



*Dr Mark Griffiths on Gambling: Right Casino Interview*

**Watch RightCasino.com's editor, Joe Attard, interview academic and gambling expert, Dr Mark Griffiths.**

In the course of a long discussion, Dr Griffiths speaks about gambling in the media, in British culture, on social media platforms, in traditional casinos and in legislature. He also describes the psychological appeal of particular games and clears up misconceptions about problem

gambling and addiction.

### **Full transcript**

*Right Casino: Hi! Today we're interviewing Dr Mark Griffiths at Nottingham Trent University. Just to start us off Mark, I was hoping you could briefly summarise the kinds of research you do.*

*Dr Griffiths: Okay. I've spent the last twenty seven years studying gambling. My main areas [have] looked at problem gambling. Not that I'm anti-gambling in the slightest. Obviously I think the gaming industry and we as researchers should be concerned about those where gambling affects their lives, their finances, everything that people do. I think what's amazing in this country is that people often perceive me as being public enemy number one because I research problem gambling. Yet my friends that research problem drinking, no one ever accuses them of being anti-drinking.*

*There is a culture in this country that if you in any way attack the industry for the products that they put out there and people get into problems, they take it personally. Of course I think we should be working together. Surely in terms of a long term business model, problem gamblers are not good in terms of making profits because they've got such short shelf life. I also think that the kind of business models that gambling operators should be doing is instead of using the kind of 90/10 rule where 10% of the customers generate 90% of the profits, they should be going for – if you look at Camelot for instance. They've got the vast majority of the population spending small amounts of money and making huge profits and I would like to see that convert to the slot machine industry in the casino sector, bingo sector because I think that would be better for all of us.*

*Right Casino: Wonderful. Well, we've touched on quite a few core points of the interview so let's try and list those one by one. First off, I'd like to start with some questions about the perceptions about gambling in British media. Over the past year, the mainstream media has been pretty vocal in its criticisms of the gambling industry. The Guardian went with a headline 'Roulette Machines: The Crack Cocaine of Gambling,' while the Daily Mail reported 'A Terrifying Parable of the Addictive Power of Internet Gambling.' What do you make of this criticism and do you feel it is any way justified?*

*Dr Griffiths: I think when you talk about the media is that the media's job is to report news but they like to report bad news. It's amazing. Whenever I do a piece of research if it's a good news story, maybe 10% of the papers will pick it up. If it's a bad news story 90% of the papers will pick it up. Basically misery and bad things sell newspapers.*

*I don't think it's actually they're anti-gambling. It's just that they're anti-everything if it does something wrong within society. Of course there's some papers like the Daily Mail who the editor's got a particular thing about gambling and is very anti-gambling. It doesn't surprise me that the Mail consistently come up with negative stories.*

*But to be honest it's very hard to have a positive gambling story. I mean a positive gambling story is usually reflecting big lottery winners, something that usually the companies want to put into the papers. But it doesn't surprise me that addiction is what sells newspapers. If it's a gambling addiction then they hope that readers will want to actually read those kinds of things.*

*Right Casino: Following from that, if it's the case that it's substantially harder to put out a positive gambling story versus a negative story, [does] that in any way suggest that negative content is justified? Does it suggest there are fewer positive stories to tell about gambling?*

*Dr Griffiths: The bottom line is that all research consistently shows that a small minority of gamblers do get into trouble with the activity they're engaged in. The consequence of that means that the vast majority of people who gamble don't have any problems at all but that doesn't sell newspapers. A story that says most people enjoy gambling is not going to make news. Whereas 1% of the population addicted to gambling. I mean I don't believe there is 1% addicted to gambling. One of the problems we've got is when we do studies we actually rarely mention the word addiction. We'll talk about things like pathological or problem gambling and the press then equates that as equalling addiction.*

*For instance what's called the British Gambling Prevalence Survey, which we do every few years'. The latest survey said that 0.9% of Britons have a gambling problem. Press interpreted that as nearly 1% are addicted. The thing is that all gambling addicts are problem gamblers but not all problem gamblers are addicts. Problem gambling could just mean that you spend far too much of your disposable income on gambling but it may not be indicative of addiction. That is one of the problems we've got is that the press will use and interchange words to suit their story. I do think we have to contextualise this. I've spent over a quarter of a century researching gambling problems and yes we know that a small but significant minority have problems. The number of people that are genuinely addicted in the same way that people are addicted to alcohol or heroin and other things is actually very, very small because there are very key criteria to what addiction actually is.*

