

# “I Just Wanna Play”: Women and Electronic Gambling Machines

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

Individual Interdisciplinary Program

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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Of**

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## Acknowledgements

My advisor, Dr. Don Fuchs, has been an ongoing source of wisdom and guidance. More importantly, he has provided unwavering support and encouragement throughout this project and my program of study. I owe him special thanks for taking the supervisory role which is more than he was initially asked to provide.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Ruth Berry and Dr. Karen Grant, for their helpful feedback, suggestions, and insight. Their time and effort has greatly enhanced the quality of this work. Special thanks must go to Dr. Jeffrey Derevensky for serving as the external examiner and for taking the time to review this manuscript and provide feedback.

I must also acknowledge the financial support I received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Manitoba. This support has allowed the completion of my studies.

I am forever indebted to the women who participated in this study. I thank them for generously sharing their thoughts and their time. Without their immense contribution, this study could not have been completed.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family. Volumes could be written about their support.

### **Abstract**

Since the introduction of electronic gambling machines (EGMs) and the rapid expansion of the gambling industry within Canada, the popularity of gambling among women has increased. Despite this increased popularity, little is known about EGM gambling among women. Data from 26 individual interviews and two focus group interviews with women who gamble on EGMs were used to examine the meaning and function that EGM gambling holds for women within the ecological context of their lives. The analysis of these data revealed seven main themes describing the function and meaning of EGM gambling in women's lives. These themes included (1) fun and entertainment, (2) independence and rebellion, (3) social functions, (4) time out, (5) filling a void, (6) hope for financial gain, and (7) declining fun: overspending and chasing losses. Women's experiences were influenced by a variety of ecological factors including the presentation of EGM gambling in society, gender ideology, and women's health, financial circumstances, roles, relationships, and social networks. For many women, EGM gambling provides an important means of coping, managing, or adapting to the constraints imposed by their environment and life circumstances. These findings contribute to our understanding of EGM gambling among women and have implications for future research, education, policy, and intervention.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Gambling as a leisure activity is on the rise in Canada, the United States and many other countries. Gambling involves betting money or other valuables on the outcomes of games, contests or other events whose outcomes are partially or completely governed by chance (Smitheringale, 2003). A major Criminal Code amendment in 1985 allowed the introduction of electronic gambling machines (EGMs) in Canada and gave control of gambling to the provinces (Seelig & Seelig, 1998). Since that time there has been a rapid expansion of the gambling industry and increased participation in gambling activities by Canadians. The average annual expenditure on all forms of gambling by Canadians aged 18 and over increased from \$130 in 1992 to \$447 in 2002 (Marshall, 2003). Over 75% of Canadians engage in some form of gambling activity (Marshall & Wynne, 2003) and 85% of Manitobans gamble (Patton, Brown, Dhaliwal, Pankratz & Broszeit, 2002). These gambling participants include approximately equal numbers of men and women. Gambling has been highly profitable for governments with gambling revenues yielding over \$6.8 billion in profit in 2005/06 (Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling, 2007), up from \$1.7 billion in 1992/93 (Azmier, 2005).

Despite the increasing popularity of gambling among Canadians since the introduction of EGMs, very little is known about this activity, particularly among women. Most gambling research has focussed on problem gambling and has largely ignored the vast majority of gamblers who do not experience problems with their gambling. Approaching gambling from an individual pathology perspective that focuses on biological and psychological deficits, the research on problem gambling has generally

ignored the social, cultural, political and historical contexts of gambling and the meaning of gambling in everyday life (McGowan, 2004; McMillen, 1996a). Most research has also ignored women and the features of women's lives that make EGM gambling attractive or give meaning to their EGM gambling. The purpose of this study was to increase our understanding of EGM gambling among women. More specifically, this study qualitatively investigated the meaning and function that EGM gambling holds for women and how this meaning is shaped by the ecological context of women's lives.

### ***Electronic Gambling Machines***

A wide range of government controlled gambling activities are available in Canada. These include lottery tickets, instant win (scratch and break open) tickets, bingo, horse racing, casino card and table games, and electronic forms of gambling such as electronic bingo and keno, and freestanding electronic gambling machines (EGMs) such as slot machines and video lottery terminals (VLTs). Gambling, however, is not a homogenous activity. Distinctions between different types of gambling can be made in terms of the stimuli and features that contribute to the experience of the players, the time between placing a bet and knowing the outcome, the pace of the gambling activity, and the level of skill required for the activity (Dickerson, 1993). Recognition of the variations in the structural characteristics of different types of gambling suggests that the results of studies examining one form of gambling cannot be generalized to other forms of gambling.

EGMs are free standing, computer-run, electronic devices that offer players a variety of games. They are the fastest, most continuous forms of gambling (Breen, 2004).

Bets can be made and the outcome known in a matter of seconds. EGMs use design

technology such as bright colours and flashing lights to attract and retain players. They require no specialized skill and can be played by anyone. EGM gambling is accessible at casinos and racetracks across Canada. In provinces such as Manitoba that permit VLT gambling and the placement of VLTs in bars and lounges, players have even greater ease of access to EGMs (Azmier, 2005).

EGMs are a very prolific form of gambling in Canada. Currently, approximately 40,000 VLTs and 47,000 slot machines are in place across the country (Azmier, 2005; Sack, 2003). This includes 5,500 VLTs and almost 3,000 slot machines in Manitoba (Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling, 2007). There is approximately one EGM for every 281 adult Canadians, but Manitoba has a more dense concentration, with one EGM for every 113 adults (Azmier, 2005). EGMs have produced most of the increase in Canadian gambling revenue in recent years. Gambling profits from lotteries, VLTs and casinos have all increased since 1992, but the greatest increase has been from VLTs and casinos. Nationwide, while revenues from lotteries increased 19% between 1992 and 2000, revenues from casinos increased 573% and revenues from EGMs (VLTs and slot machines) outside of casinos increased 1,369% during the same period (Azmier, 2001).

### ***The Gambling Continuum***

The expansion of the gambling industry in Canada and elsewhere has been met with concerns over the social costs of gambling. Key among these concerns is the development of gambling problems among gambling participants (Korn & Shaffer, 1999). Gambling behaviour may be viewed as existing on a continuum ranging from no gambling at one end to pathological gambling at the other (Korn & Shaffer, 1999). Of the

population that does participate in gambling activities, most remain social or recreational gamblers. Some individuals, however, move along the continuum and progress to “pathological” or “problem” gambling.

Clinically, the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1980), in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) classified pathological gambling as an impulse control disorder. This disorder was characterized by the failure to resist impulses to gamble and continued gambling despite disruptions to family, personal, or vocational pursuits. Although the criteria for diagnosing changed to more closely parallel those of substance dependence, pathological gambling has also been included as an impulse control disorder in the DSM-III-R (1987) and DSM-IV (1994) (Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of Pathological Gambling, 1999). The term “pathological gambling” was chosen to reflect the “disease” nature of the problem and subsumes excessive gambling within a medical model (Walker, 1996). “Problem gambling” refers to gambling that may not meet all DSM criteria for pathological gambling but which nonetheless “creates negative consequences for the gambler, others in his or her social network, or for the community” (Ferris & Wynne, 2001, p. 2).

In response to concerns about the emergence of problem gambling associated with gambling expansion in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, Canada, and other countries, governments began to establish services for individuals who developed gambling problems. Policy makers and program planners needed to know how many and which people in the population might seek help for gambling problems (Volberg, 2004). Several epidemiological surveys have been conducted in order to assess the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling and the demographic characteristics of gamblers in

various jurisdictions. The majority of this research is subsumed under the medical or disease model and explains problem gambling as a form of individual pathology (McGowan, 2004). Consistent with the tendency for scientific reductionism, most studies have involved a quantitative examination of individual level characteristics such as the gambler's thoughts, emotions, biological attributes, or internal events that can be associated with gambling problems (Shaffer, 2003). Such research overlooks the vast majority of gamblers who gamble without developing problems and ignores broader contextual factors that are involved in all gambling behaviour.

The medical model of problem gambling has been criticised by many gambling researchers and new frameworks for examining the phenomenon of gambling are being developed (Abbott & Volberg, 1999). For example, within the biopsychosocial framework, gambling is viewed as a multidimensional activity that is influenced not only by biological or psychological factors but also by social factors such as the availability of gambling opportunities and the attitudes and gambling habits of those within an individual's social network (Griffiths & Delfabbro, 2001). Public health frameworks recognize gambling as a social and public health issue that affects not only individuals, but families, friends, social groups, and the population in general (Korn & Shaffer, 1999; McMillen, Marshall, Murphy, Lorenzen, & Waugh, 2004; Shaffer, 2003). Gambling and problem gambling are influenced not only by individual-level factors, but by broader socio-cultural, political and economic factors. People can experience problems associated with their gambling at any point along the gambling continuum and anyone who gambles has the potential to develop problems. This contrasts the medical view that problem or "pathological" gambling is a psychiatric disorder that can be identified by clinical criteria



that differentiate problem gamblers from other gamblers (McMillen et al., 2004). While most gambling research to date has focussed on the adverse consequences of gambling, a public health framework acknowledges that there are both positive and negative dimensions associated with gambling activity (Korn & Shaffer, 1999). Equally important, this framework encourages an examination of gambling from a variety of perspectives and an examination of the contextual factors involved in all gambling behaviour.

### ***More Women Gambling***

Although gambling has traditionally been thought of as a male domain, current gambling participants include approximately equal numbers of men and women. The notion of the “feminization” of gambling was introduced by research on the impact of gambling in Australia (Productivity Commission, 1999). “Feminization” refers to the idea that more women are gambling and developing problems with gambling than in the past. Similar trends have been observed in the United States (Potenza et al., 2001) and Canada (Toneatto & Skinner, 2000). In particular, the widespread introduction of EGMs has been associated with increases in gambling among women (Volberg, 2003; Productivity Commission, 1999). To date, however, understanding is lacking on why EGM gambling has become such a popular activity among women or why women are attracted to EGM gambling.

Until recently, women’s participation in gambling has been largely ignored in gambling research. Despite the fact that half of all gamblers are women (Marshall & Wynne, 2003; Wynne, 1994), and that participation in gambling is increasing more for women than for men (Gerstein et al., 1999), most of the existing gambling research is based on studies of men and on the social construction of gambling as a male

phenomenon (Lesieur & Blume, 1991). Existing studies that focus on the phenomenon of problem gambling as a form of individual pathology have produced a body of decontextualized knowledge that ignores the meaning of gambling in everyday life (McGowan, 2004; McMillen, 1996a). Few studies look specifically at women or use gender as a key concept. "Gender" is usually treated as a demographic variable indicating the sex of respondents. The social context of women's gambling including issues of patriarchy, gender stratification, and women's relationships are generally ignored in the gambling literature. Often the findings from studies on men are extrapolated to women and ignore the differences between men's and women's life and gambling experiences. As noted by Bunkle and Lepper (2002), "a key perspective is missing from the question of women's participation in gambling; namely the views and experiences of women themselves" (p.1).

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Gambling has become a ubiquitous feature in Canadian society and an activity in which most of the population, including most women, have at some time engaged. The sheer pervasiveness of gambling warrants an examination of this phenomenon, yet at the present time, very little is known about gambling as a human activity. More specifically, very little is known about EGM gambling among women even though evidence suggests that this has become a very popular activity.

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine EGM gambling among women and to situate their EGM gambling in the ecological context that they inhabit. Specifically, this research investigated (1) the meaning and purpose that EGM gambling holds for women, and (2) the contextual factors that influence women's EGM gambling,

and shape this meaning.

It was assumed that the meanings that women construct are shaped by multiple factors in the immediate and wider socio-political context of which they are a part. An ecological framework will be introduced to the study of women's EGM gambling because it allows for an organization of the different contextual levels of women's experience. Ecological perspectives provide a holistic framework for understanding human behaviour. A key assumption of ecological thinking is that human behaviour is influenced by the interaction between the individual and her environmental context and that context encompasses physical, social, cultural and historical components (McLaren & Hawe, 2005).

To date, no other study in Manitoba has focussed on women's gambling and no Canadian studies have focussed exclusively on EGM gambling among women. The findings of this study are useful to a variety of audiences. The introduction of an ecological framework to women's EGM gambling is significant because this framework allows for the integration of information from a variety of disciplines and allows for the consideration of factors from different levels of the social environment that may influence women's EGM gambling behaviour. The current shift towards recognizing gambling as a public health issue involves developing a broad viewpoint of gambling in society that does not focus solely on problem gambling and individual-level characteristics related to gambling. Rather, both positive and negative dimensions of gambling are recognized and an emphasis is placed on prevention and harm reduction so that any adverse consequences of gambling can be decreased. The identification of the reasons why gambling is important to women, and of contextual factors that influence

their gambling, can inform public health frameworks and policy regarding the regulation of gambling. Information specific to women is useful for informing education, prevention, and intervention programs related to gambling and problem gambling. The findings of this study can also provide direction for future research on women's gambling in traditional fields of gambling research as well as in leisure and recreation studies and women's studies.

The remainder of this dissertation is outlined as follows. In Chapter 2 the literature review examines the historical context of gambling and reveals the broader social, cultural, political and economic factors that have been involved in the evolution of gambling in Canada. This chapter also discusses what is known about the significance of gender as it is related to gambling. Ecological systems theory (EST), the conceptual framework for this study, is then reviewed. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology, research techniques, selection of study participants, and the process of data collection and analysis used in the study. Ethical considerations and rigour and ethical issues are also discussed. The findings of the research are presented in two chapters. Chapter 4 provides a general description of the women who participated in the study as well as a profile of the individual participants. In Chapter 5 the themes related to the functions and meanings of EGM gambling in women's lives and the contextual influences on their gambling are presented. The final chapter includes further discussion of the findings as well as the implications of the findings for future research, education, policy, and intervention.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Historical Context: Shifting Views of Gambling

In one form or another, gambling has existed since ancient times (Bloch, 1951; McMillen, 1996a; Reith, 2002). For example, artifacts pertaining to various games of chance have been found in the archaeological remains from Egyptian, Chinese and Greek cultures. In North America, lotteries were used as a method of raising money to fund large capital projects and as a means of distributing land during periods of settlement by Europeans (Morton, 2003). Card and dice games were a common aspect of frontier life and horse racing played a central role in community celebrations. For as long as gambling activities have existed, however, there have also been segments of the population that have opposed gambling. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in North America, gambling was tolerated to some degree, but anti-gambling critics were also very vocal (Walker, 1996). Over time, gambling has been constructed as a form of sin, vice, sickness, and acceptable leisure activity.

Gambling has a complex and contradictory history in Canada with Canadians demonstrating a high degree of ambivalence towards this activity (Morton, 2003). Gambling has always been a popular pastime, particularly among the wealthy and the working class, but at the same time, for long periods of Canadian history, most forms of gambling have also been illegal. In Canada, as elsewhere, gambling has been strongly intertwined with religious, economic, and political ideology.

#### *From Sin to Vice*

By the nineteenth century the ideology of hard work as a form of spiritual redemption that formed the so-called "Protestant work ethic" was strongly connected to

economic and political organization (Abt, 1996; Morton, 2003). The work ethic was used to justify the distribution of wealth and patriarchal power in society. Early North American gambling opponents charged that gambling was a threat to the strong work ethic and values of thrift and merit that composed the capitalist economic order. Rather than being rewarded for productive hard work, gambling winners got “something for nothing” and gambling represented a threat to perseverance and self-discipline. Gambling was viewed as particularly dangerous for the working class who were needed as a source of cheap labour in the industrialized economy. The supposed connection between merit and material wealth also elevated men’s status within the household because of their role as breadwinner. This elevated status was threatened by gambling because a man who gambled and supported his family through games of chance rather than by honest labour could not legitimately lay claim to the position of the head of the household. This position required commitment to the work ethic. Gambling was also regarded as a threat to family stability because of a diversion of resources away from the household and because of the potential harm to children caused by the bad example that games of chance provided for future generations of labourers.

From 1885 to 1920 the focus of Protestant moral reform and the social purity movement in Canada was on “morality offenses” such as those involving gambling, alcohol and drug use, and commercial sex. These moral and economic concerns that reflected the perspective of the mainly English-speaking, Protestant, male, middle class gambling critics became enshrined in the law. In 1892 the Canadian Criminal Code prohibited most gambling activities (Campbell & Smith, 1998). Informal private betting between fewer than 10 people was not prohibited as long as it did not occur on a Sunday

and as long as a third party did not financially benefit from the wager. Betting at racetracks was also allowed. An amendment to the Criminal Code in 1900 allowed municipalities to grant permission for lotteries (including bingo) for charities or religious bazaars as long as the article being given away was not worth more than \$50. In 1925 another amendment permitted games of chance at agricultural fairs and exhibitions. The exceptions to prohibited forms of gambling within the Criminal Code demonstrate contradictions that existed. While gambling among the elite at racetracks or in speculative investments was acceptable, gambling among the working class needed to be monitored more closely because of the perceived threat that working class gambling posed to the work ethic. Gambling among those other than the elite was only acceptable for the purposes of raising money for charity and was not considered a suitable working class leisure activity. The laws concerning gambling remained unchanged for many years. However, these laws were irregularly enforced because of various ambiguities in the statutes and because of the lack of public support for these laws (Morton, 2003). When “crackdowns” occurred they were usually directed towards the working class or particular racial or ethnic groups involved in gambling.

### ***Increasing Acceptance***

Although the power of the gambling critics remained for many years, opposition to the Canadian laws against gambling has always been strong (Morton, 2003). Despite the legal prohibition of most forms of gambling, both legal and illegal forms of gambling flourished. For example, during the First and Second World Wars, lotteries, raffles, and sweepstakes were popular forms of raising money for war related charities. Among the elite, much gambling took place in social clubs and among the working class, in illicit

gambling houses.

Since the First World War, changing cultural and economic conditions in North America created increased pressure for the reform and liberalization of the anti-gambling laws (Abt, 1996). The first of these was the breakdown of Protestant morality. More permissive attitudes surrounding moral issues reflected the secularization of a pluralistic Canadian society and the emphasis on moral autonomy and individual freedom. Along with commercialized horse racing, commercialized forms of mass entertainment such as nightclubs, dance halls, and movie theatres appeared and attracted both working class and middle class patrons. The Depression of the 1930s challenged the work ethic principle that hard work, sacrifice and savings would bring security and affluence. Economic hardship during the Depression made gambling an attractive way to supplement inadequate incomes (Morton, 2003).

Gambling activity increased during and after the Second World War as more people had more money to spend on leisure activities (Abt, 1996; Morton, 2003). Economic reorganization in the 1940s involved a shift from a production based economy to a consumption and service-based economy. The older values of thrift and production were replaced by the values of material success, spending, and consumption. Arguments about the negative economic effects of gambling lost much of their impact. Public opinion polls conducted after the Second World War regularly showed increased public support for gambling in Canada (Morton, 2003).

With the decline of moral arguments against gambling, arguments against gambling in the 1950s focussed on the links between gambling and organized crime (Morton, 2003). Gambling was recognized as a major source of revenue for crime



syndicates in the United States after the end of prohibition in the 1930s. Nevada legalized gambling in 1931 and shortly afterward the establishment of many casinos created a major tourist industry that attracted individuals from all classes of society. With a shortage of respectable investors who were wary of the gambling industry's reputation for crime and who were not wishing to offend middle-class moralists, the Nevada casino operators turned to criminal sources to finance large casino-hotels (McMillen, 1996b). Canadian gambling critics based their opposition to commercialized gambling on its link to organized crime and the corruption of civil society. The view of gambling as an inherently immoral activity shifted to a focus on who was benefiting from gambling (Morton). In particular, a distinction was made between gambling as a form of charitable fundraising by church groups and service organizations and gambling as a source of profit for individual entrepreneurs who might be linked to criminal operations. The removal of inherent immorality from the discourse on gambling represented a distinct shift that was one of the factors that eventually paved the way to legalization.

### ***From Sin to Sickness: Problem Gambling***

With declining arguments about the inherent immorality of gambling, the discourse around gambling also shifted to concerns about the development of gambling problems among gambling participants. Gambling changed from "sin" to "sickness" in response to the development of psychological views of gambling and heavy gambling as a form of compulsion (Walker, 1996). The view of gambling as a form of compulsion existed for many years, particularly among psychoanalysts, but gained increasing momentum in the 1950s with the work of psychologist Edmund Bergler who identified a distinct type of neurotic gambler who gambled as a form of self-destruction (Morton,

2003). The work of Robert Custer, a prominent gambling researcher in the 1970s, led the American Psychiatric Association (APA) to accept the idea that “compulsive gambling” was a disorder that required treatment (Wedgeworth, 1998). In 1980 the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1980) formally recognized pathological gambling in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual(DSM-III) and has included pathological gambling in subsequent editions of the DSM. The inclusion of pathological gambling in the DSM-III marked the official “medicalization” of gambling problems (Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of Pathological Gambling, 1999).

For the purpose of the present discussion, it is important to note that the introduction of the concepts of the pathological gambler and individual pathology was an important historical moment in the controversy surrounding gambling, gambling legislation, and gambling research agendas (Borrell, 2005; Shaffer, 2003). The identification of “compulsive” gambling as a form of individual pathology reduced the strength of the moral arguments against gambling. Gambling was not necessarily a moral weakness or a vice for all gamblers, but was an activity that was potentially harmful for only certain “sick” individuals. A distinction was made between the gambler whose lack of self-control posed a threat to him/herself and others in society and the recreational gambler who did not lack self-control.

The focus of gambling research became problem gambling and specifically the development of explanations of problem gambling that focused on the individual characteristics of the problem gamblers. Most theoretical formulations are subsumed under the medical model and explain this phenomenon as a biological or psychological

disorder (McGowan, 2004; Reith, 2007). For example, biological theories have attributed the development of problem gambling to a genetic disposition (Comings et al. 1996; 2001) and neurobiological mechanisms in the brain's reward and reinforcement systems (Bergh, Eklund, Soderston, & Nordin, 1997). Psychological theories have attributed problem gambling to a variety of individual-level factors including personality traits such as sensation seeking (Breen & Zuckerman, 1999) and impulsivity (Steel & Blaszczynski, 1998), mood disorders such as depression and anxiety (Blaszczynski, McConaghy & Frankova, 1991), distorted cognitions (Delfabbro & Winefield, 2000) and conditioning (McConaghy, Armstrong, Blaszczynski, & Allcock, 1988).

Women have been largely ignored in these theoretical formulations (Lesieur & Blume, 1991) which contribute little to our understanding of gambling as a human activity. In addition, explanations of individual pathology divert attention from the social and historical construction of gambling, and the wider social, political and structural environment in which it occurs.

### ***Government Interests and Changing Legislation***

Governments had long been aware of the potential for lotteries to raise money and had frequently used them as such prior to their legal prohibition. For example, in the United States, Harvard and Yale universities were partially funded by lotteries as were other large economic projects in colonial society (McMillen, 1996b). Although lotteries were not as popular in Canada, they did exist. The first Welland Canal in Ontario was funded by a lottery and lots on Prince Edward Island were assigned through lotteries (Morton, 2003). The onset of the Depression created a renewed interest in gambling as a way for provincial governments to raise money. The Depression made the government's

need for funds more severe and influenced provincial governments to call for lotteries or sweepstakes to relieve the unemployed or to build hospitals (Campbell, 2002). During the 1930s, lottery bills successfully passed provincial legislatures in British Columbia and Quebec but could not be implemented because of the federal law against gambling. Increased attention was being paid to the potential of gambling to be used to raise funds for worthy causes.

Although gambling was under the jurisdiction of the federal government in the Criminal Code, enforcement of the gambling laws was left to the provinces. Provincial enforcement of these laws included periodic crackdowns on illegal gambling houses or church bingos, but had generally been inconsistent and difficult due to the lack of public support for the laws against gambling. Enforcement of the gambling laws became even more difficult with the increased popularity of gambling after the Second World War. For example, juries were not willing to convict bingo organizers or service club members who used raffles as a form of fundraising (Morton, 2003).

Governments increasingly argued that if gambling could not be stopped, it could at least be regulated. Revenue from gambling could be used to support worthy causes and legalized gambling within Canada would keep money that would otherwise be spent elsewhere in Canada. Between 1959 and 1963, 11 pro-lottery bills were presented to Parliament. By the 1960s, the debate about lotteries as a source of government revenue emerged as a dominant theme in the face of the expanding welfare state and increasing social service costs (Morton, 2003). The increased expectations of government services made the potential revenue from lotteries more attractive than the prospect of rising taxes, even among the middle-class.

In 1967, Pierre Trudeau announced that he would introduce an omnibus bill to extensively revise Criminal Code legislation on matters such as gambling, gun control, homosexuality, birth control and divorce (Morton, 2003). With regard to gambling, the bill proposed revisions that included the extension of betting at race tracks and a maximum ceiling prize for charity lotteries. However, the bill was not introduced because Parliament was dissolved for an election. The omnibus bill was reintroduced and passed as Bill C-150 in 1969 with expanded provisions for government lotteries. The 1969 amendment to the Criminal Code allowed both federal and provincial levels of government to hold lotteries and provincial governments to license charitable and religious organizations to hold lotteries. A final Criminal Code amendment in 1985 allowed the introduction of computer, video and slot devices such as VLTs and slot machines. The 1985 amendment also gave the provinces exclusive control over gambling with the agreement that the provinces would annually pay the federal government a portion of gambling revenue in return (Seelig & Seelig, 1998).

By the mid 1970s every province and territory in Canada had its own lottery system. In 1989, the Crystal Casino, Canada's first permanent government gambling venue opened in Winnipeg (Marshall, 1999). By 1997 all provinces except Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick had permanent casinos. There are currently over 60 permanent casinos in Canada (Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling, 2007). In 1990 the first VLTs were introduced in New Brunswick and by 1993 all provinces except Ontario and British Columbia (these provinces offer electronic slot machines in casinos and racetracks) had VLTs.

Compared to other countries, gambling policy is unique in Canada. Only the

provincial governments can conduct and manage gambling activity (Campbell & Smith, 1998). Even though governments can contract out some management activity, all contractors remain under the authority of the provinces. Private sector ownership is not allowed. This reflects a shift in the moralistic view of gambling as an unacceptable, prohibited behaviour to a more paternalistic view that allows for widespread access to gambling under government control. This shift also allows for the generation of significant provincial government revenue.

Government control of gambling in Canada is often criticized as posing an inherent conflict of interest (Campbell, Hartnagel, & Smith, 2005; McMullan, 2005). The attraction to the revenue generated by gambling creates provincial government interest in promoting gambling activity in order to generate revenue. At the same time, they have the power to regulate and control such activity. Thus, the commitment by provincial governments to limit the potential harms associated with gambling is questioned.

### ***The Completed Transformation of Gambling to Leisure***

Within the span of a century, gambling has shifted from an immoral, illegal activity to a ubiquitous feature of Canadian society that has become a routine aspect of everyday life. Social reality, in terms of the meaning of gambling, was defined by those that Becker (1963 as cited in Newman, 2004) called “moral entrepreneurs” and interest groups who had the power to influence decision makers and neutralize their opponents. Social reality was then redefined to reflect changing economic and political interests.

There is some debate about whether increasingly liberal social attitudes forced governments to loosen the laws on gambling activity or whether the legalization of government operated gambling led to greater levels of public acceptance (Tepperman,

Kwan, Jones, & Falkowski-Ham, 2004). Public acceptance and participation in gambling has reflected changing social, religious, and economic norms and changing attitudes towards work, consumption, leisure, play, and money that are part of an increasingly pluralistic and secular society. However, the economic interests of the state have played a clear role in the definition of gambling as a deviant, immoral activity and in the redefinition of gambling as a legitimate form of leisure that individuals have the right to consume. From an economic perspective, gambling is considered a market commodity (Eadington, 1995). Consumers choose to participate in gambling because this activity provides them with utility in the form of entertainment and the chance to win money.

Within capitalist economies leisure has become highly commercialized and represents a major source of profit (Dixey & Talbot, 1982). Since the liberalization of the laws against gambling, a wide variety of commercial gambling activities are being offered in locations ranging from corner stores to elaborate casinos that offer various forms of gambling and entertainment. The development of new destinations for entertainment and leisure and the development of new technologies and types of gambling have contributed to the expansion of what has become a major industry (Korn & Shaffer, 1999). Gambling is now widely promoted as leisure by governments and the industry. Canadians are encouraged to participate in provincial and national lotteries and other government regulated gambling activities. Although gambling has historically been most strongly associated with the wealthy and the working class, gambling is now equally marketed as a form of entertainment or leisure to a wider demographic base including the middle class (Fabian, 1990). Gambling has become a form of “productive

leisure” that combines amusement and the generation of government revenue (Cosgrave & Klassen, 2001).

The changes in the acceptability of gambling in Canada, and in particular the changes in the stance held by governments with regard to gambling, are part of the context in which women’s EGM gambling occurs. This political and economic background is, however, usually ignored in studies of gambling (Borrell, 2003; McMillen, 1996a).

### **Women and Gambling**

Women’s participation in gambling activity has been influenced not only by the decreasing moral constraints against gambling, but also by increasing equality for women beginning with the suffrage movement in the early 1900s and women’s increasing access to public space through paid employment. Since the 1950s, there has been a dramatic increase in Canadian women’s labour force participation that has brought women greater economic independence and increased consumer status (Larson, Golz & Munro, 2000). This coincides with the wide accessibility and availability of gambling to women. For example, women can purchase lottery and scratch tickets at the grocery store or at mall kiosks as part of routine shopping. In the past, gambling venues such as racetracks, sports venues, and betting shops were less attractive to women (Heater & Patton, 2006). However, today casino operators consciously target women by providing an atmosphere that is perceived by women to be attractive, friendly and safe (Hallebone, 1999; Trevorrow & Moore, 1998). When EGMs are designed, developers consider women as prototype customers (Dow Schull, 2003).

As previously mentioned, most gambling research to date has focussed on the



phenomenon of problem gambling and has approached this issue from an individual pathology perspective. Within this body of literature, most of what we know about gambling and problem gambling is based on research using male samples or samples containing very few females (Volberg, 2003). In a feminist critique of gambling research, Mark and Lesieur (1992) noted that in most research the sex of respondents is not discussed and gender related findings have not been reported. In much research there appears to be an assumption that what is true for male gamblers is also true for women.

Despite these shortcomings, existing studies that do compare men and women clearly identify differences in the types of gambling engaged in by men and women. Women participate in a narrower range of gambling activities than do their male counterparts (Hraba & Lee, 1996; Volberg, 2003). Although EGMs are a popular gambling activity for both males and females, men's gambling activity is more likely than women's to include gambling on the stock market, on sports and on table games such as blackjack or poker. Women indicate a preference for continuous forms of gambling such as bingo and EGMs (Boughton & Brewster, 2002; Crisp et al., 2000, 2004; Lesieur & Blume, 1991; Potenza et al., 2001; Productivity Commission, 1999).

