

Way to Play: Analyzing Gambling Ads for Their Appeal to Underage Youth

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ABSTRACT *This study is the first in Canada to look at gambling ads from a variety of media sources from different provincial lotteries, with 127 television, radio, print, and public-display ads obtained from the Atlantic Lottery Corporation, Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, Loto-Québec, and the Western Lottery Corporation. Ads were coded for recurring themes, symbols, and discourses using a qualitative software program and analyzed, with their appeal to youth forming the framework for analysis. Major findings include the discussion of nine key themes: easy money, dream, social status, glamour, regular folks, sports, excitement, humour, and youth culture. These themes are discussed in terms of their specific appeal to youth audiences, and their significance is related to existing literature.*

KEYWORDS *Psychology; Media/mass media; Content analysis; Advertising*

RÉSUMÉ *Cette étude est la première au Canada à analyser des publicités sur le jeu provenant de médias et de loteries provinciales divers, examinant 127 annonces pour la télévision, la radio, la presse écrite et les panneaux publicitaires obtenues de Loto Atlantique, de la Société des loteries et des jeux de l'Ontario, de Loto-Québec et du Western Canada Lottery Corporation. Au moyen d'un logiciel pour la recherche qualitative, nous avons recensé et analysé les thèmes, symboles et discours récurrents dans ces publicités, leur attrait pour les jeunes constituant notre cadre d'analyse principal. Nos résultats ont mené à la discussion de neuf thèmes clés : l'argent facile, le rêve, le statut social, le glamour, les gens comme vous et moi, les sports, l'excitation, l'humour et la culture de jeunesse. Nous discutons ces thèmes par rapport à leur attrait pour un public jeune et nous rapprochons leur signification aux travaux actuels sur le sujet.*

MOTS CLÉS *Psychologie; Médias/médias de masse; Analyse de contenu; Publicité*

Introduction

The social construction of gambling as exciting, harmless entertainment is the result of many overlapping messages in the media (such as news, film, television,

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music, Internet) and in everyday practices (such as office hockey pools, schoolyard poker games, or gifts of holiday-themed scratch cards). When governments build their own casinos, run their own lotteries, or support their development and proliferation elsewhere, the implicit message is that gambling is acceptable. These messages are reinforced within families where parents engage in gambling activities, in popular culture where gambling is depicted as glamorous and socially desirable, and in social contexts where gambling is part of the interaction.

The arena in which the most deliberate framing of the popular discourse around gambling occurs is in advertising. Paid messages in print, television, public advertising (such as billboards and posters), online, and via other creative avenues (product placement in film, point-of-purchase displays, direct mail, etc.) literally constitute one part of the framework through which gambling activities come to be understood as “games,” “fun,” or “sport.” This advertising contains few (if any) references to negative consequences or actual odds of winning. Unlike tobacco and alcohol advertising, where years of public-health initiatives have resulted in ever-evolving guidelines, restrictions, and outright bans, gambling advertising remains almost completely vulnerable to the whims of sponsors. And although it would be reductive to accuse advertisements of causing anyone’s gambling problems, it is reasonable to see how they help to reinforce attitudes that may be harmful to vulnerable populations.

To date, there have been a few systematic studies of advertising messages about gambling (Binde, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Korn, 2008; McMullan & Miller, 2008, 2010; Monaghan, Derevensky, & Sklar, 2008), but none of these have focused specifically on the potential appeal to underage youth. This article addresses this gap in the research through a textual analysis of a sample of print and television ads for lotteries and scratch cards from Canada and the United States between 2005 and 2006.

This project involved deconstructing gambling advertisements as a group of messages framing popular discourse about gambling, by locating and analyzing key elements in its framework. Of principal concern were those elements of this discourse that either appear to target or appeal to youth deemed underage for the purposes of purchasing gambling products, for advertising messages function as one potential mode for the social construction of messages about gambling. Although ads cannot be regarded as directly causative of behaviours in any facile way, they are nevertheless one part of a constellation of normalizing influences that can be effectively targeted by policy guidelines in the interest of public health, as evidenced by increasingly tightened Canadian legislation directed at the advertising of alcohol and tobacco products.

A concern for youth gambling activities emerges from the significant expansion of the gambling landscape in Canada and the United States in the past five years. Provincial and state governments continue to develop and enhance both the accessibility and variety of wager-based games, with many governments either entering or considering new opportunities in the online gaming market.

From a public-health perspective, there is reason to be concerned about the implications of this market expansion for teens and young adults. We do know that this rapid expansion has outpaced the efforts of public-health and social policymakers to address the possible risks. Risk prevention programs for teens that cover sexual health, alcohol, drugs, and smoking tend to make no mention of gambling, and there is no

legislation in Canada regarding what can be stated or depicted in the advertising of gambling products. Although there are many reasons for this public-health and policy gap, one of the significant obstacles regulators face is a popular view of gambling as generally benign and socially acceptable. Little is known in the public sphere about the risks this normalization of gambling poses for teens, despite research that consistently shows rates of problem gambling in adolescents at roughly two to three times those of the adult population (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004b).

Advertising

Since advertisements function as one of the key modes through which public discourses may be socially constructed (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992), they offer insight into how gambling comes to be understood in a popular context. Understanding the impact of advertising is of particular concern during a period in which the gaming industry is rapidly expanding (Binde, 2006). In Canada alone, legal gambling revenues exceed \$9 billion per year (Derevensky et al., 2004). Governments at all levels, especially in Canada, have emerged as strong players in the proliferation of gambling across various social spheres, including (but not limited to) state-sponsored lotteries, the deregulation of casinos, and video lottery terminals. Private enterprises have set up a whole host of gambling opportunities, with particular expansion in the online gaming sector. As these offerings are difficult to regulate, controlling underage gambling becomes increasingly difficult.