*But of course if somebody turns around and says I'm a problem gambler and then that problem might be that it's causing relationship problems or it's causing financial problems that would be defined within the British Gambling Prevalence Survey probably as a problem. But you'd be amazed that the number of problem gamblers who are genuinely addicted to gambling, at least how I define it is actually very, very small.*

*Right Casino: Okay. Well, we're going to touch on that issue of addiction. That's fantastic that we have this kind of summary. Do you think the media is categorically anti-gambling or is it merely critical of the gambling industry in its current form? Is there a capacity for the media to be positive about gambling if it were to change?*

*Dr Griffiths: I don't think that the national British press are anti-gambling per say but at the end of the day they are running a business and they have to sell newspapers or they have to get subscriptions online. As I say, I think if you're pointing out really bad things have happened more people are likely to read that. We as human beings we always like to compare ourselves to other people. In psychology terms we call it social comparison theory. It's a bit like keeping up with the Jones'. When you read about the misery of somebody else, it makes you feel better and in fact most newspapers stories are about death and destruction and misery and addiction.*

*These are the kinds of things that editors believe people want to read because it makes people feel better about themselves. I don't think the British press on the whole is anti-gambling but that's not to say there aren't some editors out there that have an anti-gambling stance. I think most people would agree if you look at the Daily Mail coverage over the last six or seven years, it has been really anti-gambling and it really tries to make a mountain out of a molehill.*

*I'll give you an example. In 2006 I ended up on the front page of the Daily Mail and the headline was Gambling with a Generation. The first line basically said British psychologist says millions of children will become addicted to gambling. Right now this was just total poppycock.*

*The journalist was a guy called Tim Shipman who now works at the Washington Post. I said to myself I'm not going to be interviewed by – for instance one of my findings, which was in a study that we did. We found that 4% of all juvenile crime in*

*one particular city was related to slot machine playing. That was then reported as one in four youngsters had committed crimes because of gambling. To take 4% and make it one in four it's just shocking journalism.*

*Now as I say, Paul Decker, the editor of the Daily Mail is consistently being kind of anti-gambling and I'm sure that's why a lot of anti-gambling stories get into the Daily Mail. That doesn't stop me from being interviewed by them because I like to get my point across. But again if you look at all the stories I personally have been involved with the Daily Mail over the last year, nearly all of them involve things like gambling via Facebook and it's all about trying to point out that millions of women or children are going to have problems with this activity. Of course I never said that at all but of course one quote can be taken out of context to actually sell that particular story.*

*Right Casino: The problem is to steer away from any apocalyptic prophesies.*

*Right Casino: Okay, why do you think gambling is so heavily demonised when arguably more destructive vices like alcohol and junk food escape the same level of scrutiny by the media?*

*Dr Griffiths: I actually disagree with that. I don't just research in gambling addictions. I research in most behavioural addictions including things like video game addiction, exercise addiction, sex addiction. My work touches on things like obesity. I was part of the government's working group on sedentary behaviour.*

*In terms of what comes out in the papers I can tell you now obesity is one of those things that is just as lambasted as gambling. I don't believe that gambling is demonised any more. Obviously I think most people accept that alcohol when taken to excess is problematic. Most people know that alcohol is potentially an addictive drug.*

*Now that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be doing it. I mean I drink alcohol. I love drinking alcohol. I think most people who partake actually like that particular activity. But I know that a small proportion of the population get into trouble with it. Gambling is another one of those consumptive behaviours. Like alcohol it's kind of socially condoned, socially accepted but when taken to excess can lead to problems. But I think most people's conception of alcoholism and heroin addiction versus things like gambling addiction is that I think alcohol and heroin might be seen as more medically legitimate than gambling. I think there are some people out there that would probably say that gambling is that person's own fault. It's due to weak will or whatever and they don't think it's a genuine problem.*

*But I would argue is that just like alcohol, gambling is one of those activities. Yes there are individual risk factors but the way that gambling is marketed or advertised, the way the games are actually designed and developed does mean that vulnerable and susceptible individuals can get into problems.*

*Right Casino: Okay. Why do you think the media is apparently unwilling to regard gambling in moderation as a legitimate form of entertainment? Why isn't it willing to take that stance?*

*Dr Griffiths: Again I would disagree that it isn't willing to take that stance. I think there are loads and loads of gambling stories as I say but most of them tend to be more negative because I believe that's what they think will sell papers or what people want to read. Sorry, what was the – don't know where I was going there. What was the question again?*