There is some inconsistency in the literature with regard to other sex differences, but it has generally been found that women begin playing EGMs at a later age than do men. Among EGM gamblers who develop gambling problems, women begin to gamble at a later age than men and are older when they present themselves to services (Crisp et al., 2000; Taveres et al., 2003). Taveres et al. speculated that women's introduction to EGM gambling may coincide with a "so-called midlife crisis" but this speculation has not been substantiated with research. McLaughlin (2000 as cited in Smith & Wynne, 2004)

noted that men with gambling problems outnumber women up to age 34; nearly equal numbers of men and women have gambling problems between the ages of 35 and 44 and women with gambling problems outnumber men in the 45-64 age range. After age 65 the numbers of men and women become equal again and generally decline. Household expenditure surveys also indicate that women between the ages of 45 and 64 years have higher expenditures on EGM gambling than do women of other age groups while men between the ages of 18 and 44 years spend more on EGMs than do men of other ages (Marshall, 2003). Although the data is not disaggregated by sex, other household expenditure surveys indicate that gambling is more common among the middle aged groups (25 to 64 years) than younger or older age groups (MacDonald, McMullan & Perrier, 2004). A study of VLT gambling in Alberta also found that most VLT gamblers in that province were between 30 and 49 years of age (Smith & Wynne, 2004). The literature reporting these age differences generally provides descriptive profiles of the population of gamblers under study and reasons for these age differences have yet to be investigated and explained.

Women are more likely than men to be described as “escape” gamblers. Consistent with the recent transformation of gambling as a form of leisure, most gamblers say they gamble for fun and entertainment (National Council of Welfare, 1996; Smitheringale, 2003). However, a variety of motivations to gamble have been reported and most often include gambling to support charities, gambling for action and the thrill of winning, gambling as a means of socializing, gambling to win money, and gambling to escape life problems and worries. At least among problem gamblers, women and men appear to have different motivations for gambling with women more often reporting

gambling as a means of escape while men more often report gambling for thrill seeking and to win money (Lesieur & Blume, 1991; Potenza et al., 2001). When comparing men's and women's EGM machine play, Hing and Breen (2001) found that while men play in order win money, women play in ways that allow them to maximize their playing time. These authors suggested that this could be linked to women's desire to escape boredom or to gain time out from family responsibilities.

It must be noted that many of these studies describe "sex" differences even though the authors may refer to "gender" differences. They use sex as a characteristic by which to describe study findings, but they do not usually provide any explanation for the differences observed. Gender is usually and incorrectly treated as a demographic variable. Generally, explanations to account for the observed differences in men's and women's gambling are not offered and gender-related issues are not addressed.

"Gender" moves beyond the biological differences between men and women and refers to the "array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours values, relative power and influences that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis" (Greaves et al., 1999, p. 2). The concept of gender incorporates the differences in the culturally proscribed expectations for men's and women's roles and responsibilities that are linked to women's subordinate status within patriarchal society. Literature from a variety of disciplines supports the notion that gender inequality shapes women's life experiences.

### ***Gender and Leisure***

Explanations of gambling as a legitimate form of leisure began to emerge following the Second World War. Early sociological accounts explained gambling from a

structural-functionalist perspective. For example, focussing on the functional aspects of gambling, in the 1940s, Devereux (as cited in Frey, 1984) explained gambling as a safety valve that provides individuals with an outlet from the frustrations of modern capitalism and meets personal and social needs that are not otherwise met in a capitalist system. Similarly, Bloch (1951) explained gambling as an outlet for releasing tension and frustration from the routine and boredom of workers in modern industrial life.

Gambling has also been described as a form of adult play. According to Goffman (1969), human beings have a natural penchant for play, action and risk-taking. The routinization of everyday life does not allow opportunities for people to engage in activity that offers action and risk even though risk-taking is valued in Western capitalist society. Gambling provides a socially acceptable arena in which action can be found. Smith and Abt (1984) and Abt, McGurrin and Smith (1984) also viewed gambling as a form of play that reflects contemporary American culture while providing recreation for gamblers. Gambling for economic gain and the passion to win parallel the values of competitiveness, aggressiveness, endurance and skill learned by males during socialization in North American culture. Gambling provides social interaction, enjoyment, and a way to escape the boredom of everyday life.

Gambling among women was not specifically addressed in these theories. This is perhaps a reflection of traditional expectations regarding women's proscribed role as caregivers within the private space of the home and the desired expressive characteristics for that role. The dramatic increase in the number of women who participate in gambling, however, suggests that women have embraced this form of leisure.

Gender is an important variable in adult leisure and recreation experiences and it

has been documented that women have different patterns of leisure participation and often give different meanings to leisure experiences (Henderson, 1990). Leisure has been defined differently for men and women. Early conceptualizations of leisure focused on the definition of men's "time-out" or "free-time" from paid work and essentially ignored women (Wearing, 1990). In recognition of women's unpaid labour in the home, the concept of leisure has been expanded to include "non-obligated time" and "time to myself" for women. Gender studies of women's leisure indicate that women face gender-specific constraints with regard to leisure (Shaw, 1994). These include the constraints imposed by women's caregiving role, economics, and a lack of leisure opportunities. Leisure can also be used by women as a form of resistance to oppressive gender relations.

Historically men and women have been assigned different roles within the family, but this gender-based dichotomy in the division of labour became more pronounced in modern industrial society with the creation of middle-class ideology and the separation of work and family spheres (Nett, 1993). Women were expected to fill expressive roles that consisted of being at home to provide domestic support and to nurture and care for children. Socialization patterns continue to encourage women to focus on relationships and connections with other people and to subordinate their own needs to the needs of others. Women continue to assume primary responsibility for child rearing, household tasks, and attending to the needs of others (Ghulam, 1997). Women also provide the vast majority of informal elderly care (Keith, 1995; Aronson, 1992).

Women assume primary responsibility for caregiving even when they are employed. Employed women juggle multiple roles and put in what Hochschild and Machung (1989) refer to as a "second shift" of unpaid family work that begins when the

paid work day has ended. Health surveys indicate that although both men and women experience stress, women report more stress, a wider range of stressors, and have higher average stress scores than do men (Shields, 2004). Women tend to report higher levels of chronic strains stemming from time constraints, the expectations of other people, relationships, and children and family health. "It has been suggested that women are socially conditioned to be more responsive to others' well-being so their higher stress rates may partially stem from this nurturing role" (Statistics Canada, 2004a, p. 1). These caregiving demands place women at a disadvantage with regard to time for leisure (Bialeschki & Michener, 1994; Shaw, 1994).

Both men and women experience economic constraints that serve as barriers to their leisure. However, women's lower earning power has been shown to be particularly constraining for women's lives in general and for their participation in leisure in particular (Shaw, 1994). Although women's labour force participation is now almost equal to that of men (Cooke-Reynolds & Zukewich, 2004), gender inequality exists within the workforce. North America is characterized by gender segregation in the work force with a tendency for men and women to be employed in different types of occupations (Cohen, 2004). Women continue to be heavily represented in low-prestige, low wage jobs that offer few benefits (Drolet, 1999). Although more women are entering more prestigious, traditionally male-dominated professions, women still account for over 70 percent of those employed in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical positions, and sales and service occupations (Statistics Canada, 2000). According to Hochschild (1983), women's occupational roles often duplicate caregiving and relational work within the family.

Women are far more likely than men to be employed on a part-time basis and they work part-time because of caregiving responsibilities. Women are more likely than men to leave their jobs or to reduce or shift their work hours in order to care for children (Cooke-Reynolds & Zukewich, 2004) or aging parents and other relatives (Statistics Canada, 2004b). Part-time pay is seldom proportionate to that of full-time jobs. Part-time work also lacks job security and employment benefits such as medical insurance, dental plans or pension plans.

Women's restricted occupational opportunities and low incomes contribute to poverty among women. Women are over represented among the poor, in part, because of motherhood and child-care responsibilities. Women's responsibility for caregiving influences them to sacrifice activities that would qualify them for better jobs (Larson et al., 2000).

Leisure may also be constrained by a lack of leisure facilities or programs. For women this involves not only a tangible lack of leisure opportunities but also a lack of leisure activities that are deemed appropriate for women (Shaw, 1994). For example, within sports, there is an unequal provision of funding, programs, and teams for women and not all sporting activities are deemed to be equally appropriate for women and men. There is a particular lack of facilities and opportunities for women in small isolated communities such as resource industry towns in Canada (Hunter & Whitson, 1992). Even when leisure opportunities are available, they are not equally available for all women because of economic constraints. In addition, women's access to leisure opportunities may be constrained by their fear of violence both in the home and in outside leisure settings (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1987).

Leisure can also be used by women as a means of exercising personal power as a form of resistance to traditionally proscribed gender stereotypes and roles (Parry, 2005; Shaw, 1994)

For example, Wearing (1990) found that first time mothers participated in leisure activities that provided them with a sense of autonomy and self-value that is unexpected under the traditional caregiving role. Green (1998) studied women's friendships with other women and found that engaging in women-only leisure pursuits facilitated a resistance to stereotyped gender roles, and feelings of empowerment. Participation in sports can provide an opportunity to resist gender role expectations (Shaw, 2001).

### ***Gender and Gambling***

Very little research has explored either the gendered nature of gambling or gambling as a gendered leisure activity. Most of the studies that have examined gender and gambling have focused on problem gambling among women. The studies that have examined gambling as a form of leisure for women have not specifically examined electronic forms of gambling. However, these studies have provided important information.

Morton's (2003) study of gambling in Canada included some analysis of women's participation in gambling. Women suffragists participated in the social purity movement that called for the restrictions of gambling activity. However, the most prominent critics of gambling were always men who in a patriarchal society occupied the positions of power necessary to sustain the attack on gambling. Women accompanied men to gambling clubs, purchased raffle tickets for "appropriate" charities, occasionally bet at the racetracks that sometimes held "ladies' days" and even more occasionally were



partners in their spouse's home-based book-making operations (Morton, 2003).

However, public and private gambling in various forms was largely restricted to men. Gambling was recognized as a predominantly masculine pastime and part of the male sporting culture. Although gambling threatened the image of men as breadwinners and responsible household heads, it also perpetuated the masculine characteristics of courage and risk taking. The breadwinner role provided men with access to money and control over how money was spent. As a rule, women were not welcome in the male spaces of gambling operations.

The clear exception to male gambling activity was bingo (Morton, 2003). As early as 1920, bingo was played at agricultural fairs throughout Canada and quickly accompanied draws and raffles as important sources of fundraising for Catholic church parishes and charities. With a predominantly working-class, female clientele, bingo was the exception to the male environments associated with most forms of gambling, and by the 1930s was entrenched as a leisure activity for working-class women. Bingo provided these women who had few other leisure options with an affordable, safe social activity outside of the home. Playing bingo combined the opportunity for social interaction and excitement with the opportunity to serve a real material need. Leisure and consumption were mixed with the potential to obtain money or consumer goods.

The critics of bingo in Canada included the moral reformers, and a strong business lobby (Morton, 2003). They argued that bingo detracted from women's responsibilities as housewives and mothers, and that money spent on bingo took away from purchases that should be made for women's families. However, prizes reinforced women's consumer and family roles. Many of the early bingos offered grocery items or

small appliances such as irons, toasters, and vacuum cleaners instead of cash prizes.

While the early bingos were on a relatively small scale, by the 1950s, giant bingos were organized by service clubs. Large cash jackpots and automobiles that could benefit the entire household were awarded, but large scale gender-targeted prizes such as major household appliances also remained popular.

Framing gambling as a form of leisure behaviour, a classic study by Dixey and Talbot (1982) examined bingo playing among working class women in Britain. Bingo had largely replaced movie going as an activity that women could engage in unaccompanied by men. A number of features made bingo attractive to women. Bingo is provided in a predominantly female environment that is perceived to be safe and offers non-intimate social contact. It allows for escape from the home environment which is not a place of leisure for women, and is a form of cheap entertainment that does not require special skill. At bingo halls, working class women found a suitable space that fit within the patriarchal and economic constraints in their lives. Commenting on the usual focus of problem gambling in the gambling literature, Dixey (1996) noted that:

For the majority of players the problems are not that they are 'addicted' or that they 'spend the housekeeping'; their problems are to do with powerlessness and lack of control over their destinies, with poverty, discriminatory gender roles, lack of personal time and space (particularly for those with growing children), and increasing solitude and loneliness in old age. (p. 149)

In a similar vein, Casey (2003) moved away from the usual focus on gambling as a form of deviant or dangerous activity and examined lottery play among working class

women in the United Kingdom. Structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to obtain information about how lottery play fit into the economic constraints of women's lives. All of the women expressed dissatisfaction with their current financial situation and the most common expressions centered on anxiety about debt and financial insecurity. However, women were also responsible about money spent on the lottery and did not spend money that was not "spare." Women reported that they did not "waste" winnings by frivolously spending on themselves. Winnings were usually spent on items for their homes or families. Women neither expected nor desired that a big win would drastically change their financial situation. Rather, when asked how they would spend a jackpot, they responded that they would pay bills, buy property, or invest in their children's or grandchildren's future through education or savings accounts. Casey noted that women's participation in lottery play is "an illustration of the women's everyday experiences of class and gender, within a culture of 'making the best' out of their subordinate economic situations" (p. 249).

Lesieur (1987) conducted intensive interviews with 50 female Gambling Anonymous members from across the United States. He compared the findings from the interviews with earlier studies of male gamblers and noted distinct differences in life histories, phases in the gambling career, motivation to gamble, and help seeking behaviour among male and female "compulsive" gamblers. Lesieur and Blume (1991) applied a feminist analysis to the findings of the interviews. Rather than gambling for money as was most often reported by men, many of the women reported gambling to escape abusive relationships and the restrictions imposed on them under stereotypical gender roles. Some women reported that the gambling venue was the only place where

they felt equal to men and for some it represented the only hope of economic gain. The level of gambling debt among the women interviewed was much lower than that typically reported in studies of men. However this could be attributed to lower pay as most of the women were employed in clerical positions. Many of the women postponed seeking treatment because of the shame and guilt they felt about not meeting social expectations regarding women's role as caregiver or for violating appropriate expectations for appropriate women's behaviour.

Using ethnographic observations and in-depth, open-ended interviews with 30 female video poker machine addicts in Las Vegas, Dow Schull (2002) explored how women's caretaking responsibilities at home and in the work place, and the development of video poker machines shaped their gambling behaviour and gambling problems. The interviews with the women in this study revealed that women gamble as means of isolation and escape and not for social interaction. Women use video poker as a means of escape from the excessive relationship demands at home and at work. The gambling industry has capitalized on the desire for escape through the development of the technology which provides the desired "comfort." The addictive qualities of video poker machines maximize features such as the reinforcement provided by occasional wins, rapid play, light, colour and sound effects, and carefully designed seating, all of which promote persistent play.

Brown and Coventry (1997) used observations in gambling venues, data from financial counsellors and a gambling telephone help-line, a state-wide telephone call-in, and in-depth interviews with eight women, to study women in the state of Victoria, Australia who self-identified as having gambling problems. The findings indicated that

the women, most of whom were in their forties, preferred EGMs over other forms of gambling. The most common motivation for gambling was escape from the drudgery of household responsibilities, boredom, isolation, and loneliness. Gambling venues were perceived to be comfortable, safe, acceptable places for women, and to offer affordable entertainment. Although gambling venues were also perceived to provide an environment in which women could socialize, for some women, little interaction occurred.

To follow up on the finding in the study by Brown and Coventry (1997) that the most common motivation for women's gambling was to escape boredom, loneliness and isolation, Trevorrow and Moore (1998) surveyed women from the Melbourne region to examine the association between loneliness, social isolation and women's gambling with EGMs. Comparisons were made between women who were gamblers, non-gamblers and problem gamblers. The findings of the study indicated that gamblers were no more likely than non-gamblers to be lonely. These women were not gambling to escape loneliness and were gambling as a form of leisure. Problem gamblers, however, reported more loneliness than their gambling and non-gambling counterparts. Their loneliness was not related feelings of shyness, social inadequacy or a lack of companionship. The nature of the loneliness of the women with gambling problems was related to feelings of alienation and anomie. This was described as the experience of being with other people, but not feeling like part of the group, not really being understood by others, and feeling alone despite company. All of the women who participated in this study perceived social approval for their gambling, but problem gamblers were more likely to belong to a social network of people who regularly gambled.

Hallebone (1997) used participant observation in a Melbourne casino and

interviews with a community sample in Melbourne to examine the meaning of casino gambling as a new form of entertainment. She found that housewives visited the casino in order to have the opportunity to dress up and have a social night or to occupy their time. Hallebone (1999) also reported on the findings of in-depth interviews of women attending problem gambling counselling services in Melbourne, Australia. The narratives revealed that all of the women experienced problems with EGMs. Women gambled as a way of escaping or deflecting the pain of losses in their lives, abuse, social isolation, loneliness, and boredom. Gambling was an opportunity to search for identity, independence, and better monetary fortune. However, this search led to the development of a loss of control over gambling, and serious financial problems.

Surgey and Seibert (2000) explored EGM gambling among women in Melbourne, Australia who experienced gambling problems. A series of focus groups with women revealed that women gambled as a means of achieving a “time out” from the responsibilities and expectations of their gendered roles. Women described gambling as a “time in” a social environment, but rather than wanting or achieving social interaction, women sought an experience of affinity with other women who shared the desire for time out. While winning money was not a key incentive for gambling among the women interviewed, features of the gambling machines and the gambling venues (for example, the creation of women friendly environments) did serve as incentives. Women reported that the gambling venues, while providing an opportunity for “time out” also supported overstaying and overplaying and that this helped to move them from gambling to problem gambling. The impacts of problematic gambling included financial problems, losses in self-esteem and identities as “good” women, mothers and citizens. Losses in

self-esteem and a sense of “goodness” was related to gendered roles as mothers.

Replicating the work of Brown and Coventry (1997) in Australia, Berry, Fraehlich and Toderian (2002) studied women who gamble in Northwestern Ontario. Most of the women were married or in common-law relationships and had dependent children. The most frequent gambling activity was EGM play (VLTs and slots). The most frequently mentioned motivation for gambling was entertainment and enjoyment. Women also described gambling as a way to socialize with other people and they regularly gambled with specific friends or family members. Finally, women gambled as a way to relieve stress or escape life problems or boredom, to occupy their time since retirement or reduced child-care responsibilities, or to take a break from household and childcare responsibilities. The women also stated that easy access to gambling venues and the perceived attractiveness and safety of these venues influenced their gambling. Although women reported that other options for entertainment and recreation existed in the areas in which they lived, some of the women indicated that other activities were too expensive.

Boughton and Brewster (2002) surveyed 365 female gamblers from across the province of Ontario in order to explore barriers to treatment and service needs of women who experience gambling problems. They found that 74% of the women in the study scored as probable pathological gamblers and 20% displayed some gambling problems. The average age of the women was 45 years. The majority of the women picked slots or bingo as their first choice of gambling activity and the highest monthly expenditure was on electronic gambling followed by bingo. Over 70% of the women said they gamble to have fun, to be entertained or to win money. However, half of the women also reported that they gamble to get relief from stress or to get a break from reality or responsibilities

and work. As well, approximately half of the women gamble as a form of freedom to do what they want or to do what they want with their money, or as means of treating themselves or having time for themselves. Many of the incentives for gambling reported by the women related to issues of access and safety. Women reported that gambling venues had hours that fit their needs or schedules, and that gambling venues were easy to get to. They also reported that the gambling venues were comfortable and attractive environments that women could attend alone, and feel safe and not be harassed. Thirty percent of the women reported that they had no other choices for leisure activities.

Boughton (2003) placed the findings from this survey in the context of feminist and gender studies literature. For example, she explained the women's gambling preferences as reflecting women's relational orientation to the world in which connection and intimacy with others is primary. These priorities are better met in games of chance that do not involve direct competition with others. The frequent use of gambling as an escape mechanism is explained in terms of greater stress among women as a result of greater responsibility for the well being of others, as well as issues of abuse in current and past relationships that had been experienced by many women who participated in the initial survey.

### *Synthesis of Existing Studies*

It is not possible to make direct comparisons between these studies that have explored gender and gambling because these studies examine different forms of gambling. Only the studies by Dow Schull (2002), Surgey and Seibert (2000), and Trevorrow and Moore (1998) specifically examined EGM gambling and these studies used samples of women who experienced problems with their gambling. However, this



small body of research has provided insight into the gendered nature of gambling and identified links between women's gambling and their caregiving roles, economic and leisure opportunity constraints, and their resistance to proscribed gender roles. Casey (2003), Dixey and Talbot (1982) and Morton (2003) demonstrate how gambling among women involves an intersection between gender and class, and how gambling provides very functional uses in the particular economic circumstances experienced by women in family roles. All of the studies indicated that women gambled as a form of affordable entertainment or as a means of monetary gain, suggesting that gambling is influenced by financial circumstances or economic constraints. These studies also provide evidence that women's gambling is shaped by available opportunities for women's leisure. Gambling venues are accessible spaces that women perceive to be socially acceptable, safe and attractive. Women also report gambling as a form of freedom to do what they want or to be equal to men. These factors and gambling to escape from responsibilities may also be a form of resistance to stereotypical gender role proscriptions.

The findings from studies of women's gambling also reveal that women's experience of gambling is shaped by variations in their life contexts. For example although all the studies indicate that women's gambling is connected to their family roles and relationships, the notion of "escape" gambling appears to be more salient among women who feel overwhelmed by the demands made on them in their work and family roles or when they have experienced abuse in their relationships. Dixey and Talbot (1982) and Morton (2003) described how bingo was an important form of social contact. Hallebone (1997) also found that among housewives, gambling was an opportunity for a social time. Dow Schull (2002) suggested that women who have gambling problems are

driven to machine gambling as a way of escaping relational demands. Thus, the importance of the social nature of gambling may also vary according to life circumstances. Women who feel overwhelmed by their roles or relationships may not seek social interaction when they gamble.

The studies reviewed here are a welcome departure from the dominant focus of individual pathology in the gambling literature. Even those that do examine problem gambling among women link the development of gambling problems to features of women's lives such as their roles, relationships, and economic circumstances rather than to individual pathology. However, further investigation of women's participation in EGM gambling and the context and meaning of EGM gambling is required.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Understanding the meaning of gambling in everyday life is critical to advancing our understanding of gambling and problem gambling (Reith, 2007). However, such understanding requires a multilevel analysis that incorporates wider political and economic factors as well as factors in micro level contexts that shape this meaning (Borrell & Boulet, 2007).

Ecological theory offers a holistic perspective from which to explore EGM gambling among women. Ecology examines the interrelationships and adaptation of organisms with each other and with their environment (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). As a multidisciplinary perspective, ecological thinking has been influenced by a variety of fields including biology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, education, home economics, and geography (Green, Richard, & Potvin, 1996, Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Key among the assumptions of ecological thinking is that human behaviour is influenced

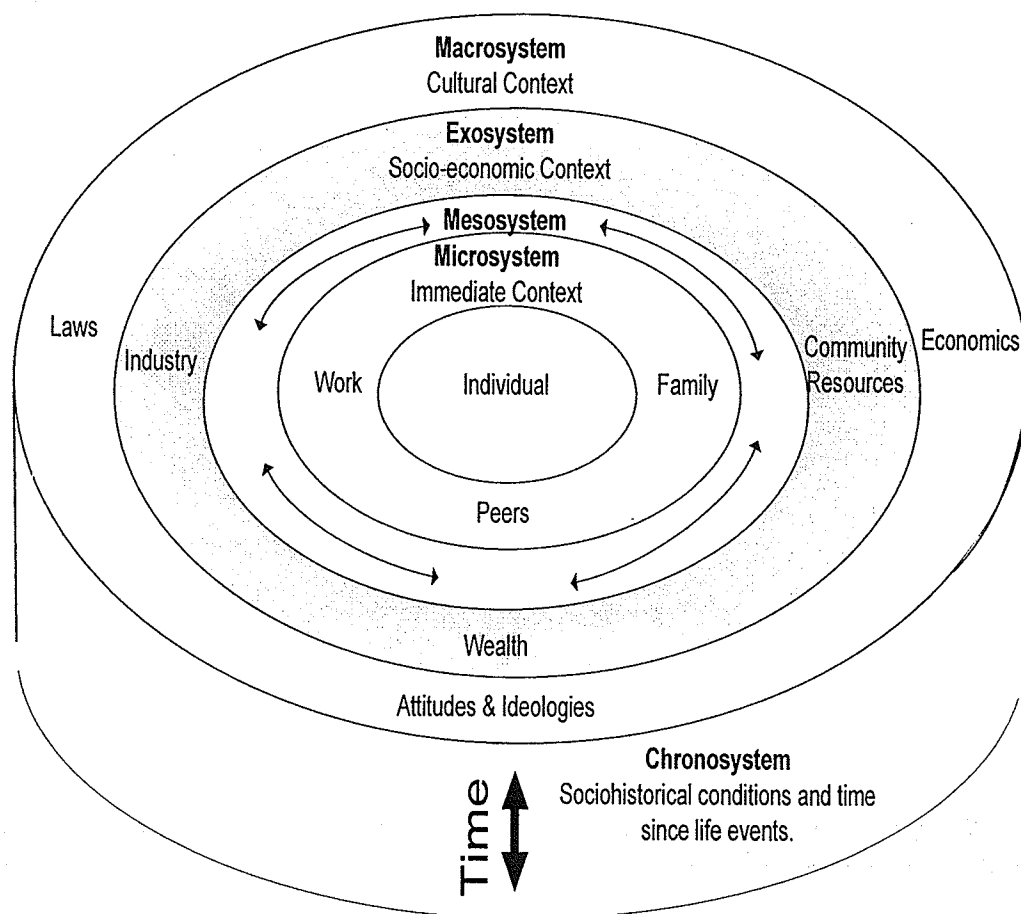
by the interaction between the individual and their environmental context which encompasses physical, social, cultural and historical components (McLaren & Hawe, 2005).

The current study is guided by ecological systems theory (EST) and the nested ecological framework explicated by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1986, 1989). One of the key propositions of Bronfenbrenner's theory is that human development cannot be understood apart from the context in which it occurs. In his original work, Bronfenbrenner (1979) outlined an ecological paradigm for examining the context of development. This paradigm was based on a transformed and extended version of Lewin's theory that behaviour is a function of both the person and the environment (Lewin, 1935 as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner expanded this theory to explain that development is a function of the interaction between the person and her environment, with development representing a broader concept than simple behaviour.

Bronfenbrenner revised his original theoretical formulation to balance what he perceived to be a lack of emphasis on the person in his initial theory and to place more emphasis on the process of development and the developing person over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1989). Bronfenbrenner maintained that the individual should not be viewed as a passive being who is simply shaped by the environment. Rather, individuals are viewed as active agents that play a role in their own development. While Bronfenbrenner's initial formulation lacked a temporal perspective, the ecological concept of the chronosystem was later introduced to account for how the changes and continuities over time in the environment in which the individual lives influence individual development.

According to EST, each developing individual is embedded in an ecological environment consisting of a series of complex and interactive systems that “is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). The ecological environment is composed of four levels which include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (see Figure 2).

The innermost level of the environment is the microsystem. The microsystem is “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features, and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 227). The microsystem involves the person’s immediate context. It represents the interactions in which a person directly engages with others and the subjective meanings given to those interactions. Examples of the microsystem are a person’s family and other personal relationships and their roles in school or work. Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted that a critical term in the definition of the microsystem is “*experienced*.” “The term is used to indicate that the scientifically relevant features of any environment include not only its objective properties but also the way in which these properties are perceived by the persons in that environment” (p. 22). He argued that aspects of the environment that are the most powerful in shaping human development are those that have meaning to a person in a given circumstance. This subjective experience is also relevant at each level of ecological structure.



*Figure 1. Ecological systems*

Adapted from Bee, Boyd, and Johnson (2006) and Santrock (1996)

The mesosystem is a system of microsystems and “comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates”

(Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 227). The interaction between work and family and how such interactions might affect interaction patterns within the microsystem are examples of the mesosystem.

The next level of the environment is the exosystem. The exosystem represents “specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.515). The exosystem includes the institutions and social structures that influence individual and family functioning such as unemployment, socio-economic status, community supports, and industry. These social factors influence functioning by their ability to produce or prevent personal or financial stress, social isolation and so on.

The macrosystem is the overarching concept of the framework that includes the entire network of nested, interconnected systems. Bronfenbrenner defined the macrosystem as “the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context, with particular reference to the developmentally-institutive belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of these systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989 p. 228). The macrosystem consists of broad political and economic environments as well as cultural attitudes, values, norms, and belief systems that inform and influence the inner layers.

EST was originally developed as a theory to examine child development.

However, various scholars have built on the work of Bronfenbrenner and the ecological framework outlined in EST has been applied to the quantitative and qualitative study of a diverse range of topics including alcohol and drug use (DeJong & Langford, 2002; Miller, 1995), smoking (Wilcox, 2003), obesity (Sherwood, 2000), child abuse (Belsky, 1980; Garbarino, 1977), youth gambling problems (Messerlian, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2005), violence against women (Heise, 1998; Meyer & Post, 2006), and prostitution (Dalla, 2001). EST has also been applied to practice in social work (Ungar, 2002) as a framework for public health (Grzywacz, 2000) and as a valuable framework for guiding program and policy design and evaluation (Moen, 1995; White & Klein, 2002).

Ecological perspectives are closely linked with general systems theory and as such have been criticized for being conservative and justifying the status quo. However, a number of authors have critiqued these accusations. Hanson (1995, 2001) and Montuori and Purser (1996) argue that the criticism of the conservative bias stem not from a general systems theory approach, but from the notion of status quo that implied a conservative political agenda incorporated in particular versions of systems theory by sociologists in the 1960s and 1970s. Status quo is not necessary to systems theory but these works set the pattern for the view of systems thinking in sociology. A number of authors argue that systems theory and ecological theories are in fact consistent with critical and feminist approaches in terms of the acknowledgement of inequality, power, oppression, and marginalization and that these concepts are subsumed within the ecological framework. Power differences between levels of the environment and in the interactions between individuals and their environment as well as the need for action to

address social injustices are recognized within ecological theories (Besthorn, 2003; Bubolz & Sontag, 1993; Germain & Gitterman, 1996; Hanson, 1995; Montuori & Purser, 1996; Ungar, 2002). While ecological theory does not promote a particular ideological position to address structural change, it provides a framework that can be used to identify where change processes at the various levels of the environment need to occur. Bronfenbrenner (1986) noted the responsibility of researchers “to go beyond an analysis of the status quo in order to design and evaluate strategies that can sustain, enhance, and, where necessary, create environments that are conducive to healthy human growth” (p.737).

Although the appeal of EST lies in its breadth and inclusiveness, ecological theories are often criticized for being very broad and for being characterized by an “everything affects everything” theme. For example, Wakefield (1996) and Green et al. (1996) have argued that ecological theory is difficult to test empirically and does not lend itself to the development of easily testable hypotheses to explain, predict, and ultimately control the subject of interest. This is a position that privileges positivist inquiry (O’Donoghue & Maidment, 2005). The ultimate goal within the positivist paradigm is the discovery of general laws that serve as a form of explanation that will ultimately lead to the prediction and control of phenomenon (Hesse, 1980). Ecological approaches are open and suited to interpretive approaches to inquiry (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993; Ungar, 2002) under which the ontological assertion of multiple socially constructed realities that are time and context bound denies the possibility of universal laws and the development of time and context free generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 2000). In the fields of health promotion and social work, critics argue that ecological models are not useful for



researchers and practitioners in the field who must direct their attention to only a few key factors for intervention (Green et al., 1996; Wakefield, 1996). However, Stokols (1995) and Grzywacz (2000) argue that ecological theory can identify “leverage points” or behaviours, roles, and environmental conditions that exert a disproportionate influence on well-being. These leverage points should be identified as prime targets for change in intervention.