Research into youth gambling shows that between 4.4 and 7.4% of adolescents exhibit serious patterns of pathological gambling, with another 9.9 to 14.2% remaining either at risk for developing or returning to a serious gambling problem (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004b; Shaffer & Hall, 1996). Based on research with adolescents in the United States, the National Research Council (NRC) estimates that problem gambling rates among teens could be more than three times those among adults (NRC, 1999). The outlook for future gambling disorders among youth is not particularly encouraging. Jacobs' analysis of 26 studies on youth gambling concluded that "the dominant long term trend has been a progressive increase in the amount of serious gambling-related problems reported by juveniles in the United States and Canada" (Jacobs, 2004, p. 9). Derevensky and Gupta explain, "Recent national commissions held in many countries have concluded that adolescents and young adults remain particularly high-risk and vulnerable to new gaming-related technologies and to developing gambling-related problems" (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004a, p. xxiii).

An age-based analysis of gambling problems highlights youth as a direct result of the increased prevalence of gambling problems. Adolescence is understood to be a developmentally appropriate stage of increased risk-taking, experimentation, and sensation-seeking. Laws that restrict underage youth from gambling, drinking alcohol, or purchasing tobacco products are based on the presumption that teens do not have the emotional maturity and responsibility to effectively and safely make consistently sound decisions in areas of high risk. This adolescent immaturity is of particular concern in light of the expansion and accessibility of the gambling industry and its attendant publicity campaigns. The rapid growth of both state-sponsored and private-sector gambling activities relies heavily on advertising to create and frame public awareness

of and appeal for their activities. That said, the above prevalence data suggest that at least three-quarters of underage youth are not at significant risk for developing gambling problems, and it is important not to paint an unduly alarmist picture. However, the numbers do suggest a need to consider what kinds of messages are being circulated through advertising about gambling as a form of entertainment, sport, or method for winning “easy money.”

It is difficult to get an accurate picture of gambling corporations’ expenditures on advertising. Although Loto-Québec is estimated to spend roughly \$20 million per year on advertising, the corporation does not release public figures on this aspect of its budget. According to one industry website, North American lotteries spent US\$400 million on advertising in 1996 and received \$34 billion in sales, which places advertising expenditures at a very low 1.17% of total revenue (My Lotto Corner, 2003). The State of Indiana reported spending \$11.5 million on promotional advertising for its state lottery in 2000 (Najavits, Grymala, & George, 2003).

Advertising occurs across a variety of media types, depending on the type of gambling and the target audience. At the moment, there exists almost nothing in the way of policy concerning advertisements for gambling, other than self-imposed ethical guidelines. There is some variance according to region and country, but the guidelines that do exist are voluntary and appear designed to allay concerns about the industry’s sense of social responsibility. One concern is that the governments involved are owners, regulators, and watchdogs of their own activities.

An example of these voluntary guidelines is found in the American Gaming Association’s voluntary Code of Conduct for Responsible Gaming, which features a pledge to “advertise responsibly.” This includes avoiding depictions of anyone under the legal age for gambling, avoiding depictions of college athletes, and avoiding featuring “cartoon figures, symbols, celebrity/entertainer endorsements and/or language designed to appeal specifically to children and minors” (American Gaming Association, 2003). At the same time, U.S. lotteries are not obligated to abide by federal Truth in Advertising laws due to the separation of powers (most lotteries are state-run and therefore exempt from federal law).

In Canada, the Gaming Control Act (1992) and its regulations have no application to commercial gambling lottery advertisements. Both the U.K.’s National Lottery Commission and Loto-Québec have been praised for sound and responsible codes of practice (Griffiths, 2005). In the case of the latter corporation, this includes requirements to avoid “concepts liable to incite the interest of children,... prohibit[ing] the use of spokespeople who are popular among youth, as well as the placement of advertisements within media programmes viewed mainly by children.” Loto-Québec also prints the odds of winning on the back of lottery tickets and has pledged to devote 20% of airtime in television commercials for new products to promoting a gambling helpline and presenting warnings about problem gambling (Loto-Québec, 2006).

There is some research-based evidence to show that actual campaigns feature images, associations, and metaphors likely to appeal to adolescents. The National Gambling Impact Study Commission (1999) found that the messages in lottery ads were oriented toward particularly vulnerable segments of the population, specifi-

cally youth. Griffiths and Wood (2001) have argued that advertising and television content introduces children and teens to the principles of gambling. Korn's (2008) study integrated both content analysis of ads for gambling products and services and focus groups of youth audiences between 13 and 17 years old. He found that many of the youth participants had positive attitudes toward gambling, found it to be generally harmless, and enjoyed the humour of the gambling ads. Lottery ticket ads were observed to use techniques more likely to appeal to younger audiences (such as humour or use of young actors) than ads for casinos or horse racing. Young people in this study reported gambling even though they agreed there was little chance of winning, claimed that gambling ads had no influence on them yet suggested through their discussion that the opposite was true, and identified gambling risks that were nevertheless perceived to be more of a problem for other people than themselves.

Other research has indicated that advertisements for gambling serve as significant triggers and incentives to gamble (Grant & Won Kim, 2001). Moreover, the Third Person Effect (TPE) postulates that people may not read gambling advertisements in a critical manner, assuming that these media messages have a greater impact on other people than they do on themselves (Davison, 1983; Youn, Faber, & Shah, 2000).

A study in New Zealand (Amey, 2001) found that a large majority (89%) of the 1,500 people sampled had recall of gambling advertising in the previous 12 months; recall was highest for those who played lottery games. It was also reported that younger people were considerably more likely to remember gambling ads (93% in the 25 and under group versus 76% of those over 65). The New Zealand survey also found an association between ad recall and participation in gambling activities: those people not gambling were least likely to recall seeing gambling advertisements, and those who spent the most on gambling were most likely to recall particular ads.

