached, the machine automatically prints out a pink cheque indicating winnings to be paid by the restaurant's cashier.[2] Each game takes 2 to 4 seconds, depending on how eager the player is.

It is a matter of a computerized machine that presents the player with many possibilities—a mini-casino including many types of games.

Poker. After an icon on the screen or the start button is touched, the screen shows five cards. If the player is lucky, the machine will show a winning combination, such as, for example, two pairs, at two times the stake, or a full house, at six times the stake. In the Jack Vegas version of poker (and in some other games), the gambler may decide to bet with the win and double the amount. This is described more fully later in the article. Almost all of the players I've talked to have told me that they started their Jack Vegas careers with poker, since it is a game they were familiar with.

The Frog Chase. This is a wheel game in which three frogs adjacent to each other on the screen give you possibilities for bigger money (but not above 500 kronor, or $70) on a bonus track. On this track, the player, through touching the screen, assumes the identity of the frog

jumping from one leaf of water lilies to another. Under the leaves there may be rewards, amounts of money, or the jaws of a crocodile, which makes you lose. Other games use the same logic—wheel games with bonus tracks if the "wished-for" combinations of icons are presented on the screen.

These two games, Poker and Frog Chase, were highly popular during 2003–2004 when I carried out this ethnographic study. I describe them here so the reader will be in a better position to understand what I write in later parts of this article.

The main office of the government-owned and controlled company AB Svenska Spel is located in the suburb Sundbyberg in the northern parts of Stockholm. The office holds the main computer system controlling the 7,000 Jack Vegas machines in different parts of Sweden. This central computer system makes it impossible for restaurant owners to manipulate the machines, as well as making the game random. The payout is programmed to a maximum rate based on all the machines. This means that the players don't know which machines will be extra lucrative to play on since there are so many machines. A restaurant in one part of Sweden may one day have a very high payout rate, while a restaurant in another part of Sweden has a very low rate. According to an interview I did with the technical director of the Jack Vegas section of Svenska Spel, the game doesn't have anything to do with skill. It is a matter of pure chance. This information is also provided in brochures produced by Svenska Spel.

The beneficiaries of the Jack Vegas machines are the restaurants owners, who get 35% of the net profit on the machines in their restaurants (what is inserted in the machine minus payout), and the Swedish state, which uses the money for the public treasury.

The Jack Vegas machines have been criticised more extensively than other gaming forms by the media, as well as by researchers and support associations for compulsive gamblers, since the latter half of the 1990s and into the 2000s, and have been correlated with social disadvantage and pathological gambling (Lalander, 2004). The state-owned company Svenska Spel has argued in its marketing and in public documents that the game has its drawbacks, but that on the whole its effects are more positive than negative.

Methodology and sample

My goal was to make contact with the gamblers in the gaming locations. My selection criterion was that they should be experienced gamers who visited the location on a regular basis. For this reason, I always made preparatory observations before I asked the gamblers if they would consider being interviewed. However, as Parke and Griffiths (2002) have observed, it is not easy to recruit informants on site. They are focussed on the game, and they often feel the researcher is branding them as 'gambling addicts' and thus failures as individuals. Another reason may be that they do not understand how their thoughts might be of importance to research.

However, with approximately a 50-50 success rate, I managed to recruit nine informants at gaming locations. In addition, I recruited another six people via personal contacts and three through associations for compulsive gamblers. In all, I carried out 18 interviews, and I repeated some of them , especially those that were made with my two key informants, Salle, 29 years of age, and Janne, 30.

The people interviewed who were recruited on site must be presumed to be more social than many other Jack Vegas players. In the interviews, I asked questions both about their gambling habits/styles and experiences in Jack Vegas settings and about their lives in general. Sometimes I asked them questions about what I had witnessed in the Jack Vegas settings. With some I got a good contact, while others were less forthcoming.

In my analysis, all of the interviewees are treated with respect to confidentiality criteria. I give no names and no information about them from which they can be recognised. The quotes from interviews presented in this article are translated from Swedish (with a local accent) into English. An effort has been made to keep some of the linguistic patterns from the verbal speech, but of course this is a complicated task.

In addition to the interviews, I made 130 participatory observations, where I played the game alongside other players. I tried to fit in with the environment. If I saw that players were betting with maximum stakes, I followed their example, and if the players were more modest, I tried to adapt to that. I was quite sparse in my comments to the other players. I didn't want to intrude on their personal spheres. In the beginning of the research period, I could, however, ask them questions about how to act with regard to different aspects of the game. Some of the players were quite polite and helpful, while others saw me as a disturbing object.

I played with my own money and lost about 5,000 kronor, or $700, during the years 2003–2004. Now and then I won, but most often I went home with less money in my pocket than when I left. Sometimes the machines were mean to me and swallowed maybe 200 kronor, or $28, within 10 minutes. By participating in the gambling activities I could gather information about how the players talk to each other and to the machine, but also I could get an understanding of what it is like to be there.