*Right Casino: Why do you feel that the media is apparently unwilling to regard gambling in moderation as a legitimate form of entertainment?*

*Dr Griffiths: Okay. I suppose gambling in moderation is one of those activities that because it costs money for people to do, particularly in the time of the recession where I suppose there's not a lot of money about. Is that spending your, if you like, your finite leisure pound on gambling rather than something that's more productive or at least what the papers see as more productive would lead to people viewing that negatively. Now of course in the recession, there are two views about what*

*happens to gambling in a recession. Some people argue that because it's a recession there's not a lot of money around so people try to maximise their kind of financial outlay by actually gambling and trying to win more money because they can't get it through their job.*

*For other people because they haven't got much money gambling is an activity that would just drop out of their kind of leisure repertoire because they can't afford to do it. My guess is both those things cancel each other out. However if you look at for instance the number of new book makers that have sprung up in the last couple of years does suggest that gambling is one of those things that might be recession proof but it doesn't seem to be negatively affected by the recession.*

*Right Casino: Having said that, that might very well be true in the UK. We've done a separate study – we looked at travel to Las Vegas and they've taken an absolute nosedive since the global recession in 2008. It does seem to indicate that casino tourism if you like isn't recession proof in the way that perhaps...*

*Dr Griffiths: Oh, there's a difference between being you know, the example of Las Vegas. I went to Las Vegas in June and I took whole of my family to Caesar's hotel, Caesar's Palace and we stayed there. The thing about that of course that cost me £4,000 just to get there before I'm even gambling. If there was a kind of Las Vegas type casino on somebody's back doorstep, I think even in a recession people would actually flock to go to there. The fact that the number of trips to Las Vegas is down is just the pure prohibited costs of actually getting to Las Vegas in the first place. It's not to do with gambling in itself.*

*Right Casino: Okay, last question about media coverage.*

*Right Casino: What do you make of media outlets, such as The Sun, that condemn gambling in its coverage but sanction it as a business opportunity by running a bingo platform? Isn't this just blatant hypocrisy?*

*Dr Griffiths: Okay, well it's just totally hypocritical. Any newspaper that's anti-gambling and then actually profits from people gambling either through their website or through some kind of their product is just – I can't think of another word other than hypocrisy.*

*Right Casino: That was what we felt as well. Glad you agree there.*

*Right Casino: Now we're going to ask a few questions about gambling and popular culture, particularly in Britain. What do you feel is unique about gambling culture in the United Kingdom?*

*Dr Griffiths: To be honest, I'm very lucky that I travel around the world and I see lots of different gambling cultures and I wouldn't actually say Britain is unique in any way.*

*Right Casino: Really?*

*Dr Griffiths: I think the perception from abroad is that Britain has always been a nation of gamblers.*

*Dr Griffiths: Now, yes. The most interesting and most profound change that I've noticed since I came to this area was when the national lottery was introduced in 1994. We suddenly had an activity that two thirds of the British public were gambling on. Even though most people if you say to them do you gamble? They'll say no. And say do you play the lottery and they say yes. It's quite obvious there is a kind of mismatch between people viewing playing the lottery as a form of gambling.*

*But what the lottery did is it made gambling more socially acceptable. It made it more socially condoned and what you got was this kind of drip, drip, drip effect. The lottery came in and of course immediately the football polls and the bingo were basically saying you've taken some of our customers away. You're not letting us advertise on television. We've got to have an equal playing field. So the government in terms of liberalisation and deregulation allowed bingo and football polls to advertise in print media, radio, TV.*

*Then of course you've got other parts of the industry saying hang on a minute. Why are scratch cards being advertised in the*

*middle of Coronation Street? You the Home Office have just said, the hard forms of gambling are those which have high or rapid staking. Well scratch cards can have high or rapid staking. You're already allowing that to be advertised every half an hour on ITV so why can't we advertise our products?*

*Of course this led then to the Gambling Act. There were many, many years of people like myself being interviewed about various aspects of things. Gambling now I think is a highly sociably acceptable activity. Of course now with online opportunities the fact that people can gamble remotely from their mobile phones, from interactive television, through the Internet. It's absolutely everywhere. It's actually endemic within British culture now.*

*We were one of the first countries that actually legalised Internet gambling. We're actually saying that we are a progressive, proactive nation. We can't put the genie back in a bottle. This idea of America trying to ban Internet gambling was just absolutely ludicrous. Britain has actually taken a very progressive stance, a proactive stance. It's tried to literally grab the nettles and try to sort this problem out.*