In addition, it has been suggested that youth are particularly attuned to gambling advertisements and have high levels of recall for these ads (Derevensky, Gupta, Messerlian, & Gillespie, 2004). The lack of analysis of gambling advertising content has been a source of frustration for some researchers in this area, who must rely instead on anecdotal evidence or the superficial analysis of non-academic interested parties, such as the Australian Christian Lobby. Reports by the Canadian National Council for Welfare (1996) and the U.S. National Gambling Impact Study Commission (1999) found it particularly troublesome that so much lottery advertising was deceptive and misleading, with little or no reference to the actual odds of winning.

Mark Griffiths (2005) concludes his article on the issue of problem gambling and advertising with the following recommendations:

It is very clear that the question of whether increased gambling advertising leads to increased gambling problems just can not be answered on the base of such a small pool of data. Although there is a lack of research in this area, there are precedents that advertisements for the promotion of gambling, especially government-run lotteries, should perhaps be placed in the same category as alcohol and tobacco promotions because of the potentially addictive nature of gambling and the potential for being a major health problem. (p. 23)

Advertising “both reflects and constitutes social order” (O’Barr, 1994, p. 4), playing an important part in determining and structuring the creation of consumer needs and wants. Judith Williamson (1978) argues that while audiences of advertisements may be naïve in their casual readings of ads, they also cannot be simply dismissed as dupes. Rather, we are implicated in the production of meaning: “It is individual people, real people, who are the connecting link here: they, we, clearly exist in time and space, in a changing world, but we also provide the arena—unconscious—for the ideological structure of ideas. This only exists inside our heads” (pp. 101-102). Similarly, Blankenship (1976) maintains that the language and images used in ads are ultimately “not merely descriptive, but ‘prescriptive’ as well” (np). In their exploration of uses of “the future,” Blankenship and Kenner-Muir (1985) chose to use advertisements as a representative text because such large numbers of people are exposed to them, and they are a “useful touchstone of social forecast” (np).

On the whole, advertising creates and reinforces a set of rhetorical filter of language and images through which the public comes to understand a particular social construction of gambling. These filters form what Kenneth Burke termed “terministic screens” (1966). Language, explained Burke, *reflects, selects* and *deflects* reality. Arguably this is also true for the visual symbols used in print and audiovisual media.

However, we must be cautious about the claims we can make from the identification of recurring discourses in ads. As Buckingham (1998) has argued, we need to go beyond blaming the mass media for the influence they exert on adolescents, and work to harness its power to positive effect. This would suggest first understanding its messages, educating children and teens about media literacy, and working to make sure that these messages fit within accepted guidelines of public health. Kline (2007) says that media literacy initiatives for youth need to include both *advertising literacy* and *economic literacy* elements, so that children and teens can learn a critical stance toward advertising appeals and become more savvy, rational economic subjects.

Using ads as a point of entry into discourse analysis can nevertheless prove very useful for scholars seeking to examine how new meanings are constituted in a commercial sphere designed for public consumption; many examples of this kind of research exist across a wide variety of scholarly fields (Currie, 1997; Hackley, 2002; Mazzarella, 2003; Rao, 2002; Wang, 2003). In this study, insight is offered into the dominant themes about gambling in terms of their potential appeal to youth audiences.

Method

In the first phase of this project, ads were collected through appeals to the lottery and gaming corporations themselves. Formal requests were made to all Canadian lottery corporations by the lead author, followed up by phone calls by an assistant. As the authors have worked with most of these lottery corporations in past efforts to develop responsible gambling messages (such as an annual press campaign urging parents and caregivers not to buy lottery tickets and scratch cards as gifts for underage youth), a predominantly cooperative relationship was easily established. In most cases, it was necessary to obtain formal approval through the chain of command at the lottery corporation. Four lotteries ended up submitting ads from their archives: Loto-Québec, the Atlantic Lottery Corporation (ALC), the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation

(OLG), and the Western Lottery Corporation (WCLC). The lotteries themselves compiled the ads (mostly in CD format), opening up the distinct possibility that they selected ads that showcased their work in the most socially responsible format. However, as this project did not require either exhaustive, random, or selective sampling, this kind of selection was not considered detrimental to our analysis. The ads selected, given the numbers in which they were sent, were more than sufficient for textual analysis.

In total, 127 ads for lottery tickets and scratch cards were analyzed. More than 154 ads were collected, but some were discarded to control for repetition (the same campaign being run by more than one lottery corporation) or because they did not directly refer to gambling activities (such as ads for concerts taking place at a casino but not referring to gambling). There were 83 print ads, 28 television ads, and 16 radio advertisements. Deconstruction of these ads were carried out with an analytical framework toward their potential appeal for underage youth. Gambling falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction in Canada, but in most parts of the country you need to be 18 years of age to gamble (19 in Ontario and British Columbia). With this legal distinction as a general guideline for the upper age in determining youth appeal for the purposes of this study, the lower end was determined by findings indicating the average age for gambling initiation is as low as 10 to 12 (Hurt, Giannetta, Brodsky, Shera, & Romer, 2008).