In some situations, when all the machines were occupied, or when I ran out of money, I searched for another observation site from which I could get a view of the dynamic around the machines, for example, from a nearby table or a bar chair. In those situations, I had a newspaper with me, often the sports news. I didn't stare at the players but rather glanced at them every now and then. In a literal sense, it was a matter of genuine participant observation, observing without them knowing it. I see this as ethically acceptable since I didn't collect any information about, for example, their names or social security numbers. In a few cases in this article, I use real names of restaurants. This is only done when I deal with Jack Vegas settings with a big flow of players. When I'm dealing with restaurants with relatively small amounts of locals, I have changed the names.

Two cities have been of special importance with regard to my selection of Jack Vegas settings for this project:

- The medium-sized city of Norrköping (over 120,000 inhabitants), 160 km south of Stockholm, has a history as a working-class city producing textiles, which gave it the nickname 'Little Manchester'. The industrial workers here currently suffer heavily from layoffs.

- The small city of Kalmar (40,000 inhabitants), 300 km north of Sweden's southern coast, is most known for its proximity to one of Sweden's tourist Meccas, the large island of Öland. Kalmar can be characterised as a trading centre.

I focussed on five locations/restaurants (two in Norrköping and three in Kalmar) and made random observations of others, mainly to see how the different places varied. I selected the locations strategically to capture a range of categories of gamblers and gaming environments. Two of the settings were located in restaurants in big department stores and two in local pubs/restaurants. The fifth setting was a restaurant/café in a low-status suburb on the outskirts of Norrköping. Through these different settings, in addition to the random observations, I developed knowledge about different gaming styles, thus trying to capture some of the social and cultural rhythms typifying the various gaming locations (cf. Fisher, 1993).

In the remainder of this article, I will introduce the environments and some of the gamblers, then thematically analyse the social dimensions of the gambling machine environments. At the end of the article, I will describe various gambling types and relate them to the types described in the research of Fisher and to some extent to those in Custer's (1985) work.

Jack Vegas settings

One hot summer day in 2002, I agreed to meet Salle outside the Domino department store in Norrköping, first to eat lunch and then to play the machines. Salle, 29 years old, is one of my two key informants. We agreed to play a bit before having lunch at the restaurant, which was located in the middle of the department store. One terminal was available, and Salle wanted to test it for 50 kronor, about $7, 'to get a feel for the machine'. He bet the maximum of 5 kronor, about 70¢, each time. This was his gaming style, even when he played the horses or bet on soccer—always a high bet, so he wouldn't be vexed if he had played low but got high odds.[3] Salle touched the start button, the results were displayed in 2 seconds, and he touched the start button again. When we had played for a while, a woman in her fifties appeared at the machine to our right. The weather was hot, so she wore a pink tank top and skirt. The woman tried repeatedly to insert a bill in the terminal but failed. Salle was aware of her but was focussed on his game.

The lady in the pink top turned to me and asked in the local dialect, 'Got change?' I answered that I only had the change I intended to play with myself. She asked, 'Can you hold the machine for me while I get change?' 'Of course', I answered. She returned shortly after, and it worked this time; the terminal accepted her bill. She directed comments to me about her game, and I responded in 'mm-hms'. Without a doubt, a social relationship had been established, which is more common at the Jack Vegas locations than, for example, in the state-owned and run casinos (Lalander & Andreasson, 2003), where it is difficult to make contact with other players. She turned to me later when I won a small amount, which caused the machine to make a winning jingle; 'Luck is with you!' she said.

Salle and I left to eat lunch and returned later to the Domino restaurant. The same woman was still there, but she had moved to another machine and said to me, 'Couldn't stay away, huh?' 'No, it was tough', I said, and she nodded slightly in agreement. I inserted a bill and started playing. What happened at this point in our acquaintance is most likely that our positions become equalised. I was not an associate professor of sociology meeting a person with a gambling problem, but rather someone in the same boat. In that sense, neither one could reproach the other. This example introduces some of the sociality that develops around the terminals. It also suggests the different gambler types. In the following, I will treat this more systematically.

Meeting grounds

The walls of the Sports Bar pub in the centre of Kalmar feature sports heroes and equipment. The dominant symbolic design is of icons of masculinity. Giant screens regularly display sports scenes. At the rear of the pub is the gaming room. In addition to a small 'restaurant casino', featuring roulette and blackjack, there are three Jack Vegas machines. Young men between 18 and 22 years of age often gather here and play. These are men who often go out to bars and feel at home in this specific pub. The pub, as a result of its historic identity as a meeting place for men, is the perfect arena for these young men to process their identity and masculinity. Downstairs, in a short corridor, there are two more machines, but these usually attract middle-aged immigrants. The décor is not nearly as dominated by symbols of masculinity; instead, the machines are placed in a passageway for large numbers of pedestrians.

