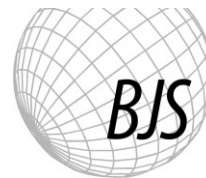


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# 1 'A place for men to come and do their thing': 2 constructing masculinities in betting shops 3 in London<sup>1</sup> 4

5 Rebecca Cassidy  
6

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## 7 Abstract

8 During fieldwork conducted with workers and customers in betting shops in  
9 London research participants consistently conceptualized betting shops as mascu-  
10 line spaces in contrast to the femininity of other places including home and the  
11 bingo hall. According to this argument, betting on horses and dogs was 'men's  
12 business' and betting shops were 'men's worlds'. Two explanations were offered to  
13 account for this situation. The first suggested that betting was traditionally a  
14 pastime enjoyed by men rather than women. The second was that betting is  
15 intrinsically more appealing to men because it is based on calculation and meas-  
16 urement, and women prefer more intuitive, simpler challenges. I use interviews  
17 with older people to describe how the legalisation of betting in cash in 1961  
18 changed the geography of betting. I then draw upon interviews with regular  
19 customers in order to show how knowledge about betting is shared within rather  
20 than between genders. Finally, I use my experience of training and working as a  
21 cashier to describe how the particular hegemonic masculinity found in betting  
22 shops in London is maintained through myriad everyday practices which reward  
23 certain kinds of gendered performances while at the same time suppressing  
24 alternatives. The article shows how particular spaces may become gendered as  
25 an unanticipated consequence of legislation and how contingent gendered associa-  
26 tions are both naturalized and, at the same time, subjected to intense attention.

27 **Keywords:** Betting shops; London; gender; hegemonic masculinity; geography of  
28 masculinity; ethnography  
29

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## 31 Introduction

32 The casual reinforcement of an association between betting on horse racing  
33 and a particular kind of masculinity is ubiquitous in the UK. Former  
34  
35

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36 Cassidy (Department of Anthropology, Goldsmiths College, London) (Corresponding author email: r.cassidy@gold.ac.uk)  
37 (Corresponding author email: r.cassidy@gold.ac.uk)

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1 bookmaker and Old Harrovian, John McCrick, the larger than life television  
2 racing pundit, refers to his wife as 'The Booby' and his co presenter and fellow  
3 tipster as 'Female'. Tanya Stevenson ('Female') has also been described as 'A  
4 Maiden for the notebook' in a headline in *The Daily Telegraph* written by  
5 journalist and former jockey Marcus Armytage (2001, see also Potter 2004).  
6 Scottish bookmaker Kelly Martin, referred to on the BBC News website as  
7 'Tall, blonde and rather more attractive than John McCrick' told her inter-  
8 viewer that she had achieved her greatest victory when a fellow bookmaker  
9 turned to her and said, 'I don't see you as a woman – I see you as a bookie'  
10 (quoted by Goodlad 2008). In receiving this accolade, Martin has achieved the  
11 fragile 'female masculinity' (Halberstam 1998) that the gambling and racing  
12 industry considers necessary for women to practice bookmaking. The  
13 gendering of betting on horseracing is maintained in different ways across a  
14 range of spaces in the UK including racecourses, training yards and thorough-  
15 bred studs (Cassidy 2002). It crystallizes with particular force in specialist high  
16 street shops where betting on horses, dogs and sports is routinely described as  
17 'men's business', and betting shops as 'a man's world'. In this article I use  
18 ethnographic data to explore this association in more detail, and offer expla-  
19 nations for its tenacity. I focus on the betting shop environment, the mecha-  
20 nisms through which knowledge about betting is transmitted and the  
21 geography of masculinity these exchanges create.

22 In 1987, Connell described hegemonic masculinity as 'the maintenance of  
23 practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women . . . constructed in  
24 relation to women and to subordinate masculinities' (1987: 185–6). Reformu-  
25 lating the concept in 2005, Connell and Messerschmidt acknowledge that its  
26 least critical uses generated trait models of gender and typologies that were  
27 unhelpfully rigid. These approaches failed to recognize that hegemonic  
28 masculinities were framed in relation to subordinate masculinities and empha-  
29 sized femininities (1987: 829). Connell and Messerschmidt's reworked concept  
30 (2005) reflects a more dynamic model of gender hierarchy which encompasses  
31 local and global forces and processes, a greater sense of gendered spaces,  
32 embodiment and resistance. Rather than postulating a singular hegemonic  
33 masculinity, Messerschmidt suggests, research employing this new concept  
34 should analyse hegemonic masculinities at three levels: local, regional, and  
35 global (2012: 59). In this article I apply the reformulated concept to the local  
36 level of betting shops in London without suggesting that this level can be  
37 entirely divorced from the national or regional level at which regulation takes  
38 place, or from the global context in which ideas about gambling circulate.

39 Betting shops in London, like the trading floors of investment banks (Levin  
40 2004) and sex bars in Finland (Penttinen 2008: 115), are examples of 'mascu-  
41 line spaces', defined by Gottdeiner as 'places where traditionally men have  
42 congregated more commonly than women and where males are at a distinct  
43 advantage regarding the deployment of power' (2005: 81, see also van Hoven

1 and Hoerschelmann 2005). This article focuses on the dynamic qualities of  
2 these spaces, and how a particular hegemonic masculinity is legitimated and  
3 actively 'cultivated' (Messerschmidt 2012: 64). Working with South African  
4 female undergraduates, Talbot and Quayle have argued that the maintenance  
5 of hegemonic masculinities requires, 'at least some kind of "buy-in" from  
6 women' (2010: 256). In this article I show how women contribute to the  
7 cultivation of hegemonic masculinity in betting shops by attributing different  
8 qualities to men and women, but also how these ideas are context specific,  
9 contested and resisted.

## 11 **Methods**

12  
13 This article draws on two streams of fieldwork undertaken in London between  
14 2006 and 2009. The first consisted of spending time hanging out in various  
15 shops talking with customers (known as 'punters'). The second involved training  
16 and working as an unpaid cashier for two different firms: a small ambitious  
17 chain and an established market leader. I gained access to the small firm after  
18 a chance meeting with a senior management figure at a betting conference and  
19 to the second by approaching the Association of British Bookmakers. The  
20 small firm was very open: I was encouraged to interview and work shadow all  
21 of their thirty employees. The large firm was less enthusiastic. Despite this, I  
22 was fortunate in being sent to a central London shop where the manager  
23 included me in every aspect of the day to day running of the shop over a period  
24 of two months.