### ***Application to Women’s EGM Gambling***

Bronfenbrenner reminds us that present circumstances and behaviour cannot be fully understood without careful observation of the entire ecological context within which the individual is embedded. Likewise, EGM gambling among women cannot be understood without examining the context of their gambling and the interaction between the levels of context. The strength of EST is that it allows for a multi-systems level analysis of women’s EGM gambling, an integration of the information about women’s gambling from existing studies, and a useful framework for further investigation of this topic. This theory allows for an exploration of the immediate setting of women’s EGM gambling but also of broader social and cultural factors that influence women’s gambling. Several factors that are relevant to understanding the ecological context of women’s gambling have been identified in the literature review and can be expanded on.

### ***The Individual.***

At the centre of EST is the individual. This level is comprised of variables such as sex and gender, age, and individual characteristics that influence behaviour including such things as knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, motivation, personality attributes, developmental history, and past experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, Grzywacz, 2000). Of

particular relevance for an examination of women's EGM gambling are the personal meanings that they give to their gambling experiences. These meanings, however, cannot be considered in isolation because they are shaped by the interaction between the person and her environment.

### *Microsystem.*

The microsystem encompasses an individual's activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships. The literature review revealed that women's family and work roles may influence their EGM gambling. Women may gamble to escape from their caregiving and work responsibilities or they may use gambling as a means of resisting proscribed gender roles. Women's family and work roles, or absence of them, also structure and determine women's use of time and the time available for leisure.

Roles and relationships also change over the life course. Research examining the relationship between leisure and life course transitions within the role of motherhood has found that leisure among mothers changes over time. While interviewing mothers about their leisure, Bialeschki and Michener (1994) found that when children are very young, mothers abandon their own leisure. As children enter school, women's leisure time often revolves around their children's activities or forms of leisure for the whole family. It is only when children are older and independent that women can engage in leisure activities that focus on themselves. Life events and transitions such as divorce or becoming widowed might also influence gambling.

### *Mesosystem.*

Mesosystem factors include the interaction between two or more groups of which a person is a member. Particularly relevant to the study of women's EGM gambling is the

interaction between women's family and work roles. As discussed in the literature review, many women juggle work and family responsibilities which may result in time constraints that affect their leisure. Juggling work and family responsibilities may produce stress which also influences gambling among women (Boughton & Brewster, 2002). Leisure activities are used as a means of coping with stress (Iwasaki, MacKay, & McTavish, 2005) and this may be an important function of EGM gambling among women.

### *Exosystem.*

A variety of exosystem factors may also shape women's gambling. The most obvious among these is the availability of gambling in the community in which a person lives. For example, VLTs are not allowed in all provinces. Provinces also vary in terms of whether or not EGMs are restricted to casinos or available in bars and lounges in various neighbourhoods. Studies on VLT gambling in Alberta indicate that people generally gamble in locations within five kilometres of their home (Smith & Wynne, 2004). A study on Manitobans with gambling problems found that they usually engaged in VLT gambling in neighbourhood bars and lounges as opposed to casinos (Wiebe & Cox, 2001). In Manitoba approximately 5,500 VLTs are available in bars, lounges and legions (Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling, 2007). The environment of the gambling venue may also influence EGM gambling and the meaning of EGM gambling for women. Studies referenced in the literature review indicated that women are often attracted to gambling venues because of these environments are perceived by women to be attractive and safe. They may also provide social interaction or feelings of social affinity.

The availability and perceived suitability of other recreation opportunities within a particular community would also influence participation in EGM gambling. Thirty percent of the women in the study by Boughton and Brewster (2002) reported that they had no other choices for leisure activities. Other studies indicate that while other opportunities for recreation or leisure may be available for women, they may be too expensive for women to afford (Berry et al., 2002).

Although research documents the influence of family and peer relationships on adolescent gambling (Derevensky, Gupta, Hardoon, Dickson, & Deguire, 2003; Hardoon, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2002), the influence of social networks on women's gambling has not been examined. Women may be introduced to gambling and gamble as a regular activity with partners, family members, or friends.

EGM gambling among women may also vary as a function of the supports that are available to women and families within a community. These could include very practical supports such as the availability of childcare and recreation opportunities for youth or the presence of extended family systems. Such supports have an impact on family functioning and interaction (Ward, 2006). A lack of supports increases social isolation which could in turn influence EGM gambling.

Socioeconomic status, may be a key exosystem variable related to EGM gambling among women. The popularity of gambling has increased among the middle classes in society. At the same time, a number of studies have indicated that although gambling expenditures increase with household income, lower-income households spend a larger proportion of their income on gambling than do higher-income households (MacDonald et al., 2004; Marshall, 1999). The relationship between income and EGM gambling is,

however, not clear. For example, an Alberta study of VLT gambling found a relatively equal distribution of VLT players among all income groups and problem gambling to be most prevalent in both the lowest and highest income groups (Smith & Wynne, 2004).

As reported in the literature review, women are often in low-paying occupations and are over represented among the poor. They face economic constraints with regard to their choices of leisure and leisure in the form of EGM gambling may offer hope of monetary gain.

### *Macrosystem.*

A number of macrosystem variables that influence EGM gambling among women were identified in the literature review. Clearly, women's gambling has been influenced by the political and economic context surrounding the legalization of gambling and the social construction of gambling as a form of leisure activity. This context also involves the government's heavy involvement in supplying gambling products, and the increased social acceptance of gambling among Canadians.

Women's gambling is also influenced by gender ideology. The continued existence of patriarchy involves socially constructed gender roles and an unequal distribution of power and resources. This ideology upholds the expectations for women as primary caregivers and is linked to women's experiences with abuse and poverty. This ideology also shapes leisure choices and the meaning of leisure to women. EST allows for consideration of how macro level ideology "trickles down" to the everyday experiences of women.

Finally, an increasingly technological society and in particular the development of gambling technologies that include EGMs are macrosystem level factors related to

women's EGM gambling. The development and marketing of the new gambling technologies has been a key factor in the growth of the industry (Korn & Shaffer, 1999) and structural characteristics of EGMs influence the experience of players (Dickerson, 1993, 1996; Griffiths & Delfabbro, 2001). As previously mentioned, EGMs are the game of choice for women.

The framework outlined here is not definitive and is only intended to outline the application of EST to the topic of women's EGM gambling. Critical factors that may influence EGM gambling among women may be missing and some factors may be wrongly included because research has not reported their significance. As noted by Heise (1998), there is considerable room for interpretation regarding the placement of various factors within the ecological framework. For example, social networks of family and friends might be considered part of the microsystem or the exosystem. However, the description provided here demonstrates how factors from various levels of the ecological environment may influence gambling activity.

EST provides a holistic framework for examining EGM gambling among women and moves beyond a narrow focus on individual-level factors related to gambling which prevail in gambling studies. This framework draws attention to the wider social context in which women's EGM gambling occurs. More specifically, EST allows for an examination of women's experience of EGM gambling in their everyday lives, but also allows for an examination of how these everyday experiences are influenced by the micro, meso, exo, and macro levels of the ecological environment.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore EGM gambling among women and to situate women's EGM gambling and the meaning that they construct of EGM gambling in the context of their lives. The specific research questions were:

1. What meaning and function does EGM gambling provide in the everyday lives of women?
2. How is women's experience of EGM gambling influenced by the ecological environment in which they live?

Methodology addresses the ways in which an investigator should go about finding knowledge (Guba, 1990). A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it was considered the most effective means of meeting the objectives of the study and answering the specific research questions. Qualitative methods are particularly useful when exploring topics that address the nature of people's experience with a phenomenon and when little is known about that phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Little is known about women's experience with EGM gambling and how this experience is shaped by their life context.

Qualitative research is an umbrella term that is applied to a variety of research approaches that seek to understand the creation and meaning of social experience. Common features of this form of inquiry can be noted. Qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of the world and is grounded in a philosophical position that is broadly interpretivist "in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted" (Mason, 2002, p. 3). Understanding requires the interpretation of lived experience within social reality.

Qualitative research is naturalistic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It is removed from a laboratory setting because this setting does not adequately allow for an interpretive understanding of human experience. Finally, qualitative research emphasizes holistic forms of analysis, understanding, and explanation and therefore draws on a flexible approach to produce a detailed, contextual understanding of complex social phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mason, 2002).

Interpretive inquiry is based on a constructionist epistemology. Constructionism is the view that “all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). In other words, people construct meaning through interaction and negotiation with others and with the environment in which they live. Depending on their context, people experience the world in different ways and interpret their experience in different ways. Therefore, there is no one, true, fixed meaning or reality. There are multiple ways of interpreting experiences and therefore multiple realities.

From this perspective it follows that behaviour must be understood in relation to the subjective meanings that individuals construct in their daily lives (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The researcher must try to tap into the experience of the people she studies. Therefore, direct and personal interaction between the researcher and the participants of the research are necessary to create an understanding of the human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Inquiry takes place in a natural or in-situ setting that holistically captures the context of the phenomenon that the inquirer seeks to understand.



Researchers do not necessarily enter the field with predetermined hypotheses because what is important or relevant for study may not initially be apparent. Therefore, the research requires an adaptable instrument and an emergent rather than predetermined design. Rather than objective, standardized instrumentation, a flexible instrument is required. The researcher becomes the primary data gathering instrument because of her inherent adaptability. Qualitative methods are preferred because they allow for the best and easiest collection of information by the human instrument and because they are adaptable to the multiple constructions of reality that are likely to appear. The specific methods used must support the basic assumptions behind the methodology and must allow for an understanding of people's experiences.

The purpose of this study was to examine the meaning that women attribute to EGM gambling within the ecological context of their lives. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the individual's subjective experience of their ecological environment is the key to understanding their behaviour and development. In order to capture the perspective of women who participate in EGM gambling, a qualitative approach was required for this study. Only such an approach can provide a subjective understanding of women's experience of EGM gambling. It was necessary for the methods employed in this study to allow women to describe their unique perceptions and experiences in their own terms.

### **Techniques**

The methods of data collection for this study included individual, in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. The purpose of interviewing is to allow the researcher to "enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Both individual, in-depth interviews and focus group interviews allow the interviewer to tap

into respondents' perceptions of the topic of interest and allow respondents to discuss issues in their own terms. Therefore, both of these techniques were appropriate for this study in which women's perceptions of EGM gambling was being investigated.

Individual, in-depth interviews allow the interviewee to provide rich details of her personal experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The interviewee is provided with an opportunity to express herself about matters that are important and significant to her. In individual, in-depth interviews, the interviewer and the interviewee have great flexibility in terms of clarifying questions, answers and meanings. Such interviews provide a depth of information that can rarely be matched by other data collection methods. Interviews are a useful tool for providing an in-depth understanding of a situation or experience (Patton, 2002).

While focus groups are not suitable for exploring complex issues in depth and detail or for exploring highly personal issues, they provide a greater breadth of information than is available through other methods (Crabtree, Yanoshik, Miller, & O'Conner, 1993; Jarrett, 1993). A focus group interview is a carefully planned group discussion conducted in order to generate a rich understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, attitudes and needs in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Human Resources Development Canada, 1999; Krueger, 1994). For exploratory tasks, the goal of focus groups is to uncover a wide range of perspectives and ideas (Fern, 2001). These group discussions are used to gain insight and understanding about the topic under study based on the perceptions and expertise of the participants (Balch & Mertens, 1999). The use of open-ended questions by a researcher who acts as a moderator allows for an exploration of how people regard an experience or event (Krueger, 1994). Focus

groups build on the tendency for people with similar experiences to respond to each other's comments and ideas that are disclosed during the discussion.

Focus groups capitalize on the interaction within a group to elicit rich experiential data (Asbury, 1995) and to provide insight that would be less available without the interaction found in the group (Krueger, 1994). The group setting and interaction allow for a broad range of ideas to be expressed. Focus group participants have an opportunity to reflect on the comments made by other participants that may stimulate their own thoughts and opinions. Participants may ask each other questions, may explain themselves to other participants, or may discuss differences in experiences or opinions, all of which provide the researcher with insights into the sources of complex motivation or behaviour (Morgan, 1996).

Individual in-depth interviews and focus groups are frequently combined within a study (Morgan, 1996). The most common reason for combining these interview techniques is to incorporate the depth of information provided by individual interviews with the breadth of information provided by focus group interviews (Crabtree et al., 1993). Another common reason for combining these two methods is to provide a form of triangulation—that is, to compare the findings of one data source with the other in order to enhance the validity of the study (Barbour, 1998; Morgan, 1996). In this study, individual, in-depth interviews were followed by focus group interviews. This allowed me to check the conclusions of the initial analysis of the individual interviews as well as to learn more about the range and diversity of opinions and experiences of the women who participated in the focus groups.

### **Participant Selection**

Qualitative inquiry relies on non-probability, purposeful sampling in which information-rich cases on the subject under study are sought (Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 2002). Studying a smaller number of information-rich cases yields the insight and in-depth understanding that qualitative studies seek to capture. Accordingly, a purposive sample was used in this study.

The research questions specifically address women who gamble with EGMs. As noted in the literature review, EGM gambling is very popular among women and the widespread introduction of EGMs has been associated with increases in women's gambling. In recognition of the diverse contexts of women's lives, I desired to explore a broad range of experiences. The criteria for inclusion in this study were for participants to be women between the ages of 18 and 64 years who could attend an interview in Winnipeg and who had gambled on EGMs at least one time per month during the previous year. Including the broad range of ages allowed for the inclusion of various family roles and transitions that might be important in terms of their impact on women's experiences with gambling. This age range also captures the demographic reported in the literature of women most often participating in gambling. Because I was seeking to understand the meanings and functions of EGM gambling for women and the contextual influences on their EGM gambling, I needed to talk to women who participate in EGM gambling on a somewhat regular basis while keeping in mind the time constraints that women face. The criteria of gambling at least once per month was loosely based on the only national prevalence study of gambling and problem gambling in Canada (Marshall & Wynne, 2003) which defined infrequent gamblers as those who gambled less than five

times per year.

Participants for this study were recruited through advertisements placed in the weekly newspapers distributed through Canstar Community News (The Herald, The Times, The Lance, The Metro, and the Headingly Headliner), Rosebud Publications (Uptown Magazine and The Prime Times News) and the University of Manitoba (The Manitoban). The advertisements ran in September and October of 2005 and in March 2006. In the advertisement, women were invited to telephone me if they might be interested in participating in the study. The content of this advertisement is included in Appendix A.

I also employed a snowball sampling technique to locate participants. Women that I interviewed were asked if they knew other women who might also be interested in participating in an interview and to provide such acquaintances with my phone number. One of the women who participated in an individual interview and two of the women who participated in the first focus group were referred to me by other women that they knew.

Finally, posters that repeated the content of the newspaper advertisement were placed in a few locations throughout the city. These locations included grocery stores, laundromats and community health facilities. Permission from proprietors and administrators was received before the posters were placed on bulletin boards. These posters were placed while I was traveling to and from scheduled interviews.

Unfortunately, I received no response to these posters.

The newspaper advertisements generated immediate interest, not only among potential research participants, but also among other media sources. Within days of

placing the advertisement in the newspapers, I received a request for a television interview with a reporter from CityTV in Winnipeg and a request for an interview with a reporter from Canstar Community News. The reporter from CityTV wanted to meet with me the next day to record an interview for a newscast. She was not specific about the kinds of questions that she would ask. I declined this interview because I would not have any control over the content. The reporter from Canstar Community News explained that he would only ask questions related to the background and purpose of my study. An article related to my study would be published in the same newspapers in which my advertisement would be placed. I agreed to participate in this interview because I felt that this might increase the legitimacy of the study for those women who may have seen the advertisement by providing an opportunity to explain the study and what was being requested of participants in more detail.

Following the publication of the story in the Canstar newspapers, I received a request to appear on Shaw Television's "City Lights", a broadcast that informs viewers about current events occurring in Winnipeg and the surrounding area. I was told that during this broadcast I would be asked to comment on the purpose of my study. I agreed to participate in this interview because as with the newspaper interview, I was provided with an opportunity to further explain the study. Indeed the media interest in my study was very helpful in the recruitment of participants. The majority of the women responded to the Canstar newspaper advertisements and several of these women told me that in addition to seeing my advertisement, they had read the article published in these newspapers. A few women who had seen my advertisement also saw the City Lights broadcast.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for this project was granted through the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. In addition to the initial ethics submission, I contacted the Human Ethics Secretariat to check on the permissibility of my participation in media interviews about the study. I also submitted an amendment requesting the approval to hire a typist to aid in transcription of the interview recordings. Approval was granted. Particular attention was paid to the ethical principles of respect for human dignity, respect for free and informed consent, respect for privacy and confidentiality, and the minimization of harm.

The purpose of the research was clearly explained to all of the women who telephoned me to indicate their interest in the study. I carefully explained the study and what participation involved. Women were told that their participation required an interview that would last approximately two hours and that the interview would be recorded. I explained that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to refrain from answering any questions during the interview. They were also told that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

This information was also outlined in the written consent form that was reviewed with each woman prior to the beginning of the individual and focus group interviews. Before signing the consent form, women were asked if they understood the content of the form and were invited to ask me questions about anything they needed clarified or wanted to know about the study. A copy of the consent form (Appendix B) was left with each participant.

Respecting participant privacy is a paramount concern in research. Women who

participated in an interview were assured that data would be kept confidential. Several steps were taken to protect confidentiality. Signed consent forms, interview notes, and lists of women's names, addresses, and phone numbers were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. Each interview recording was stored in a file in a password protected computer and labeled with a number. The typist who was hired to assist with transcribing did not know the identity of the women who were interviewed. This typist also reviewed and signed a confidentiality agreement that stipulated that the information from the recordings would not be discussed with anyone. The demographic questionnaires completed by focus group participants did not include their names and were also labeled by number. These questionnaires and the transcriptions of the interviews were securely stored in the researcher's office separate from the consent forms, interview notes, and women's contact information. Prior to the start of the focus groups, issues of confidentiality were explained and women were asked to refrain from discussing each other's comments outside of the focus group session. This request was also included in the consent form signed by focus group participants (Appendix C).

Although some of the comments made by women are included in the final report of the research, none of their names or identifying information have been included.

Pseudonyms have been used to describe and refer to women. The computer files, transcriptions, consent forms, and questionnaires will be destroyed after the completion of the research process.

I was aware that it was quite possible that I would speak to women who had experienced problems as a result of their gambling. As noted in the literature, women who have experienced gambling problems may be vulnerable because of abusive



relationships or social hardships. It was also possible that women might experience distress by discussing their gambling and other experiences. This concern was addressed by preparing a list of resources for women in Winnipeg appropriate to problem gambling and other issues. This list of resources was given to all women who participated in the study.

Finally, out of respect for the women who shared information about their perceptions and experiences, and as part of maintaining informed participation, the women who participated in individual interviews were invited to review a copy of the initial analysis of the data. Women who accepted this invitation were sent a summary of the themes resulting from the analysis and were asked to provide feedback on the accuracy of these themes and to add anything that they thought was important. The preliminary analysis was mailed to women with an addressed, postage paid envelope for return. Women were invited to provide feedback by writing their comments on the pages they were sent and then mailing these pages back to me, or by telephone or email. All of the women who participated in the study were offered a summary of the final research report.

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected in two phases between September 2005 and April 2006. In total, 34 women participated in the study. There were 26 individual interviews and two focus group interviews with four participants in each group.

During the first phase of data collection, women who contacted me about the study were asked to participate in an individual interview. These interviews were scheduled at times and locations convenient to participants. Twenty five of the individual

interviews were completed prior to the first focus group. One scheduled individual interview was postponed and could not be completed until after the date of the first focus group. Most of the interviews (16) took place in women's homes. Interviews were also conducted at the University of Manitoba Fort Garry campus (1), the University of Manitoba Aboriginal Education Centre (2), Klinik Community Health Centre (6), and my home (1). The individual interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours in length.

The in-depth interviews were guided by the topical outline included in Appendix D. The interviews began with questions gathering basic demographic information. This was followed by questions about women's EGM gambling behaviour and experiences and how these were integrated within the context of women's lives. Finally, I asked specific questions related to the personal meanings and functions of EGM gambling in women's lives. The topical outline was pretested with three women who have participated in EGM gambling and with whom I am acquainted. However, the questions were used to guide the interviews and not to restrict women from freely describing their experiences. Following each individual interview I spent a few minutes making notes about the interview process and content and my initial reaction to that content. Reference was made to these notes during data analysis.

The individual interviewing continued until I was satisfied that saturation had been achieved. Saturation occurs when new data merely confirms the information already collected and no new information is generated from subsequent interviews (Patton, 2002). None of the women that I interviewed shared identical stories, nor did I expect them to. Much variation exists in life circumstances. However, I began to notice that I was not hearing anything "new" about EGM gambling experiences. This forced me to

recognize the practical aspects of some research decisions in that at some point the researcher must make a decision to stop data collection. Although I could never be sure that another interview might not contain something new, I was satisfied that I had talked to a diverse group of women and heard about many different experiences.

During the second phase of data collection, women who contacted me were asked to participate in a focus group interview. Upon learning that the interview would involve a group, a few women hesitated. I explained that the focus group would involve an informal group discussion with a maximum of eight other women, and that women would not be required to reveal any information that they felt was too personal. I also gave examples of the questions that would be asked. Once these women heard the description of the focus group process, they were eager to participate. The focus groups took place in November 2005 and in April 2006. The first focus group took place at the University of Manitoba Fort Garry campus and the second focus group was held at the University of Manitoba Aboriginal Education Centre. Every attempt was made to schedule the focus groups at times that were convenient for all of the women and at locations that were central for the participants. This required numerous phone calls to each of the focus group participants. Only one woman who indicated an interest in participation eventually declined because she was not comfortable meeting in the downtown location that was central to other group members. The first focus group was 2 hours long and the second focus group ran 2.5 hours.

In order to keep the discussion focussed, a semi-structured interview guide was used to guide the focus groups. The purpose of the focus groups was to follow-up on the themes identified in the individual interviews and to further explore the range and

diversity of women's experience with EGM gambling within their life contexts.

Therefore, the questions built on the themes identified during the individual interviews, but women were also encouraged to freely describe their experiences. Prior to the commencement of the actual group discussion, women were asked to fill out questionnaire gathering demographic information so that the group composition could be described. The demographic questionnaire and the focus group interview guide are included in Appendix E.

The focus groups proved to be an effective means of triangulation. The ideas and opinions discussed during these sessions matched the themes identified during the individual interviews and allowed for clarification of these themes. However, no "new" perceptions of EGM gambling were revealed. This reinforced the fact that saturation had been achieved.

Each woman who participated in the study received a \$15.00 honorarium. This honorarium was refused by one woman.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the individual interviews and focus groups were analyzed separately, but in a similar fashion. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim with the assistance of a hired typist. Data analysis began with the completion of the first interview. The transcripts were content analyzed and coded to group responses into categories that brought together similar ideas, concepts and themes. The coding process proceeded in stages and was conducted manually and with the use of QSR NVivo, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software program. NVivo facilitates the management of qualitative data by providing a variety of tools including those for

coding, storage, and retrieval (Wickham & Woods, 2005).

The “categorizing” strategy of coding described by Maxwell (1996) and similarly discussed by Kirby and McKenna (1989) and Padgett, (1998) was used. Initially, the transcripts were read in full and notes to describe the content were made. Because of the importance of exploring women’s perceptions of their EGM gambling within their life contexts, these notes included a few paragraphs describing and summarizing women’s life situations. During a subsequent reading of the transcripts, memos about emerging categories and themes were made. This was followed by a line-by-line coding process that was repeated until no new themes were identified. The interview transcripts were then re-examined in full form to make sure that the themes were supported by the data. This process was repeated with the data from the focus group interviews.

The NVivo software was used to organize transcript data into categories based on the research questions and into the same categories and themes that emerged from the manual coding process. The main function of the use of NVivo was to provide a convenient way to organize and retrieve information. Computer software such as NVivo can assist with data analysis, but it does not perform the actual analysis (Patton, 2002). In reality, I found the benefits of the software program to be somewhat limited for my purposes. I was intimately familiar with the transcripts and mentally connected each participant to her transcript. When I wanted to review information I immediately thought of the relevant participants and it was just as efficient for me to find and review the original hard copy of the transcript as it was for me to search NVivo for the desired information. However, the cut and paste function was efficient for selecting and copying quotations.

## Rigour

The criteria used to evaluate qualitative research are different than those used to evaluate quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000) argue that the central criterion for evaluating qualitative research is the issue of establishing the trustworthiness of the research. The truth of the findings should be judged in terms of credibility or whether the findings are true as viewed through the eyes of those being studied. That is, do the findings correspond to the reality experienced by the research participants? Similarly, Maxwell (1996) describes validity in qualitative research as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, or other sort of account (p. 87). Maxwell further notes that validity is a key component in the design of qualitative research in that the design must consist of strategies to rule out the validity threat which is “a way you might be wrong” (p. 88). Validity threats include threats to valid description and threats to valid interpretation. Several strategies can be employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; Padgett 1998; Patton 2002). The techniques of recording and verbatim transcription of the interviews, triangulation, discrepant case analysis, member checking, and a rich description of the data were used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

As noted by Maxwell (1996), the main threat to valid description in qualitative research is using inaccurate or incomplete data. If data is not accurate or complete, then any interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data are threatened. This is largely solved by recording and verbatim transcription of the interview data, techniques that were used in this study.

The triangulation of methods, data sources, analysts, and theories are frequently described as techniques to reduce systematic bias and thereby enhance the credibility of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). In qualitative research the goal of triangulation is not necessarily to obtain consistency among different sources. While discovering consistency could contribute to the credibility of the study, the point of triangulation is to discover whether or not differences between the sources exist and to try to determine why they exist (Patton, 2002). In this study, the data from the focus groups was compared to the data from the individual interviews. As it turned out, there was consistency between these two sources of data.

During the process of analysis, I found discrepant data or cases that did not neatly fit with general patterns that were observed in other interviews. Although some features of the stories told by a few women were similar with other women's stories, other features of their stories were quite different from all of the others. Identifying and analyzing such cases are a key component of examining the correctness of interpretations and conclusions (Maxwell, 1996). All data were included in the analysis and information from all cases is presented in the findings.

A key threat to the valid interpretation of data is "imposing one's own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the people studied and the meaning they attach to their words and actions" (Maxwell, 1996, pp. 89-90). Member checks are one of the main ways of avoiding this threat. Member checking involves soliciting feedback about your interpretations and conclusions from study participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Often researchers ask participants to review the transcripts of their interview sessions and to make any desired changes, add anything missed and so on.

I have always questioned this process, however, because it does not necessarily allow for feedback on how the researcher *interprets* what was said in an interview. In this study, member checking was used to solicit feedback on my actual interpretation. As previously mentioned, women who participated in the individual interviews were asked to review the themes from my analysis to comment on the accuracy of my interpretations. Fourteen women agreed to review the themes from my analysis. Four of these women provided me with feedback. Three women communicated that they felt I had done a good job of reflecting their perceptions and experiences. One woman communicated that she was somewhat dismayed because she felt that I had omitted some of the important points that she had made during her interview. I contacted this participant and explained that the points that she referred to would indeed be included in the results section. She thanked me for the opportunity for clarification and expressed satisfaction with my reassurances.

The final strategy used to improve the validity of this study was the inclusion of a rich description of the data. In the presentation of the findings I have included many quotations made by the women who participated in the study so that their perceptions and experiences are described in their own words. This allows the reader to make some judgement about the accuracy of my interpretations and the transferability of the findings.

### ***Summary***

A qualitative methodology was employed in this study because it was the best means of examining the purpose and meaning that women construct of EGM gambling within the context of their lives. In order to allow women to describe their unique perceptions and experiences, in-depth individual interviews and focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 34 women who gamble on EGMs. Participants for the



study were recruited through newspaper advertisements and snowball sampling. Data analysis consisted of identifying common themes revealed in women's stories.

Throughout the research process, attention was paid to maintaining ethical standards of research and to the use of techniques to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

## **Chapter 4: The Women of the Study**

The findings from the study are presented in two chapters. In this chapter I present a description of the women who participated in the study. The next chapter will include a presentation of the themes derived from the data analysis reflecting the purpose and meaning of EGM gambling in women's lives.

The 34 participants were a heterogeneous group of women with diverse life contexts. The women ranged in age from 32 to 64 years with an average age of 50 years. The majority of the women were white, six were Aboriginal, and one woman was Métis. Women were involved in a variety of relationships and roles. Participants were also from a diverse range of educational and employment histories. Many women had participated in post-secondary education programs and some had not completed high school. They were involved in paid and unpaid work activities, and those who worked for pay were employed in a variety of occupations. Some of the women were not currently employed and in addition to homemakers, this group included women who were retired, temporarily out of work, and a few women who could not work because of disabilities. Information about income revealed that household incomes ranged from under \$10,000 to \$150,000 per year.

A qualitative approach to research emphasizes a holistic understanding of human experience. Human experience and the interpretation of this experience vary with the life context of the individuals being studied. Qualitative methods allow for a richness and depth of data not available through other methods of research. Sharing the richness of the data collected by presenting information that describes the life context of the women who participated in the study is important for gaining an understanding of their perceptions of

EGM gambling and of the themes that are presented in the next chapter. I have included profiles of the 26 women who participated in the individual interviews and briefer descriptions of the eight focus group participants. This information allows the reader to become more familiar with the women and their lives and to appreciate their diversity and uniqueness. Within these profiles I have tried to use the informal language and tone that women used as they described themselves to me during our interviews. Pseudonyms have been used to protect women's identities and preserve confidentiality.

### ***Individual Interview Participants***

#### ***Rebecca***

Rebecca is 64 years old, white and employed full-time in a professional occupation. She lives with her husband and they have no children. Rebecca has a university degree and her annual household income is approximately \$150,000. She is an avid gardener who is currently landscaping her lovely new home. The first time Rebecca was exposed to EGMs was in the 1970s while on vacation in the Bahamas. She went to a casino and she hated it. She thought that people who gambled were "crazy". She described "fast forwarding to the 1980s" when she and her husband tried a bus trip to a US casino. Rebecca is very much a social person who likes to be around and interact with other people. She does not even remember gambling on the bus tour, but she had fun socializing. She happened to meet the tour operator and took a weekend job as a hostess for the casino bus tours. She tried EGMs while working on these tours. Although she left her hostess job within a few years, Rebecca continued to visit casinos on trips. She formulated a "mission" to see how many casinos existed in the US and to visit every one of them while on trips with her husband or girlfriends or while on business trips.

Although she has not quite accomplished her mission, Rebecca has visited many casinos. Currently, Rebecca plays while on vacation a few times a year with her sister in Las Vegas and while on trips alone or with her husband. She also occasionally plays VLTs in rural bars when she is away on business and at the racetrack in Winnipeg with a girlfriend who likes to play there. Rebecca loves the casino atmosphere, but she never plays in Winnipeg casinos because she finds them dingy and unpleasant. If the conditions are right she can play for ten or more hours. These conditions include a bright, clean, safe casino with a good air system, a machine that she enjoys playing, a machine paying enough to let her continue to play, and smoke free surroundings. She describes herself as a “happy gambler” and if something about a place makes her unhappy, she will leave. She likes playing a variety of games on EGMs and likes the action, challenge, and fun of the games. She says the machines in US casinos pay more frequently and that players get more bonus rounds compared to casino machines in Winnipeg. She finds the VLTs in Manitoba to be very boring. Rebecca does not necessarily set a specific limit to her spending when she plays, but she has a general limit that she does not exceed. For Rebecca, casino slots are a source of fun and pleasure and an opportunity to be around and socialize with other people.