At the Domino restaurant in Norrköping, retirees of Swedish background and a few young Swedish men tend to frequent three of the machines, while the two other machines are usually frequented by immigrant men. This segregated use of the five machines becomes possible because there is a wide pillar separating the space with two machines on one side and three on the other. Based on my observations, different groups often seem to colonize different locations or parts of locations. However, the mixture of people with different characteristics is more salient at some locations, such as the Café Plaza in the suburb Hageby, which is visited by people with backgrounds such as Finnish, Kosovo-Albanian, Swedish, Turkish, and Chilean. But even at a place like this, intercommunicating cliques arise. That there are many immigrants at the Café Plaza results from the fact that not only do people of similar backgrounds tend to seek each other out, but the neighbourhood is located in a low-status suburb of Norrköping and is populated almost 50% by people from other countries.

On Kungsgatan in downtown Norrköping, there are several Jack Vegas locations, and at one of them there are five machines that you have to pass if you want to order or pick up a pizza. This location seems to be more heterogeneous in terms of those who frequent it. However, one gets the impression that the majority of people are not those who follow the traditional Swedish life pattern of staying sober during the day and on weekdays.[4] Often, by three in the afternoon, one can see gamers sitting with a pint bottle of beer, sometimes with 7.2% alcohol, typically the economical choice of the customer who puts alcohol content first. It is difficult to imagine so-called respectable folk sitting there and playing. In that sense, the regulars are a collection of outcasts who sit at a machine for a while and perhaps order a beer. The environment here also corresponded to an outsider lifestyle. The ashtrays were rarely emptied, the décor was shabby, chair stuffing poked out, and a light didn't work.

The gamblers and the staff/owners of the restaurants

Several of the informants reported that they knew the owners and/or the staff at the places they frequented most often. In order to better understand the text below, the reader must recall that the owners of the restaurants with Jack Vegas machines get 35% from the net profit, and that the machines don't cost anything to get or to support. The company Svenska Spel takes care of that. But the gamblers very seldom knew about this deal between the government-controlled company and the owners of the restaurants. The gamblers most often had a very positive view of the staff and the owners of the restaurants. Linus, 19 years old, said this about his favourite location:

> Well, yeah, you usually become really good friends with the people owning the machines. You have your favourite spots, and you usually get to be really good friends with them. They are like really nice people. You could be standing there like just before closing, and they didn't care, 'Oh, wow, look, that's great', standing there and seeing if you won.

For Linus, it was a matter of getting confirmation from his circle of acquaintances. Hassan, 20 years old, of Iranian background, was encouraged by the restaurant owner, who called him a 'brave' guy, a man who wasn't afraid to take risks. He also said he knew the owners and they were glad when he won and sometimes told him to leave if he lost too much money. He was also sometimes treated to a beer by the owners (other players have reported similar treatment). His favourite spot, Bud's, is located in central Norrköping. He says the pub has become a home to him, and he often goes there when he has nothing else to do to see who is there and to play. At Bud's he is reaffirmed as a brave gamer, while he feels like an outsider in other settings. Thomas, 21 years old, reports that he sometimes borrows money from the owners:

> Philip: Do they ever lend you money?
>
> Thomas: Yeah, sure. We work on the same street, so sometimes when I get there I might borrow a hundred or two ($14 or $28).

Manucher, 45 years old, is from Iraq. He worked illegally at a restaurant with gaming terminals, and after the restaurant closed at night, he and the owner often stayed and played together. Manucher's black-market paycheque was often spent there. It was ironic that the restaurant owner was refunded 35% of the salary he had paid. Manucher reports that the owner would sometimes order him to go home with his money before he lost it all. At the same time, the owner couldn't really enforce his order, since he also stood there and gambled. Iris, 57 years old, described the owners by saying they were 'so happy' when she won and that they sometimes treated her to a cup of coffee. She said the people working there were 'wonderful' and that was why she went there so often.

> Yes, they are so nice, so pleasant, sweet, they come in, 'Oh, would you like a cup of coffee?' and 'there's my sweetheart', as they say. Yes, I come here, have a beer, and play a bit [laughs]. It happens.

I told most of them that they didn't need to feel grateful for a beer or a cup of coffee when the owner was taking 35% of the proceeds. They were surprised by the high percentage and agreed they had earned that extra beer. The owners probably did not announce how much they earned off their regulars because it would have soured customer relations.

The reinforcement that gamers get from the owners often revolves around the fact that they are there as gamblers. They are not included in the owner's or personnel's mental sociogram of friends. If Iris were to be absent from the Jack Vegas locale for several weeks, it is unlikely that the owner would call her home and ask if she was all right. For that reason, one cannot say that the problem of loneliness or the experience of faulty social integration is solved in a permanent or stable way. Rather, it may be that the terminal is a substitute friend who steals time from the gambler that could have been used to meet others.