The ads—including print, video, and audio (radio)—were coded in Nvivo 8, which allows for detailed, timeline coding of specific elements of media images and sound. All ads were coded by two people, according to recurring patterns in theme, words, images, pacing, sound, colour, and symbolism. Coding congruencies and discrepancies were discussed according to the objective of the project. Since this investigation was focused on elements that might be particularly appealing to youth below the legal gambling age, specific attention was paid to the ages and socio-economic classes of people represented, the use of humour (especially with an irreverent or sarcastic tone), depiction of consumer items or indulgent purchases that might be made by lottery winners, and references to work or financial responsibilities, social status, and popular culture. Coding took into account any reference to ease of winning, including mention of the actual odds or other references. These coded elements were then used in various queries to detect commonalities, contradictions, and juxtapositions. Query results were then interpreted and analyzed. The pattern of themes that emerged across the various ads, was discussed according to the narrative, visual, textual, and/or audiovisual elements that were highlighted.

A focus on youth-based appeals has the unfortunate result of collapsing the incredible diversity of North American youth into a homogeneous group. While this group is helpful for heuristic purposes in this kind of first-stage analysis, there are clearly different appeals (and silences) around different demographic categories. It has been argued that certain groups can be considered higher risk than others, notably adolescent males (Tavares, Zilberman, Beites, & Gentil, 2002), Native American youth, and children of immigrants from certain countries (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004b). Although distinctions in representation and appeals based on ethnic-

ity, nationality, and socio-economic group are worthy of scholarly investigation, these questions are outside the scope of this research project.

Results

Analysis of the advertisements in this study revealed nine dominant recurring themes: easy money, dream, social status, glamour, regular folks, sports, excitement, humour, and youth culture. Here these themes are discussed in terms of their specific appeal to youth audiences, and their significance is related to existing literature.

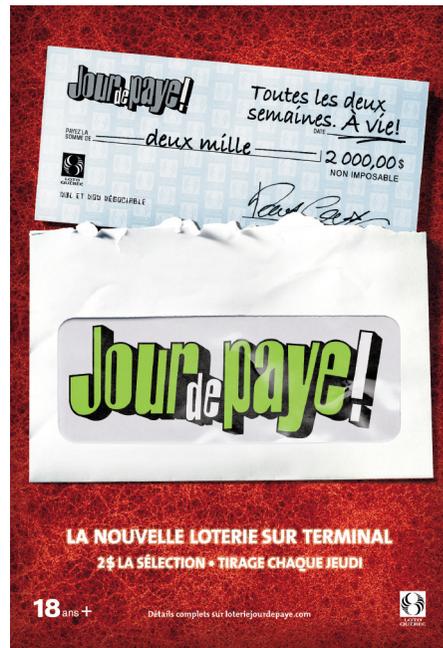
Easy money

Unsurprisingly, the most common theme was “easy money,” in which the simple purchase of a lottery ticket or scratch card can bring riches unimaginable to most people in conventional jobs. There is no question this is enticing to adults, who dream of rising above their income level. For adolescents, who have little access to disposable income and tend to work at minimum-wage, low-skill-level jobs, this is also an extremely powerful appeal.

For adolescents, this easy money brings not only the promise of riches, but also freedom from dependence on their employment and, more importantly, on their parents. One early study found more than half of adolescents surveyed spontaneously expressed worries about employment and unemployment (Gillies, 1989). Since parental disbursement of funds (whether as allowance, gifts, or tuition for school) often comes with accountability (e.g., doing chores, babysitting for siblings, being home for curfews, and/or earning good grades), the promise of “easy money” promises additional freedom. The notion of “easy” in this theme is intriguing for the way it tacitly exaggerates the odds of winning. The idea that all anyone has to do to gain access to this money is simply buy a ticket and play the game is so obviously a blatant contradiction of reality, but nevertheless it remains very compelling (Korn, 2008).

In Figure 1, it is possible to see the direct way in which anxieties about earning power and disposable income are targeted. The prominent slogan in this ad (“Payday!”) speaks clearly to these financial worries and desires, and the ad stimulates fantasies of lifetime financial freedom. (The text translates roughly as “\$2,000 every two weeks for life!”) The familiar imagery of the paycheque and torn envelope (which also evokes contrasting images of bills) may be particularly compelling to teens and

Figure 1:
Loto-Québec—*Jour de paye!*



young adults who have begun contemplating the jobs/careers they will need in order to sustain themselves as adults.

While this theme would be compelling to any demographic group, one subcategory of “easy money” represents a particularly worrisome appeal to adolescents. In these ads (see Figure 2), items such as consumer electronics (including iPods, Wiis and other video games, smartphones) and high-end bicycles or sports cars are offered

Figure 2:
Loto-Québec—Cadeau d’été

as prizes, items likely to be of particular interest to teens and young adults. These specific ads belie the standard contention of lottery corporations that adolescents are truly an unintended secondary market.

This particular ad, which was distributed to households, features backpacks, walkie-talkies, and cordless phones, among other items. The middle inset photo shows a beach scene with a bicycle, walkie-talkies, and a camcorder. Although it is possible to imagine this ad is directed at those over 18, the particular images and design elements strongly suggest an intended youth target audience.

Dream

It has been observed that people purchase lottery tickets for the chance to dream of winning. That dream has powerful emotional and psychological components, opening up the boundaries of imagination and offering momentary freedom from the restraints of reality. Once again, this particular theme is one with universal appeal to all demographic groups, but will have particular resonance with adolescents.