### ***Kathy***

Life is very busy for Kathy. She is a 32 year old, white, married mother of two active sons aged 3 and 5 years. She has a college diploma, works part-time, runs a home-based business, and volunteers at her children’s schools. She is busy from morning till night. She has played EGMs since 1991 when they were introduced in rural bars. She also enjoyed getting dressed up for girl’s night out and attending the Crystal Casino.

Kathy says that her current reasons for playing are different. She and her husband don't want to leave their children with a sitter, so for now their entertainment is limited. She goes out to play EGMs after her children are in bed and when her husband is home with them. Although Kathy prefers the casino, she will also play in nearby lounges. She likes the variety of games that are available on the machines and likes to try different games. Even though she sometimes feels guilty for spending money on gambling, she feels that the money is well spent. Playing provides her with a "sanity break" during which she can have time for herself out of the house when she does not have to think about anything. She knows that she has spent far more on EGMs than she has ever won, but she loves spending any winnings on her family. Her household income is between \$70,000 and \$80,000 per year.

### ***Glenda***

Glenda is a 54 year old Aboriginal woman who describes herself as a second generation residential school survivor. She completed grade 10. Divorced twice, she has mainly single-parented three children who are now adults. Even though it was a financial struggle to support her three children on her earnings, the bills were always paid on time and her children had everything they needed. That is part of the reason that she cannot understand how VLTs turned her into a "selfish monster" who took money from her son's bank account in order to play. She began playing for fun in a local bar in 1994 but financial problems quickly stopped the fun. At times Glenda has been overwhelmed by life issues and VLTs are a way of managing negative emotions and a way of lashing out against the need to always be "good." Her children convinced her to seek help for her gambling and in addition to programs at the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, Glenda

has used the services of a financial counsellor. Glenda describes her current partner, with whom she has been living for just over a year, as supporting her efforts to stop playing the VLTs. He keeps her bank card for her so that she cannot easily access money. She very much wants to stop playing the VLTs, but her “addiction” is tough to beat. She still goes to play at various bars and a casino.

### ***Belinda***

Belinda is a 59 year old Aboriginal woman who has been divorced for seven years. After raising seven children of her own, for the past three years she has been raising three grandchildren aged six, eight, and ten years. She also works full-time and her annual household income is between \$20,000 and \$30,000. She started playing EGMs in 1993 with the opening of McPhillips Street Station. She describes her EGM play as having moved “from addiction to pleasure.” At one time she was at the casino every day and put every cent that was left after the bills were paid into the machines. She attributes this phase to the fact that once her children were grown, she did not feel needed and had nothing to fill her time. The machines filled an emptiness that she felt. Belinda eventually got fed up with watching all of her time and money go into the machines. Now that she has her grandchildren living with her, she does not have much free time. Currently, she plays the VLTs a few times a week during her lunch hour and occasionally visits a casino. She limits her spending and now views EGM playing as something she does for fun.

### ***Karen***

Karen, who is white and 39 years old, describes herself as “digging out” financially as a result of EGM gambling. She completed high school and is currently in

an employment training program. She first played VLTs shortly after they had been introduced in Winnipeg bars. She didn't play much at first, but by 2000 she was playing at a neighbourhood lounge every second day. Stopping to play after work helped to relieve the stress of her job and was a way to avoid going home to a bad relationship. She says that the older machines that were in place at that time got her "addicted." The combination of the absorbing qualities of the machines and the overuse of alcohol while playing made her lose all track of time and money. Karen feels that VLTs and alcohol are a deadly mix. She is currently trying to control her desire to play and she does not understand how she got stuck in a vicious cycle of playing, drinking, overspending, and chasing. She feels that the government purposely got people addicted to the machines when they were first introduced by programming them to pay out more often and in higher amounts. She feels that the new machines do not give people a fair chance to win back the money they spend.

### *Daphne*

Daphne is white, 41 years old, recently separated, and has no children. Even though her ex-husband wanted to sell the house when they separated, she is very determined to keep the house and her two dogs on her own. She works full-time, earns between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year, and needs to be careful with her money in order to maintain the house. Her epilepsy prevents her from driving and she feels lonely because her friends are all married and go out with their husbands. She does not drink and does not like going to bars because she perceives them to be "pick-up joints with a bunch of drunks." She was introduced to Keno by her father shortly after McPhillips Street Station opened in 1993 and tried the slot machines shortly thereafter. When she

was living with her husband they would occasionally attend the casino and they accumulated some credit card debt taking out cash advances to play the machines. As far as Daphne is concerned, this took the fun out of playing because she believes that credit should not be used for entertainment. She now has a strict \$20 limit for playing the machines, no longer has a credit card, and refuses to carry any debt other than her mortgage. She currently goes to a casino once a month for an outing with her elderly neighbour. She prefers the penny machines because she can usually play for two hours on her \$20 and feels like she has had her afternoon out. Daphne views her trips to the casino as an outing and she does not play to win. If she does win, she leaves. She plays for entertainment and pleasure.

### *Melanie*

Melanie is a 41 year old Aboriginal woman who has a 23 year old son who shares her home. She has completed high school and some college, works full-time, and her annual income is between \$20,000 and \$30,000. Melanie was introduced to VLTs in 2000 by her ex-husband whose excessive playing and spending caused their divorce. Although she found the machines boring at first, she notes that her playing and spending have increased over time. She has a small circle of friends, but most of her friends have young children and have limited time outside of activities that involve the children. She always plays the VLTs in a neighbourhood lounge and sometimes she stops to play on her way home from work so that she is not going home to an empty house. Her current boyfriend also enjoys playing. Melanie describes their relationship as lacking emotional intimacy. Going to play the VLTs is about all that they do together. She finds that playing can be fun and a little exciting, but she is unhappy that she wastes time and so much of



her hard earned money on the machines.

### *Candice*

Candice is white, 42 years old, and juggles full-time employment and family. She has four daughters aged 22, 17, 13, and 8 years, all of whom live at home and a stepdaughter who does not live with her. The three oldest children are from a previous relationship and she is currently married to the father of her youngest daughter. Her annual household income is between \$40,000 and \$50,000 and “keeping up” financially is difficult. The transmission in her van broke about seven months before our interview, and Candice is still saving to have it repaired. She remembers writing a paper for a college class criticizing the introduction of the “one armed bandits” into Manitoba bars. However, a few years later she found herself playing, happy to spend just a few dollars before cashing out. Currently Candice plays four or five times a month and she has noticed that she is spending a lot more money. Her usual spot is a bar that houses her favourite machine and that is conveniently located between her home and her workplace. Most often she stops in after work or during early evening by herself, but she also occasionally plays with her sister. Her husband does not play, but she sometimes goes to the bar with him on a Saturday afternoon and will spend \$5 on the VLTs while he socializes with his male friends. She finds the games, particularly Lobstermania, to be very fun - too fun. Even so, the play can become mechanical and boring at times. She plays as a way to relax, have time out of the house away from the kids, and to win some extra money. However, she knows that the chances of winning “big” are very slim. If she wins she can play longer and if she can win enough to leave with some extra money, she can treat her children. She is frustrated about the amount of money that she spends and

she knows that when she loses she goes home in a bad mood.

### *Josephine*

Josephine is 59 years old, white, and describes herself as a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and a wife. She and her husband have seven adult children between them. For the past three years they have been raising three grandchildren - 3 year old twins and a 5 year old grandson who has severe learning disabilities. Josephine stays home to care for the children. Her household income is approximately \$40,000 per year. She first started playing the machines in 1995 or 1996 when she would take her mother out to a hotel lounge or a casino for a little break from caring for her father who was ill. When her mother moved, Josephine continued the outings on her own. She and her daughter won a trip to Las Vegas and she loved the machines there. After Las Vegas, she found the machines in Winnipeg quite boring and stopped playing for a while. She started again in 2000, after McPhillips Street Station got new machines with a greater variety of games. Currently she visits the casino about twice a month, either after the children are in bed in the evening or when she can take an hour in the afternoon when the children are in school or nursery school. Josephine loves the games on the machines and enjoys playing different games. She is playing because this is her only entertainment out of the house and without the children. Playing is one of the few things that she does for herself. She likes to dress up, go to the casino, and have an opportunity to be in her own little world to have some time during which no one is making any demands on her. While she plays, she often thinks about things in her day to day life and how to deal with various situations with the children. She plays only the nickel machines and is very clear that she is not playing to win. Winning is fun and the money can come in handy, but whether or not she

wins, Joyce has gotten out of the house, had some fun, and goes home feeling rejuvenated.

### *Mary-Jo*

Mary-Jo is a 45 year old Aboriginal woman who moved to Winnipeg last year so that she could be closer to services for her 7 year old daughter, Betty, who has numerous physical and cognitive disabilities. She has been married to Betty's father for ten years, but they both are raising children from previous relationships and have always maintained separate residences. In addition to Betty, Mary-Jo has two adult children who live on their own and a 12 year old son who lives with her and Betty. Betty requires constant supervision and intensive physical care and when she was born, Mary-Jo learned how to provide care for her. Mary-Jo has not worked since Betty's birth. Her annual household income is just under \$20,000. She began playing the VLTs on a regular basis after Betty was born. She had a respite worker coming into her home for a few hours three days per week and would use this time to run errands and to stop in a local bar or lounge to have coffee and play the VLTs. Mary-Jo would very much look forward to these outings as a time to be out of the house and around other adults. She got to know other women who attended the venues and the time socializing provided a much needed break from her isolation and loneliness. Playing the machines would also provide her with a bit of fun and excitement which could not be found at home. She was able to "leave life at the door". In the beginning, Mary-Jo did not really care about winning. Winning was nice and any money that she won could be used to pay a bill and by "extras" for her son, but it was the chance to get out that appealed to her the most. She only spent \$5 or \$10 each time she went to play. However, when the new interactive

machines were introduced, Mary-Jo found them very fun and exciting. Her spending escalated to \$50 per session and this was far more than she could afford. She began lying to her husband about expenses so that he would give her more money. After a while the fun and excitement died, and Mary-Jo found that her trips to play the VLTs revolved more and more around money and trying to recover losses. Since she has moved to Winnipeg, Mary-Jo has been seeing a counsellor about her VLT playing. She does not play as much as she used to, but she still plays at a nearby restaurant lounge. She does not know many people in Winnipeg, and she finds that the people in the lounge where she plays are not as friendly or interested in socializing as were the women in her last community. Mary-Jo feels that she is paying a price for trying to get a bit of excitement and company and that it is unfair that women should have to go to the machines to find these things.

### *Debbie*

Debbie is a 42 year old Aboriginal woman who has four children ranging from 18 to 25 years. One daughter occasionally stays with her, and she has care of her two year old grandson who lives with her. She is married but her husband is incarcerated. She completed grade 10 and is not employed outside of the home. She has been on social assistance for a while now and even though she can be very frugal, she struggles financially. Debbie first played the slots in 1993 when McPhillips Street Station opened. Out of curiosity she went to check the place out with some friends who had to show her how to use the machines. She played \$5 and won over \$2400 and left the casino immediately. She did not play again for a few years and when she did play again she played the VLTs in legions and lounges. She got "pulled into it" and would spend almost

all of her money playing. Debbie cut back on her play for a while but eventually found herself going to a nearby lounge about four times per week. Most times she would limit the amount that she spent to \$5 or \$10 or whatever change that she had. Usually, she would win something. Playing became a way for her to get some much needed extra money. She would buy groceries, pay bills and sometimes help family members. During the interview she pointed to some of the furniture and household items that she has purchased from VLT winnings. She knew that she would never get wealthy off the machines, but "it really did keep me alive." In the past year, Debbie has cut back on her playing again. The new machines just aren't paying like the old ones did and she cannot afford to spend money without winning at least something. Now she goes to the lounge to play about three or four times per month when her grandson's father takes him for visits. Although these occasions are a time out for Debbie she does not view VLTs as being a form of entertainment. Playing remains a way to try to get some extra money.

### *Mary*

Mary will never forget the first time she played the slot machines. It was in 1990 at the Crystal Casino. She was with her girlfriend who showed her where to put the coins in the machine. She dropped her first 75 cents into the machine and won \$10,000. She loved the decor, glamour, and ambiance of the casino and felt that this was *the* place to go out for a social evening. She also thought that she would continue winning. Mary is 58 years old, white, and is divorced with two adult children, one of whom lives with Mary while attending university. Mary has retired from her profession, but works part-time in another field. She has a university degree. Keeping busy is very important to Mary who was raised to believe that there should be "no idleness." Following her initial

win, Mary would attend the casino with her girlfriend every weekend. She lost her initial \$10,000 win within a year and kept playing. By this time she recognized that her illusions of winning more money were false, but she kept on going to the casino for a social outing. A few years later she and her non-gambling husband divorced. By then the Crystal Casino closed and was replaced by McPhillips Street Station and Club Regent. Her social network of other gamblers had also expanded and her casino visits became more frequent and more expensive. Mary began to feel financial consequences and bills would be juggled. Both of her parents and several other relatives died within a short time span. Mary gambled even more and began playing the VLTs in bars and lounges in addition to playing casino slots. She is currently trying to find more "balance" with playing the machines, but she continues to play, often alone. Mary says that EGMs have become a companion that fill a void in her life. She feels an emptiness created by lost roles and relationships and playing allows her to forget about everything including feeling sad and lonely.

### *Patricia*

At 64 years of age, Patricia describes herself as a heavy smoker and drinker. She is a white woman who has completed some university education and who is also trained as a journeyman automotive painter. Many years ago she divorced the father of her two daughters who are now adults and she has lived with her common-law husband for 25 years. The first time she played the VLTs was in 1993. She was in a downtown hotel bar where she played a quarter, won \$100 and was "hooked". She continued to play at various downtown hotels and her spending escalated. She was not working and would take money out of her husband's bank account. If she won enough, she would put the

money back, but the account was overdrawn. Patricia would become very absorbed by the machines and would lose all track of time and money when she played, particularly when she was also drinking. Her husband took over many of her parenting responsibilities when she was out playing. By 1998, she started writing bad cheques for money to play the VLTs. In order for Patricia to avoid criminal charges, her husband took out a \$5,000 loan which they are still repaying. She describes repaying this loan as a "pain" on their household income which is between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Patricia continues to play about once per week at various downtown hotels within walking distance of her home. She loves the machines and describes her attraction to the movement and colour and sound effects. She finds that playing provides her with an "adrenaline rush" and this thrill and excitement keeps her playing. She usually goes out alone, but will also play the VLTs when she and her partner go out to the bar. He does not play. Patricia is now working full-time so she spends her own money. She usually sticks to a \$20 limit, but she is not always successful. She carries a hand held poker game that she uses when she has the urge to play VLTs. She refers to this game as her "pacifier." She has attended Gamblers Anonymous meetings but feels like she does not belong with the other gamblers who speak of high stakes gambling. She wishes there was a GA group strictly for VLT players in the core area of the city. She also wishes that not every hotel bar around her had VLTs.

### ***Dawn***

Dawn is 47 years old, white, and married with no children. She has a university degree and was previously employed full-time. In the early 1990s she began to have back problems which got worse over time and she settled out of court on a disability claim in

1998. She is unable to engage in full-time employment, but she and her husband manage properties that they own and they enjoy financial security. They travel in an RV two or three months of the year, often stopping at casinos to stay and play for a few days. She plays the slots, but her husband enjoys only table games. They also enjoy on-line poker. Although she has played the slots while on vacation or on occasion in Winnipeg casinos for 25 years, she noticed a difference in her gambling after her disability forced her to leave her job in 1993. In addition to the loss of physical abilities that greatly limit her activity, the losses associated with her disability included the loss of roles and relationships. She was also under a lot of stress because of an ongoing legal battle to settle her claim for disability insurance. These circumstances took a toll on her relationship with her husband and they went through a difficult period with frequent arguments. She most often goes to McPhillips Street Station, but also goes to play the VLTs in a hotel bar near her home. During her peak playing period, Dawn was going three or four times a week, sometimes for the whole day and evening. Dawn has spent a lot of time reflecting on her gambling and says that going to the casino provides her with somewhere to go in the morning and something to do when everyone else around her goes about their busy lives. It also provides an environment to be around other people. Dawn has made quite a few acquaintances while attending the casinos and regularly chats with these acquaintances. She also reads a book or writes letters when she gets bored with the machines. Playing the machines in the casinos also allows her to take a break and forget about the issues in her life. Most often she goes alone, but attending the casino is also part of a regular outing with her aunt who is only a few years older than Dawn. Once a week they go together and this is a fun part of their relationship. Dawn knows that she



has lost a lot of money on the machines, but she has also won and it is fun to share any winnings with her aunt. She says that the losses do not affect her financially—she usually sets a \$400 dollar limit, but she can afford to lose \$400. However, her gambling has caused arguments with her husband and she has made an effort to cut back. She has actually called a gambling hotline, but the person on the phone focused on how much gambling may have caused financial problems for Dawn and it has not. Dawn has noticed that in the past few months she has been going to the casino less and less often. At the time of our interview she had not been there for three weeks. She wonders if this is because issues in her life related to her disability have settled down.

### *Cynthia*

Cynthia is white, 40 years old and lives with her husband, her 20 year old daughter, her 17 year old son, and her 14 year old stepson. She describes her household as being very “unruly.” Cynthia is unable to work because she suffers from anxiety and depression. She completed grade eight and has not returned to school. Her husband has a disability and they struggle to survive on his part-time earnings and their disability allowances which bring in less than \$20,000 per year. Having enough food to feed the family is a frequent concern. Cynthia plays the VLTs in a nearby hotel pub once a week. She loves the games on the machines, especially the new ones like Lobstermania. She describes them as “really fun but really addictive.” She knows that she cannot afford to spend the money, but going to play provides her with time away from the stress at home. More importantly, there is always the chance of winning some much needed grocery money. The hope of winning, even when she is losing, keeps her playing. When she wins she feels great but when she loses she feels even more depressed and anxious.

*Maureen*

Maureen is white, 52 years old and currently single. She has a university degree, works full-time, and earns between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per year. She lives with a roommate and her cat and dog. She remembers going to the racetrack with her father when she was about six years old. He was adamant about setting a strict spending limit that was never exceeded. She has learned by his example and has never spent more than her limit on gambling. She first played the VLTs in 1993 when she worked in a hotel that introduced the machines in the bar. She would spend up to \$5. She spent a short time working as a VLT cashier. At that time Maureen was in a common-law relationship with a man who she says developed a problem with the VLTs. This left her feeling like playing was no longer fun so she stopped playing. Currently, Maureen enjoys day-long gambling jaunts to casinos in the US. She calls these her "mental health holidays." She also occasionally goes to the casinos in Winnipeg. She enjoys the casinos because they offer entertainment, pleasant surroundings, and good food in addition to the gambling. She also likes the machines, but she prefers the older style machines over the flashy new ones that "gobble up money way too quick." During her observations in the casinos, she has noticed that the machines used to be "looser" and pay more often. She plays only the nickel machines because they provide her with the best entertainment value. She limits her spending to \$20 and if she wins she immediately walks away. She views playing the machines as a form of entertainment just as her other entertainment activities such as movies, concerts, travel and the theatre. She always knows exactly how much playing the slots is going to cost her and she only uses expendable cash. Playing the machines provides fun and a little excitement, and for Maureen it is important to keep it fun.

*Grace*

Grace is a 33 year old Aboriginal woman with two boys, aged 15 years and 7 months. Although she is in a relationship with the father of her baby, she does not live with him. She lives with her two children and her mother shares the apartment with them. She is employed full-time, but at the time of our interview she was on maternity leave. Her income is just under \$20,000 per year. Grace is involved in a social network of heavy gamblers and describes gambling on card games and bingo from early childhood. She says that both of her parents are heavy gamblers who were always broke despite the fact that her father had a job that paid well. Gambling was normalized for Grace when she was growing up and she describes how any kind of social occasion or gathering involved and continues to involve gambling in one form or another. She moved to Winnipeg from her northern community the day after she graduated from high school so that she could get away from her parents' drinking, gambling, and arguments over money. The first time that she played the VLTs was on September 1, 1993, the day they were introduced in Winnipeg bars. She has been "hard core" ever since. The VLTs stopped being fun after about the first year and Grace has experienced financial and legal difficulties as a result of her VLT play. Currently, she gambles at the casinos. In addition to the slots, she plays bingo, electronic bingo, Keno, and cards, but it's the machines (slots) that always get her "going". She has tried to cut back and control her spending but she is not always successful. She spends about \$400 per month on gambling, sometimes more. She is preoccupied with gambling when she is not gambling and finds that while she is now off work for her maternity leave, she gets bored and wants to play the machines more. She continues to be immersed in a social circle of gamblers and this circle now includes her

baby's father. For Grace, gambling is a part of life even though she doesn't fully understand why this is so. She describes the rush and excitement of winning and thinks that it all comes down to wanting to win. She does not want to be rich, but she wants to be debt free and to be able to have something left after she pays her living expenses instead of being broke until the next payday.

### *Joyce*

Joyce is white, 59 years old and in six months is looking forward to receiving her first pension cheque. She happily explains that she is planning on using that cheque to finance a casino outing. She has a university degree and previously worked full-time. She lives with her husband and has two adult children and three grandchildren whom she loves to babysit. Joyce describes numerous health issues that somewhat limit her activity. She has been retired for a few years. The first time she played the slots was at McPhillips Street Station in 1993. From the start, she loved playing. Currently, in addition to her casino visits in Winnipeg, Joyce also visits casinos while travelling in California, Nevada, and Arizona. Her husband occasionally plays with her and although he does not like to see her spend too much money, he does not complain too much because playing makes her happy. In preparation for a trip to the casino, Joyce enjoys dressing up, and doing her hair, make-up, and nails. She loves the casino atmosphere and likes to walk around, explore the decor, take in the entertainment, and dine. She also truly enjoys the machines and finds the games, particularly the newer ones, fun and amusing. She also plays simulated slot games on a game program that she has connected to her television. She only plays with money that she can afford to lose and recognizes the need to be disciplined and to play in moderation. She is not expecting to win anything and if a

machine is starting to “suck up” money, she walks away. Joyce is happy to spend any winnings taking her husband out for dinner, or buying groceries and treats for her children and grandchildren. To her, playing the machines in the casino is a form of fun and entertainment. She describes her casino visits as one of “life’s perks.”

### *Nadine*

Nadine is 55 years old, white, and although she has retired from her profession, she currently volunteers and is looking for some interesting part-time work. She is married and has an adult stepson. Her annual household income is between \$40,000 and \$50,000. The first time she played the machines was about 15 years ago while on vacation in Las Vegas with her husband. At that time she preferred Blackjack because she initially found the machines boring. Her attitude towards them has changed. In the summer months she and her husband regularly stop at the South Beach Casino on their way to the beach. They also occasionally visit Club Regent and go for weekend trips to casinos in the U.S. Although Nadine sometimes visits a casino with a girlfriend, she most often accompanies her husband. She worries about his gambling because he plays to win and is not always conscious of their budget. Nadine plays the penny machines and finds that she can play for a few hours on \$10 or \$20. Her limit is \$20 and her motto is to keep it fun. She describes the new machines as being quite intriguing in design and finds that following the games is fun and amusing. She also appreciates the beautiful decor in some casinos and enjoys walking around watching other people. Playing the machines provides Nadine with a little “escape” just as does going to a movie. She says that gambling provides her with something a little bit different to do in a life that is currently somewhat “quiet.”

*Lada*

Lada is white, 49 years old, divorced, and has one adult daughter who lives in another city. She has a college diploma, is employed full-time and works the midnight shift. She earns approximately \$40,000 per year. Her disability limits her mobility. Lada describes a life filled with trauma, abuse, and numerous losses. She describes herself as being socially inept and socially isolated. She began playing the VLTs when she moved to Winnipeg in 2000. She lost \$15,000 in the first year. She has had her household utility services suspended and has gone without her medication because her money had been spent on the machines. She has written bad cheques to finance her gambling and has been a regular user of payday loans. She most enjoys playing the casino slots, but she has signed herself out of the casinos for six months. Currently, Lada plays the VLTs at a lounge near her home. She says that even though she has attended GA and is in counselling for other life issues, she cannot control her gambling. The VLTs begin a whole cycle of addictions for her. She will play to try and give herself a lift and feel good, but then when she loses, she will drink, use drugs, or overeat because she feels even worse. She likes to win, because winning makes her feel good. However, the monetary aspect of winning does not matter to Lada. When she does win, she shares the money with whoever is around at the lounge. She likes the light and sound effects on the machines and she likes the fact that the machines are fast and provide instant gratification. Lada says she likes to go to the venues because even though she does not interact with anyone while playing, being in the venues allows her to create the illusion of sociability and temporarily fills a void created by isolation and loneliness. The machines provide her with a "commercial break" from her life, allow her to counteract negative

emotions, and serve as an outlet for her anger. She describes having a relationship with the machines that is safer than relationships with people. Even though Lada knows she is going to lose money on the machines, at least she knows the rules—the only expectation the machines have is that she keep on putting in money.

### *Natalie*

Natalie is white, a 46 year old widow, and has no children. She has completed high school and some university. She lives on a small horse farm just outside Winnipeg with her mother and describes them both as “horse people.” She works two part-time jobs and earns between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per year. She also does volunteer work. She began playing the machines shortly after they were introduced in Manitoba bars and lounges. She would play when out for dinner with her mother and her husband. When the change came from the bill, she would use it to try the VLTs in the restaurant lounge. She says that her husband was very “cheap” and despite the fact that he did not want her to work many hours, he would give her very little money. She gradually learned how to play the machines by watching other people play at the racetrack or at a lounge and through the help of a friend who would give her money to play. She began playing the slots at a casino because she thought that this would be a way for her to get some money for herself. These attempts failed and, to this day, Natalie regrets overspending at that time. After her husband died in 1997, she cut back on her playing and tried to keep busy. She currently plays by herself or with her mother at the racetrack or nearby lounge on a weekly basis for an hour or less at a time. She limits her spending to \$15. As well, she meets her “well-heeled” friend about once a month at a hotel where they have lunch and then play the VLTs for a few hours. Her friend continues to give her money to play.

Although at first she did not like the new machines, she now really enjoys the new interactive games and likes progressing to the different levels. She is not looking to get rich. She says that playing the VLTs provides her with some fun and entertainment, a little excitement, and occasionally a little “extra jingle” that she uses to finance her play and buy lottery tickets.

### *Caitlyn*

Caitlyn is white, 59 years old and is recovering from injuries she received in a car accident. She says that although she only has a grade eight education she has always worked full-time. However, she left her most recent job due to her injuries. She currently receives social assistance, but she is in the process of starting a small business that should be running within a few months. She has divorced twice. She has two adult children. She gave her oldest daughter up for adoption at birth and this daughter is now married with two children and lives in another city. Caitlyn raised her younger daughter on her own. This daughter lives in Winnipeg and has a 14 month old son. Caitlyn regularly visits and helps with her grandson. Caitlyn lives in subsidized housing and does not feel safe in her apartment. She says her apartment sometimes feels like a prison where she is afraid to open the door. Sometimes she just needs to get out and be away from the apartment. Caitlyn describes a history of abuse that began in her childhood and that continued in her adult relationships with male partners. As a result of these experiences, Caitlyn is very leery of getting too close to anyone and lacks trust in relationships. The first time she played the machines was in Las Vegas in the 1970's when she met her sister there for a few days. At that time, she was married to an abusive husband, and she enjoyed finding a safe space where she could have a little fun and excitement while being around people



without having to interact. She played very little after that until she moved to Winnipeg about five years ago. Then she began playing the VLTs in various hotel bars and lounges. She plays once or twice a month and although she plans on spending much less, she usually spends about \$200. Despite the fact that Caitlyn does not want to get close to anyone, she likes to be around other people and to “feel their energy.” Whenever anyone starts to get too friendly or familiar with her while she plays the VLTs, she moves to another venue. This allows her to be around other people and have an occasional chat without having to be in any sort of committed relationship. She feels that the venues are safe because there are always plenty of staff and customers around. Caitlyn is ambivalent toward the actual machines. On one hand, she feels they are stupid and an insult to people’s intelligence. However, the machines have very absorbing qualities and allow the player to “escape.” For Caitlyn, this escape involves having time away from her apartment, time away from loneliness and isolation and time away from her daughter who can be demanding and critical. Going out to play also provides a sense of freedom to be out on her own with no one controlling her. Finally, playing provides her with time just for herself—a safe space where she does not have to be responsible for anyone or anything. Of course the drawback of playing is that it costs money. Caitlyn knows she is going to lose, but she plays for time, not money.

### *Denise*

Denise says that she is desperate to control how much she plays the machines but she just can’t seem to do it. She is white, 54 years old and married with two adult children who live on their own. She completed grade nine and says that she has worked at many different kinds of jobs. Her household income is approximately \$35,000 per year.

She and her husband have both declared bankruptcy as a result of EGM play and they almost lost their house last year. She drove to our interview in a leased vehicle that she knows she will lose in a few months because she will not be able to get financing to purchase the vehicle once the lease agreement ends. In the beginning, Denise and her husband would play the machines at McPhillips Street Station or at the racetrack when VLTs were introduced. Their bills were caught up and they would go out to play with a bit of extra money to get out of the house and have some fun and entertainment. Things got out of hand six years ago while Denise was employed at a casino. She does not really know what happened but she thinks that seeing other people win, the thrill of winning, and the thrill of playing while she was forbidden to play made her cross a line that included spending bill money and missing work in order to play. She describes her current situation as a vicious cycle of playing to try to win money to pay bills, losing, and then chasing the losses. Playing has also become a way to escape the extreme financial stress Denise is under. On one level, the fun stopped long ago. However, Denise still loves playing the machines and she says that fact is part of the problem. Currently, she most often plays at a casino because the machines there "don't suck quite as fast" as the VLTs in bars and lounges. She is not working right now so she can play in the daytime in addition to going out to play with her husband in the evening. He loves to play too, but he has much more control. Denise says that he does not support her efforts to control her gambling because he still wants to go play and wants her to go with him. Denise cannot seem to just let him go alone. In the past he has encouraged her to call in sick at work to play. She does not have a lot of friends and the friends that she does have do not gamble. Nor do other family members. This increases Denise's isolation because no one talks

about gambling and no one knows “how bad things are.”

*Michelle*

Michelle is white, 60 years old, recently retired, and lives with her husband. She has three adult children and two grandchildren. Her annual household income is between \$80,000 and \$90,000. The first time she played the machines was on her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. She went out for dinner with her husband and some friends and then went to the Crystal Casino to try the slots. She really enjoyed herself and joked that she was “hooked” the first time. Ever since then, she has gone to a casino almost every weekend. In addition to visiting Winnipeg casinos, she and her husband frequently go on casino bus tours to the U.S. In fact, they sometimes organize these trips. At first they would organize a group of people to go on a trip and for doing so, they would get their own trip for free. Now they organize groups of people to go on the trips and the tour company donates money to a charitable service organization to which they belong. Michelle always goes to the casino with her husband or her sister or a girlfriend, but never alone. She only goes in the evening and is much too busy to think about going during the day. In the beginning she and her husband set a strict \$20 per person spending limit. Now that the children are gone, the mortgage is paid and she is retired, they have increased this limit to \$30 or \$40, perhaps a little more if they are in the States. If she runs out of money, she either stops playing or shares a machine with her husband, which she also finds to be fun. Stopping at the casino has become part of their entertainment routine and they often integrate a stop into a night out for dinner or a movie. She rarely plays in the summer, because she and her husband spend their summer at their cottage. Michelle has her favourite machines and likes the games and the light and sound effects. She enjoys the fact that while she plays

she is distracted from mundane life details. Although she does not play for money, winning adds a bit of excitement and the money is spent on her children or grandchildren, or for shopping in the U.S. For Michelle, going to the casino to play the slots is a source of fun and entertainment, inexpensive travel, socializing, and time to relax and forget about everything. However, she has described some ambivalence toward gambling. She knows that some people, including people in her own social circle, frown upon this activity and she has always been bothered by stories of how much money people have spent and lost. She describes a “healthy” fear of potential addiction.