Interaction between gamblers

> Philip: When you're there playing, do you have any contact with them [other gamblers]?

> Janne, age 30: Well, sure, there are people you say hi to, and who say hi to you when you see them out and about, but what you talk about is mainly the game. You don't ask like, how are you, but, how's the game going, have the machines … have they been good to you? Are they guzzling, or what?

To ask how the day's been would be to overstep the boundaries of the conversational rules that apply to gamblers who are not relatives or who have not been included in a close relationship. Nonetheless, on a surface level there is communication among gamblers. This takes many different forms of expression, while, at the same time, and like other social institutions, it has its limits and rules. The conversational rules may vary greatly in different gambling settings. In the Swedish state-owned casinos, it is viewed as strange to address another gambler if you are not at the bar or not pointing out to another player that the staff or bank has counted wrong (Lalander & Andreasson, 2003). At the casino, one doesn't normally say 'Bye!' when one leaves the table. At the racetrack, social mores are usually more relaxed and it is not considered very strange to address someone one doesn't know. But even at the racetrack, there is a barrier to talking about one's private affairs (Hansson, 2005).

The Jack Vegas environments can be characterized by the regulars greeting one another, perhaps in a noncommittal way, but still a greeting. Many times during the observations I heard phrases similar to the ones Janne expressed above: 'How's it going?' 'Has the machine been good to you today?' or 'Is it just guzzling?' Young men sometimes arrive in groups and egg each other on to double up, or to put their winnings on the line by drawing the right card (this will be described in more detail later). Then you can hear things like, 'Come on, don't chicken out!' It is also typical for players to ask each other to hold the machine if they need to go to the restroom or make a telephone call.

A doomsday philosophy, or dystopia, can be created among players, such as with Iris, who said she would live on hardtack and water after losing. It's also typical to create an atmosphere of being held prisoner by the terminal, and thus to lose great amounts of money. There is no need to feel any great shame about gambling when sitting among other regulars, since everyone's in the same boat.

Logging out of life in general

Even if there is some sociality among people at the Jack Vegas locations, it isn't especially selective or supportive away from the gaming locations. If Janne or Iris didn't show up for weeks, it is highly doubtful that anyone would ask where they were. In this sense, the gamblers are expendable, since it is not as individuals that they are interesting, but as customers. Not only are there different types of sociality, but there is also asociality (cf. Custer, 1985); in other words, the players focus on the terminals rather than on other gamblers. Human interaction is important to some people, such as Iris, who was treated to coffee, and Hassan, who felt the pub was like his living room, a place where he could feel at home. For others, this is less critical, even though it is a physical shift in environments to

leave home and visit the gaming room. The link between the gamblers is the terminal, as described above, and most of them say as well that they are there to visit the terminal. Some even view the machine as a friend. Manucher, age 45, says,

> I think of nothing, and I think that's why I play, to forget, to not think. I was single, the terminal was my wife. I didn't have any real friends; the terminal was everything for me. I have fun when I play, too, and that … it's fun, I mean like, for me, that's all it is, I get a rush from it … away from …

Manucher gets the feeling that he disappears from something when he plays, and I believe he feels temporarily released from the anxiety that otherwise torments him. In this sense, the gaming functions like a drug. The past and the future are pushed aside, and only the present is meaningful. In the interaction with the terminal, a relationship arises from which everything else is excluded. It is only about pushing buttons for possible winnings. Leifos, aged around 30, of Greek origin, describes the difference between Jack Vegas and blackjack and roulette:

> It was, like, a lot, like, faster, somehow … like, on the machine. It was like, if you sit in on blackjack or roulette, there's so many people crowding around, they have to collect their tokens, they have to give the money to the winners and stuff … it was more like that kind of stuff …

The pace and continuity of the game contribute to creating a feeling of being disconnected from the surrounding world and one's own troubles (see Griffiths, 1995; Breen & Zimmerman, 2002; Breen, 2004). But that is probably not the whole picture. Your own movements get the machine to react. When you press start, the wheels start to spin, or cards are dealt. The gambler focusses on the screen and reflexively decides whether to continue or not. The pace keeps downtime to a minimum; there is no real opportunity for contact with the outside world. Roulette, otherwise considered to be a fast game, is slow in comparison with Jack Vegas and can't compete for the restless and often socially isolated people who are looking to fill their time by pushing buttons and spinning wheels: a moment free from existential anxiety and fear, a moment in which being alone is no longer a problem, a moment of being temporarily logged out of life in general.[5]

Strong frustrations

The social tensions and conflicts that arise in person-person and person-machine interaction are yet another component to be included in the description of the Jack Vegas locale as a social environment. The following account provides one such description.