*It's quite clear that we are a gambling nation because our successive governments have basically said people do want to gamble. We'll give them opportunities to gamble. But you as operators now have to put into place harm minimisation measures, player protection measures, responsible gambling features so that the harm can be kept to a minimum.*

*My perception is that I don't think we're unique. I'm very lucky because I do travel from country to country seeing gambling cultures. I think what we do have in this country is that we're a lot more relaxed and tolerant of other people gambling even if we don't gamble ourselves. There's a big anti-gambling significant minority faction out there. They're often a lot of faith groups. People that have been affected by gambling themselves. You'll get that with alcohol. You'll get that with other kinds of illicit drugs. Gambling is no different. But I think honestly in twenty years, the nation's heartbeat on gambling has really softened. Most people now, if you include the lottery, most people gamble rather than not gamble.*

*Right Casino: Okay. I suppose this is somewhat related to the previous question. How do you think the public perceives different forms of gambling? Is our perception of bingo and poker different say to our perception of roulette and slots? Do people have different feelings towards different games, different practices?*

*Dr Griffiths: We know for a fact that people think differently about different games. Of course there are some people that for instance play the lottery that never dream of engaging in any of the gambling activity apart from maybe a once a year bet on the Grand National. There are some things that are perceived as kind of bringing people together. Buying lottery tickets, buy the odd scratch card, betting on the Derby or the Grand National.*

*Those kinds of things we're almost expected to have aflutter on. The amount parents that give their children say right, here's one pound to gamble on the Grand National. Which horse do you want to choose?*

*Dr Griffiths: Yes, those kinds of things are socially acceptable. People do them. There is a big difference between that and for instance going into a casino and spending all night playing poker or blackjack or sitting there playing a slot machine. We know that a number of people that frequent casinos is very, very small.*

*Less than 5% of the British public will have gone into a casino in the year. It just shows you that's a very low prevalence activity. Although of course casinos in and of themselves are generating lots and lots of profit, which suggests that a small amount of people are generating this profit of which a proportion will obviously be problem gamblers as well.*

*Now in terms of how the public think about different activities, of course I do think this is where the media can have a role sometimes. For instance we've seen a lot of stories over the last year about fixed all the betting terminals in betting shops. They have been painted out by the media to be the most addictive things ever and it will all probably put some people off ever wanting to play those things in the first place because of the amount that it could cost them and how much money you can lose very, very quickly.*

*Now the thing about this is that my attitude is if you're a gambler and you want to gamble on something, you should have all the information up front to make an informed choice about whether you're going to play or not.*

*Now I'm sure when I talk later about how and why some people become addicted, there is quite clearer an association between problem gambling and fixed odds betting terminals. But we have to take the point that it's not the game itself, it's how those games are designed. I'll come to that later on in the interview because I know we're going to cover that.*

*Right Casino: Thank you very much! In your research, what have you learned about different gambling demographics? Are people of a certain age or gender inclined to gamble on certain games?*

*Dr Griffiths: I think when we look at anything to do with the demographics of gambling is that what we know is that it differs [from] culture to culture. Here in the UK what we tend to find is that the only activity that's played more by women than men is bingo. There are two activities – lotteries and scratch cards – that are played equally by men and women. Every single other activity tends to be played more by men than women.*

*Having said that I think those kinds of differences between the games are going to diminish over the years and will become a bit like alcohol. Forty years ago most men drank. It was mostly men that were alcoholics. Now what we see is just as many women drink as men. The only difference is the types of drinks that people tend to get addicted to and I think this is what will happen in gambling. I think what's happening now there's a real push to bring for instance women to play online bingo. We know that women love playing bingo so what the online firms have done, they've decided we don't want to alienate half of our potential customers. So why don't we bring them into game? We know they like playing offline and bring an online dimension, allow them to chat to each other. Make it kind of a social fun.*

*But of course in terms of online is that the games tend to be a lot faster. The event frequency is higher. There is actually a more potential for people to develop problems in those kinds of online environments because of the event frequency. We also know that men kind of gravitate more towards skill-based games and women tend to prefer chance-based games. But again this is cultural. Now in this country for instance, we are the only country in the world where men are more likely to play slot machines than women. You go to most other places and it pretty much is equal in terms of the number of males and females gambling say in America on a slot machines. The thing about our slot machines over here of course is that we are the only country in the world that actually have slot machines that don't use a random number generator and for people that know what they're doing there is a small element of skill in playing a British slot machine. People can literally watch the machine fill up with other people's money, then come in and actually get the pay out from it.*