Dream appeals can work in different ways. Some ads depict iconic symbols of luxurious indulgence such as mansions, sports cars, or tropical beaches (as opposed to images of either sustainable financial security, such as retirement funds, or financial generosity, such as charitable donations to non-profits). A more common and arguably more compelling trend is to invite the viewer to consider their own lottery win. Figure 3 challenges the viewer to consider “What will your happy dance be?” Fantasies of being suddenly, wildly rich can be their own source of pleasure, bought

Figure 3:
Atlantic Lottery Corporation
—“Happy dance”



sions? Actual odds of winning are never explicitly stated in the ads, and, in fact, are often exaggerated to misrepresent the chances of walking away with a prize. To sustain the appeal of this theme, the parameters of the dream are less explicitly drawn out. The Loto-Québec “18+” and ALC small-type admonishment to “Know your limit. Play within it” (as in Figure 4) are both relegated to a bottom corner, where they disappear into the frame the same way reminders to “Drink Responsibly” or avoid smoking when pregnant become visually and rhetorically ineffective for alcohol and tobacco products (Austin & Hust, 2005; Beiner, 2002). The visuals and large text are so compelling that little if any attention is paid to small text reminders or warnings. They are figuratively erased, existing only as reminders of lukewarm and ineffective social responsibility, and certainly not allocated the kind of prominence they would require to effectively deliver their messages to underage youth or their parents and caregivers.

In Figure 4, the rhetorical weight of the social responsibility message in the bottom right-hand corner is literally erased by the incitement to dream (“Family reunion in Paris”) and the questionable promise that “Every ticket wins a prize!” The liberal

for the small price of a lottery ticket. In this way, the responsive viewer becomes complicit in their own surrender to the dream appeal.

Lifestyle appeals are among the most common dream themes to run through these ads (19 ads out of 127 referenced lifestyle). Presenting consumers with the luxurious images and indulgences made possible by a big lottery win structures the purchase of a lottery ticket as a choice to be made. Moreover, lifestyle ads tend to imply a resulting freedom from everyday financial worries and stress. Roughly half of these ads depict couples in their 20s and 30s, clearly adults.

But how is this invitation to dream structured in lottery ads? How can realistic parameters for the dream be established in order to keep harmless, briefly distracting fantasies from turning into obses-

Figure 4:
Atlantic Lottery Corporation
—“Family reunion in Paris”



use of exclamation marks connotes a breathless excitement that offers a counterweight to the small-type advice to “Know your limits.” Moreover, the deliberately vague prize promised by each ticket may well be nothing more than a free ticket or small amounts of cash (\$1, \$2, or \$5) that do not even cover the \$10 purchase price. Even the name of the type of lottery ticket, highlighted in red and white, implies a promise of cause and effect: “Scratch and Win.”

Social status

Appeals based on improving social status are a regular part of advertisements for gambling products and services. While ascribed social status is generally fixed, ads focus on ways in which a product may confer heightened achieved status. These ads may work through flattery of the consumer as discerning, intelligent, exciting, or “in the know” if they buy these products or services (for more on this, see the section on Glamour). More commonly, however, they work by equating the accumulation of wealth (and its trappings) with social power. For example, Loto-Québec’s popular “It pays to be nice” ads reinforce the idea that winning large amounts of money will make someone more socially desirable; in fact, the presentation of the ads extends this idea to the mere purchasing of lottery tickets, since each unclaimed ticket in one’s pocket has the remote possibility of winning.

The importance of social status for adolescents is well established (Hawley, Little, & Card, 2007; Kennedy, 1990; Malloy, Albright, & Scarpatti, 2007). Research indicates that matters relating to social recognition and success are among adolescents’ top worries (Kaufman, Brown, Graves, Henderson, & Revolinski, 1993). The concept of social status implicit in the idea that “it pays to be nice to people who play the 6/49” is also one that is likely to be extremely resonant with adolescents, who are at a time in their lives when they are very status-conscious. The linkage between money, lifestyle, and status is also one that might appeal to anyone, but is particularly compelling to teens and young adults.

Social-status appeals in gambling ads may play upon two noted effects in people’s outlooks on the world. “Relative deprivation” is generally used to describe feelings of resentment stemming from the belief that one is deprived of a deserved outcome relative to some referent level (Crosby, 1976). Furthermore, most people maintain an abiding belief that they are good, hard-working people deserving of good outcomes (Lerner, 1980), in other words, the notion that everything should “even out” or those people who are relatively deprived deserve positive outcomes in some form. Relative deprivation predicts efforts toward self-improvement, which are not always successful (Hafer & Olsen, 1993). Gambling offers the prospect of a convenient way out for individuals experiencing personal relative deprivation, that is, individuals who also may not perceive more conventional means of self-improvement as viable or feasible in the shorter term. In other words, low social status can contribute to a notion of relative deprivation, which can in turn lead to efforts toward self-improvement through gambling.

Gambling may offer an easy means of increasing social status that an individual feels he/she deserves but might not be able to attain otherwise due to constraints on ascribed status. Individuals with lower socio-economic status are more likely to spend a larger proportion of their income on gambling to balance inequalities in social sta-

tus (Welte, Wieczorek, Barnes, & Tidwell, 2006). Advertisements for lotteries and other gambling-related activities either explicitly or tacitly portray gambling as a viable means of attaining desired outcomes (e.g., “dream” homes, cash prizes) that, according to the advertisements, everyone ought to have (Korn, Reynolds, & Hurson, 2006). Callan, Ellard, Shead, and Hodgins (2008) observed that self-reports of personal relative deprivation (which includes perceived low social status) predicted problem gambling and gambling urges over and above control variables. In a second study, Callan et al. (2008) found that when personal relative deprivation was manipulated by researchers (half the participants were informed they had less discretionary income than “similar others”; the other half were informed they had more discretionary income), a greater percentage of participants in the “relatively deprived” condition opted to gamble when given the opportunity. This suggests gambling serves a “justice-seeking” function, whereby some people attempt to behaviourally compensate for the sense they are getting less than they deserve in life (i.e., they feel they deserve higher social status). Among adolescents, gambling can be a way to increase their social status among peers (Fisher, 1995).