I met Sahib, a 20-year-old from Iran, outside the Domino restaurant in central Norrköping. He was standing and watching the Jack Vegas players who had gathered around the terminals, three men of immigrant background and two retired people of Swedish background, one man and one woman. Sahib would occasionally make a comment to them, but they did not seem to listen. Sahib appeared to be influenced by hip-hop culture, which was confirmed in our interview. He had the cap and jeans of the style, jeans that hung low between his legs. I made eye contact with him while standing by myself watching the game, and I said 'hi' to him. He returned my greeting and I thought, 'All right, this may turn into an interview'. Unfortunately, I was just about to leave for another interview, so I asked if he could meet me at four o'clock at the same place. He really wanted to be interviewed, yet at the same time he behaved strangely in the way he answered. Sahib spoke with a louder

voice than the others, repeated his words often, and used hand gestures imitative of a rapper.

When I returned to the meeting place, he was already there. We sat at a table about 10 metres from the gaming terminals. The interview mainly centred on how angry he was at everything and everybody, at society in general, at everyday people (especially women who had 'betrayed' him), and at Svenska Spel. He spoke with his mouth very close to the microphone, as if to make sure that everything he said would be retained by the minidisk recorder. He also told me he had played the machines since he was 16 years old. After about a half hour the owner of the restaurant came over and said something like: 'Remember what I said: you're not allowed in here!' Sahib looked at him and said, 'We'll only be a moment longer'. I had no idea what to say and chose to remain silent. After the interview I asked him what it was about, and he answered that on one occasion when he lost a large amount of money he hit the terminal screen so hard that the machine was broken. He lost several thousand kronor on that occasion, so he had actually already paid for its repair, but that is not how the reasoning dominating today's society works, and the owner decided to ban him from the premises.[6]

Hitting the gaming terminals is by no means unusual, and it is a result of the frustration felt by people, mostly men, who are so wrapped up in the game and in the 'clever' finesses the game contains that they lose their self-control. They think 'in just a couple of spins, my luck will change', but it doesn't. Their entire monthly budget may be spent, their rent money, perhaps more. Their money is inside the terminal, which has been transformed from being a machine of opportunity into a safe with no code. To Sahib, and others like him, while he still has money the terminal looks like a safe with the door ajar. The money inside it, if Sahib is lucky, can become his to spend. But once his money is gone, the safe is locked. He has no chance of getting back money that is locked inside the terminal, later to be split between the Swedish government and the restaurant owner. Of course, there are other frustrations in the Jack Vegas environment. For example, women often come there to collect their men from the terminals.[7] In that sense, the settings cannot be described as a harmonious social paradise.

The gambler types of Custer and Fisher

Constructing different types from empirical data is an analytical strategy that has been tested in sociology since the days of Max Weber in the beginning of the 1900s. In gambling research, these typologies are used to nuance the picture of the gambler and demonstrate the different motivations and qualities. Robert Custer (1985) constructed a typology that included Professional Gamblers, Asocial Gamblers, Social Gamblers, Escape Gamblers, and Addicted Gamblers. The typology is based on several different variables and derives from Custer's experiences meeting with problem players in a psychiatric clinic. Another typology that somewhat corresponds to Custer's is that of Sue Fisher (1993). In ethnographic studies of a gambling hall on the west coast of England, she found and labelled the following gambling types:

- Arcade Kings are usually young men who achieve a certain kind of status by gambling. For these young men, the money was not the goal; rather, they strove to be skilful players in order to gain respect in the gambling environment. This gambling type can be described as social in the sense that they often had younger and less experienced gamblers surrounding them when they played.

- Machine Beaters are obsessed with conquering the machine. Unlike the Arcade Kings, they are not especially interested in social interaction. Rather, they relate strongly to the machines.

- Rent-a-Spacers are teenaged women who prefer to watch others play. They have no real interest in the game itself (see also Griffiths, 1995).

- Action Seekers are similar to both Arcade Kings and Machine Beaters and look for excitement at the gaming terminals. They are also highly similar to the gambler type described in Goffman's (1967) classic essay, 'Where the Action Is', in which the gambling is a way to obtain excitement and confirmation of status in an insecure environment. Action Seekers is a more general concept than Arcade Kings or Machine Beaters since it doesn't say anything about the gambling setting (the arcade) or about the machine. The Action Seeker, therefore, doesn't have to be a gambler in a literal sense, but can also relate to, for example, a criminal who likes to live a risky life.

- Escape Artists gamble to forget the social world they live in.