*We actually tracked down the patent in this country and found that British slot machines use what's called adaptive logic. They have what's called a compensator. Now the reason for this is that in this country particularly kind of what we call single site machines. The machines that are at cafes, chip shops, movie foyers, etc. These single site machines were often what kept the business afloat. Now if you use a random number generator, kind of RNG techniques that are used abroad, they're on kind of a yearly pay out cycle.*

*The thing is the shops, chip shops, cafes can't wait a year before they get profits back. They have to have a regular set of profits being paid back. What happens instead of the kind of cycles of probability being based on millions and millions of spins, here in this country they are on hundreds of thousands, which does mean if you watch a machine fill up with £300 of other people's money that machine does have to pay out in the short term and so called sharking, backstabbing, skimming, a whole load of names is built up with people that come in and basically take those people's money.*

*For me that is a skillful element even though essentially slot machines are still on the whole chance determined. If people understand British slot machines versus American slot machines is you will realise there's an element of skill, which is why I think here in Britain young males like playing slot machines because they see it as akin to a kind of videogame. It's a skill based game that if you know everything you can do better. But abroad these are totally chance determined, which is why both men and women will play them.*

*What we know is that culturally there are differences based on how particular products are designed. We know that males and*

females tend to gravitate towards different types of activity with men more skill based and women more chance based. There's also an age factor as well. We know for instance that online gambling is very much the domain of those aged between eighteen and thirty four. You get a much higher proportion of younger people gambling via the Internet. Of course these are people that have been brought up in this technological culture.

I look at my three screen-agers. They have never known a world with the Internet, without mobile phone, without interactive television. My children will be the gamblers of tomorrow, they will actually partake in gambling in areas where and [through] mediums with which they're familiar. The typical fifty year-old either doesn't trust or is not very familiar with the online world.

My mother before she died she still couldn't even program the video. She never even turned on a computer. Someone like her is not going to be able to gamble online. Of course all people, like my own kids, were using state of the art technology from three or four years old, you can imagine them being the gamblers of tomorrow and wanting to gamble with the things that they find most comfortable and actually trust.

Right Casino: Absolutely. In your view is there disparity between the way the gambling industry represents female gamblers throughout advertising and the actual gambling habits of women? Does this come down to a degree of chauvinism inherent in gambling culture?

Dr Griffiths: It's quite clear that traditionally females have not been big gamblers. Even when they do gamble, if they go along to bingo it's more for the social element rather than to win money. What bingo halls have done, they've kind of got linked jackpots now. They've made the jackpot prize much bigger. What that has done is brought younger females into play who are actually more money motivated than being socially motivated. But interestingly it's brought more men in.

Again by increasing a jackpot size, if you go into a typical bingo hall now you'd probably around about a fifth of the people in there are actually males. Twenty years ago it was probably 99% females and what was stereotypically called the Blue Rinse Brigade. You go in now and you see the spread of females is right down to kind of eighteen right up to those in their mid-seventies. This is all because if you like the structural characteristics of the activity have changed. Whereas before you might win the equivalent to a can of beans now you can win thousands and thousands of pounds through a linked jackpot playing right across the country.

Obviously if I was running a gambling operation what I don't want to do is alienate half of my potential customers. Of course what people are doing now is feminising their products. What are the bookmakers doing? Instead of having a bet on who's going to win a particular league it'll be who's going to be next evicted from the Big Brother house? Who's going to win an Oscar this year? Who's going to be evicted from I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! They're going to choose activities that they think females will have an opinion on and might actually want to have a bet on as well.

It's not just a case of bringing in online bingo and actually catering for activities that females traditionally play anyway. You've got to bring activities that you think females might actually have a view on and actually want to engage in. I think we'll see this right across the industry.

The real blocks for or one of the barriers for women at the moment is that there are a lot of gambling environments [that] are seen as very male biased and male based. If you walk into a typical casino if you look at the people actually gambling probably 90% of them are men. There may be other women around watching, having a drink, watching their partner play or whatever. But people find those environments very male dominated. As a result of that, women actually gambling in what they perceive to be male environments like a bookmakers or like a casino is something that women may feel stigmatises them, or they feel alienated from it.

Of course what some casinos are doing and we've noticed it here in Nottingham they have female nights, women nights only. Women can come in. They get a free meal if they come and then they can play and gamble in the casino. I do think most sectors within the industry are starting to realise there are 100% of people out there. Why are we only catering for 50% of them? I think you'll find lots and lots of advertising, marketing, just different ways of gambling to bring that female audience in.