25 Before I undertook my training as a cashier, I spent two months visiting  
26 more than a hundred shops in London, having conversations with staff and  
27 customers. I then chose sixteen locations (from large flagship stores in prestig-  
28 ious sites to small, relatively neglected shops in quiet side streets) and spent  
29 up to three periods of six hours in each, observing daily routines. Spending  
30 long periods of time in shops enabled me to develop rapport with my partici-  
31 pants and to become part of the environment, reducing my impact on behav-  
32 iour (which none the less remained the product of a unique research  
33 encounter). I was able to compare what people told me about their activities  
34 with what they actually did and to record how their behaviour changed  
35 through time and across different spaces. No deliberately covert fieldwork was  
36 undertaken, although it is possible that some of the people I observed in shops  
37 were unaware of the reason for my presence.

38 Data gathered included a daily diary of events and interactions, time and  
39 motion studies of betting patterns, recorded interviews and discussions with  
40 groups and individuals. Interviews took a number of different forms. Some  
41 were organized in advance and took place outside the betting shop, including  
42 those with fifteen betting shop managers. I conducted life history interviews

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1 with twenty of the eighty punters identified as key participants in this article.  
2 During these interviews we constructed personal history lines recording gam-  
3 bling and other life events. Discussions with key participants were open ended  
4 and ongoing during fieldwork. As these relationships developed the kinds of  
5 data I was able to gather also changed, from abstract statements about gam-  
6 bling to more personal reflections on family, friends and work. One of the most  
7 productive techniques I employed – and the source of many of the quotations  
8 that feature in this article – were informal group discussions that might be  
9 described as ‘focus groups’, although they were more flexibly constituted and  
10 managed than that term implies. This format reflected my preference to discuss  
11 research questions openly with my participants and to involve them in the  
12 research process, which I consider to be dialogic (Rabinow 1977) and iterative  
13 (Cassidy 2010).

14  
15 **Betting and other gambling activities in the UK**

16  
17 There are around 8,500 betting shops in the UK and they are a familiar sight  
18 on the high streets of almost every town. Betting is a part of a mature, diverse  
19 and flourishing legal market for gambling and the British are regularly  
20 described as ‘a nation of gamblers’ (Kuper 2006). According to the authorita-  
21 tive British Gambling Prevalence Survey (BGPS), completed in 2010 and  
22 based on more than 7,500 responses, 73 per cent of the adult population had  
23 gambled in the previous year. The most popular form of gambling was buying  
24 tickets for the National Lottery (59 per cent of adults had bought tickets in the  
25 previous year), followed by other lotteries (25 per cent) and scratch cards (24  
26 per cent). Betting on horse races was the fourth most popular activity (16 per  
27 cent). Less popular activities included playing fruit or slot machines (13 per  
28 cent), bingo (9 per cent), casino games (5 per cent) and poker (2 per cent)  
29 (Wardle et al. 2011).

30 Each of these varieties of legal gambling has distinctive, if somewhat fluid,  
31 associations. Betting on horses and dogs in cash has traditionally been  
32 regarded as gambling for working class men (Chinn 2004; Newman 1972) in  
33 the same way as bingo has been seen as gambling for (older, working class)  
34 women (Dixey 1982; Downs 2010; Mann 2003). Casinos have retained a  
35 tenuous association with the international rich, although in suburban and  
36 regional casinos the Chinese and Asian British community are more likely to  
37 be over represented (Fisher 2000). According to the BGPS, overall, men were  
38 more likely to have gambled in the past year than women (75 per cent for men  
39 and 71 per cent for women). Gambling participation in the past week showed  
40 that bingo was the only activity for which participation was greater for women  
41 than for men (4 per cent and 1 per cent respectively). Conversely, 5 per cent of  
42 men had bet on horseraces in the past week and only 1per cent of women

1 [1] (Wardle et al. 2010: 24). Betting is the largest sector of the British gambling  
2 industry in terms of gross gambling yield (stakes less prizes), accounting for 53  
3 per cent of the total of £5.7 billion in 2009–10 (Gambling Commission 2011).

4 The majority of betting shop users I consulted were habitual users, called  
5 'regulars' in the trade. The BGPS 2010 identified those who spent more than  
6 seven hours a month (the top 10 per cent of their sample in terms of time spent  
7 gambling) as 'high time' gamblers. The survey found that people who spend  
8 long periods of time gambling are disproportionately drawn from the poorest  
9 socioeconomic groups (Wardle et al. 2010: 65). The high time betting shop  
10 customers I worked with reflected this tendency: 40 of the 60 men and 12 of the  
11 20 women I interviewed regularly were either unemployed or retired. All but  
12 two of the men described themselves as 'working class'. The two exceptions  
13 self identified as 'middle class' and 'criminal underclass'. A recent report  
14 suggested that betting shops were likely to be found in low income areas  
15 (Harman 2011). Development officers with intimate knowledge of the markets  
16 for betting in London understand that this is where they are likely to find the  
17 strongest demand for their products.

### 18 19 **Betting shop spaces and rhythms**

20  
21 Betting shops in London share a common layout and material culture, of  
22 racing newspapers fixed to the walls, television screens, four Fixed Odds  
23 Betting Terminals (FOBTs – video machines that provide a range of games  
24 including roulette), betting slips, pens, chairs and tables in company colours.  
25 Branding is highly significant, and the same experiences are replicated in each  
26 outlet of the three large firms that dominate the sector. Competition between  
27 operators is also strong and advertisements and offers or 'specials' featuring  
28 well known sports stars are prominently displayed. The counter is the physical  
29 fulcrum of the betting shop, providing a separation between customers and  
30 staff and the 'front' and 'back end' functions of the shop. In most of the shops  
31 where I worked the counters were framed by 'bandit screens', reinforced glass  
32 panels with small gaps through which transactions can take place. Access to the  
33 area behind the counter was controlled by a reinforced door opened by a  
34 button behind the counter, as one would find in a bank. While electronic  
35 payments have rapidly increased in the majority of high street shops, betting  
36 shops continue to deal almost entirely in cash, which flows across the counter  
37 from customer to cashier, initially into a register (called an Electronic Point of  
38 Sale or EPOS), and eventually into a safe. Less regularly, winnings cross the  
39 counter in the opposite direction.