Fisher's (1993) categories derive from her experiences in the field. I don't think it is a problem that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Of this Fisher is also aware:

> The types describe the dominating motivation to gamble. However, they are by no means mutually exclusive, and elements of each type were perceived in the orientation of all fruit machine gamblers. The search for excitement; the 'buzz' experienced by a win in front of 'the gang', on 'the gang's turf'; the wish to outwit the machine and temporarily escape from reality, were all present in varying degrees. (p. 471)

I have also found it difficult to keep separate the gambling types that I devised, and I don't believe it is necessary to do so, as long as one is clear about intentions. A gambler type is not a person but a quality or a collection of qualities that are used to conceptualize motives and qualities seen among gamblers. We also have to remember that Fisher's study was done in one setting and mine in another. Fisher focussed on young people, while I had a broader sample. Much of what she describes reflects teenage culture. Nonetheless, I benefited greatly from Fisher's typology, and to some degree Custer's as well, in terms of understanding the gamblers I played with and interviewed.

Gambler types in Jack Vegas settings

When I entered the little pizzeria in Kalmar, Iris, 57 years of age, and a younger man of Asian background were at the gaming terminals. Iris made a comment about the young man's game, seeking contact. The man didn't understand her language and muttered something back.[8] My colleague and I sat down at a table near the terminals and ordered beers in order to merge with the environment. Iris was highly conscious of our presence and made a joking comment about the game, as if to make contact. We responded that we hadn't played much and asked her a little about the game. She answered in a light-hearted and joking way, and the contact we made led later to an interview. Iris is what Custer (1985) would call a Social Gambler type in the sense that she truly reaches out to others when she is playing. She doesn't cut people off, as many other players do, with one-word answers or by muttering. It was easy to get her to agree to an interview, and she was just as social towards the restaurant personnel as she was towards us. I met several people who could be called Social Gamblers.

Other gamblers seem to get so completely involved in their game that they become highly asocial (cf. Custer, 1985). They are easily irritated by people who watch over their shoulders or who seek contact. The young man Linus, aged 19 years, provides some indications why when he describes the feelings he has about his regular spot:

> I felt at home. It was like being at home. If someone showed up, it was like, 'Oh, no, an intruder. Why the hell is that person coming here and bothering my game?' you know? It felt like … you get so used to it, to being there … so it was really like being at home.

Linus developed a feeling of being at home at the gaming terminal. Other people who weren't regulars and didn't know how to behave were seen as a disturbance in his 'home'. Gambling had developed into something manic for him, and when he played he didn't want any interference but rather a perfect situation between himself and the terminal. I called Linus a Terminal-Fixated Gambler, which Custer calls Asocial, and Fisher calls Escape Artist, i.e., one who plays not primarily to experience social interaction, but solely to disassociate, in other words, to disconnect oneself and the terminal from the surrounding world. The reason I am not completely sold on Custer's concept is that I feel it is too coarse. Yes, Linus is asocial, but he is primarily fixated on the terminal, and that is what renders the asociality possible. I don't adopt Fisher's concept because, although it is about escape, it is also about intimacy with something, a search for a simpler existence, characterized by human-machine interaction. The Terminal-Fixated Gambler can be contrasted with Custer's Social Gambler, who not only focuses his or her attention on the terminal but also, in terms of speech and behaviour, seeks interaction and contact with people in the surrounding environment.

Young men often played more offensively and aggressively than women and older men. With this I mean that they raised their voices towards the machine in an aggressive way, saying, for example, 'fuck it, give it to me', or hit the buttons of the machine harder. I heard several stories about young men who had broken the glass of the touch screen. I never heard this about women. This way of interacting with the machine was especially obvious in relation to the terminal's doubling-up function. If, for example, you had a full house in poker, you could choose to receive five times your bet and cash out or you could bet the winnings by doubling up. For example, if you play 5 kronor, or 70¢, a full house will give you six times your bet, or 30 kronor, or about $4. If you choose to double up, you touch the screen and eight cards appear, three in the top half of the screen and five in the bottom half. If you touch one of the three cards in the upper half and it turns out to be a jack, to retain your accumulated credits you must choose a card from the bottom row that is equal to (returns your credits) or more valuable than the jack. If you get a king, your credits will be doubled to 60 kronor, or $8. If you wish, you can continue to double up until you have lost or reached the ceiling, which is 500 kronor, or $70. Many young men egg each other on to double up. These young men represent a type of gambler that is similar to both the Machine Beaters, in that they are attempting to conquer the machine, and the Arcade Kings, in that their gambling is usually confirmed by others standing around them. However, another one of Fisher's (1993) types also describes them very well, in fact, namely the Action Seekers, reflecting Goffman's (1967) archetype of the gambler as a person who prefers a risky to a safe life, at least during the game.