Of the many ads that used this social-status appeal, the Loto 6/49 “Roommates” ad was interesting because of the tremendous crossover to teens. The youthful actors, the roommate/living situation, the lack of implied family, the drums—all of these things have heavy connotations of youthfulness and familiarity for young people. In this case, the guys’ friendship hinges here on the 6/49 win, without which the hapless roommate would find himself turfed out of his apartment.

Glamour

Social status intersects glamour in another interesting linkage in these ads, and serves as a fascinating counterpoint to the “regular folks” ads. In the glamour ads, social status is heightened by both winning money but also, more pointedly, by the playing of these gambling games. In other words, it is not actually necessary to win “big” money, but to be seen playing the games, for which the possibility (however remote) of a large win exists. This significant rhetorical shift is rather more convenient for the lottery corporations. You see this with the 6/49 “It pays to be nice” ads, but also in more direct connotations as in the following.

In the ad illustrated in Figure 5, a well-dressed young man with the requisite dark sunglasses could have walked off any movie set. He has an

Figure 5:
Loto-Québec—Casino Royal



iconic James Bond feel to him. This text references the glamorous lifestyle implied in popular film and television, translating it to the decidedly less glittering and luxurious world of scratch tickets. Glamour appeals both acknowledge and reinforce the performative element in social status, signified by particular choices in clothing, accessories, speech, and demeanour. Adolescents are particularly interested in these social cues in the communication of identity. Exaggerated references (such as the juxtaposition of glamour and scratch cards) draw attention to the performance itself as a humorous device, and flatter the viewer for recognizing this and being “in the know.”

Regular folks

It is important to note that these glamour ads are distinctly different from the “regular folks” ads. In these ads, the rhetorical argument of “anyone can win” is reinforced by images of “real,” non-glamorous people in workaday situations. These people tend to be older, wearing little (if any) makeup, and are often depicted in working-class or lower-middle-class positions. Many of these ads, including those showing images of actual winners, invite the viewer to believe that regular people *just like them* win the lottery. Viewers are encouraged to imagine their own faces replacing the ones in the ads.

The second category of regular-folks ads invites us to laugh at the people in the ads, reduced to caricatures of “regular folk.” In these ads the viewer is flattered by the implication that they are more sophisticated and worldly than the generic office workers and housewives who appear in these ads. This kind of humour is extremely popular with all age groups, and will certainly resonate with adolescents. One BCLC (British Columbia Lottery Corporation) ad offered a particularly excellent example of teen appeal through a “regular folks” ad. This 30-second television ad was part of the popular “Some moments last forever” series (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ckO_gtckzU). In it, a middle-aged man in a cheap powder-blue sports jacket moves in slow motion to hug a boyish convenience-store clerk, launching the vat of liquid orange nacho cheese the clerk is holding into the air in his surprise. Clearly having just won the lottery, the customer jumps up and down in slow-motion exuberance, his toupee flapping with the motion. The young clerk has long hair and shares his customer’s joy. The title “Some moments last forever” ends the segment before the BCLC logo appears on the screen.

Figure 6:
OLG—Prehistoric jock strap



tooupe flapping with the motion. The young clerk has long hair and shares his customer’s joy. The title “Some moments last forever” ends the segment before the BCLC logo appears on the screen.

Sports

Sports imagery and references are used in the design of lottery tickets and scratch cards as a way to capitalize on the culturally powerful recognition factor of organized sport. Associations of excitement, competition, and winning are already built in to this appeal, and the implication of skill (through practice and mastery of a sport) flatters the

prospective lottery player with the suggestion they may have more than luck going for them when they purchase their tickets. Even more significant is the association with male players, who are invited to link the playing of lottery with the playing of sports.

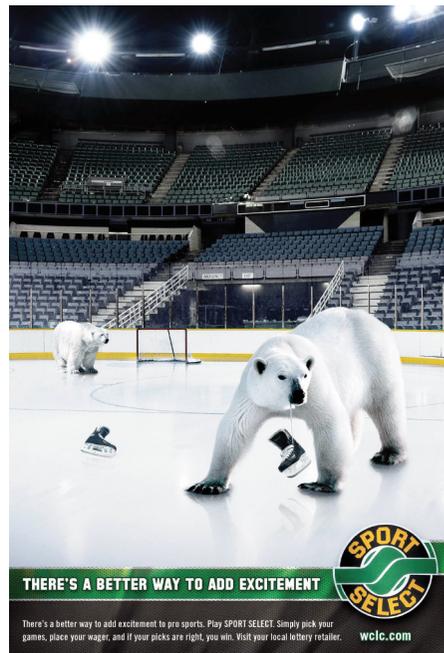
We know from prevalence data that scratch cards are particularly appealing to young people because of their fast turnaround time (Felsher, Derevensky, & Fischer, 2004). It is likely that sports imagery and association is seen as a way to lure male players of all ages. However, the concern with this association (especially in tandem with the ribald, somewhat sophomoric humour of Figure 6) is that it is particularly appealing to young men.

Excitement

Equating gambling with excitement offers a strong inducement to play, especially where it is implied as adding interest to an otherwise humdrum daily existence. Excitement can be explicitly denoted as in the WCLC ad (see Figure 7) or implied with text, colours, and movement in the image, or sound in a TV or radio ad. Excitement is a familiar advertising appeal, and is used in tandem with a wide variety of products and services even when there is only the most arbitrary connection between them (as with tampons or soap). For most viewers, including teens, the suggested association with excitement is such a standard trope in advertising that it is not always that resonant in and of itself. However, combining the suggestion of excitement with humour and other icons (as with the hockey rink in Figure 7) reinforces the message that gambling introduces a little excitement into the monotony of one's routine. Figure 7 borrows from the logical association of sports and excitement (whether as spectator or player) and extends it to the purchase of scratch tickets. There is also an implicit connection to the dream appeal here, because the mere act of purchase is unlikely to be exciting in itself, but the fantasy of winning becomes the source of pleasure and excitement.