40 There are 1,173 betting shop in London. Among the largest is a 2,200 square  
41 foot unit operated by the market leader Ladbrokes, which is located in a Grade  
42 II listed building on a prestigious London street and has seven staff and forty

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1 eight flat screen televisions. Some flagship stores resemble men's clubs with  
2 comfortable seating and private areas. In contrast to these large, comfortable  
3 central London shops there are small and sometimes dingy shops located on  
4 the high streets of depressed suburbs, the perceived clustering of which since  
5 the Gambling Act 2005 has caused concern within parliament and the media.<sup>2</sup>  
6 A few bookies appear to have changed little since they were legalized in 1961.  
7 The first shop I visited at the start of my fieldwork in south-east London was  
8 small enough for perhaps eight people to stand in, contained the racing news-  
9 paper pinned on the walls, three antique televisions and one man with a  
10 suspicious expression, a can of Special Brew (a variety of strong lager) and a  
11 dog. The man behind the counter was wearing a shirt, slippers and pyjama  
12 trousers. The windows were blacked out, the door was covered by a plastic  
13 curtain and there were no seats. The two men scowled at me until I left. In  
14 another of the shops I frequented the floor had to be replaced because people  
15 had been urinating in a corner after the toilets were closed following a  
16 drugs raid.

17 A number of qualitative studies of betting shops in the UK have been  
18 conducted by sociologists, who identified categories of punters based upon a  
19 combination of the timing of their entry to the shop and their behaviour while  
20 there (Bruce and Johnson 1992; 1994; 1995; 1996). Neal, for example, distin-  
21 guished between morning and afternoon punters, lunchtime punters, the  
22 unemployed and the homeless (1998). People who exemplified these catego-  
23 ries were identifiable when I first entered the bookies. However, as Neal  
24 acknowledges, interesting aspects of individual behaviour may be overlooked  
25 by categorical assessments of punters, which sharpen distinctions between  
26 groups of people that may in fact be flexible, and de-emphasize what people  
27 who behave differently in the shop may have in common. In distinguishing  
28 between 'regulars', 'professionals', 'compulsives' and 'committed' and 'uncom-  
29 mitted' customers, for example, Saunders and Turner eliminate variation in  
30 behaviour over time and speculate on motivations that may not easily be  
31 discerned let alone distinguished from each other (Saunders 1983; Saunders  
32 and Turner 1987).

33 Changes in betting shops since 1994 have made categorical distinctions,  
34 particularly those based on the timing of visits, less useful. Until the mid-1990s  
35 betting operator wisdom dictated that shops should offer approximately forty  
36 'events' each afternoon. Horse and dog races took place according to an  
37 annual calendar and daily schedule. Mornings in betting shops were quiet and  
38 reflective as people planned and placed their bets, afternoons (when the racing  
39 took place) were much busier. Technology and regulation have altered this  
40 rhythm. Betting on horses and dogs is now available throughout the day:  
41 pictures are beamed in from South Africa and elsewhere during the mornings.  
42 Any gaps of longer than ninety seconds between races are filled by 'virtual  
43 racing', (animated races base on randomly generated numbers). Numbers

1 draws take place twice daily. Bets are available on sports other than racing,  
2 including football, tennis, golf, rugby and cricket, as well as events like the  
3 television programme Big Brother. In addition, casino games are constantly  
4 available on FOBTs. Some events retain their distinctive characters: the Grand  
5 National is the most bet upon event in the sporting calendar.<sup>3</sup> The Cheltenham  
6 festival and to a lesser extent, Derby day also provide temporal markers in an  
7 otherwise humdrum routine.<sup>4</sup> In general, however, the vast expansion in the  
8 number and variety of events has diminished the seasonal differences and  
9 daily rhythms that were identified by previous studies. This change has  
10 impacted workers and customers nostalgic for the old days when betting on  
11 horses and dogs was the primary activity in shops (Cassidy 2012). As one  
12 senior manager told me with a barely concealed sneer, 'I used to work in a  
13 betting shop, now I work in an arcade'.

14 Descriptions of women's use of shops in these studies are conflicting.  
15 Saunders and Turner (1987) and Saunders (1983) conducted ethnographic  
16 work in Cardiff, Wales during the 1980s and claimed that women outnumbered  
17 men during the mornings. Newman, working in London in the 1960s, also  
18 suggested that betting shops were feminine spaces in the mornings and mas-  
19 culine spaces in the afternoons, saying that, 'the morning hours from opening  
20 time at ten to midday belong to women' (Newman 1972: 129). Neal conducted  
21 participant observation during the 1990s in three shops in Richmond, a rela-  
22 tively prosperous London borough, and one shop in Wirral in Cheshire. He  
23 disputed earlier findings and suggested that:

24  
25 Only very rarely were women found to outnumber men. The handful of  
26 fleeting moments when this was so occurred during extreme lulls in custom,  
27 i.e. when only three or four punters were present. (1998: 591)  
28

29 My fieldwork in London confirmed Neal's findings: women were a minority in  
30 shops at all times of the day except when they were virtually empty and women  
31 happened to be present. In the five different shops in which I conducted a  
32 count over a period of three weeks women constituted between 3 and 18 per  
33 cent of customers, and exhibited no significant differences in the timings of  
34 their visits.

35 Betting shops in London are masculine spaces. By this I don't mean simply  
36 that the customers are primarily men, (although they are), but that this is a  
37 distinctively male place, with a set of rules that codify what men, and by  
38 implication, women, do, and should do. That is, a particular way of being a man  
39 (and woman) is normative, though of course, not enacted by all men (or  
40 women), in the same way, all the time. I am not suggesting that there *is* a male  
41 or female way of occupying space. On the contrary, my argument is that in  
42 betting shops there is an unevenly distributed and observed understanding  
43 of how men and women *should* behave. This prompts the following  
44 questions: 'How are punters and staff produced in this place?' 'What does the

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1 performance of a punter, or a cashier involve?’ and ‘How is one rewarded for  
2 this performance?’ I begin by describing how my research participants  
3 accounted for the dominance of men in betting shops by referring to the  
4 legalisation of betting shops in 1961.

### 6 **Early betting shops**

7  
8 My research participants often described the contemporary male dominance  
9 of betting shops as the inevitable result of a historical association between  
10 betting and working class men. John, a forty five year old joiner working in the  
11 informal economy, spent his lunches, weekends and free afternoons in the shop  
12 and told me:

13  
14 Betting has always been a man’s thing. Women never done it in the past . . .  
15 It was a man’s thing then is what I’m saying. Always has been. Me grandad  
16 and me dad and that. They bet their whole life. Me mum never did, like. It’s  
17 one of them things. Men bet. Women cook and that. If they want to go out  
18 they’ll go down the bingo.