*Right Casino: Okay. How is the increase in the number of celebrity endorsements affecting the gambling industry? Take Shane Warne's affiliation with 888 casino. Ray Winston's voiceover for Bet 365. Does the fact that a known figure is openly endorsing gambling, say on television or the Internet, through various media outlets make gambling seem acceptable?*

*Dr Griffiths: Certainly celebrity endorsement in any area of selling something is seen to be something that will bring the punters in or bring the buyers in some way. To be honest firms wouldn't spend hundreds of thousands of pounds paying people to do it if they didn't think it had an effect. Now with gambling it can work very well for you and it can actually go really wrong.*

*The most classic case where a celebrity was used where actually resulted in people having a downturn in gambling is when Billy Connolly advertised the national lottery. At the time he was purple bearded. He was somebody that was in a series of commercials wanting people to play lottery. What Camelot found in their research was that yes, there was high recognisability and high recall for the advertising campaigns but it actually put people off wanting to gamble on their products.*

*Now obviously people like Shane Warne and 888.com is that they're trying to portray a particular image. Here's somebody that is well known all around the world, international star, okay? It's basically saying if you come to 888 you're identifying with Shane Warne as an individual. In effect you're trying to say I want to be something like Shane Warne. A successful man who's wealthy, got a beautiful girlfriend, etc., etc.*

*Ray Winston. If you look at him in terms of the typical sports better they probably chosen Ray because he's got that kind of regional dialect, London accent. He's basically Joe Public in terms of how he comes across but he's been incredibly successful.*

*The in play betting market is the fastest growing market in this country. Who are the most successful firms? It's Bet 365. Even my twelve year old son, right? When we're watching a sports match now, what does he do? He tries to guess what Ray Winston's bet is going to be during the halftime. He'll go 'I bet he's going to say that Rooney's 2 to 1 score the next goal.' That has become so endemic that even my own teenage children recognise him, recognise what he's doing. So they're an important part.*

*Now for some people there are always going to be celebrities that put them off gambling on a particular product and also there are things when things go horribly wrong. We had the example for instance, Churchill Insurance and we had Vic Reeves who was the voiceover. Then he was done for drink driving. Of course being in the insurance firm the Churchill were paying out on car accidents. They couldn't have him as the voice anymore.*

*There's always a thing in terms of reputation management. There's an old cliché that reputation takes a lifetime to build up but a second to destroy. Whenever you get any kind of celebrity endorsements yes they can have a real halo effect for a while but if something goes wrong then that might actually hit on the product as well. Gambling is always going to have that image problem.*

*My guess is that Shane Warne is not somebody that is controversy free. There are things around him in terms of wild nights and spending too much, blah, blah, blah. Now that might actually be appealing to a small amount of audience and maybe 888 have done their research and realised that he's going to attract the kind of customer that they want. But celebrity endorsements are here to stay. There's nothing that's going to stop them doing it. People do believe that it makes a massive difference in terms of uptake and acquisition of that activity. It's not something I condemn. All I would say is I'm not anti-gambling in the slightest but I am anti-adolescent gambling. I think where you've got celebrities – my son's a cricket fan. Knows who Shane Warne is. We sit and for many years now and watched IPL cricket. Shane Warne was captain of Rajasthan Royals.*

*But him promoting gambling if it's done during a time where children are actively watching I think that has negative effects for children. As far as I'm concerned gambling is an adult activity. It's got a right to be marketed and advertising but it should be done and targeted at times where adults are watching rather than children.*



*Right Casino: Right. Now we're going to move onto a pretty hot topic, especially in online gambling and that's social playing or social gambling. For users social gambling is services where you gain real cash using social media platforms. So popular games are poker, bingo, slots and so on and so forth. Social gambling is a relatively new phenomenon. How do you feel that it will develop? Do you think it will remain limited to relatively few services or does social play represent the future of online gambling?*

*Dr Griffiths: I think looking at social gambling everybody's watching everybody else at the moment. When Bingo Frenzy was launched in August 2012 almost every sector as looking to see whether this particular game was going to take off on the Facebook platform.*

*Now I looked at a crystal ball and say what I think is going to happen in the future but I think the issue is actually bigger than social gambling / social gaming. What is happening of course is that almost every area that you work in now people are trying to monetise their products. What we're seeing now is convergence between lots of different platforms. I was writing articles ten years ago [where] I was predicting that gambling companies were going to start using videogame technology. That videogame companies were going to start bringing gambling elements into their game and that's starting to happen.*