### *Frances*

Frances describes herself as a very social, energetic person. She is white, 40 years old and lives with her husband. She has no children of her own, but her husband has two adult daughters. After high school she completed some university. She works part-time and does volunteer work. Her annual household income is between \$70,000 and \$80,000. Enjoying financial security, Frances and her husband engage in a variety of entertainment activities including travelling, dining out, and attending movies and concerts. Although her husband does not gamble, Frances loves to visit the casino and he will occasionally accompany her. She will also attend casinos when they are on vacation in Las Vegas or other locations. Other times Michelle visits Winnipeg casinos with her girlfriends. For her, EGM play is part of a whole entertainment package available at the casino. She loves to play the machines, but sometimes gets bored playing, so she chats with other people, walks around, takes in the shows, and enjoys some food. She views these outings as a social outlet and a way to have fun and take a break. She is aware of the consequences of over spending on the machines, and is determined to keep gambling fun. Frances sets

strict spending limits for herself. She does not care if she wins, but she always wants the money to last a few hours so she has her night out. If she is lucky enough to win something, she splurges on herself or buys gifts for other people.

### *Stacey*

Stacey is white, 45 years old and lives with her common-law partner of seven years in a home that she purchased before they were together. Although her partner has two adult children, Stacey has no children of her own. She has a college diploma, works full-time, and has advanced in her field over the past 25 years. Her annual household income is \$150,000. She enjoys spending time at her cottage in the summer and she and her partner like to travel. The first time she played the slots was 20 years ago while on a weekend party trip to Las Vegas with girlfriends. She found the machines quite boring and was reluctant to part with the \$10 that she played. She would occasionally play the VLTs when they were introduced in bars in rural Manitoba, but this was part of a social outing with particular friends. She never enjoyed the old VLTs and would spend \$5 or \$10. After Club Regent opened in 1993, she would attend two or three times a year as part of a social outing and would spend a maximum of \$10 on the machines. Things changed after the renovation and expansion of Club Regent in 1999. The new interactive games interested Stacey and she would play more often and spend more money. She was still concerned about spending and losing money and she said that she “almost died” the first time she spent \$100. A little voice inside her told her that this was “bad, bad, bad.” However, at about the same time Stacey celebrated her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, she describes having an attitude change. She was financially secure and knew she could afford to spend some money on entertainment. She decided that she was at a point in her life where if she

wanted to spend \$50 or \$100 that she was going to do it and not feel guilty about it.

Although she enjoys occasional weekend getaways to casinos in the US, she most often plays at South Beach Casino. She and some of her girlfriends get together and go there for the day about once per month. When they go, they know they are going for the whole day and they split up and then meet to enjoy the free supper buffet before leaving. She likes the variety of machines at South Beach and she also likes the fact that she can smoke, something she only does once in a while. To Stacey, these trips bring a sense of rebellion and she feels free to do whatever she wants in the casino. Stacey is not sure, but she thinks that the fact that gambling has such a negative image may be part of the attraction for her because she pursues the “forbidden apple.” The games on the machines are fun and interesting to follow. Equally important for Stacey is the fact that the technology of the machines allow her to “escape.” She is very clear that she has a good life and that she does not have anything to *escape from*. However, she describes herself as a “type A” personality who is always thinking, and enjoys the fact that she does not think about anything else when she plays the machines. When she is finished playing, she feels refreshed. She does not care about winning and she always goes with the attitude that she will go home with nothing. Stacey hopes that South Beach soon gets some new machines for her to explore.

### ***Focus Group Participants***

Due to the nature of focus group interviews, it is not possible to provide detailed profiles of the women who participated in these groups. During the discussions women were not asked to share as many details of their personal lives or experiences playing EGMs as were the women who participated in the individual interviews. Rather, they

were asked general questions regarding women's EGM gambling. However, the women who participated in these groups completed a demographic questionnaire and they did share some information about their experience and the appeal of EGMs.

### ***Focus Group 1***

#### ***Pamela***

Pamela is white, 51 years old, works full-time, and lives with her husband. They have three adult children who no longer live at home. Their household income is between \$50,000 and \$60,000 per year. Pamela and her husband both love to play the machines and although they sometimes play at a casino, she prefers to play the VLTs in lounges because lounges are quieter. Now that her children are grown she has more time and freedom to pursue and enjoy her own interests. Pamela chooses to play VLTs as a form of entertainment because she finds playing fun, challenging, and exciting.

#### ***Ashley***

Ashley is white, 58 years old, and although she was set to retire at 55, she continues to work at her job on a contract basis. She is married and has two adult daughters, one of whom is living at home while she finishes university. Her annual household income is between \$80,000 and \$90,000 per year. Ashley loves playing the machines. Although her husband doesn't play much, he frequently accompanies her to a lounge or casino and quite often they arrange to meet friends at these locations for an evening out. However, Ashley prefers to play by herself. Ashley doesn't care about winning, she just wants to play. After all these years of looking after her family, she has found something to do that is "just for me."

*Gayle*

Gayle is white, 60 years old, and divorced. She has two adult children who live on their own. Although she worked full-time for many years, she is currently receiving disability insurance benefits because was recently injured in an automobile accident. With investment income, her annual household income is between \$50,000 and \$60,000. Like the other women in the focus group, Gayle really enjoys playing the machines and most often plays at a casino. When she plays she becomes very focused on the machine. She appreciates the absorbing qualities of the machines because this provides her with a time to not worry about anything. She describes herself as having always been a worrier and it is nice to have a break from worrying. She does not expect to win, but winning is nice because the money allows her to play longer without exceeding her spending limit.

*Crystal*

Crystal is white, 49 years old, and she lives with her husband and her 15 and 18 year old daughters. Their annual household income is between \$50,000 and \$60,000. She works full-time and describes herself as being very busy. She is enjoying the fact that her daughters are now very independent. Although they still rely on her for many things, they are busy with school and friends. Crystal can now enjoy time out of the house without having to worry about her children. She goes to the casino with her husband or with a girlfriend. She loves to chat with other people while she is out, and finds that the casino is a nice place to socialize. Playing the machines is fun and entertaining. Crystal describes her casino outings as a source of freedom and entertainment.



***Focus Group 2******Faye***

Faye is a 58 year old white, married woman who has two adult sons who live on their own. She has been retired for two years and has an annual household income between \$70,000 and \$80,000. She plays EGMs at the casino and at a quiet hotel bar with her husband. An uncle often joins them for this outing. Although she is very happy with retirement, Faye misses the opportunity that work provided to be around other people. She finds that going to the bar or the casino provides her with an opportunity to be around other people, socialize, and to feel like she is a part of the current culture. She also appreciates the fact that these outings provide her and her husband with something that they can go out and do together. Faye describes some health issues that limit her ability to walk too much or to be on her feet for too long. She would not be able to go to the mall and walk around for a few hours, but she can sit at a machine and still enjoy being out and around other people. She is not expecting to win, but any winnings are put aside to spend the next time she is out playing the machines for an hour or two of enjoyment.

***Donna***

Donna is white, 53 years old and lives common-law with a man who she describes as being an alcoholic. She has no children. Donna is hearing impaired and she took an early retirement because of her hearing. Her household income is between \$40,000 and \$50,000 per year. She has more time to play the VLTs now that she is retired, but she plays for fewer hours per session and spends less money now than she used to. She tries to stick to a spending limit, but she has overspent and chased her losses.

Donna says that playing the VLTs allows her to take a break and to escape from relationship problems and negative emotions when she is feeling down. She plays alone at bars and lounges that are conveniently located. Even though she prefers not to socialize when she plays, she does like to be around other people. Playing is better than sitting at home in front of the television. Winning gives her an emotional boost, but she says that the new machines don't let you win as much as the older machines and that they take your money faster.

### *Nicole*

Nicole is a 64 year old Metis woman who became a widow a few years ago. She is retired and has two adult daughters, one of whom lives with her. Her annual household income is between \$10,000 and \$20,000. When her husband was alive, going to a casino or a lounge to play the machines was part of their entertainment routine. Now Nicole will go to a nearby lounge and play the VLTs by herself for thirty minutes or an hour or she will meet one of a few girlfriends who also play. They will meet, play the machines for a little while, and then have coffee and chat. Although she does not feel that playing the machines is a big part of her life, Nicole finds playing provides a little fun and entertainment.

### *Cherise*

Cherise is white, 45 years old and lives with her partner. She has three children from a previous marriage. Her 20 year old daughter lives on her own, but her 15 and 17 year old are still at home with her and her partner. Their annual household income is between \$80,000 and \$90,000. She works full-time and describes herself as being very busy juggling work and family. Cherise also tries to spend as much time as she can with

her father who has Alzheimer's disease and who is living in a nursing home. She and her partner go out together and play the VLTs at a hotel lounge. Cherise says that the VLTs provide her with an "escape from reality." She explained that going to play the VLTs is the only time that she has for herself. She likes to get in front of the machine and she "zones everybody out" for an hour or two at a time. Even though she is seeking time for herself, while she plays she sometimes thinks about how she will deal with situations at home such as her son's reluctance to complete a homework assignment. Cherise says that by the time she has finished playing her set limit, she often feels that she has figured out ways to deal with whatever issue she is facing.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to place women's EGM gambling within the context of their lives. The profiles presented in this chapter illustrate the diversity of the lives and experiences of the women who participated in this study. These profiles also serve as an attempt to expand their lives beyond demographic profiles which in themselves cannot adequately capture women's experience with EGM gambling.

The individual interviews provided information about women's gambling patterns. Women had been regularly playing from between five and 18 years. Although the frequency of playing and the amount spent while playing had fluctuated over the years for some women, at the time of the individual interviews, women played EGMs from between five times per week to once per month and spent from between under \$5 to \$400 per session.

Women who participated in the individual interviews were asked to describe the first time they had ever played EGMs. Prior to the introduction of EGMs in Manitoba, a

few women had played at casinos while on vacation in Las Vegas or other travel destinations. A few women first played in rural Manitoba bars after EGMs were introduced in these locations in 1991. The majority of the women who participated in the interviews first played EGMs in Winnipeg. This included a few women who were introduced to the slot machines at the Crystal Casino which opened in 1989. However, most women began playing after the opening of Club Regent and McPhillips Street Station and with the introduction of VLTs in bars and lounges, both of which occurred in 1993.

The first experience playing EGMs most commonly revolved around curiosity. Women remembered that there seemed to be a lot of “hype” around the introduction of EGMs, particularly with the opening of the two casinos in Winnipeg. They were curious and went to the venues with friends or family members to “see what this was all about.”

It was at the grand opening of McPhillips Street Station. I had to go play these VLTs. It was all new and I had never been to a casino before. So you had to go see what it was all about. (Belinda)

I was out shopping with a friend and there was a bar across the street. My friend wanted to go so I just went along to check it out. (Glenda)

I first played when the casino first came out in Winnipeg on McPhillips Street. I was just curious to see what those machines were all about so I went to go and check it out. (Debbie)

A new, government sanctioned entertainment source had been introduced in the province and women went with other curious friends and family members to explore the new opportunity.

For some women, the first experience playing EGMs was regarded very positively. This was because they either enjoyed the casino atmosphere, enjoyed playing

the machines, or won money. However, for many women, the first time playing EGMs was not regarded as a positive experience.

The first time I played was at a hotel bar with my cousin and my brother. I remember thinking “What a stupid bloody thing! That’s silly.” (Karen)

I didn’t know what I was doing, and I thought I was wasting my time and my money. (Glenda)

Like Glenda, many women did not understand how the machines worked or how to play them. They had to rely on the advice of friends or family members who accompanied them or they just watched others in order to learn how to play themselves. Whether or not they found the initial experience appealing, all of the women continued to play and eventually discovered some positive aspects of playing. As Caitlyn put it,

You keep playing a little bit and you put in another dollar and eventually you find out what they can do for you. (Caitlyn)

Following these initial experiences, women found that EGM gambling served a number of purposes. The themes describing the purpose and meaning women derived from EGM gambling within their life contexts will be presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Functions, Meanings, and Influences**

A diverse group of women with varied life contexts participated in this study. Although there were differences between the women in terms of their life experiences and their experiences with EGM gambling, the data analysis also revealed common themes that reflected women's experiences. In this chapter I present the themes reflecting the purpose and meaning of EGM gambling in women's lives. As discussed in Chapter 2, the ideas and opinions discussed during the focus group sessions matched the themes identified during the individual interviews and allowed for clarification of these themes. In this chapter, unless otherwise stated, the findings and narratives from the focus groups are integrated with those from the individual interviews.

What did women "get" out of EGM gambling? Seven main themes relating to the purpose and meaning that EGM gambling holds for women were derived from the data. These themes included (1) fun and entertainment, (2) independence and rebellion, (3) social functions, (4) time out, (5) filling a void, (6) hope for financial gain, and (7) declining fun: overspending and chasing losses. Sub themes are also presented in some themes.

The first theme is "fun and entertainment." Most experiences with EGM gambling began in the context of engaging in a leisure activity and this theme describes the entertainment function of EGM gambling and the pleasurable aspects of this activity. A sub theme describing the thrill and excitement offered through EGM gambling is also presented. As women's EGM gambling experiences unfolded, some women discovered that in addition to fun and entertainment, EGM gambling served other purposes. The theme "freedom and rebellion" describes feelings of independence derived from women's

freedom to choose how to spend their time and money. In addition, this theme describes how the persistent negative image of gambling provided a forum for rebelling or “being bad”. The theme “social functions” describes the important social functions filled by EGM gambling. Specifically, going out to play EGMS provided an opportunity for social interaction or social connection.

“Time out” emerged as an important theme describing women’s use of EGM gambling as a time out from responsibilities and demands. This theme includes four sub themes describing various dimensions of time out. The sub theme of “time for me” describes women’s use of EGM gambling as a time to focus on their own enjoyment. “Distraction and escape” is a sub theme describing women’s use of EGM gambling as a time out from stress, negative emotions, and everyday worries. The sub theme “time to think” describes women’s use of EGM gambling as a time in relative peace and quiet to think about life situations. The final sub theme of “time for rejuvenation” describes women’s experience of feeling energized and refreshed after having time out.

For some women, EGM gambling was used a means of “filling a void”. This theme describes women’s use of EGM gambling as a source of comfort when they faced challenging transitions and as a substitute or replacement for lost or unhappy roles and relationships. The theme “hope for financial gain” describes some women’s use of EGM gambling as a way to try to ease financial struggles. When these women played, they hoped that they would win money. The final theme that emerged from the data analysis was “declining fun: overspending and chasing”. Within this theme, women’s experience of overspending on EGM gambling and/or becoming involved in a cycle of overspending and chasing their losses is described. When this occurred, the positive aspects of EGM

gambling became overshadowed by negative financial consequences.

During the individual and focus group interviews, contextual factors that influenced their EGM gambling and shaped the purpose and meaning of this activity within their lives were discussed. These contextual factors are described within each theme.

### ***Fun and Entertainment***

For most women, EGM gambling was perceived to be a source of fun and entertainment. As women told me about their experiences they often referred to the fun and enjoyment they got from going out to play EGMs. When I asked women to fill in the blank at the end of the sentence “VLTs or slot machines give me.....” almost all responses included “fun,” “pleasure” or “entertainment.” Most women simply enjoyed playing the games available on the machines and playing was seen as an amusing and pleasurable activity.

They are a source of entertainment and I like to play. It's just fun to play.  
(Natalie)

First thing that popped into my head was pleasure. Yeah, the first thing was pleasure. I look at like it's pleasurable fun and it's entertainment. I don't look at it negatively even though I have lost money. Like I said, I am not going there to get rich. I don't do anything to get rich so I look at it very much as an entertainment value because it gives me fun and pleasure.  
(Stacey)

Playing EGMs was viewed as an entertainment activity comparable to going to a movie or out for dinner. In most instances, women described having other entertainment and leisure activities available to them. They engaged in these activities in addition to EGM gambling or they chose EGM gambling over other types of entertainment.

To me it's the fun of the games and I like to try different games all the



time. It's an outing. It's entertainment. It's leisure. You can go out for dinner and spend fifty or sixty bucks and what do you get for it....a dinner and that's it. This gives me more fun. (Pamela)

It's about going to have fun and do something that I enjoy doing. Like I could go and shop through the malls. I could go and get my hair done. There's a 101 things that I could do but I don't want to. I choose to go and play the machines. Because I just like playing those games. I know that I'm not going to win and I'll come home and my husband will say, "Well did you win?" And I'll say, "No I didn't but I had fun." (Josephine)

There are a lot of other things to do, but I just don't want to do them. (Pamela)

Part of the appeal of EGM gambling as a source of fun and entertainment was the EGM venues. Women's choice of EGM gambling locations varied. Women from both the individual interviews and the focus groups discussed their venue preferences. Some women only played the machines in casinos (12), some played in bars or lounges (13), and some played in both the casinos and in bars or lounges (9). Those women who preferred the casinos perceived them to be attractive and glamorous.

The minute I walked in there I liked the ambiance. I just liked what I saw. I am a visual person and I am quite artistic so I liked the bright colours and the decor. The place really appealed to me and it still appeals to me. The general decor was beautiful. It was a nice place to spend an evening. (Mary)

I prefer the casino. There's more people. They actually come around and ask if you would like something to a drink, like a hot chocolate. And I just feel more special there. I think because it reminds me of Vegas with all the machines. When you walk in there's a big chandelier and it's quite glamorous. You walk in and you get a different air about you. Maybe it's just me. I don't know but I feel very posh when I go in there and I always make sure that I'm dressed up and look all right. Because that is the ambiance of the place. And God knows we don't go to enough places to get treated like that. And I think we deserve it. (Josephine)

I like going to the casino. I like the ambiance, I like the atmosphere. I like to see new and different things. I like to get gussied up for it. And it's all hyped, everyone is having such a good time and when you're thrown into where people are having a good time it really rubs off. You are also

treated really well there. And the buffets! (Joyce)

Women described enjoying the “whole entertainment package” that can be found in casinos. They liked the fact that in addition to gambling, there are other things to do in casinos. Women could take a break from playing, walk around, “people watch” and enjoy the entertainment and food service.

We just go to the casinos because they have entertainment and they're pretty and they have a restaurant and a great buffet. For me it's just like going to a movie. I know how much it's going to cost me and I am not going to go over. So it's just entertainment. (Maureen)

Sometimes I get bored with the machines, but I also like the entertainment. I love the shows. Or sometimes we will stop gambling and just sit and have a Coke and talk or talk to the people we have met and socialize. Sometimes we have a meal. There are a number of entertainers that I have seen there. Sometimes I'll go just to sit and listen to the entertainment. It's a night out that I really enjoy. (Frances)

There are very nice people to talk to and like I say people don't need to go for just the gambling. You can sit in front of any machine but there are the sights and the people and the entertainment is fabulous. (Joyce)

As a group we gamble for a couple of hours and then we'll have a drink at the bar. Then we might go to the pool and then go eat. It's socializing but you're moving around to the different places in the casino. And then with the bus [tours] we always go shopping. (Michelle)

The casinos were also perceived to be safe.

I would prefer the casino. Because I like the atmosphere. I like the variety of the machines. I don't necessarily walk through the fish tank every time I go, but I like the idea that it's there. It's well taken care of. It's clean. Like you never really see scuzzy people at the casino. I do feel safer going there rather than going to a hotel. I want the safety too and that's why I definitely prefer the casino. It's safer and they have security. You win a thousand dollars at a hotel and they pay you out cash. You're walking to your vehicle with a thousand dollars in your pocket. And I really don't feel safe leaving a hotel because people are watching you. At the casino, if I win a thousand dollars I can get a cheque made out to my name. Then I have a cheque instead of cash in my pocket and security will drive me to my vehicle. (Kathy)

When I asked women if they found anything appealing about the bars or lounges that they frequented to play the VLTs, they did not describe an attraction to bars and lounges in terms of the provision of an attractive environment. The appeal of bars and lounges was that these establishments housed the VLTs and that they were conveniently located. Bars and lounges with VLTs can be found in most neighbourhoods and this geographic accessibility allowed women to choose locations that were close to home, work, or wherever they were when they wanted to play. Some women did mention that they could choose bars and lounges that were clean and a few women appreciated getting to know familiar faces in these establishments. For Caitlyn, part of the appeal of bars and lounges was that they offered some anonymity. Because of negative experiences in past relationships, Caitlyn did not want to form close relationships with people and she changed her EGM playing location if anyone around her became too friendly.

If I start getting people pressuring me about my personal life, I hardly ever go back. Because I'm not there to be buddy, buddy with anyone. And if I choose to talk to anybody it's my choice. So if I feel pressured by anyone I hardly go back. I'm just out spending my money. I don't think I need to explain myself to anyone. (Caitlyn)

In addition to the safety of anonymity, Caitlyn explained that bars and lounges offer a degree of physical safety.

Well they're going to protect you because they want your money. So they're brightly lit and the staff know you're at the machine and they'll watch your machine at half of the places that you go. Because you're spending money and they're making money off you. They do notice you. You're in a safe place. And there are other players around you. There's quite a few people. It's not like you're alone somewhere so it's a safe place to be. (Caitlyn)

The extended hours of operation of both the casinos and bars and lounges allowed

women to play when they were able. Women played EGMs at times that revolved around their work and family schedules. They would stop in to play after work, or play in the evening or as a weekend outing. For women parenting young children, going to play the EGMs was one of the few things they *could* do because of the time constraints imposed by caregiving. As Josephine pointed out, EGM play does not require an appointment or the commitment of large blocks of time.

Well going to a movie or bingo you're looking at two hours and you have to be there at a certain time to start. I don't always have two hours and I never know when I'll be able to get away or if the kids won't go to sleep. This way I can go for an hour in the afternoon or an hour in the evening. I can go when I can go and stay for whatever time I have. (Josephine)

Difficulties with physical health limited a few women's abilities for activity. For Faye, going out to play the EGMs presented an opportunity for something fun to do as well as something that *could* be done.

My husband is older and both of us have health issues. So I can sit at a machine up to two or so hours and you don't feel the pain you would feel if you were standing somewhere doing something else, like shopping for instance. I wouldn't be able to spend two hours on my feet in the mall. (Faye)

Women also perceived EGM gambling to be an affordable source of entertainment. Several women compared the cost of going out to play the machines to other forms of entertainment and felt that EGM gambling provided value for their money. EGM play was perceived as being comparable and in some cases less expensive than other forms of entertainment and allowed women to maintain their entertainment budgets.

So I can take ten dollars or maybe twenty at the most and I can play for a long time with that at a penny machine. And there is quite a variety of them. It's kind of like a fun thing. From my way of thinking I'm going for the entertainment. I am not going with the mind set like a lot of people I know, thinking that they are going to win. I am going more for the

entertainment. So I sit there and I have a little giggle at whatever is going on and I'm happy. (Nadine)

With the penny machines, well you can sit there for two hours and your money is still sitting there. So people like me who don't have a whole lot of money, we'll go play the penny machines. If you want a night out then you can just go and put twenty bucks in the penny machine and you can have your night out. (Daphne)

A few women also took advantage of travel packages to nearby U.S. casinos. These packages often include bus transportation to the casino destination as well as accommodation and gambling tokens or vouchers. Women noted that these trips were offered at a very low cost.

The technology of the machines contributed to women's perceptions of having fun. Most women enjoyed playing the games and they talked about how the machines have changed over time. They explained that when the machines were first introduced in Manitoba, the games were predominantly "spinneys" or line games that involved winning when a particular combination appeared on the screens. This combination might include a pattern of cards, numbers, or objects such as fruits or gold bars. Many of these machines have been replaced with machines that provide games that women described as being more "interactive". These games allow the player to follow a story or achieve different "levels" that come with bonus plays or higher levels of payout prizes. The machines also offer games that emulate popular television games such as "The Price is Right" and "Wheel of Fortune" or popular board games such as "Monopoly." Women also spoke of enjoying the colour, light, and sound effects of the machines.

I enjoy the machines. Some more than others but, all of them have very attractive music, and movement, and sound effects. All of them are very attractive and that's what grabs you. (Patricia)

Now I have to say, I get kind of ... I don't know if "turned on" is the right word because that sounds funny, but it's really a hoot to watch what they've done with these machines. I mean I can sit there and I have a little giggle and watch the characters on the screen. On one game there was a little duck and when you got to the bonus level he was going through mazes. It was fun watching him. That's kind of the fun of it—just to watch things unfold like that and you think "Who has thought of these silly things to entertain people?" The imagination that somebody has put into these VLTs is just phenomenal. (Nadine)

Yes, I like the machines. Some of them play a little cartoon movie. So my goal is to get to see this. That's the attraction these days. For me it's trying to play till you get to see those special screens. And then I'm satisfied. (Natalie)

As noted by Dow Schull (2002) and Turner and Horbay (2004), the manufacturers of the EGMs have been very successful in their attempts to develop technology that provides players with intense entertainment.

Not every woman who participated in the interviews enjoyed the games on the machines. When I asked Caitlyn if she liked the games, her response was negative.

No. They are totally boring, they drive you crazy. You go to a machine and you play Larry Lobster and pretend you are fishing, or you play the Frog Prince and the frog kisses the princess and I think "What an insane world we live in." It's so stupid, but you just push buttons and you kind of unwind. And you just sit there because there's nothing to think about. I mean it's so stupid that you don't have to think about anything. I find the games such an insult to your intelligence. The games take your money just so you can have some space. It's not the games, it's the escape. The games are totally ridiculous. They're actually an insult to your intelligence if you have any. (Caitlyn)

Even though Caitlyn did not enjoy the games, however, EGM gambling served other purposes for her.

### ***Thrill/Excitement.***

As a source of fun and entertainment, EGM play also provided women with a level of thrill and excitement that is not available in other entertainment activities.

I guess at night I could read, but it just doesn't give me that release that playing the machines does. I want a little bit of excitement too. Because there is an excitement there. I could go for an hour and I could play on the same money. It's excitement. So it gives me that little bit of buzz that I need where lot of activities like reading would not. (Kathy)

Several women mentioned the "rush" or "adrenaline rush" that they experience while playing. Even though women were not necessarily expecting to win money, winning or nearly winning was fun and exciting. As well, some of the games on the machines are perceived as challenging and just "beating the machine" provided thrill.

Sometimes I feel like it's a challenge to try to win. It's a thrill. It's excitement for me. (Crystal)

If they didn't have money or if you didn't play for money, that would be irrelevant to me. It's the action of the game itself and the challenge of the game and the fun of the game that's really what I like. (Rebecca)

They give me a bit of excitement. There is a zing you get when you hit the bonus whether it's a guy picking up the lobster or a frog kissing a frog prince. Whatever it is, it's excitement. It seems like a vicarious type of ... excitement in our lives. It just gives a bit of a thrill. (Donna)

Josephine and Mary-Jo, whose lives were immersed in child-care responsibilities, compared the excitement of playing EGMs to the lack of excitement at home.

I get so excited because there's not a lot of excitement in here [home] you know. I'm still just in this little space and it's just me and my little game. But it's the excitement and the rush when you hit something and you go "Oh my God" and you look up and you've won \$5. That's a few more spins. (Josephine)

I like to meet people there and just socialize and I like the excitement of the place. It's just an adult area where there are no children and I would look forward to getting there and playing the machine. And it's like waiting for the excitement or something, you know, cause you're getting no excitement at home. (Mary-Jo)

The fact that the women in this study found that EGM gambling provided fun and entertainment is consistent with general population surveys examining gambling

behaviour that report that fun and entertainment are key motivations to gamble (Azmier, 2001; Smitheringale, 2003). Research specifically examining gambling among women has also found that women gamble to have fun and be entertained (Berry et al., 2002; Boughton & Brewster, 2002) and view gambling as a form of leisure (Trevorrow & Moore, 1998). EGM gambling provides a forum in which to meet the basic need for relaxation, enjoyment, and time away from responsibilities. The appeal of the casinos reported by women in this study is also consistent with other research that has documented women's perceptions of casinos as providing attractive, friendly, safe environments (Berry et al.; Hallebone, 1999, Trevorrow & Moore). Unlike previous research which has found that women gamble because of a lack of other entertainment or leisure options (Brown & Coventry, 1997; Boughton & Brewster), women in this study stated that they did have other options for leisure. However, these options did not offer the thrill and excitement available through EGM gambling.

As noted in the literature review, women's leisure is constrained by the demands of their caregiving role and by economic factors (Shaw, 1994). The extended hours of operation of the EGM venues fit with the time constraints on women's leisure. For women with limited financial means, it is important that allotting a small amount of money can provide a few hours of entertainment. Thus, EGM gambling also fits within the economic constraints experienced by some women, a finding that parallels women's attraction to bingo halls found by Dixey and Talbot (1982).

### ***Independence and Rebellion***

EGM gambling provided women with an opportunity to assert autonomy.

Compared to past decades, women today can make more choices regarding the types of



activities in which they participate. Women perceived that playing the machines was an avenue of choice and independence.

You feel independent. You feel like you are making a choice about what to do and how to spend your money. You're not being told what to do, you're not being controlled. If you blow it [money], you feel bad - but you have the control. You know you have your own say in what you're doing. There's no one telling you anything like go do the dishes or pick up the mess like they did in my mother's era. I would rather have someone kill me before living in that era. That era was crazy. And so I think this is the way women feel they're independent. They're independent and they make choices. It might not be a good choice playing that machine, but it's a choice, and it's an independent choice. I think it's healthy in a way, maybe not financially, but psychologically healthy. (Caitlyn)

I am at a point in life—I turned forty something years old and I am not suffering [financially]. This is my form of entertainment and if I want to spend fifty bucks, eighty bucks, a hundred bucks, it's okay. (Stacey)

And gambling is non-gender [both men and women can gamble]. I don't really fit into that mind set that says that women stay at home and be the housewives. Maybe it's kind of like if you can't beat them join them. And women have their money to do what they want with. (Natalie)

I mean there was a time when women didn't have the freedom to go out of the house without having a reason for going out of the house. They couldn't leave the house without having to report to somebody and having to justify the money that came out of the joint bank account. There was no independence or very little independence. In today's society it's [playing EGMs] just one of the things that you might choose to do. (Faye)

Women enjoyed having the freedom to go out and to spend their time and money on an activity that they chose.

Casinos were perceived to be appropriate places for women and most women felt they could attend casinos accompanied or alone. Women also perceived that it has become increasingly acceptable for women to be alone in lounges and bars if they are playing the machines. If women are playing the EGMs, the purpose of their visit to a lounge or bar is clear. They are there to play the machines and do not want be "hit on."