Excitement in these ads was frequently paired with social status, as a way to connote an implicit "in" crowd. In these ads, the excitement comes from winning large amounts of money and either being transformed into a more exciting person or hav-

Figure 7:
WCLC—"A better way to add excitement" (polar bears)



ing a more exciting life (as in Figure 8). The implication here is seductive: the source of excitement is depicted as external to the main character (the stand-in for the viewer).

Figure 8:
OLG—“Daily draws. Daily winners.”



In other words, leading an exciting life or being an interesting person has nothing to do with one's inner drive or intrinsic characteristics, but needs to be enabled or supplied from the outside. The tired and unappealing-looking woman in the Wednesday “before” photograph is little more than a shell waiting to be animated by her lottery winnings. This notion of extrinsic happiness is culturally pervasive, and extremely demotivating for younger people seeking to build rewarding lives for themselves.

Humour

Humour functions in a variety of ways in gambling ads: to encourage recall of the ad messages and brands, to reinforce a theme through exaggeration (such as the hyperbolic niceness of the Mark character in the “6/49” ads), and to facilitate identification between the

consumer and the characters portrayed. Some forms of humour are more accessible and inviting to an adolescent audience, making use of particular social codes and cultural references that young viewers can relate to. In an ad in BCLC's “Some moments last forever” campaign, a group of professional wrestlers who discover they have won the lottery offer a tableau with particular appeal to teens and young adults, based on their campy costumes, the slow-motion jiggle of their culturally coded bodies, and their exaggerated facial expressions (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmhjuIzSpts>).

Humour can have a particular resonance for adolescent viewers when it is ironic. For example, some of the “regular folks” ads described above can also be read as ironic stereotypes of regular people, flattering the viewer with the implication of enhanced cultural sophistication. Teens may enjoy the opportunity to laugh at stereotyped representations of their parents or the adults around them, as well as images of other teens, with the message that they are somehow above them. This kind of gritty irony is commonplace in independent films with a strong youth following, such as *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Napoleon Dynamite*, or *Juno*.

Youth culture

Ads speak to audiences through the use of social codes. Some of these are broader and speak to a wider audience, while some (such as the wrestler spot mentioned above) have more narrowly defined coding. Audiences from different groups can watch and

understand a broad spectrum of coding, but it is arguable that youth-specific cultural references would have a particular appeal to the group they spring from.

One of the tools of advertising is the seemingly arbitrary association of products/services and intangible qualities to create a powerful, saleable image or brand. For example, think of Pepsi and youth (“The choice of a new generation”), Virginia Slims cigarettes and gender equality (“You’ve come a long way, baby”), or almost anything and sex. Conflating gambling and youth is objectively arbitrary, and it creates a worrisome association with a demographic sector that is up to three times more at risk for developing gambling problems.

In the OLG’s “Happy Dance” television commercial, a montage of various people dance exuberantly through scenes from their regular lives, celebrating (as we are led to believe) their lottery or scratch card wins. What makes this ad stand out is the inclusion of hip-hop dancing images that specifically connote teen/street culture. In one segment, a young man dressed to connote either a street kid or a busker breakdances his way across the screen. His age is ambiguous, but the signification of youth culture blurs the boundaries here. What we are left with is the image of a lottery-winning youth. This trend works subtly (think of the convenience store clerk discussed above in the BCLC “Cheese” ad). Korn’s (2008) teen focus group participants observed that many of the people in lottery ads looked “just old enough to legally buy tickets,” suggesting there is a blurry boundary here in advertisements following the letter of the voluntary regulations but nevertheless strongly suggesting to young people that gambling is a desirable activity.

Another trend in advertising and marketing of scratch cards (a form of gambling particularly appealing to youth) is the use of board game and pop-culture television references (see Figure 9). Other references include Scrabble, Tetris, Sudoku, Yum!, and Yahtzee. These offer a fairly direct tie-in to the products with the young people who might choose to play them.

Rhetoric

Trigger words like “giveaway” or “winner” and terms such as “set for life” or “payday” build a rhetorical argument in which winning seems like a given. As discussed above in the section on “easy money” appeals, the references to scratch cards as Scratch and

Figure 9:
Loto-Québec—Monopoly scratch cards



Win reinforces the notion that winning is much easier than the astronomical odds would lead us to believe. These are emotional appeals based on fantasy, structured to have more influence on our purchasing decisions than any logical understanding of games of chance.

Words and images in ads can also be used to connote more than one thing at a time. These multiple meanings are both economical and clever, summing up an argu-

Figure 10:
Atlantic Lottery Corporation—"Way to play"

The advertisement features a red self-serve ticket-checker machine on the left. Above the machine, a yellow banner reads "Did you win? Avez-vous gagné?" and "Check Here. Vérifiez ici." with a blue arrow pointing to the machine. To the right of the machine, the text "Way to play" is written in large, bold, blue letters. Below this, a blue banner says "Check it right away and go on with your day." followed by smaller text: "Atlantic Lottery introduces another way to play. Self-serve ticket-checkers make it easy for you to check your own draw, sports and Scratch'n Win lottery tickets to see if they are winners. You can also check results of your favorite draw and sports games online at alc.ca or pick up a winning numbers list at your retail location. It's a smart, simple way to play." At the bottom left is the Atlantic Lottery logo and "alc.ca", and at the bottom right is the slogan "Know your limits. Play within it."

ment in a memorable way. In the “Way to Play” series of ads (see Figure 10), the ALC is indicating with the word “way” both a new method for playing and also the colloquial version of the phrase, intimating happy approval or congratulations. In addition, the text “It’s a smart, simple way to play” extends by association the meaning of the word “smart” from simple protection of one’s ticket from fraud to the act of gambling itself. Smart is a trigger word, and one that will have particular resonance for an adolescent population seeking adult approval for their actions.