19  
20 Alistair, another middle aged regular who worked intermittently as a tiler,  
21 agreed with him readily:

22  
23 It’s somewhere for men. Betting was their thing see. On a Saturday, of an  
24 afternoon, after work. You couldn’t talk to a woman about horses. She  
25 wouldn’t know what you were on about! It’s always been like that.

26  
27 The evidence gathered by social historians McKibbin (1979), Huggins (1999,  
28 2003) and Chinn (2004) suggests that the exclusivity of this association has  
29 been exaggerated. According to Chinn, unlike pitch and toss and cards, ‘off  
30 course betting was not a gender specific activity’ (2004: 145). Evidence sub-  
31 mitted to the 1923 House of Commons Select Committee on Betting Duty and  
32 the 1932/3 Royal Commission on Betting and Lotteries suggested that partici-  
33 pation in betting by women was widespread and increasing. A 1926 report  
34 claimed that more than half of the women in one poor district in Liverpool had  
35 the ‘betting habit’ (quoted by Huggins 2003: 75).

36  
37 After the second world war, the thriving business of betting in cash took  
38 place on street corners and in factories with illegally operating ‘street’ book-  
39 makers who sent ‘runners’ to collect bets from factories, docks and the homes  
40 of punters, returning winnings the following day (Chinn 2004). By the late  
41 1940s, the inability of the police to enforce the unpopular ban on street betting  
42 was undermining their authority, particularly in working-class neighbour-  
43 hoods. In 1951, the Royal Commission on Betting Lotteries and Gaming, with  
44 the support of the police and the Home Office, advocated legalizing betting  
shops. The 1960 Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act legalized shops. The



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1 intention enshrined in the legislation was not to create new business, but  
2 merely to accommodate existing demand, thereby eliminating the illegal  
3 market. The shops were to be Spartan at best: the original bill forbade loiter-  
4 ing, radio and television. Seats were eventually permitted, when some people  
5 argued that the shops would be so austere that they would fail to attract any  
6 custom at all. According to my participants, the shops became gendered in a  
7 way that betting with illegal bookmakers had not been.

8 I was introduced to Ethel, a 76 year old woman, by her son, Phil. Ethel  
9 managed Phil's hardware shop in the afternoons while he spent time in the  
10 bookies next door. Referring to the impact the legalization of betting shops  
11 had upon her betting, Ethel told me, 'Oh, it was completely different.' Having  
12 once given her bets directly to Harry, the local illegal street bookmaker, she  
13 instead gave them to Reg, her husband, to place at the shop. Ethel continued:

14  
15 At first we all went down [to the shop] to have a look. Well, it was nothing  
16 to write home about. I know I wouldn't want my mum to see me there. It felt  
17 different somehow. Of course I was used to someone calling for my bets at  
18 home, like. Like my mother. Oh no, we didn't go out and bet, we had  
19 someone call round and take them. That's right. We'd see 'em the next day  
20 if they [the bets] were any good. (Ethel, south-east London, interviewed  
21 2007.)

22  
23 Reg, Ethel's husband, agreed:

24  
25 Even in them early days betting shops weren't really set up for ladies. They  
26 was very plain, you know. Not much there, just the blower and the papers.  
27 They were a bit low to be honest. A bit of an acquired taste! (Reg, 88,  
28 south-east London, interviewed 2007.)<sup>5</sup>

29  
30 The practice of 'runners' calling at individual homes to collect bets, described  
31 by Hogge (1905) and in evidence to the 1923 Select Committee was also  
32 legalized by the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act, but it appears that as the  
33 majority of day to day business moved to the shops the practice became less  
34 prevalent. The creation of a single place for betting, which replaced the numer-  
35 ous options of illegal betting on streets, in pubs, places of work, homes, news-  
36 agents and even fish and chip shops (Chinn 2004: 124) created greater  
37 possibilities for gender segregation. Writing ten years after their legalisation,  
38 Newman described London betting shops as a world in which, 'strong, rigid, sex  
39 differentiation continues to exist, the male and female universe follow differ-  
40 ent paths, their separation almost retaining forms of ritual avoidance' (1972:  
41 129). Like Newman, my research participants described early betting shops as  
42 stigmatized spaces where an activity that was barely tolerated took place  
43 between working class men, literally and figuratively out of sight.

## **Maintaining masculinities**

Hegemonic masculinities are reproduced and maintained through everyday forms of cultural production. Morris, for example, studied the transmission of gendered differences in academic perceptions in a predominantly white, lower income school in Kentucky (2008). His observations of informal discussions among students enabled him to see how an ideal of masculinity was reinforced during the most ordinary academic tasks. For example, writing a story, one boy rejected Morris's suggestions for improvements saying 'Naw. I don't want to put in a lot of extra effort like that. I'll just do the basic stuff and get a B.' Two other boys supported his decision saying, 'Yeah, I hate these pussies who make like an A minus and then they whine about it.' And 'Yeah it's like why do you care? Why does it have to be better? Nothin' wrong with a normal grade!' (2008: 738). Like the working class 'lads' Willis worked with in the West Midlands of England (1977) these boys rejected the ideal of educational achievement as a path to improvement by rendering it feminine. At their school in Kentucky, 'hegemonic practices of masculinity . . . focused on a carefree, almost rebellious attitude toward schoolwork, and physical toughness exemplified by manual labor.' (Morris 2008: 741). Newman described a similar set of ideas in betting shops in London during the 1960s where men were apparently: 'resolute, independent yet cooperative, humorous, modest, indifferent in the face of danger and adversity' (1972: 23). He referred to this working-class masculinity as a 'universal male ethos' and described how it was preserved in shops:

Each subtle nuance of action and reaction will undergo the litmus test of judgement by equals, will serve, not as on first impact one might be inclined to assume . . . to separate the leaders from the mass in competitive encounter, but rather to sustain common values, to confirm the image of what man ought to be like. (1972: 23)

Newman's work reflected his interest in championing the betting shop as the last bastion from which to resist what he referred to as the 'embourgeoisement' of the 'viable, homogenous, working class' (1972: 17). His work is a celebration of, rather than a critical exploration of the masculinity that he universalizes. However, similar ideas continue to circulate in betting shops today. Regulars discouraged attitudes and activities that were gendered female (including budgeting, complaining, jealousy, nagging and talking too much) and encouraged others that were gendered male (including generosity, a carefree attitude and righteous anger).