I am walking into them [bars] alone. Like 10 years ago I would have never walked into a bar alone. I mean I have always had to be escorted by my husband or by a male, you know. It was not the proper thing to do for a lady to walk into a bar. Like before if I was going into a bar I was going into a bar to have a drink. Now I'm not going into the bar to drink, I'm going into the bar to have a machine. So there are not as many men in there that would be half cut to try and pick you up. Because now they are spending all their money on the VLTs which is what you are doing. In the past, you went and sat down at a bar and some man might want to buy you a beer. But if you are at a machine, nobody is going to offer you a quarter to play the machine. Now you go in there and it's okay. (Belinda)

You're just playing a game and you're not drinking. People used to go to bars just to drink but now they have these machines in there and you can just have a ginger ale or coffee and play. (Mary-Jo)

Part of the reason why more women are going now is that it's an acceptable thing. Now if you walk in the whole bar doesn't stop because you've walked in. I think it's more acceptable. It's more of an acceptable thing now and I think that some of the bars cleaned up a little bit once they got the VLTs which makes it better. (Rebecca)

Heater and Patton (2006) examined gender differences in gambling patterns among Manitobans and expected to find that more women would gamble in casinos than in bars because casinos were thought to be more acceptable locations for women. Contrary to this expectation, they found that women were just as likely to gamble in hotels, bars and restaurants as in casinos. The statements made by women in the current study suggest that the placement of EGMs in bars and lounges has defined these locations as being acceptable public spaces for women.

Although women perceived an increase in the social acceptance of gambling, the image of gambling is double-sided. Women also described the negative image attached to this activity. Despite increased social acceptance, gambling may still be frowned upon and women who participated in the study were very much aware of the persistent negative image of gambling.

The image is negative, definitely negative. You wonder what people think about you. The fact that I gamble is not something that I go advertise. I wouldn't go to work and say "Oh I went to the casino this weekend and blew a hundred bucks"...no I wouldn't. If I went and won two hundred I wouldn't be bragging about that either. You only tell certain people. (Stacey)

You mention the word gambling and people say it's the government taxing people with a weakness. I don't think the image is anything positive. If it's young people gambling you look at them and say they are way too young. If you look at middle aged people you question whether they can afford it and whether they are gambling their rent money. If you look at old people you think they are gambling away their pension cheques. That's the image. Nobody thinks about anything good that people might get out of it. (Nicole)

And some of your friends look at you as if to say "Oh you're going gambling! Don't you have anything else to do with your money or better to do with your money?" I just think that we have worked for our money and it's none of their business how we spend it. But people put you down. (Michelle)

You always have to defend yourself or defend that you are choosing to gamble. (Crystal)

For some women, the appeal of playing the machines lay in the negative image of gambling. The "badness" of gambling creates a sense of risk and adventure and provided an avenue for rebellion.

They [VLTs] provide me with a sense of ... I don't know how to explain it, but some men like to go skydiving or whitewater rafting or whatever. They give me a thrill in my life. They give me my adrenaline rush without having to kill myself. Like I would never skydive, I would never whitewater raft, I would never bungy jump, I would never do any of that stuff. This is my little excitement. (Patricia)

I have to say when we go to South Beach [casino] I enjoy it. I don't know ...it's the freedom. It's the lack of restrictions. I like that. It's kind of like living on the edge you know, reaching for that forbidden apple. (Stacey)

When the casino first came I used go and play. It was very, very moderate. Then the racetrack got VLTs and I would play there. But again, it wasn't extreme. And then I started working at the casino. While I was working at

the casino, well of course you're not supposed to play anywhere in Manitoba. I think it was maybe because it was because it was forbidden that I wanted to play. I wasn't supposed to play in Manitoba. (Denise)

Glenda was still healing from her experience in residential school that has continued to influence her adult life. She described using the EGMs as a way of rebelling from the need to be considered perfect and responsible.

I've always wanted to be a perfectionist. They [residential school staff] wanted us to be perfect little kids. And then I wanted to be perfect for my kids. But I think that too is a problem with the way I was brought up. I had priests and nuns who were hypocrites. They would brainwash me for 13 years. So I think it [VLT gambling] has a lot to do with that too. I wanted to be bad and .... I didn't want to be good anymore. So I kind of lashed out. (Glenda)

The theme of independence and rebellion is consistent with other research that has found that women gamble as a form of freedom and resistance to restrictions imposed by stereotypical gender roles (Boughton & Brewster, 2002; Lesieur & Blume, 1991). This theme reflects women's gains in freedom and equality as well as their resistance to stereotypes regarding appropriate feminine behaviour.

### ***Social Functions***

EGM gambling also served important social functions in women's lives. Going out to play EGMs provided an opportunity for social interaction and an opportunity for social connection.

#### ***Interaction With Others.***

For many women, going to play the EGMs was a time to be social. Women reported that they enjoyed talking to people in the venues where they played. This included people that accompanied them to the venues or people that they met while playing.

There was a woman I really enjoyed spending time with and we would go play and chat and sometimes we would share games. And you know it's very odd, you share games with people that you don't know. If you win, you share the winnings. So it definitely, definitely became more of a place to see people and chat. (Dawn)

I do interact. People that know me will describe me as outgoing. I love meeting people from all walks of life and you meet such a cross section of people because there's not one type of person that likes to gamble. I just like talking to different people. (Frances)

I talk to everybody at the machines next to me. I'm very social, I talk a lot (laughs). I definitely find it a social outing. (Kathy)

Women would chat with other people while they were playing the machines or while they were taking a break from playing.

Some of the women with whom I spoke described EGM playing in the context of their social networks. They described gambling with their partners and/or belonging to social networks that consisted of friends or family members who also liked to play EGMs. Going to play EGMs became a regular social activity and was perceived to enhance social relationships.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the things that I find that attracts us as a couple is that it is something we can do together. (Faye)

I've got quite a few friends that like playing them too. I'll meet my girlfriend downtown sometimes and we'll play right in The Bay. We'll play and bet and then we'll go sit and have coffee after or whatever. (Nicole)

I have a couple of different girlfriends that like to go so I like to spread it out. I go with one girlfriend one time, and then maybe another week I'll go with another girlfriend because they all like to go just as much as I do. So I think there are a couple of us that may be a little closer if anything. We'll go to dinner too but they like to gamble a lot so if anything we see each other more often because it's like a ritual. You make it a point of going out and getting together on a certain night. (Frances)

Women looked forward to going out, having fun, and having an opportunity to be with their friends and family. For these women, going out to play the machines was seen as an opportunity to socialize, and social interaction was an important part of their experience. This is consistent with other research that has found that women perceive gambling as a social activity that involved an opportunity to interact with other people (Berry et al., 2002; Hallebone, 1997).

In contrast to those women who enjoyed chatting with others while they played the machines, a number of women stated that they did not want any social interaction while they were playing EGMs. They preferred to play in relative solitude.

I really resent it when people talk to me. I really do because that's my quiet time. I don't want to listen to anyone. (Gayle)

I'd rather not talk to anybody. I'm just there to play. (Cynthia)

The desire to avoid interaction is related to the "time out" theme that will be also be presented in this chapter.

### ***Social Connection.***

Previous research examining women who gamble has found that although gambling venues are perceived to be social spaces, little social interaction occurs among the women within these venues (Boughton & Brewster, 2002; Brown & Coventry, 1997). In the current study, some of the women with whom I spoke emphasized the importance of being in a social environment rather than the importance of social interaction. Whether or not women do in fact like to interact with other people, playing provided a sense of social connection. It was a time to be around other people, even if there was no individual interaction. For example, although Caitlyn did not want to get too friendly with anyone,

she wanted to be around other people.

So this was my space to myself and I could find some excitement and just you know ... be out and have fun without mingling with people... I can get the energy and have the odd chit chat, but I can walk when I want to. It's not a committed relationship, it's not a committed situation. I find it's like being out, away from home, because it does get pretty lonely day after day, month after month, year after year by yourself. And then you need the energy, human energy, and that's my little escape. (Caitlyn)

The desire for social connection was most evident among women who were socially isolated. While Caitlyn chose to isolate herself to some extent, other women described being socially isolated without choosing to be so. This isolation stemmed from a variety of sources. Some women did not have a network of friends or acquaintances with whom to share company or activities. A changed relationship status created by separation, divorce, or becoming a widow created isolation for some women. For example, after separating from her husband, Daphne experienced loneliness.

I just enjoy going out with my neighbour. I don't go out with anybody else. You know it gets pretty lonely sitting here by yourself. All my friends are married and they don't go out with single people. They go out with their husbands. So when you become single again you sit in the house by yourself. The summer was a nightmare for me. It was pretty lonely. So you know to go out with my neighbour to the casino on a Saturday morning meant the world. Because it gave me something to do out of the house. All of the people I work with are younger. I don't drink and I don't do drugs and they are into that kind of stuff. I think one thing that is really against me is that I don't drive. I have epilepsy so I don't drive. You know, if I had a car, that probably would make a difference for me because then I could go anywhere I want. (Daphne)

Other women experienced isolation that was related to their roles. For example, the demands of caring for children can be experienced as isolating because of limited adult contact in day to day routines. This was very pronounced for Mary-Jo who was raising a child with disabilities. The demands of caring for her daughter around the clock

kept Mary-Jo at home most of the time. Going out to play EGMs while a respite worker cared for her daughter a few times a week was her only opportunity to share adult company and interaction and to escape the confines of her home and demanding routine.

I felt like I needed to go to these places where they had VLTs just so I could talk to other people. Sometimes it was just more of a social thing instead of playing the VLTs. I would meet friends there and we would laugh and we would talk together. And you would meet new friends there, other ladies... So it was more I think for a social thing. You can sit there and drink coffee and socialize with adults and so I think that's what it was for me. I wasn't really in it for the money. (Mary-Jo)

For some women the need for social connection was a function of changing roles. For example, after she retired, engaging in a popular activity with many other people made Faye feel as if she was a part of the current culture.

It's like going to a show, only in this case it's doing something else and you feel like you are part of the current culture. Now that I have retired I don't have a lot of interaction with people the way I did when I worked, so for me it's like being at work where you are at your desk doing your own thing in a group of people. And that's what you are doing at the machine as well. You are doing your own thing—in a group of people. And if you are inclined to talk to strangers, people are always willing to talk to you in an informal way, so there is real social interaction. (Faye)

When all of Belinda's children left home, being around people in the casino was better than facing an empty house.

Just something to fill that emptiness that you had after being so busy all the time. All kinds of people come to the casino. Lonely people, people that don't have any children anymore, people who are just not needed anymore. Most of the times it's not even about the winning, it's just being amongst people. You know just being somewhere where there are other people. (Belinda)

Lada explained how she used being in the social environment of the EGM venue to create the illusion of sociability. She frequented a neighbourhood lounge where she played the VLTs in her favourite spot in the corner of the room. She could watch



everyone around her and “pretend” to be social.

So I’m really isolated and gambling is a way for me to look socially okay. I think my whole life I’ve been isolated and it’s really hard for me to feel socially adequate. You know I think for me I go back to the social. It looks like I’m socializing, it looks like I’m talking to people, it looks like I’m being accepted in an environment where I would not normally be. It breaks the isolation and yet it’s more isolating when you really look at it. You don’t talk to anybody and you don’t want anybody talking to you. (Lada)

If she won while playing, Lada shared the money with other people sitting in the lounge.

This was another way to appear social.

If I win a thousand dollars I’ll cash it in and give everybody in the place ten bucks. And then everyone’s your buddy for five minutes. After that they don’t even know who the hell you are. (Lada)

Other research has documented the importance of the social connection available in gambling venues to women’s experience. Dixey and Talbot (1982) found that bingo halls provided women with a suitable space to be with other women and to have non-intimate social contact. Surgey and Seibert (2002) found that some women who participated in EGM gambling sought “time in” a social environment even if little actual interaction took place.

### ***Time Out***

In their study *Playing for Time: Exploring the Impacts of Gambling on Women*, Surgey and Seibert (2000) used a time metaphor to describe the experiences of women who gambled on EGMs in Australia. This metaphor also matched the experiences of the women in the current study. As the interviewing progressed, it became very evident that most of the women who participated in this study were not playing EGMs for the purpose of winning money. In fact, most of the women with whom I spoke played for time.

I love to win, but I don't have to win. I just want to be playing. If somebody could just give me enough money to play for hours and hours and hours, that's all I want. I don't necessarily have to win. I just wanna play. Just let me play for hours. (Ashley)

Similar to the findings of the study by Hing and Breen (2001), many of the women in the current study used playing strategies that allowed them to maximize their time on the machines. These strategies included playing penny and nickel machines, placing low bets, reinvesting any winnings in the machines, and sharing winnings with whomever accompanied them so that time on the machines could be prolonged.

As a group we used to share the prizes. So it kind of kept us going all evening, but it wasn't really paying us anything. We weren't even getting half of our money back. But it didn't matter. It was just enough to keep us going, to keep as at the machine. When I went with a few other girlfriends we would laugh because the casino rule was you never left with money. (Belinda)

The nickel and penny machines intrigued me. I mean it wasn't that you won more but you could play longer. (Josephine)

Playing for time allowed women to have "time out" from responsibilities, from the needs and demands of other people, from worrying, and from negative emotions. Caitlyn summarized this theme when she stated:

It [playing the machines] gives you time out. Just time out. Time out from *whatever*. That's it. (Caitlyn)

### ***Time for Me.***

Women were involved in work and family roles with many responsibilities. In addition to providing women with the opportunity to have a needed break or "time out" from these responsibilities, playing EGMs also provided a time for women to focus on themselves and their own enjoyment. This sub-theme was most pronounced among the women who were mothers or grandmothers raising their grandchildren. These women

had little access to personal time or space and in some cases going out to play EGMs was the only time women took a break from the demands that were made on them.

I want a place that I can go where there are no children. I don't want to have to go into the malls and hear kids screaming, I can stay home for that. It's [the casino] a place where I can go and it's something I enjoy and I don't have to be accountable to the people that are in there. No one is saying "Can you get me a coffee?" "Can you run and get me a drink?" "Can you get me a sippy cup?" "Can you change my bum?" I don't have to hear all that. This is just *for me*. It's my time. It's like my own little space, my own little world where nobody comes in, nobody bothers me, nobody is demanding anything of me. I just push that button and if I don't want to push it, the machine doesn't jump up and say "Hey lady push that button." It's my own little space to go. (Josephine)

I always say I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't really have a lot of extra things that I do. And this [playing EGMs] would be, my entertainment. Like my personal entertainment. Because I don't have a lot of time at home to do anything other than work. Whether it is my business or my kids or housework or whatever. So this is *my time*. (Kathy)

You need that time to yourself. To just be responsible for no one and nothing. Because women have always been known to be nurturers. We take care of everything—kids, pets, the house. You're always *nurturing* things and sometimes it's like "Hey you know, what about me?" (Caitlyn)

Women described how juggling the demands of both work and family also contributed to this need for "me time."

I work full-time and then I have the house and the kids. Sometimes I just need a little break after work. Sometimes I'm not ready to deal with the house and the kids. (Candice)

But like I say it's my escape. My plate is so full. Sometimes I just need that time. Just half an hour to myself. I zone everybody out and I just get in tune with myself... When I go play the VLTs I feel like I'm saying "Don't bother me." That is my time and I will face the problems when I get home. They'll be waiting at the door for me anyways so.... (Cherise)

These findings are consistent with many of the findings reported in the existing literature on women's gambling. Berry et al. (2002), Brown and Coventry (1997), and

Boughton and Brewster (2002) also found that women gambled to take a break from work and family responsibilities. Women in Dow Schull's (2002) study of video poker "addicts" reported that EGM gambling provided them with an escape from the relentless demands of caregiving and Surgey and Seibert (2000) also reported that women who identified as problem gamblers gambled to obtain "time out" from those responsibilities associated with their gendered roles as caregivers. This parallels the purpose of EGM gambling described by women in the current study even though these women had not necessarily experienced problems with their gambling.

Going *out* to play EGMs was important to women with children because they felt that it was necessary to physically leave their homes in order to have time for themselves. For these women, home was not a place for rest or leisure because there was always something to do.

And to me hobbies at home would be more of a chore again. And you don't really have time to relax because the kids always want you or there is something that needs to be done. Or when the kids are in bed I think that I should be on the computer doing something for my business. So I want to do something totally out of the house. (Kathy)

Because once I get them home from school, my whole time is devoted to the children. You know making sure they have everything they need. When supper is over well then I've got baths, dance, everything else you see. So believe me dear, this is a place for me to go where I just .... I love my family and I love everything that I have to do, I really do. But *this is just for me*, and sometimes I just need to go out and get away. Go and just [sighs] breeeeathe. (Josephine)

Sometimes I can't even go into the bathroom and take a hot bath and soak without my daughter coming in and saying "Mom, I need...." I have no privacy. I also do the walking thing, but I always take my cell phone and the kids phone me. When I go to play the VLTs it's my only time. (Cherise)

Similarly, Dixey and Talbot (1982) noted that bingo provided women with an

opportunity to get out of the house to have some leisure time and space. Being away from home was particularly important because the demands of family members did not allow for leisure within the home.

Women felt that they were entitled to take this time for themselves and they defended the time as well as the cost of the time.

Well I know with me working and having my own income at least I feel that I can go and do an outing like this. And I know I'm not going to overspend. But if there is some extra money in our account, yes by all means that's going to be my entertainment, not my husband's. This is my entertainment money. Because I feel that I don't get the release during the day. At least he goes to an office, he's socializing all day long with his co-workers. He goes out for lunch every once in a while and those kinds of things. And to me this is my outing and if I only do it once every two to three weeks, let me tell you that's money well deserved for me. (Kathy)

Back in my mind I think "Hey, I need a chance to spend my money on what I enjoy doing." I like playing VLTs even when there is some yucky stuff [financial ramifications] after. I make my own money. So why can't I do what I want with my hard earned money. I earned it. That's what I would tell myself. I'd rather do that than go drinking. (Glenda)

Several minutes of the first focus group was spent discussing the idea of how women's roles influenced their EGM play. The discussion revolved around family and parenting roles and how now that their children were older it was time for the women to take time for themselves. "Me time" was justified by the years they had spent looking after the needs of their families.

All these years everybody else has been getting everything. You go through life and it's like I am living for my husband and my children. I am doing everything I can to make them happy. We just put our two girls through university, five years each. And now I think it's my turn. It's *pay back time* for me. It's for me now. I have found something that I really like. (Ashley)

For so many years we never took time for ourselves. We did everything...we took care of the family, the house and work and we did

the birthdays and we did this and that. Now it's our turn. (Pamela)

We spent so many years doing what other people expected of us that you find you are at a point in your life that you don't have to think about any of that. And you tell yourself "Okay, now I am going to take time for me." And I am not going to feel guilty about it. (Gayle)

### *Distraction and Escape.*

EGM gambling also provided women with an opportunity to have time out from thinking about life issues and challenges. While playing EGMs, women were temporarily distracted or escaped from stress, negative emotions, and everyday worries. Women explained that the machines have very absorbing qualities that allow for this escape. While sitting in front of a machine staring at the screen women become so focussed that they can "zone out" or "tune everything out" and "forget about everything."

You're really focussed on your own machine. You don't think about what is going on around you. You don't think period. You get tunnel vision sitting in front of the machine. (Melanie)

I think we play because it's something that we don't have to think about. We can just go and totally just get rid of everything in our minds and just zone out. I really believe that. I am thinking all day from the time my alarm goes off in the morning and sending my kids to school and running around all day long and if I do have a break, why wouldn't I want to just zone out? (Kathy)

Women described playing EGMs to escape from the stress that stemmed from a variety of sources. Karen and Gayle described escaping from work related stressors.

Work was very stressful. And that [VLTs] was my getaway. I didn't want to talk to anybody, I didn't want to answer any phones and I didn't want to be at home. So I'd go, and I'd play. Have a few cocktails because I was stressed out and I met a whole schwack of other people, kind of doing the same thing I was doing. But I always found that I just didn't know when to stop. (Karen)

Well I am not working right now and I don't want to work again. And I don't know what's going to happen with the disability [insurance]. So I

constantly think about it. "Oh, do I have to go back to work? What am I going to do? Where am I going to make the kind of money I made as a nurse?" I have always been like that. I have always been that way. I always worry about things before they happen and it may never happen, but I worry about it. So those kinds of thoughts are there, but when I am at the casino I don't think any of that stuff at all. (Gayle)

For Cynthia, playing VLTs provided an escape from the stress associated with parenting and family issues.

For me parenting is very complex and very stressful. I've got the 14 year old living at home doing a lot of stealing and ... my husband just got off the phone with the school and they're having a problem with him at school. He's very defiant, ....I'm just having a lot of trouble just trying to parent the 14 year old and I'm sick to my stomach with it. I've been falling into a really bad depression with him because I don't know what to do. And my 17 year old has been getting into trouble. So for me sometimes it's like, "Okay I've got to get out of here, I've got to remove myself from the situation." And if I've got the money that's when I go and gamble. I think the whole scenario of my whole family life influences my playing. (Cynthia)

Denise had experienced negative financial consequences because of her gambling.

Ironically, playing EGMs allowed her to escape from the stress created by her financial situation.

Just to sit and hopefully last a while and just relax, you know. It takes your mind off of everything else while you are there. Unless you are blowing bill money. Then, of course, you're still stressed. But if you're not actually blowing bill money and you've got a few bucks it does take your mind off stuff. (Denise)

Health issues created stress in Dawn's life and EGM gambling provided relief from this stress.

The machines would take me away from everything that's going on around me. The break from stress, almost like a hideout. Nobody could find me if I was there. I guess I just think about when I was through all the stuff with disability and that...I didn't have to think about medication or doctors, or lawyers, or my husband, or my family or what they thought. (Dawn)

Playing EGMs also served the purpose of escaping negative emotions associated with difficult life experiences. For example, women played to deflect anxiety, sadness, depression, and anger. Lada described her time playing EGMs as “a commercial break” from her life and noted that playing was a time not to feel pain.

Sometimes my life can be really chaotic and unsafe. I come from a family where it was not very good. I have 10 brothers and sisters, six of whom have committed suicide. I have nieces and nephews who have committed suicide. So there is a lot of sadness and stuff and it [the machines] gives you a little bit of a break from that kind of stuff. (Lada)

Glenda and Donna made similar comments.

I would go there when I was angry. When I felt unappreciated, all the negative stuff right? And like I say it's [playing the VLTs] a mood alterer for me. I don't have to worry about anybody, just me and the machine. (Glenda)

I think it's like what Cherise said, it's an escape from reality...I started doing it when I was in a difficult relationship. My boyfriend at that time liked to bet on the races and when they got the VLTs at the racetrack I started going with him. I wasn't too happy with the way things were going so I started playing and then I found them [VLTs] more of an escape. When I was upset with things in the relationship and the problems in my life I'd go. It would be like an escape. (Donna)

Existing gambling literature frequently reports that women who gamble and women who develop problems with their gambling, gamble as a form of escapism. For example, women gamble to escape stress and worry (Berry et al., 2002; Boughton, 2003) and painful memories and experiences associated with loss and abuse (Hallebone, 1999). Lesieur (1987) noted that more than half of the women in his study of female pathological gamblers gambled as a way to escape overwhelming problems. Some of the women in the current study also described playing EGMs to take their minds off troubling matters. However, the desire for distraction and escape was not only connected



to negative life situations. As many women commented, playing can be a time to escape even if they had nothing in their lives "to escape from." These women were not necessarily overwhelmed by negative life situations or events and were generally happy and satisfied with their lives. Playing was simply a time not to think or worry and to be distracted from everyday life. It was a time for not thinking about the hundreds of responsibilities, chores, and mundane details that occupy much of daily life.

Playing the machines gives pleasure. Pleasure, and what kind of word am I looking for about slot machines ...I guess peace of mind too. There's something about sitting there just playing. I seem to forget about everything else. I think you forget about all your worries. [Playing provides] distraction from other things. Cause there's no way when you are playing you are thinking "Oh what am I going to make for supper tomorrow." So maybe that's selfish, but I think it's good...it feels good. (Michelle)

They give me an escape from reality. I find I go into my own little world. I might have problems with my children who are typical teenagers setting out on new adventures. I have everyday pressure from working full-time and coming home, preparing supper and making sure the kids' homework is done. When I play the VLTs I don't think about those things. I find the VLTs is my time. I don't like to play them that often and I don't spend my whole pay cheque. I've got a limited amount of money I take and that's it – I won't go over that budget. It's just getting into your own little world. A two year old can operate the machine because you just push a button and that's all you do. You don't have to think. (Cherise)

It just takes you to another world. It's almost like soap operas. It takes you to another world, your escape. It's an escape. It's not that I have to escape. I don't have a bad life that I have to escape from. But it's the everyday stuff. It's just something that just takes you away for a bit. (Stacey)

Like other leisure activities, EGM gambling simply provided a time out from daily existence. Women chose to have this "escape" time and to temporarily take a break from whatever their lives held. They were not under any illusion, however, that playing would actually solve any problems.

Because we know where reality is and we know it exists just outside that door and when I go out I am picking it up on the way out. When I go in I drop it at the door. (Gayle)

*Time to Think.*

In contrast to those women who viewed EGM play as a time out from thinking, a few women described how playing EGMs provided them with time to think or reflect. The machines do not necessarily require a high level of skill or concentration so playing does not require thinking. While they would sit in front of the machines, they would think about how to approach and handle various issues and challenges at home or at work.

Something new had come up and it was going to involve making a big new plan for how I could work things out, logistically speaking, to move some horses up from the States. I was thinking about all this stuff and when I would sit somewhere at home I wouldn't be able think straight. So I went to the local watering hole, which can be a really quiet place so I don't have to think very hard about what I'm doing on the screen. I had all these thoughts running through my head but they were all jumbled up. And I was just thinking and sorting things through. So I don't know that I came up with the answer that night but I just thought about it while I played and I always do that. (Natalie)

Despite the fact that EGM playing was women's time to take a break and have time for themselves, some mothers used the time in the relative solitude of the EGM venues to think about family issues.

Well it is boring in a way but I find it boring because I go into my own little world. I clue everybody out around me. I don't hear anything. Then as I am pressing these buttons I think "Okay now, how am I going to deal with this situation? Junior hasn't got his assignment done and it's due. So what can I do?" And I think about it as I am pushing this button. I think of things and I'm problem solving. It kind of comes to me and then when I am finished playing my money I walk away and say "Okay now I know how to deal with this situation." (Cherise)

Because even though I sit there and play, I still sit and think. And to me it's like therapy...like self-healing and self-teaching. I think "Did I do that right?" "Was there another way I could've handled that situation?" And a

lot of times that's how I do work through a lot of things going on. (Josephine)

***Time for Rejuvenation.***

Given that women played EGMs for a break from their responsibilities and as a time for distraction or escape, it does not seem surprising that for some women, playing provided rejuvenation. Having a reprieve from demands, responsibilities, stress, negative emotions, and everyday life allowed women to feel refreshed and energized.

So you come back and other than the fact that your pocketbook is lighter, you are refreshed. (Stacey).

So it [playing the machines] would be a little release too. If I have had a really busy day and then I go play I come home feeling good and I'll be like "Okay, what do I need to do now?" And I'll do whatever needs to be done. (Kathy)

So I just sit there and I play. I may lose and if I win it's a bonus for me. If not, well I still got out and had a good time. And I got away from the children and I got away from the house. That gives me a different outlook on things. (Josephine)

Women explained that after they had taken an afternoon or evening to themselves they felt ready to face any challenges awaiting them at home or at work.

The 'time out' theme derived from the data analysis is consistent with the notion that leisure activities help to manage and cope with life demands. Individuals use various leisure activities to provide themselves with time and space in which to focus on themselves and women find this particularly important because they are responsible for taking care of other people (Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000). Leisure can also buffer the impact of negative life events by providing distraction (Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002). Finally, leisure provides a time out from stressful everyday lives and allows for "individuals under stress to feel refreshed and gain renewed energy and perspective, and

to help them to regroup to handle stressors” (Iwasaki et al., 2005, p. 4). The sub-themes of “time for me,” “distraction or escape,” “time to think,” and “time for rejuvenation” help to explain some women’s preference for playing alone and/or not interacting with anyone while they play. As noted by Dow Schull (2002), going out to play the EGMs is a time when some women are purposely trying to get away from having to be with other people and from meeting relational demands. Therefore, they do not want to interact. This contrasts Boughton’s (2003) assertion that women’s choice of games is due to a relational orientation to the world and their desire for connection and intimacy. In fact, for some women, the choice of EGMs reflects the desire to achieve the escape provided by the machines.

### *Filling a Void*

Some of the women who participated in the study described using EGM gambling to fill a void that they experienced in their lives. These women turned to the machines as a means of replacing something that they felt was missing or lost in their lives. This “something” was usually a combination of factors related to unhappy, absent, or lost relationships and lost or changing roles.

When her son reached adulthood, Melanie no longer needed to take care of him and this left her with more time on her hands. However, her social network consisted of women with younger children and these women were busy with childcare and children’s activities. Melanie no longer participated in such activities and was often alone during her free time.

My son is in his own relationship. He's old enough now. I don't really need to be nurturing him that much. So part of my thing [playing VLTs] is boredom. Who wants to go home to an empty house? (Melanie)

Women described being unhappy in their current partner relationships and turning to the machines to compensate for qualities they perceived to be lacking in these relationships. For example, in addition to having more time on her hands with reduced childrearing responsibilities, Melanie was also in a relationship that she described as missing important elements.

I think it's my relationship that I do have with this person. It's not too healthy. It's not an emotional or an intimate relationship and I think maybe that's why I go do it [play VLTs] because I'm lacking that. Well at least it [VLTs] gets your adrenaline going. Like if I'm not getting it from him, well I might as well get it from the machines. (Melanie)

Donna had recently retired because of her hearing impairment. In addition, she was unhappy with the relationships that she had in her life. She looked to the EGMs for some comfort to compensate for unhappy relationships.

Basically I was unhappy with almost everybody in my life. I wasn't having a lot of success with my work because of my hearing. I just wasn't happy with any of my relationships....my family, my friends, my partner. (Donna)

In contrast to women who participated in EGM gambling to take a break from the demands of childrearing, a few women turned to EGM gambling to fill the void created by declining childrearing responsibilities. Having children grow up and become less dependent could be a difficult transition for women. Facing the empty nest after her children grew up was very difficult for Belinda.

I have worked all my life. I had seven children of my own and I raised a grandson from when he was small and so I had raised eight children. So I was very busy with kids and I was a working mom and you didn't have the time for yourself. So then after my kids grew up and started having their own children, eventually I just had the one adult son at home and eventually it was just my grandson who was an adult and was able to look after himself. So there was no need for me. It made me lonely. It was like after being busy all your life and giving, giving, giving to somebody else

and always taking care of somebody else, and then what do I do? All of a sudden I have nobody to take care of! You know, I have nothing to do with my time. A lot of it was that I was no longer needed at home. It was a sad part of my life. You know so that was my reason for going to the machines. (Belinda)

While some women experienced retirement as a time of increased freedom, this transition could also be difficult. Retirement was not what Nadine expected and she found EGM playing could fill the void created by time and boredom.

I guess for myself this retired thing is not always fun. Although I'm getting better, some days I find that I am at loose ends. I think, "What am I going to do today?" And I guess I have to be honest and say that sometimes, maybe I am bored. So to hop in the car and go to the casino, that is an escape from the day to day life that is...maybe somewhat quiet? But I guess that's what I meant by escape. What else is there to do that is maybe a little bit different? (Nadine)

In recent years Mary experienced the death of several family members and her ex-husband. At the same time, her children became independent adults. Although she had a part-time job, she had retired from her life-long profession. These transitions proved difficult for Mary who had been raised with the belief that one should always be busy. She turned to the EGMs to fill the void created by the changes in her life.