Fisher's Machine Beater type is present in my material. Initially I called this gambling quality the 'cheque-chaser', but I think Fisher's concept is better and more general. The cheque-chaser label is based on the fact that when the terminal's credit display reaches 500 kronor, or $70, it automatically prints out a pink cheque to be submitted for cash from the

restaurant's cashier. Several players have told me that the main point of playing was to get the terminal to print out this cheque, like a trophy, a sign that the machine had been beaten. If this is the goal, the gambler stays at the terminal until it has admitted defeat, at least in the mind of the gambler. It is a demonstration of power. Janne, 30 years old, is a pronounced Machine Beater and describes his gambling in these terms:

> If you hand in a 400 kronor ($56) cheque, then it feels like the terminal beat you, even though you are taking out cash. If you get out a cheque for 500 kronor ($70), then you've beat the machine; that's how it is, really. You can't win more on that cheque. It's all for that 'Ha! [distinctly triumphant laughter] I got you!' you know.

To get the machine to print a cheque creates an illusion of forcing the machine into submission. Janne is an outcast and had been in prison for several years. He also has a broad history of drug abuse. But at the gambling machines he can sometimes feel like a success, like a winner, a person with power. Many people spoke of forcing the machine to print out.

Besides the type of gambler described earlier as the Terminal-Fixated Gambler, I have developed two other types of gamblers that are not included in the typologies of Custer or Fisher. Gun-Britt, a 50-year-old gambler, told about players who disturb other players by standing at the terminals without playing them:

> When people stand behind their backs, they [the gamblers] get irritated. But some people enjoy standing back and watching just as much. If you've noticed, out there in Hageby, there are these two guys. They don't play, not for more than a ten or something. But they love to stand behind someone's back and watch while other gamblers lose money.

These gamblers come across as voyeurs who get a kick out of watching others lose money. This is not an unusual occurrence in gambling and is what problem gamblers in Sweden call 'playing dry.'[9] It could also be that the gambler in question is out of money, but still wants a moment of entertainment at the gaming terminals. In their casino report, Lalander and Andreasson (2003) denoted this gambler type as the Dry-Playing Voyeur. In the casino environment, these voyeurs aren't experienced as being particularly irritating, probably because it is easier to be a voyeur when lots of people are milling around. An observer in that case does not attract attention. For Jack Vegas gamblers, these observers become disturbing if a lot of money is being lost. Dry-Playing Voyeurs are irritating to the Terminal-Fixated Gambler, whose goal is to withdraw from the surrounding world, but they are also irritating for other reasons, which are developed below. There is some correspondence to Fisher's Rent-a-Spacers, but only a vague one, since the latter participate in the gambling environment as an identity-confirming complement to teenaged men, such as Fisher's Arcade Kings. People who are just watching, however, influence the situation for the gamblers.

The interview excerpt below introduces yet another gambling type. It reveals opinions about having someone's eyes on your back:

> Philip: Were there lots of people there playing? Can you remember anything about that? Were there people standing beside you or not?

> Manucher, age 45 years: Yes, sometimes, yes, sometimes people arrive who wait, because most people know I play a lot, but they wait until there's no money left, and that, I tell you, damn! [laughs] is it irritating.

> Philip: Oh you mean like, it's annoying to have their eyes on your back?

> Manucher: Yes [emphasis]. My god, I hate it when someone stands beside me there.

The ones who 'wait until there's no money left' are the Vulture gambler types, who have a strong influence on the environments of regular gamblers. The Vulture waits for a 'hot' terminal, one that can give high winnings for a small sum of money. The Vulture preys on terminals that have been 'fed' with money for a long period of time without producing large winnings. The existence of the Vulture is based on the idea that big jackpots are periodic. If over a period of playing time a machine hasn't given out a big jackpot, then the longer that time is the closer it is to a big win. But in order to approach the winning mood of the machine you have to feed the terminal. If the machine has been fed with bills for a long period of time without having produced anything but small, occasional jackpots, most gamblers believe the moment is near when it will pay out a big jackpot. According to information from Svenska Spel, as I noted earlier, this thought doesn't have any correspondence with reality and one can't apply that kind of thinking on one machine, but a lot of gamblers believe they have penetrated the logic of the machines, and this penetration, and the thoughts related to it, guides their actions.

The Vulture waits for gamblers to use up their money so he or she can make large profits with one or two dollars. If the above thought principles didn't exist, either in the mind of the person circling and waiting for the right moment at the terminals or in the minds of the other players, the Vulture would not exist either. The existence of the Vulture in the mental worlds of gamblers means that you don't want to leave your machine before it starts paying out. Awareness of this gambler type extends the probable time that a player spends at the terminal. The observers that Fisher (1993) calls Rent-a-Spacers are not a threat; rather they support the self-confirmation of the Arcade Kings who are working on their identities when they play. The Vulture, however, is a strong source of frustration, raising the spectre of the cold logic of 'your loss is my gain'.