Working with trainee teachers, Brown and Evans have shown how the legitimate qualities of male physical education teachers are transmitted through a pedagogy which is reinforced around a gendered persona that includes, 'demonstrable practical sporting ability; a competitive sports

1 orientation; informality; fun, jokes, and pranks; spontaneity; strength and inde-  
2 pendence; strong discipline when necessary; and an implicit demand for  
3 respect based on these qualities' (Brown and Evans 2004: 57). The hegemonic  
4 masculinity of betting shops is also maintained through everyday practices that  
5 merge into the background as elements of the particular *habitus* exhibited by  
6 betting shop workers and customers. Where physical education teachers  
7 should exhibit sporting ability, betting shop regulars emphasized the mastery  
8 of intellectual skills, particularly the esoteric language of horse racing and  
9 betting. Although it is simple to place a basic bet by making a random choice  
10 and asking for help from a cashier, this is a performance that would prompt  
11 scorn in habitués. Sophisticated betting combines an assessment of the relative  
12 merits of a horse or a sports team, deduction of the probability of different  
13 outcomes and calculation of the stake to be risked on such eventualities. The  
14 bet is not the only important part of the process, but how the decision is  
15 reached. In this way losing bets were a source of pride and respect, while lucky  
16 wins attracted criticism. Over-celebration was also discouraged. When Mark, a  
17 relative youngster among the regulars, began to strut and puff his chest out  
18 after landing a win he was shunned by the rest of the group, who left his high  
19 fives hanging and turned their backs on him. When I asked Frank, a more  
20 senior regular, what was going on he told me that:

21  
22 We're bringing Mark down a peg or two. Any fuckin' idiot can back a winner  
23 or two. He's got to pull his head in – same as the rest of us. You can't get  
24 above your station here.  
25

26 Mark gradually learned to celebrate in the same casual, magnanimous fashion  
27 as the rest of the group.

28 As well as mastering the technical and social aspects of betting, winning and  
29 losing, regulars also became skilled at exchanging playful, sexual comments  
30 with female cashiers described as 'banter'. According to Leech, banter is a  
31 form of mock impoliteness, or 'an offensive way of being friendly' and the  
32 opposite of irony which is 'an apparently friendly way of being offensive'  
33 (Leech 1983: 144). In betting shops, sexual banter used up a great deal of time  
34 and energy each day. Men conventionally referred to women as 'love', 'darling'  
35 and 'babe' and continually evaluated their physical appearances. Pressure to  
36 'play along' took many forms. When I worked as a cashier men would chide me  
37 by saying, 'Oh come on darling, be a good sport, give us a smile. It might never  
38 happen!' Female colleagues sanctioned this behaviour by diminishing the  
39 importance of sexual remarks, saying, 'He doesn't mean anything by it'. As my  
40 female manager told me, 'I don't mind if the men have a little bit of a look and  
41 that. They don't mean no harm. Be worse if they didn't give me the time of day.  
42 Then I'd be worried.' Some punters told me I was 'stuck up', using class to  
43 explain my resistance to playing a part in the exchange of sex talk, others as

1 'frigid'. By refusing the only role offered to me, my femininity became open to  
2 question.

3 As well as exchanging banter, some male customers developed relationships  
4 with female workers based upon gifts and the sharing of personal information.  
5 In all of the shops I worked in at least one or more regulars would bring 'treats'  
6 to the female staff, including coffees, fried chicken, chocolates and cakes. Many  
7 would also give 'luck money' to female staff if they had a big win. Because I  
8 was known to be interested in people's opinions I was often the victim of what  
9 my colleagues and I came to refer to as 'inappropriate sharing'. I asked one  
10 punter not to tell me about his pornography collection and his haemorrhoids.  
11 A female colleague banned a punter from her shop after he wrote and rec-  
12 orded a CD of songs for her. Explicit sexual banter was acceptable, intimacy  
13 was not. As I will describe in more detail in the next section, female staff  
14 distinguished between what went on between customers and staff in the shop  
15 and their 'real' relationships outside.

16 Men and women also negotiated their relative positions using more explic-  
17 itly coercive tropes. I became accustomed to being shouted at for being slow to  
18 take bets or making mistakes, real or imagined, in taking those bets. I relied on  
19 my manager to back me up during these times, but also on regulars. I recorded  
20 a typical example of verbal abuse that might occur three or four times in a  
21 week in my notebook:

22  
23 11.40 Monday. Lemons called me a fucking whore and smashed down his  
24 slips and pen on the counter. David (my manager) told him quietly to watch  
25 his language. Ruben (a regular) said 'easy mate'. Lemons left the shop and  
26 no one referred to it again.  
27

28 Sexual violence was also a 'threat' invoked by male and female colleagues and  
29 punters. During my observation of shops, I was continually warned about  
30 dangerous men, propositioned and followed home on several occasions, all  
31 examples of 'censures' that served to reinforce the terms on which my encoun-  
32 ters in the shop took place (Roberts 1993, see also Bird 1996). As Roberts  
33 argues, censure operates to 'divide the "good" and the "bad" . . . Censures are  
34 a red light, a hand signalling "stop" ' (1993: 171). In this case, the signal was less  
35 direct, but the implication was clear, by spending time the shops without a  
36 husband or male protector I had made myself vulnerable to the threat of  
37 violence.

38 Gendered ideas about betting shops are also cultivated and legitimated  
39 *outside* the shops through interactions with relatives and friends. Of the 80  
40 regular punters I interviewed repeatedly during fieldwork (60 men, 20  
41 women), only ten failed to identify their first experience of betting as having  
42 been initiated by a relative or friend of the same gender. Many of my research  
43 participants had taken an interest in their father's betting, as had Angus, aged

1 18, who told me simply that, 'Me dad liked a bet and he taught me what's what.'  
2 Not all fathers shared their knowledge as freely, and some actively discouraged  
3 their sons from betting:

4  
5 My brother took me. He showed me the betting slips and that. My dad went  
6 mad. When he found out we'd been to the bookies he took me to one side  
7 and he said, 'It'll come to no good!' And he was right. But he couldn't say  
8 nothing because I knew he was down the dogs all the time. I was 16 then.  
9 (Pete, 40, refuse collector, south London, interviewed three times between  
10 2006 and 2009).