Many of the themes discussed in these ads have in common the fantasy of escape, a finding also noted by Korn (2008). While escapism is a pleasurable and harmless distraction for many, it can also function as a passive and dysfunctional coping mechanism for at-risk youth (Erickson, Feldman, & Steinder, 1997).

Discussion and conclusion

It has been argued that consumer product advertising has become one of the great vehicles of social communication (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). It is a privileged form of discourse, which means we accord its messages a particular prominence in our lives. Ads appropriate and transform a wide variety of symbols, ideas, social codes, and cultural reference in their attempt to sell products and services; in doing so, they also serve as powerful messages through and about objects. These messages are recycled through social interaction and back into the creation of new messages.

The gambling industry maintains that ads for gambling products and services are not specifically intended for underage audiences; nevertheless, this study offers ample evidence that many ads can be assumed to have strong appeal to adolescents. Many of the themes described here are likely to have tremendous appeal to adolescents and

young adults, even if they are not the primary target audience. Although in some cases, efforts have clearly been made to use older adults and adult references (such as office settings), there are many more examples of signifiers likely to have strong resonance with youth viewers, such as ironic humour, and the use of quasi-adolescent characters and cultural references. In addition, many of the classic marketing devices for gambling products and services have an ageless appeal, for example, the idea of easy money, or dreams of luxury.

These ads appear on billboards in public spaces, on buses and subway cars, in daily newspapers, and on both radio and television during prime listening and viewing hours. Korn (2008) noted that his adolescent focus groups reported seeing ads for gambling activities during their favourite television shows, hearing them on their radio stations, and sometimes seeing them embedded in the programming itself (in the case of signage on hockey rinkside boards). It would be naïve to assume that this appeal, extensive as it is, is accidental—merely an unintended fact of the universal appeal of these themes. From a marketing perspective, the gambling industry, like the tobacco and alcohol industries, must ensure that a next generation of gamblers will emerge to replace the old one. Gambling corporations require continuity to maintain and increase their market share, and this can only occur with consistent and continuous normalization of gambling as enjoyable and benign entertainment. Moreover, evidence suggests that brand recognition is even more effective when it is introduced to children at a very young age (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). For these reasons, it is critical to learn the lessons of the tobacco and alcohol awareness advocacy movements, which have had several more decades' experience crafting effective guidelines to protect youth from potentially risky messages for those products.

An argument that alcohol advertising targets youth simply because it is in so many ways undistinguishable from all other advertising that targets young people (Austin & Hust, 2005) can be extrapolated here. Austin and Hust's comparative analysis of alcohol ads and other ads targeted at young people found few differences in themes and appeals. Followers of social cognitive theory will see how youth exposed to positive portrayals of drinking alcohol in ads are likely to imitate this behaviour in hope of the same happy outcomes. Of critical concern in advertising any product that is potentially risky to the end user is the social climate of normalization that surrounds it, theoretically heightening audience's receptivity to the product. A study of adolescents found that non-drinkers who showed high receptivity to alcohol advertising messages were more likely to try drinking than their peers (Henriksen, Schleicher, & Fortmann, 2007). The authors of that study suggested that limiting adolescents' exposure to alcohol ads and increasing their skepticism about the claims in these messages would have an impact on adolescent drinking habits. The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University released a report that found a 49% reduction in youth exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines between 2001 and 2005 (CAMY, 2007). This was seen as the direct result of the 2003 adoption by the alcohol trade association of restriction on ad placements in magazines with youth audience compositions lower than the industry standard. However, youth exposure to alcohol ads on television rose 38% between 2001 and 2007 (CAMY, 2008).

This leads us to the pressing question of whether these advertising messages cumulatively offer encouragement to youth to gamble while they are underage. This is a complex question, to which answers must necessarily take into account a multitude of variables, including other cultural messages about gambling, social attitudes, and parental modelling. Though no one would suggest there is any simplified “magic bullet” effect in gambling ads, it is fair to assume they contribute to a normalization of gambling as entertaining and harmless. Hammond and Parkinson (2009) concluded there was no such thing as “safe” advertising for tobacco. More research is necessary to determine what the “safe” levels are for gambling products and services vis-à-vis at-risk youth. What elements, messages, symbols, and metaphors should be avoided? Are there any messages that effectively communicate safe, responsible play?

This study is a preliminary investigation of themes in gambling advertisements that may be appealing to youth. It is limited to textual analysis; without any interview or survey data, we cannot make any assumptions about the actual readings youth audiences make of these texts. Moreover, we cannot assume any simple causal relationship between viewing an ad (or even an accumulation of these ads embedded in media programming over time) and youth gambling behaviours.

These findings require additional research with youth audiences to gauge their particular understanding and readings of ads for gambling products and services. However, this textual analysis serves as an effective jumping-off point for that kind of research with audiences. Ideally, this research would ideally be conducted with focus groups to get sufficient complexity of responses, as well as on a larger-scale quantitative level. Understanding how youth audiences make sense of gambling ads would be extremely helpful for the development of education and awareness campaigns targeted at youth gambling problems.

Finally, this research draws attention to the need for a comparative policy analysis of advertisements for gambling, with advertisements for alcohol and tobacco products to assess the implementation and effectiveness of specific advertising guidelines designed for the protection of young viewers and readers. A review of guidelines and restrictions used with those products, especially with assessments of their effectiveness, would be extremely helpful in guiding future policy development for restrictions on gambling advertisements.

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