It got pretty bad in the past five years actually. But then there were many other aspects of my life that got worse in the past five years. And this is why this [EGM gambling] has been my out. You know you have many losses as you get older and in the past 10 years I have lost 12 members of my family and some good friends. And now my ex husband passed away last year. So after every one of the deaths, especially since my parents passed away, it's like such an emptiness in your life. The people that you cared for throughout your whole life and had close bonds with are now gone and it leaves a big emptiness in your life and you fill it with something that you think will fill that void for a few hours. So therefore for me it was gambling. (Mary)

Mary further explained,

When you get older like at my age, 57 or 58, it's much harder to make

friends and the ones that you have had and your close family members are gone. There's a big emptiness that comes into your life as you age I find. And you end up doing a lot more things alone. Although you have your children they don't fill your whole life. They are all up and gone and having their own life. They're not always there. It's not like when they were two years old in the house and you were so busy. They're busy too with their boyfriends and going here and there. So sometimes you find yourself very much alone. So then you go out. (Mary)

Mary and Lada described developing a relationship with the machines. EGMs were used as a substitute for lost or unhappy relationships. The "friendship" of the machines was comforting for Mary when other people were not there for her.

VLTs or slot machines, they just provide a type of companionship even. Yes, they become like your little friend there. They provide comfort. When you are lonely you say, "Well nobody is calling me tonight to go out and I am lonely so I am going to go there and I will see people." Even if I don't talk to people I will be amongst people and that's good enough for a lonely person. (Mary)

Experiences of trauma, abuse, and unhappiness in past and current relationships made a relationship with the machines appealing for Lada. EGMs served as a substitute for relationships with people. Lada explained that EGMs were easier than relationships with people.

I will go to a slot machine before I will be in a relationship with someone. If you give me the option of going out to dinner with somebody or going to the VLTs, I would take the VLTs. That's just what I prefer. Being in a relationship with people takes a lot of energy and a lot of work. Sitting down in front of a slot machine does not. I have a closer relationship with the machine than I do with anybody and the machine doesn't have expectations other than I put money in it. So a machine is easier to have a relationship with. I know what the rules are. I know the game. I know how to play and I know I'm going to lose. (Lada)

Dawn's disability created numerous losses in her life. Her deteriorating health forced her to leave her job and she found many other things changing in her life.

Although some friends and family members were supportive, others turned away because

they did not know how to respond to her disability. The loss of her work role carried over to her marriage and her identity.

Our roles really got reversed from the time we got married to the time of my disability. Even in terms of who did what. I used to look after all the finances and be the one who made a lot of the decisions. I was the one who had my own business and he was working doing his own thing. And I was all over the place. I mean before the disability started happening I was on three or four boards of directors in Winnipeg, I was travelling all over the place, and I was out of the province teaching sometimes for months on end. He was also working away. And then things sort of switched. And I think the casino and gambling helped with that adjustment because all of a sudden I was like ... I didn't know who I was anymore. (Dawn)

Dawn further explained that going to the casino helped her feel like she had somewhere to go and something to do like everyone else around her.

I was also unhappy with the fact that I was sitting around and moaning and crying about the fact that I'm disabled and I have no life. I looked at other people and away they would go with their life. My husband goes off to work at 8:30 in the morning and comes home for supper and goes out again to play in a group who play and sing barber shop music, or to other activities. He's very involved in it, he just loves it. So I watch him and when he comes home at 11:00 at night I think to myself, "What a day you've had." And I've been in bed crying that whole time. I think that it's sort of easy to find something for you to do and I think that's what gambling does for me. You know it gives me some place to go and something to do. That's why I like to go in the morning. I like to go when everyone else is going to work and getting on with their day. (Dawn)

Dawn wanted to maintain some semblance of what she described as "normal" life and to be out when other people were going about their busy day. Her casino opened at 9:00 a.m. and provided her with a place to go.

Existing research focusing on women who gamble does not specifically describe gambling as a way to fill a void. As previously mentioned, Brown and Coventry (1997) and Hallebone (1999) also found that women gamble to escape loneliness and isolation and this might be interpreted as filling a void. Surgey and Siebert (2000) found that



women gambled on EGMs as a way to manage life changes including separating from a partner or being diagnosed with a mental illness. These findings are somewhat similar to “filling a void” in the current study. The theme of filling a void has appeared in studies of problem gamblers that include mixed samples of men and women. Doiron and Mazer (2001) conducted interviews with seven VLT players (including five men and two women) and found that involvement with VLTs revolved around addressing a sense of emptiness or a missing quality in participants’ lives. VLTs were used to fill the void created by divorce, the death of a family member, problematic relationships with friends and family, and quitting alcohol use. Escape also emerged as a theme in Doiron and Mazer’s study but gambling to escape was distinct from the theme of gambling to fill a void which, as in the current study, involved gambling to replace or substitute missing life elements. Filling a void also emerged as a theme in a more recent study by Wood and Griffiths (2007) that examined gambling as a coping strategy among 47 male and seven female problem gamblers. Rather than being related to specific life changes or transitions, however, the void in players’ lives was related to boredom, a lack of friends, or the need to seek approval.

### ***Hope for Financial Gain***

As previously mentioned, the majority of the women in this study were not playing EGMs with the goal of winning money. In fact, they knew the odds of winning were against them, they knew that over time they had spent more money than they had ever won, and they walked into the gambling venues knowing that they would likely lose the money they allotted for play. Winning was pleasant and fun, but it was not an essential part of playing.

If I win that's great. All I do is put it aside for the next time I go and I expect to lose it again. I just want to not be in the hole and I have had an hour or two of enjoyment being out doing what it is that I do. (Faye)

I'm just going to play and have fun. If I win, I win, if I don't, I don't. And if I win something the machine will tell me what I get. So to hell with worrying or thinking about winning. Because to me worrying about winning would take the fun out of it. (Josephine)

Financial resources are, however, obviously necessary to play the machines.

Women with higher incomes and greater financial resources could afford to incorporate EGM gambling with other forms of leisure such as dining out and travel. Women who had their own personal income from employment felt justified in allotting a certain amount of their income to indulge in EGM gambling. Even if women were not employed outside of the home, they felt they were entitled to some money for their own entertainment, but most were careful to restrict their spending on the machines so that this spending would not negatively impact their household budget. Winnings were typically used to buy "extras" or "treats" for their families.

The role of financial resources in EGM gambling was more complex for some women who did in fact play for the purpose of winning money. Winning was significant for women with limited financial means who were struggling to make ends meet. Because they were poor, they played EGMs in order to try to win money to stretch their budgets and to buy necessities for their families.

Debbie and her young grandson lived on less than \$10,000 a year. Her initial exposure to EGM gambling involved "checking out" the casinos with some friends as part of a night out. That night she won what she perceived to be a substantial amount of money and future EGM gambling revolved around the hope of winning money.

I really don't go for the entertainment. It's a way to get extra money. I go there thinking I want to win. I need some extra money. I just look at my money situation and that's what will take me there. I don't have extra money. I would put that money towards the machine to try and make some extra money but now it's not helping. (Debbie)

Debbie showed me some of the furniture and household items that she had purchased with EGM winnings and explained that any money she won was often used to buy grocery items. As she mentioned a few times, she relied on EGM winnings to ease her financial struggles. At the time of our interview she had cut back on her playing because she perceived that the machines were not "paying out" like they used to and, as such, they no longer assisted her efforts to stretch her budget.

Before, I could throw in so much and I would always walk out of there ahead. But this past year I haven't won anything on the new machines that came in. Not really, not like the old machines. I used to win something all the time. So it practically kept me alive and kept me going. (Debbie)

Although Grace was employed full-time, she struggled financially. She earned under \$20,000 per year and was raising two children. Grace explained that from a young age gambling had been normalized in her life by a social network consisting of family and friends who gambled heavily.

I grew up with it so I always thought it would be inevitable that I would gamble the same way my parents do. It's because I grew up with it and watched my dad and my mom and all of my mom's friends. It was always just acceptable to gamble. (Grace)

Grace explained that money was always "tight" and that she naturally turned to EGMs to try to win money.

It's always about wanting more money. I have enough to pay all my bills but I don't want to be broke for another two weeks. You want some kind of spending money. So when you want that spending money you spend money on the machines and then you end up with nothing in the end. Like I say if I have paid off all my bills then I'm not going to have any money.

And then the next time I get paid, I have to put all the money on more bills again. And I think "If only I could get a little bit of money." (Grace)

Disability allowances and one part-time income brought just under \$20,000 into Cynthia's household per year. She explained her financial situation and her desire to win a little on EGMs.

I've got to really watch myself right now because we're really struggling and we don't get any money until a week from next Thursday. We're only getting a budget for three people but I also have other people that come here and eat all the time. I'm feeding approximately seven people on a three person budget. And we're only allowed \$430 for rent for three people and we pay \$620 to rent here. It's very hard to find good accommodations and even here the landlord is a slum landlord. Our ceiling is falling apart. That's why I'm always hoping that I'm going to win a little extra money. We're down to half of a four litre jug of milk. It's like "Where am I going to get my next 4 litres of milk?" I'm struggling financially.... and for me it's a big deal because of my depression and all of that. (Cynthia)

Cynthia further explained that financial struggles and parenting stress exacerbated her depression and anxiety. She played the VLTs to try to relieve some of her symptoms, but when she lost, she felt much worse.

If I'm really depressed or really down and I have money I think "Okay, I'm going to go play". You're hoping to win and get that extra \$20 or \$40 or \$100. And the games are fun to play so you feel good playing. And if I'm winning I feel a lot happier and I can handle things better. But if I lose, I feel worse. I feel sick because I have lost the money and I get really depressed. I mean they say that money is not everything but money sure helps sometimes. (Cynthia).

Cynthia also suggested that people with low incomes are targeted by the government as EGM players.

I believe that there are more low income families or low income women that are out there gambling compared to people who have a lot of money. I mean it's another ploy for the government to make more money. They give you only so much money on social allowance and then they put the VLTs everywhere and make them so attractive. The games are *really*,

*really fun, but they are also really, really addictive. And then you win a little bit so of course you are going to go back. You are going to go back to try to win again. Even if you are losing, you keep playing or you go back. Because you're hoping you're going to win. (Cynthia)*

Previous studies indicate that lower income households spend a greater proportion of their income on gambling (Marshall, 1999; MacDonald et al., 2004). Shaffer (2003) speculated that one possible explanation for this fact is that people who are poor have a greater potential to change their lives if they win money gambling. However, the women in the current study were not thinking they would drastically change their lifestyles through gambling. For Debbie, Grace and Cynthia, EGM gambling fit within the economic constraints of their lives and was a way to try to manage these constraints and obtain relief from their financial struggles. This is consistent with Casey's (2003) examination of women who bought lottery tickets and Dixey and Talbot's (1982) examination of women who played bingo.

### ***Declining Fun: Overspending and Chasing Losses***

Some of the women who participated in the study indicated that their spending on EGM gambling had increased over time. For example, although Kathy's EGM gambling did not have a negative impact on her household budget, she noticed that her spending patterns had changed in the past few years.

*But I noticed over the years my gambling habits have changed. I am spending more. I am not sure why. Actually my friend and I were discussing it the other day and we don't know. When the casinos first opened I would spend about forty dollars. Maybe that's because we were very conservative, but we spend more now.*

I asked Kathy if she now stays at the venues longer or bets any differently.

*No. You see that's the part that really baffles us, because we actually are staying the same amount of time and we have always bet max. But yet we*

are spending so much more money. Everyone says the payouts used to be better years ago when they [EGMs] first came in. I don't know if that has changed or not. They never tell you the odds. (Kathy)

Other women also perceived that over time there had been a change in the amount of money that they won on the machines and therefore in the amount of money that they spent in order to play. Several women mentioned that they perceived that the older machines were "looser" and paid out more money.

Remember the old machines with the bells and you put in your loonies or quarters and your hands were always black and dirty and stinky. It was actually disgusting. But those machines were paying out more than now. I find the government somehow can control them better now and they don't pay. (Cherise)

But now the games that I play don't usually pay as much. They seem to have...the payout is less now on the machines. (Donna)

Although women had noticed a difference in what they spent and won, there was mystery and misunderstanding surrounding the issue of the machines and government control" of the payouts.

Discussion between group members during the second focus group yielded a different explanation for how things have changed. As Faye explained, the new machines are faster, so women spend money more quickly.

Originally when you gambled you had to take the time to gather up the coins in your hand, put them in the slot and wait for the machine to register the money. Then you had to make a decision about how many lines to play and how much to bet each time before you pulled the handle or pushed the button. And all of that would take a matter of seconds per decision. Now all you are doing is pushing a button. You don't have to put in money and you don't even have to decide how many lines to play or how much to bet for each time you play because there is the repeat button. You don't even have to make a choice of how much you are going to put in because you just set it at x number of lines and x number of spins and you just keep pushing. So that push and that spin happens so quickly that you could have gone through a lot more money in the same amount of

time than you used to. If you came to play \$25 it used to take a lot more time if you were putting in nickels or dimes or quarters. It would take you a while to get through your money. (Faye)

During our interview, Karen tried to demonstrate how quickly money can be spent while playing the machines.

Can you imagine hitting these things at a buck twenty five a hit... [she makes hand motions to show what it is like sitting at the machine and repetitively pushing the buttons on the VLTs and how quickly one can spend/lose money]. You just keep hitting. In all the times I've hit it right now in these few seconds in front of you, I've gone through ten or twenty bucks. You can go through twenty bucks like that [snaps her fingers]. I've seen it, I've done it! You can go through twenty bucks in two minutes! And I'm not exaggerating. (Karen)

Although women complained about the perceived changes in the machine payouts and noted their increased spending, for many women these changes created few consequences. Spending more did not necessarily involve overspending that resulted in negative financial consequences. Some women who spent more had simply chosen to increase their allotted spending limit and most often maintained this limit.

In some situations, however, women did begin to overspend. Overspending represented a turning point in women's experience with EGM gambling. Mary referred to the "flip-side" of EGM play.

There's a good side to [playing EGMs]. There is a fun side to it that you enjoy. Then there's a flip-side to the coin as there is with everything. There's a bad side too and it's usually financial. The bad side is financial when you start putting too much money in them [EGMs] and when it's not just a game anymore. This is not so funny. When you are running after your losses as they say. You think "I've lost a hundred dollars so I am going to put in another hundred to try and regain my losses" and then all of a sudden you find that you have lost two hundred and then you walk out of there mad and depressed and hate yourself for it. (Mary)

The impact of overspending on EGM gambling could be extreme.

I had my husband's bank card and then I started taking money out of the account and....I just started taking two hundred bucks and going to play. And if I won something I would put it back. If I didn't win something the next day I would take another two hundred. But the mortgage payment would come due and the bank would take it off anyways, right? Finally, the bank called him and took away his card. (Patricia)

I've had my heat cut off and I've had my hydro cut off. I didn't have water for a while and it didn't matter. I am on a lot of medication and I spend \$200 every two weeks on my medication. And I couldn't afford to have my medication and yet I work full-time. (Lada)

Financial problems caused by losing money on the machines made a few women desperate to recoup their losses. For these women, playing became a vicious cycle of spending, losing, and chasing those losses. For example, although Glenda saw a financial counsellor to help her get her finances back in order after overspending, she continued to chase.

Once I put the money in and start to play, it's hard to stop right? Especially if I lose right? I end up getting more mad. Ohhhh! I've got to get my money back. (Glenda)

Even though Denise's overspending on EGMs resulted in bankruptcy, she continued to play. Her playing revolved around chasing.

I keep playing because I think I have to get more [money]. Or once I've spent bill money I think well I've got to get it back and that's when you start chasing and you don't get it back! And then you're in worse shape. And then you have to call the creditors and make excuses, you know. It's very, very bad. And you know you take a loan out, and it's supposed to be for something else and you end up going and playing and spend the bill money and then you start chasing again. And when you start chasing, you're lost. (Denise)

Overspending and chasing losses changed the meaning of EGM gambling for women. Playing was no longer described in positive terms and became a clear source of dilemma. Playing the machines was no longer necessarily seen as fun, entertainment, a



time out, or a time to be social.

At first it was fun. I mean you were kind of trying to figure out what to do on the machines and then it was fun. Fun until I lost my money. Then I would just go back and keep going back and back. (Glenda)

Well at first me and my girlfriends would go out and just have fun. Then after a while it was like I was looking in watching everyone else have fun. Because I couldn't have fun anymore because I had spent all my money and then I'd be a miserable bitch because I lost all my money. (Grace)

After these new machines came out everybody was so excited about them. I thought so too. And then later I found that it wasn't exciting anymore. The excitement just died and the people around me were just putting money in a machine. I was supposed to be there for the company, but I was spending more and more and more money. Money that could have been put to good use. And then you feel terrible. (Mary-Jo)

But VLTs can also make you depressed at the end of the evening if you have poured too much money into them. And if you start not paying your bills because of them and running behind then they're bringing you problems. You can go home depressed if you put too much cash in there. (Mary)

I would get so mad at myself. I would come home and feel so bad, so horrible for doing that and I would think that I could have given my kids that \$20 instead of spending it. (Candice)

As illustrated in the above quotations, in addition to becoming preoccupied with money lost, overspending caused women to become moody, and to feel guilty, angry, and depressed. Women also noted that overspending could become a source of conflict in relationships. However, efforts to reduce EGM gambling and overspending were sometimes hampered by relationships with other people. Denise and her husband argued about the money Denise spent on EGMs, but he still encouraged her to accompany him to the casino. Mary and Grace explained how friends encouraged them to play.

You have your gambling friends and it becomes your social activity. So now these people call you up every weekend and say "Oh let's go for coffee." Well after coffee you end up going to a lounge and you end up

playing fifty or sixty dollars on the machine. An expensive cup of coffee! So you have your circle of gambling friends and that is not always a good thing. (Mary)

When me and my friends get together we always gamble. Whether it's at the casino or we play cards at home and gamble for money. It's never anything friendly anymore and I can't get away from it. Sometimes I won't answer the phone just so no one will ask me to come out and gamble. We do it all the time and that is what we expect of each other. You know we'll even play cards for a dollar or two. This is what we do always. Everything that I do in my life revolves around something to do with gambling. All my entertainment goes around gambling. Everything in my life revolves around gambling. It's always been that way. (Grace)

Women who participated in the study described factors that contributed to overspending. Key among these was the EGMs themselves, and in particular the newer EGMs. Women found the games on the machines interesting and fun, and the absorbing qualities of the machines allowed women to become distracted from responsibilities, worries, and negative emotions. However, many of the same features that made the games fun and absorbing also facilitated overspending. As mentioned previously, the newer machines are faster. In addition, cash is no longer involved in betting or winning. Money that is inserted for playing is converted into credits. When a player wins, rather than receiving cash, the amount won is also converted into credits that can be used to play. In order to receive any actual money that might be won, the player must "cash out" to receive tickets or tokens that are redeemed for actual money. Women described how they lost track of money.

It wasn't really like you were spending money. It was credits and you never really cashed it out of the machine. (Belinda)

You play machines and you forget that it's money. When I play the nickles I never looked at it in terms of how much money it was. If you're at a thousand [credits] it just didn't seem like it was money because to me it was nickels. And nickels don't amount to anything when you're

gambling. So if I got it up to four thousand nickels it just didn't seem like it was anything you know... (Maureen).

Cause it doesn't become money anymore. You lose the complete value of the dollar when you play those machines. You forget that it's money. It becomes almost like a point system. You don't see that you've drained however much money. (Karen)

Candice described how playing becomes very mechanical.

I just sat there one day and won \$100. But instead of cashing out, I just kept playing. I remember just sitting there thinking "Oh hurry up just win already!" I even got bored with it but I just kept on going. I still had forty dollars credit and I had to go to the washroom. Instead of cashing out I told my sister to keep pressing the button for me. (Candice).

Karen and Patricia were somewhat unique because they were the only women interviewed who discussed alcohol use in relation to EGM gambling. Karen attributed overspending to a combination of the EGM technology and alcohol use. She described alcohol and VLTs as creating a dangerous combination.

I'd be so hammered that I wouldn't care. "Ohhhhhhhh I'm having so much fun, and this is so much fun." And you go home and you just want to be sick in the morning. When you realize what you've gone through and see all your little receipts this thick in your wallet. It's just a nasty, nasty, vicious circle. And after a few cocktails, it seems you're almost intoxicated by the machines. It's not a happy place to be. It's been two weeks today since I've played. And I would really like to see them at least be removed from the bar environment, just because there's alcohol involved and you tend to lose your inhibitions and you just don't care anymore. (Karen)

Karen was one of the women who provided feedback on the initial analysis of the data for this study. She indicated that I had not emphasized the role alcohol can play in EGM gambling strongly enough in my analysis. Karen is adamant about the fact that alcohol consumption should be more controlled in environments where VLTs are present.

Now figure this one out Cheryl, you can't even buy a double at the casino. They won't pour you a double. They will not do that. But yet, you can sit there and get pie-eyed in a bar and play the same damn machines no

problem. Now, where's the logic in that? There is none. It doesn't make any sense... It should be illegal, quite honestly. I mean sure have them [EGMs] in an environment that's more structured. In the casino you've got the security guards around, you've got this, you've got that, but to plop them in a bar with no restrictions is crazy. I mean I've been served to a point [uses body gesture to show being very drunk] that I've had friends who tried to cut me off, but staff would still serve me and I could still play the VLTs. (Karen)

Patricia claimed that she had reduced the amount of money that she spent on VLT play. However, she was not always successful at maintaining her \$20 spending limit, particularly after consuming alcohol. Going to bars to drink was a regular activity for her and her husband, and it was an activity that they enjoyed. Although she did want to reduce her VLT playing, she did not want to reduce her drinking and she found it difficult to resist playing VLTs while she was in bars. She felt that she could not avoid the temptation of the VLTs.

Well I live in the north end and I mean I got the LaSalle, I got the King's, I got the West, the Northern, the Yale, the Bell and before there was the Patricia, and the Savoy. These places were all within 20 minutes walking. I mean if they would have one hotel that didn't have the f----- things I would go to it! (Patricia)

The experiences of Karen and Patricia reflect the role of regulatory policy decisions that allow the placement of VLTs in bars and lounges where the use of alcohol is not restricted while patrons play the VLTs. Within Manitoba casinos, alcohol can only be purchased and consumed in designated areas and is not allowed in the actual areas where EGMs are located.

### *Summary*

Women described a number of purposes served by EGM gambling in their lives. For most women, playing EGMs served more than one purpose. For example, while

EGMs were a source of fun and entertainment, playing could also fill important social functions and provide a time out from responsibilities. The meaning and purpose of gambling could also change over time and in some situations this change was perceived negatively. As some women gambled to escape, to fill a void or with the hope of winning money, they spent and lost more on EGMs than they could afford. In addition to an emotional impact, overspending carried financial ramifications that resulted in attempts to recoup losses by further gambling. Some women became involved in a cycle of overspending and chasing losses. These findings will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Little is known about women's experience with gambling. Much of the research on gambling has focused on problem gambling and individual-level characteristics implicated in the development of problem gambling. Such research has ignored the role of contextual factors in gambling activity. Despite the increasing popularity of EGM gambling among women, little research has attempted to examine and understand EGM gambling from women's point of view. The purpose of the current study was to answer two primary questions: (1) What meaning and purpose does EGM gambling provide in the everyday lives of women? (2) How is women's experience of EGM gambling influenced by the ecological environment in which they live?

The findings from this study revealed that EGM gambling served a number of important purposes in women's lives. Most, if not all, of women's EGM gambling experience began with playing EGMs for fun and entertainment. Following this initiation, as women's experiences unfolded, they discovered that in addition to fun and entertainment, EGM gambling could also serve other purposes within their particular life circumstances. For some women EGM gambling provided a sense of autonomy and an avenue for rebellion and resistance to socially proscribed expectations for appropriate feminine behaviour. EGM gambling could also serve important social functions and provided an opportunity to socialize or a valuable source of social connection. Playing EGMs provided women with a time out from demands, responsibilities, negative emotions, and everyday worries. Engaging in this activity allowed women to focus on themselves, to think, and to come away feeling rejuvenated. Lost and changing roles and relationships created a void in some women's lives and the machines provided comfort

and solace that allowed women to temporarily fill this void. EGM gambling could also be used by women as a means of trying to stretch household budgets so that basic necessities could be provided for their families.

Some of the women who participated in the study experienced a “flip side” or a “turning point” as their EGM gambling experience unfolded. This turning point revolved around overspending that resulted in negative financial consequences. Although the initial meaning and purpose of EGM gambling was similar for both women who did and did not overspend, the consequences of overspending changed the meaning of EGM gambling. The pleasurable aspects of this activity became overshadowed by financial problems, worrying about money, conflict in relationships, anger, depression, guilt and other negative feelings about themselves. These negative consequences increased the desire for distraction and escape and the desire to win money to recoup losses. Some women found themselves in a vicious cycle of overspending and chasing losses.

### **Integration with Ecological Systems Theory**

Although EGM gambling serves a number of purposes in women’s lives, there is no single, consistent pattern of women’s experience. The women’s stories illustrate how different perceptions of EGM gambling unfold within their different life contexts. This variation in women’s experience with EGM gambling is consistent with the proposition of EST that human behaviour and development cannot be understood apart from the context in which it occurs. Each theme reflecting the purpose and meaning of EGM gambling for women revealed the interaction of multiple factors within the ecological context of women’s lives that worked to influence their gambling and to shape the meaning that this activity held for them. These factors are specified in Table 1 and will be

**Table 1. Ecological factors influencing the meaning and purpose of women's EGM gambling**

Theme	Ecological Factors
Entertainment	Public policy regarding legalization of EGM gambling; social acceptance of gambling; gambling industry policies and practices on development of EGM technology; gambling venues; gender ideology; constraints to leisure imposed by caregiving, health, and income
Independence and Rebellion	Gender ideology; gambling venues
Social Functions	Social networks; social isolation
Time out	Demands of caregiving and work roles; role overload; stress; EGM technology; health; experiences with loss and trauma
Filling a Void	Social isolation; experiences with loss and trauma; EGM technology; health; unhappy relationships; transitions in roles and relationships
Hope for Financial Gain	Poverty and financial stress; EGM technology
Declining Fun: Overspending and Chasing	EGM technology; financial stress; availability and use of alcohol; social networks



discussed with regard to their position within the levels of the environment specified in EST.

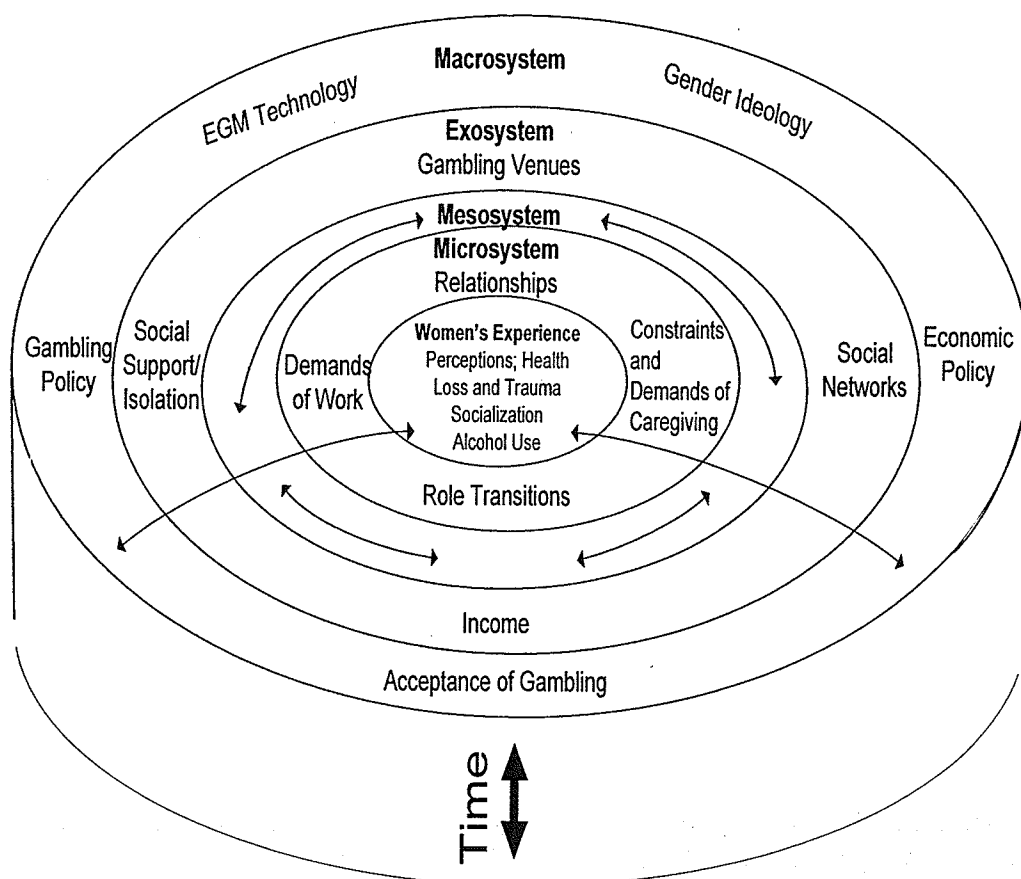
### ***Contextual Levels of Influence***

According to EST, each individual is embedded in an environment that consists of multiple systems of influence which include microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels. An ecological framework describing factors from each level of the environment that influence women's EGM gambling is illustrated in Figure 2.

#### ***Individual.***

At the individual level of analysis are those characteristics and experiences of the individual that influence their behaviour and shape their response to factors in other levels of the environment. Women's experience of EGM gambling and the meaning of EGM gambling to them was the focal point of investigation in this study. Individual factors related to this experience included physical and mental health issues, stress, experiences with loss and trauma, early socialization experiences involving a family history of gambling, and alcohol use.

Some of the women who participated in this study described physical and mental health issues that influenced their EGM gambling. Managing disabilities and physical health difficulties limited their ability to work, their activity, their mobility, and their social connection. EGM gambling allowed women to overcome the constraints on their leisure imposed by health issues that limit physical activity and mobility and provided an opportunity to be around other people. Playing EGMs was also perceived as a way to relieve the symptoms associated with depression and anxiety and provided women with a means of distraction and escape.



**Figure 2. The ecological context of women's EGM gambling**

Women who were interviewed described previous experiences with loss and trauma in their lives including the death of family members and abuse during childhood and in previous intimate partner relationships. EGM gambling allowed women to escape the negative emotions associated with these difficult life experiences. In some cases, previous experiences of abuse created apprehensiveness about forming new relationships and contributed to social isolation. In these situations, EGM gambling provided a source of social connection.

Early socialization experiences involving gambling also influenced women's current EGM gambling behaviour. Some of the women were introduced to gambling by their parents during childhood. In addition to shaping perceptions about the acceptability of gambling, early experiences could also involve learning a cautious approach to gambling with a strict adherence to spending limits. However, as was the case for one woman who participated in the study, heavy gambling and excessive spending could also be normalized through early socialization experiences.

The use of alcohol was significant for two women who described their use of alcohol as a factor contributing to overspending on EGMs.

### ***Microsystem.***

The microsystem is the immediate context of the individual including their roles and relationships within family and work settings. In the current study roles and relationships and changes in these roles and relationships emerged as factors influencing women's EGM gambling.

Women's employment contributed to their sense of independence and provided them with a source of income that they used to justify their gambling expenditures. Only

a few women mentioned that they gambled to relieve stress associated with their employment roles. Many more women, however, used EGM gambling to have “time out” from their roles as caregivers within the family. The demands of caregiving contribute to stress, constrain women’s leisure time, preclude women from having leisure time and space within their homes, and can contribute to social isolation.