11  
12 Some men presented a visit to the shop as a rite of passage marking progress  
13 from childhood to adulthood, from being contained by a domestic environ-  
14 ment often envisaged as dominated by women to a world of singular, mascu-  
15 line individuals, unconstrained by responsibilities other than those to their  
16 'mates'. Ron, for example, a fifty year old unemployed builder explained  
17 during one of our group discussions:

18  
19 Betting makes a man of ya. You go in what 15, 16, with your mates. You aint  
20 got no women there. No apron strings. You make your own mind up about  
21 something and you back it up with your own money. We used to have a thing  
22 round our block. When we all knew each other and that. We used to say the  
23 first pay packet you picked up when you was a young lad you took it to the  
24 bookies. Like losing your virginity. You either did it or we took it and did it  
25 for you. It makes a man of ya. None of these fuckin poofs around 'ere now.  
26 (Extract from a group discussion in a betting shop in central London 2007)

27  
28 The explicit violence of this description emphasizes the constraints placed  
29 upon by men by other men in this context and evokes other examples of ritual  
30 violence to which men subject one another, women and animals in order to  
31 make good their masculinity (Campbell 2000; Enloe 1993; Evans, Gauthier and  
32 Forsyth 1998). It merges sex, violence and betting and frames them as catalysts  
33 for the break to manhood from the domestic, feminine world of 'apron strings'  
34 and 'fuckin' poofs.'

35 The majority of the violence I observed during fieldwork was limited to  
36 angry verbal exchanges, pushing and shoving. I also recorded seven more  
37 serious incidents, ranging from two men fighting after a disagreement, to a  
38 brawl which damaged furniture and spread out into the street. I saw only one  
39 weapon, a knife brandished as a warning, and blood was spilt on four  
40 occasions. The police attended the brawl, the other fights were stopped by staff  
41 and customers. Some of this violence was directed towards staff. A man who  
42 threatened a female colleague with a golf club was roughly ejected by other  
43 customers, an event which anticipated an incident in 2013 when a man attempt-  
44 ing to rob a betting shop in Plymouth died after being restrained by regulars,  
45 one of whom said at the time:

1 They would do that in a shop like this, it is our betting shop . . . The staff  
2 become your friends, it's a little family, and it's no different to a member of  
3 your family being threatened (Sawer 2013).  
4

5 Some of the Plymouth regulars didn't even notice that an attempted burglary  
6 had taken place: 'When I walked in they were on the floor. They were scuffling  
7 but I just thought it was a fight' one said. Low level violence of this kind was  
8 also unexceptional in the betting shops where I worked.  
9

### 10 **Women and betting shops**

11

12 In their reappraisal of the concept of hegemonic masculinities, Connell and  
13 Messerschmidt emphasize that they are not exclusively maintained by men  
14 (2005: 837). In this section I show how, in betting shops, women discipline both  
15 other women and men who fail to meet their expectations. This should not  
16 imply that the women I describe endorse this hegemonic masculinity in every  
17 aspect of their lives. Their actions relate to ideas about appropriate behaviour  
18 in betting shops. They are not unusual in endorsing various ideas of  
19 masculinity. Talbot and Quayle, for example, have shown how during inter-  
20 views that focus on work, social, family and romance, female South African  
21 University students described distinctive male and female qualities in each  
22 context and were 'particularly willing to accept subjugation to engage in ideals  
23 of romantic partnership congruent with emphasized femininity' (2010: 255). In  
24 this case, the masculinity that women endorsed and upheld in betting shops did  
25 not always reflect their ideas outside this space.

26 In March 2006 I joined five other female recruits training to become betting  
27 shop cashiers at the Head Office of a large company. Deborah, our enthusiastic  
28 guide, had worked in the industry for twenty-five years, and was eager to share  
29 her experiences with us. During three days we have been told about the  
30 company, its products and our responsibilities. As we left, Deborah gave us  
31 what she refers to as a final 'pep' talk, a condensed version of the previous  
32 three days: 'Don't forget girls!' she said energetically (to a group of women  
33 who ranged in age from 21 to 45):  
34

35 Always smile when a customer walks in the door. If you can't remember his  
36 name, say 'Hello Darling'. Be cheerful. Say 'Good Luck' when you take his  
37 bet. If they don't want to talk that's fine. If they do talk to you, don't give  
38 your opinion, they all know a lot about racing, just agree with them. Don't  
39 forget they've come in the shop to get away from their wives, they don't  
40 want you nagging them. They're men! They want to be left in peace! Even  
41 though you're a woman you have to try to think like a man, and ask yourself  
42 what he wants. Be a woman, act like a woman, but a man's woman.

1 Cashier training rewarded and encouraged certain kinds of behaviour, sup-  
2 pressed and discouraged others. Even before we began work, Deborah had  
3 instilled in us the idea that we had to be friendly, well turned out and *feminine*  
4 as well as competent. The exact nature of the emphasized femininity (Messner  
5 2002) that we were expected to strive for became clearer as we grew in  
6 experience.

7 Beryl, a 58 year old cashier 'on and off' for thirty years, continued my  
8 training 'on the job'. Beryl was friendlier and more welcoming to men who  
9 came into the shop than she was to women. When I asked her to explain her  
10 treatment of female customers, she told me that:

11 I ain't one for women in the shops. 'Why don't you fuck off down the bingo?'

12 That's what I say. But then I'm old fashioned. My dad would always put me  
13 mum's bets on for 'er. Even the (Grand) National. She weren't let in the  
14 shop, me mum wasn't. Not once. She stood outside when the race was on.

15  
16 Beryl makes a distinction between women's presence in shops as customers  
17 (morally questionable) and as cashiers (morally acceptable). Her attitude is  
18 one that I encountered among many betting shop workers who appeared to  
19 accommodate ideas about gender in the shops that they did not necessarily  
20 apply to the rest of their lives. Beryl was the sole wage earner in her household,  
21 responsible for both her husband, who was unable to work after an accident,  
22 and her grandson who lived with them. At home, Beryl was confident in her  
23 role as provider, and maintained the family car, the house and garden. When a  
24 neighbour commented on her climbing a ladder to clean the front windows, for  
25 example, she replied, 'How else is it going to get done? I don't see you offering  
26 to come round do I?' Beryl didn't regard her opinion that betting shops were  
27 more suitable places for men than for women as contradictory to her having  
28 adopted a traditionally male role at home. Gendered performances were,  
29 for Beryl, piecemeal and formed and located in particular contexts and  
30 circumstances.