*Now in a way what a lot of the companies do particularly on social gaming platforms is that they use foot in the door techniques. They get people used to playing particular types of games. For instance something like Zynga's Texas Hold 'Em Poker, one of the most popular games on Facebook, around about thirty five million people playing it every single month. I know that's a worldwide figure but that's a huge amount of people playing basically playing for points, okay? They buy their virtual cash and then they play poker.*

*Now to me this is a psychological masterstroke. The idea that you get people to pay for virtual currency to then play a game and we know that millions of people do it. If I was saying the kind of next thing to add on is look, you've been buying all this virtual currency. We can give you an opportunity now to actually use your real currency and you might even – by using virtual currency you know you've lost that money. There's no way of getting it back. But of course bringing in real gambling, people have the chance to win that back.*

*Now what's bizarre is when you see things like PKR who started having virtual accessories that people could buy. So while people were playing poker you could buy credits to have people buy alcohol while around the table. This is happening in all forms of online gaming social gaming – the virtual accessory market is worth millions and millions. This is a case where people will gladly pay money to dress their avatars up in particular types of clothing. This could easily be transferred to online poker rooms for instance where you create your avatar and you get people to start playing.*

*Of course to bring in the real money element in is something that every operator would want to do because that's where the biggest profits will be. Now [the problem with] saying 'where do I think things are going to be in twenty years time' is that ten years ago I could not have – things like Facebook – I would never have dreamed that something like a social networking site would have taken off in the way that it has and revolutionised gaming [and] has the potential to revolutionise gambling. It's just one of those things again in terms of marketing, it's a marketer's dream because here's a platform where we know lots of women predominate. We know that loads of women spend loads of time on Facebook chatting to their friends, playing Candy Crush or whatever.*

*What we've got is a situation that if we want to bring out a gambling product, we can use one of these foot in the door techniques to get people who are already gaming and playing for free and playing for points, we can also offer them opportunities to gamble as well. Of course what companies are starting to do is play the game for free but win real money.*

*Again a classic foot in the door technique is getting people familiar to the game. Getting people in a no risk situation where they can play for nothing and potentially win prizes. When they win prizes they feel great. That reinforces them.*

*The whole thing about human behaviour is we actually stop engaging in behaviour unless we get constantly rewarded for it. Now every social game that I can think of from Candy Crush through to Texas Hold 'Em Poker is a game that's full of*

reinforcement and rewards. Now for most people that will result in persistent play and for a small minority persistent play might lead to problems.

As a psychologist I can see how psychological techniques can be exploited and a small proportion of people that are vulnerable and susceptible can be sucked into that and develop problems. Now that's a kind of moral question whether you should be doing that or not but we get that in all walks of life.

Now your basic question: is social gambling going to take off? The answer we just don't know yet but my guess is that you're going to see more and more convergence just between gaming and gambling anyway. There'll be lots more opportunities for people within gaming environments to have a little flutter and there'll be lots more gambling environments, sorry a lot more videogame environments that will start to introduce those gambling type elements. The kind of cannibalisation of all these fields.

When I started researching back in 1986 – 1987 I was researching gambling addiction. Early nineties I started doing videogame addiction. Then 1994 Internet addiction. Now video-gaming, gambling, Internet they've all combined. Everybody can do it on the same device. I remember in 1990 talking about something I called the teleputer that people carried around with them that they could phone on, that they could do everything in terms of what a computer could do. To watch television. I said you know maybe one of these would be available in fifty or a hundred years' time. It's basically taken twenty years for this technology to be there.

People talk about Internet gambling even that now is just an obsolete term. We're talking about remote gambling that can be done on any tablet, any mobile, any device. Anyone got online capability that's linked up to a social networking platform and you can advertise to people on the move. The basic rule of thumb is where you increase accessibility not only do you increase the number of regular users of an activity but you increase the number of problems as well. What we need of course is a kind of social responsibility infrastructure in place that can help us with those vulnerable and susceptible individuals. I really wish I could give you a definitive answer on whether social gambling is going to be a big thing in ten or twenty years. We just don't know. I wouldn't be surprised if it is but my guess is that the gambling and gaming field will have moved on by then anyway.