Over time, women had also experienced transitions in their roles and relationships. Retirement and decreased caregiving responsibilities were perceived by some women as an opportunity for increased freedom and time to pursue their own interests. However, retirement, decreased caregiving responsibilities, or a change in employment status due to becoming disabled could be experienced as difficult transitions that created a void in women’s lives that they sought to fill through EGM gambling. In addition, a few women described being unhappy in their intimate partner relationships and turning to EGM gambling to compensate for the “void” or missing element in these relationships. Separation and divorce contributed to isolation and the desire for social connection.

### ***Mesosystem.***

The mesosystem involves the relationship between two or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). In the current study, the relationship between the work and family microsystems influenced women’s EGM gambling experience. The demands of juggling work and family responsibilities constrained women’s leisure time and contributed to their stress and their desire for time out.

### ***Exosystem.***

The exosystem includes the formal and informal social networks and structures

that impact the inner levels of the ecological environment. Exosystem factors related to women's EGM gambling in the current study include the gambling venues, socioeconomic status, social networks, and social isolation.

Within Manitoba, the legalization of EGM gambling has translated into the placement of approximately 8,500 machines in the province (Canadian Partnership for Responsible Gambling, 2007). In addition to casino venues, the province has allowed the placement of VLTs in bars and lounges, making the machines accessible in most neighbourhoods. EGM gambling is offered in venues that are perceived to be suitable for women, attractive, safe, or within convenient geographic access. Casinos in particular are perceived to be attractive entertainment destinations that offer a variety of options for entertainment and food service in pleasant surroundings. The extended hours of operation of the venues allow women to overcome the constraints on their leisure imposed by caregiving demands. The unrestricted availability of alcohol within bars and lounges also contributed to overspending for some women.

Women's initiation to EGM gambling and the social functions of gambling are clearly influenced by women's social networks. The opportunity to socialize and enhance relationships is an important component of the EGM entertainment experience for women who have a network of friends and family members who are accepting of gambling with whom to share this activity. While having a social network consisting of other gamblers could enhance the socializing and pleasurable aspects of EGM gambling, such networks could also contribute to overspending when friends and family members encouraged women to gamble even if these women were trying to reduce the frequency of their play.

Women who were socially isolated and who lacked companionship reported that EGM gambling provided valuable social connection by allowing them to be in the presence of other people even if little social interaction or non-intimate social interaction took place. In some instances, EGM gambling was used as a form of companionship for women who were socially isolated. These women continued to play EGMs despite overspending because the comfort provided by the machines outweighed the negative consequences associated with overspending.

Women's caregiving role contributed to social isolation and this was most apparent for women who were caring for children with disabilities and who had to rely on scarce respite services in order to have some time out of the house. Although there was little mention of other community resources by women who participated in the study, the scarcity of respite services and other support resources within the community for caregivers increased women's isolation. In these instances women's EGM gambling served as a much needed source of time out and social interaction.

Socioeconomic status and more specifically, income, was a factor influencing women's EGM gambling. While winning was not a significant motivation for EGM gambling for most of the women who participated in this study, women who experienced poverty and financial stress gambled with the hope of financial gain. Their efforts were reinforced by occasional wins.

Income also influenced the consequences of spending on EGMs. Although many women noted that the amount of money that they spent on EGM gambling had increased over time, their increased spending did not necessarily result in overspending that negatively affected their household budgets. Women with higher household incomes

incorporated EGM gambling with other entertainment activities such as dining out and travel, and accepted any losses as part of their entertainment costs. Women with sufficient household incomes could at least absorb the cost of EGM gambling and increased spending on EGM gambling within their budgets. In essence, some of these women could afford to “pay” for whatever they were seeking from EGM gambling. Women with low incomes, however, could not afford to pay. They more readily felt the strain of gambling losses and even small losses represented overspending and were more difficult to manage in their already limited budgets. These women more readily felt the consequences of overspending such as a lack of money to buy necessities, worrying about money, guilt, and negative feelings about themselves.

### *Macrosystem.*

The macrosystem consists of the overarching ideologies, and political, economic and social conditions that influence each of the inner levels of the environment. Key macrosystem factors influencing women’s EGM gambling identified in this study include social policy regarding the legalization of gambling, social acceptance of gambling, the policies and practices of the gambling industry regarding the development of EGM technology, and gender ideology.

The common denominator shaping all women’s experience with EGM gambling involves macro level economic and political conditions and public policy decisions regarding the presentation of EGM gambling in society. As described in the literature review, the social construction of gambling has undergone transformation over time. In response to government economic interests, gambling has shifted from an immoral, illegal vice to a legitimate, leisure activity which most Canadians perceive to be

acceptable. Since the legalization of EGMs in Canada in 1985, there has been a rapid expansion of the gambling industry and increased access to EGM gambling opportunities. Within this context, women have discovered an appealing entertainment activity. Most of the women who participated in the current study began EGM gambling in Manitoba in the early 1990s following the opening of McPhillips Street Station and Club Regent in Winnipeg and the introduction of VLTs in bars and lounges in 1993.

The development of the EGM technology by the gambling industry significantly influenced women's experience. The games on the machines are affordable and easy to play and machine features such as lights, music and sound effects are appealing. Over time, the EGM technology has evolved to make the games more attractive and appealing and newer machines offering a greater variety of interactive games have been introduced in Manitoba. In contrast to mundane daily routines or alternate leisure activities such as reading or watching television, EGM gambling provides some thrill and excitement. The same features of the machines that provide an enjoyable entertainment experience also allow women to achieve "time out." While playing EGMs, women become very absorbed and find escape and distraction from stress, negative emotions associated with difficult life experiences, and everyday worries. This "time out" or escape was also a source of comfort and solace to women who turned to the machines to fill voids in their lives. Other research has also found that women report that EGMs provide a way to "zone out" (Berry et al., 2002), to "exit" (Dow Schull, 2003), or to "log out" (Lalander, 2006).

The developing EGM technology also contributes to increased spending and overspending. While EGM features such as a fast pace, continuity, visual stimuli, and repetitive patterns of betting and outcome contribute to the player's enjoyment and



experience of feeling disconnected from the world, these same features contribute to repetitive play (Breen, 2004; Griffiths, 1999). While many women did not understand why their spending had increased over time, contributing factors were machine features including the speed of play, bill acceptors, and credit displays. Games on the newer machines are faster and women described losing track of how much money they were spending because of the use of credit displays that made them forget that they were playing with “real” money. As Dow Schull (2002) concluded, rather than individual pathology, the machine technology is a major factor contributing to excessive gambling.

Finally, gender ideology and the societal beliefs regarding appropriate roles and behaviour for men and women and an unequal distribution of power and resources are important macro level factors shaping women’s experience with EGM gambling. On one hand, it can be argued that attending the venues to play EGMs reflects women’s increased access to public spaces and allows them to resist socially proscribed expectations for appropriate behaviour. However, women’s subordination is also linked to the fear of sexual harassment and violence which may limit their access to public spaces. In addition, although women may have increased freedom with regard to participation in public life, culturally proscribed distinctions between men’s and women’s roles continue to exist. These distinctions, and in particular the expectation that women should assume primary responsibility for caregiving, influence each of the inner levels of the ecological environment. For example, childcare responsibilities restrict women’s participation in occupational spheres, increasing their economic vulnerability and risk of social isolation. Employed mothers juggle multiple roles and responsibilities and these demands further constrain leisure time and increase stress and the desire for time out.

### *Commonalities and Variations in Ecological Context*

Understanding EGM gambling requires a holistic examination of the multilevel factors influencing this activity. All EGM gamblers are influenced by public policy regarding the presentation of EGM gambling as a government sanctioned entertainment activity, the expansion of the gambling industry, and gambling industry policies and practices regarding the development of EGM technology. These policies, however, are not gender neutral. EGM gambling is a gendered experience that reflects women's subordinate social position and the expectation of women as primary caregivers perpetuated through prevailing gender ideology. As previously mentioned, this expectation constrains women's time and contributes to social isolation, stress, and an increased risk for poverty.

Even within the common macro level landscape of women's EGM gambling, women who gamble on EGMs are not homogenous and there is variation how this activity is experienced in their everyday lives. This variation reflects the interplay between factors at different levels of the ecological environment. For women with comfortable incomes (exosystem) and no caregiving responsibilities (microsystem), the presentation of EGM gambling in society may be seen simply as an opportunity to have fun, to socialize, and to assert autonomy. However, women who are financially secure and do not have caregiving responsibilities, but who have experienced difficult role transitions (microsystem) due to retirement or disability (individual), may perceive EGM gambling as an escape from boredom or stress and an important source of social connection. Women who lack social support and who are socially isolated (exosystem) may also find social connection while playing EGMs. Women raising children

(microsystem) may use EGM gambling as an enjoyable and needed time out from the stress, isolation, and the demands of caregiving. Combining poverty (exosystem) with caregiving responsibilities (microsystem) creates a different context and increased stress for women who may perceive EGM gambling as time out as well as a chance for financial gain. Poverty (exosystem) and caregiving stress (microsystem) may exacerbate symptoms associated with anxiety and depression (individual) and EGM gambling may be used as a way to relieve symptoms. These examples illustrate the multiple contextual influences that shape women's experience and how variations in life situations and circumstances create differences in the purpose and meaning of EGM gambling in women's lives.

### **EGM Gambling as Adaptation**

According to EST, individuals are constantly involved with transactions with their environment that both provide opportunities for behaviour and set constraints and limits to behaviour. For many women in this study, EGM gambling provides an important means of coping, managing, or adapting to the constraints imposed by their environment and life circumstances. In this way, EGM gambling performs adaptive functions in women's lives. For example, the theme of independence and rebellion reveals how EGM gambling can be used to actively resist pressure to conform to cultural expectations regarding appropriate feminine behaviour. The themes of fun and entertainment, time out, and the sub theme of "time for me" illustrate how women use EGM gambling to actively resist or negotiate the demands of their caregiving role. For women who are poor, EGM gambling may be rationalized as a way to manage and gain some control over their challenging financial situations. In other situations women may use EGM gambling as a

means of reacting to their life circumstances. The theme of distraction and escape illustrates women's use of EGM gambling to manage stress and to cope with difficult life experiences such as abuse and loss by allowing them to manage the emotions generated by these experiences. EGM gambling provides solace in the face of boredom and loneliness, and is an important source of comfort for women experiencing voids created by lost or changing roles and relationships.

The adaptive functions of EGM gambling for women in this study parallel the findings of Greaves (1996) who applied a feminist political economy perspective to an analysis of women and smoking. Some of the themes reflecting the value of smoking to women in her study are similar to the themes reflecting the purpose and meaning of EGM gambling for women in the current study. For example, women in Greaves study reported smoking to feel independent, to reduce negative emotions, and to obtain comfort and support. Greaves postulated that:

Smoking may be an important means through which women control and adapt to both internal and external realities. It mediates between the world of emotion and outside circumstances. It is both a means of reacting to and/or acting upon social reality, and a significant route to self-definition (p.107).

According to Greaves, women's smoking must be understood within the gendered social and economic circumstances of their lives. Despite the health risks associated with smoking, cigarettes help women to adapt to and comply with their life circumstances and can be both a passive and active response to these circumstances. Similarly, despite potential negative consequences, EGM gambling helps women to negotiate their life

realities. Although Greaves' theoretical orientation differed from that used in the current study, the economic, political, and social location of women is subsumed within EST at the macro level of the environment in which all other levels are nested.

### **Future Directions**

EST provided a useful framework for this exploratory investigation for EGM gambling among women, and giving women an opportunity to describe their experiences has provided valuable information that contributes to our understanding of this activity in women's lives. Asking women to describe their perceptions and experiences has revealed important information about the meaning and purpose that EGM gambling has for them and the factors in the ecological environment that shape this meaning and purpose. The ecological framework of women's EGM gambling that I have presented is, however, by no means complete or definitive and this study is not an end point. The findings have implications for future research, education, policy, and intervention.

The women who participated in this study are not representative of all women and all life circumstances. Although a diverse group of women participated, specific attention was not paid to an analysis of issues such as race, class, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. Although a number of Aboriginal women were interviewed, I did not specifically ask them or analyze how being an Aboriginal woman affected their experience. Although I attempted to recruit younger women through advertisements, no one under the age of 32 years was interviewed. Although poverty clearly affected women's experience, this study did not allow for a full investigation of the impact of socioeconomic status on women's EGM gambling. Future studies targeting specific groups of women must be undertaken to investigate differences among these groups and

to further our understanding of how these issues shape women's gambling experiences.

Participation in this study involved meeting for a single interview during which women tried to provide many details of their experience. Longitudinal studies would provide valuable information about how the meaning and purpose of gambling changes over time and how these changes are related to changes in women's life circumstances and transitions such as the empty nest and retirement. In particular, longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into women's experience of a "turning point" in their EGM experience and how some women recover from this turning point.

The findings of this study indicated that EGM gambling has benefits for women that may, in fact, help them to adapt and cope with their life circumstances. More research examining the potential mental health benefits of EGM gambling are needed. For example, the notion that leisure may act as a means of coping with stress is not new (Iwasaki et al., 2005) and future studies could investigate the role of EGM gambling as a form of coping among women.

The fact that some women do experience harmful consequences as a result of their participation in EGM gambling should obviously not be minimized. I would argue that overspending and the negative consequences of overspending should not be viewed as a matter of individual pathology caused by the biological make up or psychological deficits of women that somehow predispose them to "problem" gambling. Like the purpose and meaning of EGM gambling in women's lives, the experience of overspending was influenced by contextual factors that women described. Future studies also needed to examine factors that may increase the risk of overspending or protect

against overspending. These studies must use frameworks other than the medical model that focuses on individual characteristics related to problem gambling and ignore the fact both the positive and negative aspects of EGM gambling are influenced by women's social and cultural environment. The findings of this study suggest that in addition to women's roles, income, social networks, and social isolation, particular attention should be paid to factors related to EGM features and the gambling environment that may increase women's risk of overspending.

For example, several women who participated in the study described how EGMs have changed over time and noted that their spending on EGM gambling has also increased over time. New machine features include faster speed that allows for reduced intervals between successive plays. There is some evidence that game speed, the introduction of bill acceptors and credit displays contribute to faster play by gamblers and misjudgements about how much money is actually being spent (White et al., 2006). Research examining the impact of changes in the structural characteristics of the machines on women's gambling and spending patterns is needed. In the future, the findings of such research should be used to inform regulatory policy *before* changes in EGM technology are implemented.

Another potential risk factor that was described by two women in this study that warrants examination is the placement of VLTs in bars and lounges where alcohol service is less restricted than in casinos. Numerous studies have pointed to high rates of comorbidity including alcohol and drug addiction among problem gamblers (Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of Pathological Gambling, 1999). Some of these studies suggest that this is evidence of pathology that contributes to problem gambling

(Comings et al., 1996). Less attention has been paid to the impact of alcohol consumption on gambling patterns. Existing research does suggest that drinking even moderate amounts of alcohol while EGM gambling increases the player's time spent gambling and the money spent while gambling (Baron & Dickerson, 1999; Ellery, Stewart, & Loba, 2005). Further inquiry investigating the impact of the availability of alcohol service on women's EGM gambling is needed to inform policy decisions regarding alcohol service or the restricting of alcohol service in EGM venues.

The findings of this study also have implications for education. Many women who participated in interviews lacked accurate information about gambling. For example, the fact that a few women were hoping to win money while playing EGMs suggests that they lack accurate information about odds ratios and the house advantage. As part of its responsible gambling education mandate, the Manitoba Gambling Control Commission (MGCC) launched an education campaign that ran from September 2005 until January 2006 (MGCC, 2006). The campaign consisted of the advertising of responsible gambling messages, specifically regarding EGM gambling, through a variety of mediums. The messages were intended to inform gamblers about the odds against winning and the lack of player control over winning. The time frame of this campaign coincided with the interval during which most of the interviews for this study were completed. Whether or not the campaign had an impact on any of the women who participated in this study is not known. However, the evaluation of this public education campaign indicated that 85% of Manitobans did not recall having seen or heard the advertisements (MGCC). More concentrated efforts to provide education specifically targeted to women are needed. Education campaigns should also include information that acknowledges the fact that



most women are not gambling with the purpose or expectation of winning money.

Although women were aware of the fact that they were spending more money, they were confused about why this was so. Only a few recognized that the speed of play has increased and affected spending. This confusion should not exist. As described in previous sections, EGMs are recognized as being the fastest, most continuous form of gambling and structural characteristics of the machines have increased the speed of play and spending. Why are women not informed of the potential impact of the changes in the EGM technology? If gambling is marketed as a form of entertainment, informing participants of a potential increase in cost to this form of entertainment could be thought of as a matter of fair practice. Many forms of entertainment increase in cost over time. However, consumers are generally aware of the cost increases. For example, increases in restaurant menu prices or the cost of a movie admission are “visible.” It would seem that women should also be informed that the cost of EGM gambling activity has “increased” or at least be provided with a fair warning that changes to machine characteristics may increase the cost of playing. The lack of information in education programs is related to current policy surrounding gambling.

There is a growing consensus in the research community that among the different types of gambling available, EGM gambling poses the greatest risk for the development of gambling problems (Breen, 2004; Dickerson, Haw, & Sheperd, 2003; Marshall & Wynne, 2003). Specific features of the machines are associated with this greater risk (White et al., 2006). These include speed of play, sound and visual effects, multiple games, and bonus features. Although these features may enhance the player’s experience, they also encourage extended and continuous play as do the use of bill acceptors and

credit displays. All of these machine features were mentioned by women as they described their experience of EGM gambling. It is logical to question why, if these features are known to pose risks to some gamblers, have they been introduced in Manitoba? At the very least, a question that should be asked is why has this knowledge of the potential risk not been translated to the consumer? It is one thing to tell consumers that the odds of winning are against them and to inform them of “responsible” gambling practices and information on the signs of problem gambling. It is another thing to actually tell consumers that they are engaging in a form of gambling activity that poses a particular risk for the development of gambling problems or that the machines available for play have been made even more risky. Clear information regarding changes in EGM features and the risks associated with EGM technology should be made available to women. As noted by Bowal and Lau (2005), in most instances Canadian consumers are protected through various measures including requirements for product safety, the prohibition of unfair practices, and labelling requirements. No such protection exists for gamblers.

The peculiarities in current Canadian gambling policy reflect the government’s conflicting role as both the provider and regulator of gambling (McMullan, 2005). Sincere efforts to protect citizens and to reduce any harm associated with gambling are tempered by the desire to generate revenue. The aim of the MGCC education campaign described above was to “empower all Manitobans to make informed choices related to their gambling activities” and to “encourage all people who choose to gamble to do so knowledgeably and responsibly” (MGCC, 2006, p. 1). Similar rhetoric is presented in responsible gambling policies across the country. These policies have developed in

response to concerns about the social costs of problem gambling and are supposed to represent an attempt by government and industry to reduce or minimize gambling-related harm. Responsible gambling policies, although they claim to have the goal of increasing knowledge and informed choice, focus on correcting faulty beliefs about the nature of randomness and player control over the machines, encouraging “responsible” gambling practices such as adhering to a spending limit, and providing information about the signs of problem gambling. This is not all the information that is needed for women to make “informed choices.”

In reality, the information provided to consumers under current responsible gambling policies and strategies represents a continuation of the focus on the individual with regard to development of gambling problems (Borrell, 2003, 2005; Reith, 2007). Individuals who gamble are supposed to protect themselves with adequate information and to limit how much they play. The responsibility of industry and the governments is subordinated. As noted by McMullen (2005, p. 17) “consumer choice is valorized and harm reduction programs are strategically framed within an “individual responsibility” paradigm that pathologizes people, promotes profits to shareholders and invisibilizes the broader social, cultural and political contexts that supply deleterious products.”

Public policy with the sincere goal of harm minimization should not place the onus of the prevention of gambling problems on gamblers themselves. Government and industry developers of EGM technology must also be accountable for promoting and regulating machine technology. Efforts to minimize harm could include targeted, aggressive education campaigns that provide women with information about the inherent risks involved in EGM gambling. As previously mentioned, the impact of changes to

EGMs on gambling patterns and behaviour should be researched *before* any changes to machines are allowed. As noted by Borrell (2005) and McMullen (2005) gambling policy and regulation should invoke the precautionary principle, erring on the side of caution or doing no harm.

This study also has implications for problem gambling prevention and treatment programs. Program developers and treatment service providers must be aware of the purposes served by EGM gambling in women's lives and recognize how gambling may help women to adapt to their life circumstances. For women who experience negative consequences associated with their EGM gambling, alternative ways of managing life circumstances must be explored. Program developers and treatment service providers must also recognize that gambling problems are not located within individual gamblers and must recognize and address broader social factors implicated in the development of gambling problems.

Gambling research, regulatory policy, education, and harm reduction and intervention strategies must integrate a gender perspective. The current study has provided valuable insight on women's perceptions of EGM gambling and has described how women's perceptions are shaped by the context of their lives. I have argued that EGM gambling is a gendered activity which is shaped by the reality of women's lives. My argument is, however, based on interviews with women. Future studies must compare women's and men's EGM gambling experience so that gender-related differences can be more closely examined and better understood. Gender-based analysis is also needed to assess the differential impact of gambling related policy, education, harm prevention strategies and intervention on women and men. It should not be assumed that these

policies and programs are gender neutral.

The focus of gambling and gambling related harm at an individual level detracts attention from macro level factors that shape the context of women's lives and EGM gambling experience. Actual responsible gambling policy is not just about gambling, but involves many aspects of social, economic, and political policy. The title of this dissertation indicates that women "just wanna play." The reasons that women want to play EGMs, including the desire for autonomy, the need to resist or escape the demands of caregiving, or the desire to win money to buy necessities, reflects the reality of women's lives. Gender inequality must be addressed in macro level policy arenas. For example, the fact that a number of women used EGM gambling as a refuge from the demands of caregiving responsibilities and reported that EGM venues were the only place that they could have time and space for themselves is alarming.

Women's EGM gambling is situated in a context that consists of multiple layers. This study has illustrated some of the ways in which the meaning of EGM gambling to women is influenced by factors from all levels of the ecological environment including how the broader social context is experienced in women's everyday lives. Many responsible gambling campaigns encourage gamblers to "keep it fun." EGM gambling is not just entertainment for all women. Keeping gambling as a form of entertainment requires that broader social issues are addressed. Improvements at the micro level of everyday existence from which women interact with their environment require macro level changes.

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**Appendix A: Advertisement Content****Women Who Play VLTs or Slots**

A doctoral student from the University of Manitoba is interested in learning about women and VLT and slot machine gambling. I am interested in talking to women who live in or near Winnipeg, who are between 18 and 64 years of age, and who play VLTs or slots at least once per month. If this is you and you might be willing to participate in an interview for this study, please call Cheryl .



## Appendix B: Individual Interview Consent Form

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# UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

**Project Title:** Women's Electronic Gambling Machine Gambling: An Ecological Perspective

**Researcher:** Cheryl Fraehlich

**Supervisor:** Dr. Don Fuchs

**Approved by:** University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board

**Complaints:** Human Ethics Secretariat, 474-7122, Dr. Don Fuchs, 474-7879 or Cheryl Fraehlich, :

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

A doctoral student from the University of Manitoba is conducting a study about women's VLT and slot machine gambling. She is interested in learning about factors in women's lives that influence their VLT and slot machine gambling and the function and meaning that gambling has for them.

You are being asked to participate in an interview that will last between one and two hours. You will receive a \$15 honorarium for participating in the interview. The researcher will ask you a series of open-ended questions that explore your gambling practices and how these are influenced by such things as the roles and relationships that you have in your life. Your responses will be audio-recorded and later typed to allow the researcher to review your comments.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop at any time and you are free not to answer any questions you don't want to. Your name will not be used in the typed record of the interview. Your answers are confidential. Although some of your comments might be used in the final report of the research, no results will be presented in such a way that could identify you personally. Only the researcher will have access to the recording of the interview or the typed record of the interview. The recording of the interview will be downloaded to a computer file that is password protected. The typed record of the interview will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's

office. These will be destroyed six months after the study is finished. Please note that the researcher is required by law to report current and past child abuse or situations dangerous to children to the legal authorities.

Before the final report of the research is prepared, you will be asked to review a draft of the initial analysis of the information from the interviews and to provide feedback on the researcher's interpretation of this information. If you agree to review a draft of the analysis, it will be mailed to at an address that you specify. You will also be provided with a postage-paid envelope to return the draft with your written comments. If you like, you will also be mailed a summary of the final research report.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I would like to review the initial analysis of the information from the interviews

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

I would like this analysis mailed to the following address:

I would like to receive a summary of the final research report \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

I would like this report mailed to the following address (if different from above address):



## Appendix C: Focus Group Consent Form

# UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

**Project Title:** Women's Electronic Gambling Machine Gambling: An Ecological Perspective

**Researcher:** Cheryl Fraehlich

**Supervisor:** Dr. Don Fuchs

**Approved by:** University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board

**Complaints:** Human Ethics Secretariat, 474-7122, Dr. Don Fuchs, 474-7879 or Cheryl Fraehlich,

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

A doctoral student from the University of Manitoba is conducting a study about women's VLT and slot machine gambling. She is interested in learning about factors in women's lives that influence their VLT and slot machine gambling and the function and meaning that gambling has for them.

You are being asked to participate in a focus group interview that will last approximately two hours. You will receive a \$15 honorarium for participating in the interview. You will first complete a short demographic questionnaire. Then the researcher will ask a series of open-ended questions that explore women's gambling practices and how these are influenced by such things as the roles and relationships that women have in their lives. Your responses will be audio-recorded and later typed to allow the researcher to review your comments.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop at any time and you are free not to answer any questions you don't want to. Your name will not be used on the demographic questionnaire or in the typed record of the interview. Your answers are confidential. Although some of your comments might be used in the final report of the research, no results will be presented in such a way that could identify you personally. Only the researcher will have access to the recording of the interview or the typed record of the interview. The recording of the interview will be downloaded to a computer file

that is password protected. The typed record of the interview will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. These will be destroyed six months after the study is finished. You are being asked to refrain from discussing the comments made by other women in the focus group outside of the focus group interview. Please note that the researcher is required by law to report current and past child abuse or situations dangerous to children to the legal authorities.

You will be offered a copy of a summary of the final research report. If you would like to receive a copy of this summary, it will be sent to you at the address or e-mail address that you specify.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

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Participant's Signature

Date

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Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature

Date

I would like to receive a summary of the final research report.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

I would like this summary mailed to the following address:

**Appendix D: Topical Outline for In-depth Interviews**

Tell me a little bit about yourself. Probes:

- Age
- Education
- Employment Status and Occupation
- Income
- Ethnic Background/Race
- Living Arrangements
- Number and Ages of Children

Tell me about the first time you ever used a VLT/slot machine. Probes:

- When was the first time?
- How were you introduced to VLT/slot machine gambling?

What about your current VLT/slot machine gambling. Probes:

- Frequency of VLT slot/machine gambling?
- Why VLTs/slots are preferred?
- Where VLTs/slots are usually played?
- Reasons for choice of location?
- With whom do you gamble on VLTs/slots ?

Tell me more about your current roles? You mentioned that you work, have children, etc. Are there any other things that you do or roles that you have (Such as caring for other people or volunteering, etc.)?

How do the things that you do or the roles that you have influence your VLT/slot machine gambling?

Does playing VLTs/slots effect these roles?

Tell me about your current relationships (children, partners, friends, family, work colleagues). Probe:

- Quality of relationships?
- Support offered by those with whom in relationships?

How do these relationships influence your VLT/slot machine gambling?

Does playing VLTs/slots effect these relationships?

How is your VLT/slot machine gambling influenced by your current financial situation?

Are there other leisure opportunities available to you? Have you noticed advertisements about gambling? What do you think about them?



Do other things in your neighbourhood/community influence your VLT/slot machine gambling?

Why do you like VLT/slot machine gambling? Why is it attractive to you?

How would you fill in the sentence "VLT/slot machine gambling gives me \_\_\_\_\_" (purpose or functions of VLT/slot machine gambling)

Can you tell me anything else about the place of VLT/slot machine gambling in your life or about other factors that influence your gambling?

**Appendix E: Focus Group Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Guide****Demographic Questionnaire**

1. What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
(Day) (Month) (Year)

2. What is the highest level of education that you have completed? (Please check ✓)

- ☐ Grade nine or less
- ☐ Some high school
- ☐ Completed high school
- ☐ Some community college or technical school  
(e.g. certificate or diploma)
- ☐ Completed community college or technical school
- ☐ Some university
- ☐ Completed undergraduate degree
- ☐ Graduate degree

3. What is your relationship status? (Please check ✓)

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Dating
- ☐ Common-law
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Separated or Divorced
- ☐ Widowed

4. Do you have any children? (Please check ✓)

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you have children, what are their ages?

Child 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Child 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Child 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Child 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Child 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Do these children live with you? (If yes, please check ✓)

Child 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Child 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Child 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Child 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Child 5 \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your present employment status? (Please check ✓)

☐ Employed full-time (30 or more hours a week)

☐ Employed part-time (less than 30 hours a week)

☐ Unemployed (out of work but looking for work)

☐ Student employed part-time or full-time

☐ Student not employed

☐ Retired

☐ Homemaker

6. If you are currently employed in an occupation other than a homemaker, what is your occupation?

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7. What was your total household income before taxes last year? That would be the household income before taxes and from all sources for all persons in your household. (Please check ✓)

- ☐ Under \$10,000
- ☐ \$10,000 – 20,000
- ☐ \$20,001 - 30,000
- ☐ \$30,001 - 40,000
- ☐ \$40,001 - 50, 000
- ☐ \$50, 001 - 60,000
- ☐ \$60,001 - 70,000
- ☐ \$70, 001 - 80,000
- ☐ \$80,001 - 90,000
- ☐ \$90,001 - 100,000
- ☐ over \$100, 001

8. Do you feel that you belong to a particular culture or ethnic group within Canada?

(Please check ✓)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, which group is that?

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### Focus Group Interview Guide

1. We know that everyone here gambles on VLTS or slots. What is it that you like best about VLT/slot machine gambling?
2. Women participate in a variety of roles in their lives. Do you think women's roles influence their VLT/slot machine gambling?
  - Work roles?
  - Family roles? (mother, partner, etc.)
3. Women are also involved in a variety of relationships including relationships with their children, partners, friends, family, and work colleagues. Do you think that women's relationships with other people influence their VLT/slot machine gambling?
4. Women have told me that because they are busy doing so many things, like work and family, they need some "Me Time" and that playing the machines gives them that. Does that fit for you?
5. Is there anything about the venues in which the machines are found (for example casinos, bars, and lounges) that appeals to women?
6. What about the machines themselves? Most women I have talked to really like the machines – the games. Does that fit for you? Are machines paying out less than they used to?
7. What is the popular image of gambling? Is it seen as positive or negative? Does this influence women's VLT/slot machine gambling?
8. Most women tell me that playing is really not about winning money? Does that fit for you?
9. Is VLT/slot machine gambling influenced by other opportunities for leisure or recreation?
10. What is it about VLTs/slots gambling that makes it so popular among women?
11. What functions or purposes are served by VLT/slot machine gambling among women? / If I were to ask you to finish the statement "VLTs/slots give me \_\_\_\_\_" how would you fill in the blank?

12. Are there any other factors that we have not discussed that influence VLT/slot machine gambling among women?

13. Have we missed anything? Is there anything else that you would like to say about the about the benefits that VLT/slot machine gambling provide for women or that you would like to add to today's discussion?