31 Some working-class women in London presented betting shops as part of a  
32 wider masculine geography and culture that was separate from, and contrasted  
33 with, their own. In one of the neighbourhoods in south-east London where I  
34 conducted fieldwork the mothers, wives and sisters of the men who bet in the  
35 bookies could be found in the pub next door, which they described as having  
36 become increasingly accessible to women as the betting shop became less so.  
37 One group I came to know well over a period of three years, met on Saturday  
38 afternoons to eat fish and chips in the pub while the men dashed in and out to  
39 the bookies. During our discussions, men and women described their interests  
40 and activities as separate. Bob presented the shop as an enclave from which he  
41 could resist the demands made upon him by his wife, Shirl:

42 The bookies is me office. Shirl has her bingo, her shopping and the  
43 kids. I don't stick my nose in that and she does the same with me betting.

16 *Rebecca Cassidy*

1 She ain't interested anyway. (Bob, retired train driver, 66, south-east  
2 London)

3  
4 Shirl revealed how women reproduce knowledge about betting shops as mas-  
5 culine spaces:

6  
7 I don't bother about betting. Apart from the National, I have a little flutter  
8 on that. But betting was always a man's world wasn't it? Me dad and me  
9 uncles were all into it alright, but me mum was like 'that's not for you. It's  
10 just something for the men.' You don't want to get yourself mixed up with  
11 the betting shop crowd and that. And I never did. (Shirl, 64, mother and wife,  
12 south-east London)<sup>6</sup>

13  
14 Shirl was not fearful of betting shops, merely convinced that they were 'not for  
15 her'. However, for some people, betting shops were 'dangerous places' occu-  
16 pied by 'unpredictable strangers' (Lupton 1999). At a hearing for a betting  
17 shop licence application, for example, a woman who described herself as 'a  
18 university-educated housewife and mother' told me that she had never been  
19 into one and didn't know anyone who had, but betting shops were full of 'drug  
20 addicts and homeless people' and that gambling was 'a sign of hopelessness, a  
21 cry for help'. A petition opposing the new betting shop included an entry which  
22 stated that the shop would attract 'skagheads, winos and the culturally poor.'<sup>7</sup>

23  
24 **Betting as maths**

25  
26 The idea that betting was an activity that was suitable for men (and thus, by  
27 implication, unsuitable for women) was forcefully communicated by both men  
28 and women. Despite this, the consistently differing rates of participation of  
29 men and women in particular forms of gambling were regularly presented to  
30 me as a reflection of their *essential* aptitudes, preferences and interests. As  
31 Griff, a regular, explained:

32  
33 Men are always going to be better at maths and science. Women are better  
34 at taking care of children. They don't want a hobby that's about working out  
35 probability and risk. That's why they like bingo and the lottery. There's  
36 nothing to work out. It's just 'oop' up pops another number. She can under-  
37 stand that and she doesn't need to work out whether to go each way or  
38 nothing like that. She's happy with that. Men need something to get their  
39 teeth into. It's just natural. It's the way we're built. (56, council worker on  
40 long-term sickness benefit, central London. Interviewed in 2007.)

41  
42 According to these views, familiar from many other contexts, women are both  
43 'naturally' part of the domestic sphere (Rosaldo 1974) and also content to deal  
44 with games based on random events over which they have no control. Men are



1 more individual, seek control and relish tasks that require calculation, abstract  
2 reasoning and the accumulation of facts. In positing this binary opposition,  
3 discourses about betting resemble those about mathematics (Fennema and  
4 Leder 1990; Mendick 2006; Willis 1989, 1990) and other typically 'masculine'  
5 activities including engineering and politics.

6 Ideas about differences in numeracy between men and women were easily  
7 elicited during interviews and discussions. They provided a naturalized expla-  
8 nation for the relative dominance of men in betting shops which focused on the  
9 choices of women. Women preferred something else, I was told. It was not that  
10 they were excluded (by men), on the contrary, they were welcome, but they just  
11 wouldn't enjoy adding up and counting. As Frank, a regular I interviewed over  
12 a period of three years, told me, 'Women can come in, but they don't because  
13 they find it boring. It's too technical. They don't know about horses or bets and  
14 they get bored. It's not that we don't want them in here. They just don't bother.'

15 These ideas also emerged strongly during discussions about recruitment.  
16 Despite the presence in shops of extremely able and numerate female man-  
17 agers, senior managers, staff and punters consistently referred to different  
18 qualities in men and women. Women should be 'friendly' and 'easy on the eye'.  
19 Men should 'know their stuff'. During one lunch time meeting, Gerald, a sixty  
20 year old senior manager who had worked in the betting industry for over forty  
21 years was exasperated by what he saw as a tendency for his female colleague  
22 in Human Relations to hire good looking young men as cashiers, rather than  
23 what he called 'totty'. He continued, 'What's the point of that? I mean, no one's  
24 gonna come into the shop to look at great big hairy blokes are they?'<sup>8</sup> Tracy, a  
25 45 year old regional manager, who had worked in the industry for 20 years,  
26 contributed at this point. She was doubtful that women were equally skilled in  
27 the 'business' of betting: knowledge of horse racing and the ability to calculate  
28 complicated bets:

29  
30 You get a lot of young girls coming in for the summer or whatever. They  
31 don't know anything about horses or dogs. They don't get any training . . .  
32 They might be good looking, punters might like having a chat with them, or  
33 that, but . . . Girls don't know about racing. They don't naturally do the  
34 figures. You see a lot of men who just it comes naturally to don't you. Not the  
35 girls as much. Interesting that.

36  
37 Deirdre, a trainee manager, responded:

38  
39 Yes but I know that the figures don't come as easily to me as they do to  
40 Martin, but I work harder. And I'm better at customer service. Martin will sit  
41 behind the counter and watch the racing. I'll get up and talk to people, say  
42 'hello' when they come in the shop, fetch them a coffee or whatever.