Vultures don't lift the mood at the Jack Vegas terminals, but of course this is based on the fact that people gamble away large amounts of money playing the machines, and the Vultures try to take advantage of this spent money. They try to open the safe. But the Vultures' strategy for getting money out of the machines is far from a sure way to get rich.

Discussion

It would be wrong to say social intercourse is lacking at the Jack Vegas sites. Sometimes relationships develop among gamblers, who most often approach the terminals alone. The social interaction is, however, limited to 'holding' the machine for someone else or asking if the machine is giving or taking. Sometimes the feeling of sitting in the same boat is created, a common we'll-all-go-down-together philosophy. Different categories of people stake out claims at their own special meeting places. Young men meet at some pubs, outsiders meet at others, retired people at others, and immigrants at yet others.

The gamblers often engaged in social relations with the owner or personnel. However, these social relations were based on the length of time that the customer was in the pub or restaurant. For the customer, who might otherwise have felt lonely, this social contact nonetheless had great importance.

Despite some sociality, most gambling was about the human-machine relationship. In this sense, it is relevant to speak of asociality or machine fixation. The gambler is absorbed by the rhythm and continuity of gambling at the terminal. Using computer terminology, the gambler logs in and out from the everyday world he or she otherwise inhabits. In this sense, the surroundings, even the social surroundings, become relatively uninteresting. Their heavy focus on the game, and on the financial losses they incur, can also cause great frustration.

It is important when drawing up a typology to be aware of two contexts that determine the outcome of the typology. First, whatever may be the researcher's academic discipline or profession is a critical factor, and second, the typologies reflect the empirical environment in which they have been created. Custer's (1985) typology clearly reveals an extensive psychiatric and treatment-centred perspective. Fisher (1993), however, based her types on ethnographic study and took inspiration from sociological theory, such as Goffman (1967). Her concepts are nonetheless strongly tied to the specific environment of the arcades on the English coast. Furthermore, her types are limited to teenaged men and women. Nonetheless, fruitful categories can be found in both Custer's and Fisher's typologies that can be used to further develop gambling types. In my study of Swedish gambling machine settings, I could justify using some of the already presented types, but I have also discovered a couple of new types that play a large role in developments in these environments. The types documented in the literature which were useful in this analysis are as follows:

- Social Gamblers (Custer) seek social contact and do not allow the game to be too dominant.

- Action Seekers (Fisher, from Goffman) prefer a risky to a safe life, at least during the game.

- Arcade Kings (Fisher) feel that their identity is confirmed while other people admire their gambling skills.

- Machine Beaters (Fisher) are usually men who long to master the machine to prove their worth to themselves and others.

Apart from the types above, I extracted three more types which I could observe in my empirical material:

- Terminal-Fixated Gamblers want to log out from the problems and worries of everyday life.

- Dry-Playing Voyeurs are there only to watch, but they irritate other players in the gambling environment.

- Vultures heighten frustration at the gambling sites, but are logical outcomes of the gamblers' reasoning on how the terminals work.

I believe the above typology represents a fruitful way to work by starting with the typologies that already exist, but not by locking oneself into them. If I had done so, categories such as the Vulture would not have been given attention in my analysis, despite the fact that their existence makes people frustrated and causes them to remain at the terminals as long as they can, waiting for the magic moment when the safe opens and the money pours out.

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[1] Bingo halls organized by Swedish grassroots associations are the exception. They host a type of electronic gambling machine called Miss Vegas, manufactured in the same way as Jack Vegas and with similar software. The name reflects that women tend to prefer bingo more than men do.

[2] Monetary amounts will be expressed in Swedish kronor in the remainder of the article. The exchange rate I have used is 1 Swedish krona equals 14¢ US; thus, SEK 100 equals $14 US.

[3] If a winning combination occurs, the profits are greater the more one bets up front. In poker, for example, a full house gives a return of six times the bet; in other words, one krona gives six kronor and five kronor gives thirty kronor.

[4] Cf. Frykman and Löfgren (1987), who describe the influence of middle-class propriety on Swedish culture and the drive for respectability and order which these influences encouraged. See also Ambjörnsson (1988), who describes the sense of order which was involved in the organisation of the working class movement, including expectations of sobriety during the work week.

[5] In addition, roulette is in no way as accessible as Jack Vegas.

6 Approximately the same logic can be found in some pubs, in which customers can order a long string of drinks, upon which they become drunk and are then thrown out, sometimes violently.

[7] In a statistical survey by Westfelt covering more than 600 Jack Vegas players, 71% were men. See Supplement in Lalander (2004).

[8] I later asked him for an interview, since he was one of the regulars at the place. He did not understand my question. I tried English, German, and Spanish, but failed to make myself understood.

[9] I heard the term for the first time when I gave a talk at a treatment clinic for gambling addicts. Gambling dry was like filling in a soccer betting slip without submitting it.

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