43  
44 In 2008, the Chief Executive of a betting shop chain used the introduction of  
45 electronic point of sale (EPOS) technology to account for the rise in the

1 number of women finalists in the competition for the Betting Shop Manager of  
2 the Year saying, 'They've done away with traditional settling (calculating win-  
3 nings), which was usually done best by men. Now the emphasis is on customer  
4 service, which is where women come into their own.' (quoted by Wright 2008).  
5 According to these arguments, men and women could both excel as betting  
6 shop managers, but for different reasons. Specifically, women were better at the  
7 'soft skills' of customer service, making people feel welcome and being  
8 responsive. Men excelled in the 'harder' skills: calculating the returns of bets  
9 and acting as repositories of specialized knowledge about horse racing and  
10 betting. Staff recruitment and training reproduced conventional ideas about  
11 appropriate behaviour for men and women. It also reproduced a conventional  
12 association between men and women and certain gendered and differently  
13 valorized aptitudes.<sup>9</sup>

## 14 15 **Conclusions**

16  
17 Kimmel has suggested that a 'crisis of masculinity' in the USA in the late  
18 nineteenth century prompted a rise in 'manly pursuits' including outdoor clubs  
19 and sports (2005). In London, betting shops provide a setting in which  
20 masculinities based on traditional working-class ideas of gender can be imper-  
21 fectly preserved, reworked and resisted. The incentives to 'break down the  
22 walls' of betting shops are less obvious than those that surround participation  
23 in other traditionally male dominated activities including sports, entertain-  
24 ment, business and politics. Unlike these activities, which are, in theory at least,  
25 subject to shared public standards that condemn sexism (as well as other kinds  
26 of discrimination) betting is easily dismissed as trivial, morally ambiguous and  
27 inconsequential. As a result of this lack of critical attention, betting shops have  
28 been able to provide a 'haven' for the performance of a particular kind of  
29 masculinity.

30 Participants in my research attributed the male dominance of the betting  
31 shop to a natural preference by men for activities that involve calculation and  
32 deduction and to the absence of this preference among women. However, the  
33 idea that betting in cash off course is an exclusively male working-class pursuit  
34 misrepresents a practice that was once far more widespread. When betting  
35 shops were legalized in 1961 the cross class/cross gender appeal of betting was  
36 imperfectly preserved. A cult of masculinity grew up around the shops, aided  
37 by enclosure and the lack of visibility and ventilation that regulation required.  
38 An image of fraternal exclusivity was enhanced and maintained by the ways in  
39 which betting knowledge was shared and the construction of the betting shop  
40 as a place that stood in contrast to the femininity of home or the bingo hall.

41 Mundane everyday exchanges support the masculine geography of betting.  
42 In the London neighbourhoods where I conducted fieldwork, women banished

1 themselves from betting shops, rejecting their smelly embrace in favour of a  
2 booth in the pub or a table in the caff. If they wanted to have a flutter they  
3 might pop in but they were more likely to 'stick to the lottery' or 'go down the  
4 bingo' with (female) friends. Inside shops, staff recruitment and progression  
5 sought and rewarded different qualities in men (numeracy and knowledge of  
6 racing) and women (friendliness and physical attractiveness). As a cashier  
7 working in betting shops I was taught how to behave as a woman by punters  
8 and colleagues who coached me in sexual banter and submissiveness ('cus-  
9 tomer service'), telling me to 'lighten up' at the same time as they warned me  
10 about 'dodgy blokes' to be avoided. As a visitor to shops my treatment by  
11 fellow customers varied. I was sometimes forced to leave by stares, grumbles  
12 and physical shoves, sometimes taken under the wing of a (male) elder as a  
13 kind of exotic pet. As a woman, I didn't have a place inside the betting shop  
14 unless I was behind the counter.

15 The hegemonic masculinity that I observed in London's betting shops is  
16 partly a reflection of a more generic idea of men as numerate, intelligent and  
17 potentially dangerous. However, it is also residual in the sense that it survives  
18 despite the many alternative, less binary, less hierarchical, more fluid ideas  
19 about gender that are available on London's streets. It has persisted because  
20 the betting shop was initially isolated physically and morally from the rest of  
21 life on British high streets. By the time shops were opened up by legislation  
22 during the 1990s, and gambling became less stigmatized, recategorized by the  
23 state as a form of leisure to be consumed, rather than a vice to be controlled,  
24 betting on horses had been established as an activity 'for' men, in the same way  
25 as bingo was 'for' women. More recently, the internet, smart phones and tablets  
26 have provided access to a huge variety of gambling products without any need  
27 to visit specialized shops. Under these dynamic technological and regulatory  
28 circumstances it seems likely that betting shops will remain masculine spaces,  
29 if they survive at all.

30 (Date accepted: September 2013)  
31

## 32 Notes

33  
34  
35 1. I'm grateful to both betting operators from the European Research Council, grant  
36 for granting me access to their shops and to reference GAMSOC 263433.  
37 staff and customers for their time and  
38 patience. The names of research partici-  
39 pants have been changed in accordance  
40 with their wishes. Fieldwork was supported  
41 by the Economic and Social Research  
42 Council and the Responsibility in Gambling  
43 Trust, grant reference RES-164-25-0005.  
44 Writing up has taken place with support

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reference GAMSOC 263433.

2. In 2007 the *London Evening Standard*  
described what it referred to as a 'Betting  
Shop Boom', caused by the eradication of  
the 'demand principle' which limited the  
supply of betting shops to a level thought to  
meet existing demand in a particular area.  
See also Hackney Council 2007 and Harman  
2011.

1 3. The Grand National is the most  
2 popular betting race of the year in the UK.  
3 Half the adult population bet on the race  
4 each year.

5 4. The Cheltenham festival is an impor-  
6 tant jump racing meeting held each March.  
7 The Derby is Britain's richest horse race and  
8 one of the five 'Classic' races of the flat  
9 racing season, held at Epsom in June.

10 5. The 'blower' referred to the public  
11 address system that relayed results through  
12 from the racecourses.

13 6. A 'flutter' is British slang for a bet. It  
14 implies an inconsequential, occasional, low  
15 stakes bet.

16 7. The licensing hearings I attended in the  
17 borough of Greenwich were dominated by

middle class women. However, working  
class women and working and middle class  
men have also spearheaded or contributed  
to campaigns against the granting of licenses  
for new betting shops in low income areas.  
See, for example, Hackney Council (2007).

8. 'Totty' describes good looking people,  
particularly women, and in the betting shop  
also suggests sexual availability.

9. For a comparison of the labour  
required of croupiers and machine minders  
in casinos in Australia see Austrin and West  
(2005). Although gender is not the explicit  
focus of this article, it is another example of  
how the regulation of gambling impacts  
upon workers, in this case exposing them to  
particular kinds of surveillance.

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