Right Casino: Okay it's almost a shame you didn't take out a patent on the invention of the tele-computer twenty years ago. Of course media convergence is a process that's happening across all entertainment industries. It was predicted in the eighties. I was interested though, you're talking about the kind of natural logical progression between these foot in the door game services where you begin playing free, become familiar with the rules of play, transitioning seamlessly or ideally seamlessly to real money play where you're actually rewarded for your play.

But one of the biggest players in free to play online poker, Zynga exited the market with their tail between their legs after attempting to obtain a real money gambling license. Now they're completely pulling back on plans to expand into real money play. So it seems like the market isn't yet as stable as it should be, which as you say it seems like it should be a match made in heaven but it doesn't seem to be as straightforward as that. Do you have any idea why that might be the case?

Dr Griffiths: Comes down to jurisdiction by jurisdiction in terms of what they're prepared to allow. Britain as far as I'm aware is the first country in the world that's legally allowed gambling companies to operate products through Facebook. Every other jurisdiction is looking to us in terms of whether this is causing any legal problems, whether there's any psychosocial impact. That's why we can't kind of second guess.

The bottom line is that anyone operating in any sector, whether you're the mobile gaming sector, mobile gambling, Internet, interactive television is it's all about monetising the products you already have. Obviously the freemium models with games like Candy Crush for me this was where gambling is going to go because what you're going to do – you going to give people hours and hours of fun playing for absolutely nothing. But of course if people want those extra levels or those extra experience they have to pay for them. Of course what the gambling operator will start to do is you're already paying for these extra levels for effectively a virtual asset or something that's virtual. Why don't we give you a chance to win the money back that you've played with?

*I can see companies if they're allowed to do it and being able to do that. But like you say, there will be some jurisdictions that just decide we're not going to allow that. This is the thin end of the wedge. We don't believe – they might take the view that social networking environments are basically predominated by adolescents. Therefore we don't want if you like adult activities on those. I think that's going to be very hard to do.*

*I do foresee a time in twenty years' time that social networking as we know it now is still around. Gambling will be endemic. But my guess is that the types of gambling that people do will probably have changed and evolved. We couldn't have imagined twenty years ago that we'd have things like in play betting. That simply couldn't happen without something like cloud computing. The fact that Bet 365 can take two or million calls in an ad break during a football match, there just wasn't the technological capability to do that. Not even five years ago.*

*And now of course in a way I've always said this. In terms of technological revolution the two industries that always capitalise on it first are the sex industry and the gambling industry. They learn how to use these new technologies to monetise their products. Of course as soon as we had the Internet, it was online porn and online gambling that were the first two activities to basically monetise their products and everything that they do.*

*Right Casino: Obviously social gambling is a young industry so this might be hard to answer and leads to speculation here. But how has social gambling impacted on gambling habits in general?*

*Dr Griffiths: Right. In terms of how social gambling might impact on habits there aren't enough people doing it at the moment to make any kind of guess about how it's impacting in other areas of their lives. With all of these things there seems to be tipping points. In terms of social networking and the whole phenomenon, obviously when it was just operating within a kind of college university environment on a very local level, it came to a point where suddenly it just tipped out of that particular domain and went almost exponential.*

*That could happen in terms of social gambling. I don't see it happening any time soon just because the number of companies that are investing in wanting to move their products from the pure social gaming market into the social gambling market. They're still very much looking around thinking – you pointed out with Zynga. Well, in fact take someone like Bet Win for instance. They put fifty million dollars aside to set up their social gambling division. As far as I know they're not being allowed to do it at the moment. In fact I did hear one report they were thinking of not even going with that market at all now. In terms of what happened in Britain with Bingo Frenzy, it didn't really take off in a way that people thought it would.*

*The bottom line is if companies can make money from games where people are not actually gambling, they'll continue to do that. But my guess is that you always want as many products in your portfolio as possible. But really those kinds of questions are best to ask someone in the industry rather than somebody like myself, outside looking in. Yes, I can see trends that happen but there are things like social networking that honestly ten years ago I could never have seen coming.*

*Right Casino: Well in that case hopefully this question will be – more within your arena to answer.*

*Right Casino: Is there any proof that free casino style games on social media act as a gateway to real money gambling? And moreover are children that play these free games more likely to gamble in later life?*

*Dr Griffiths: Okay there's a number of issues there. The first one and there's at least three or four studies now showing that one of the major risk factors for children gambling and children's problem gambling is playing free games. That's both free games on for instance a legitimate online gambling site that allows kids to play demonstration mode or a free play practice round. Also games like Texas Hold 'Em Poker on social networking sites. Parents will often buy credits for their children, let them play and they're actually not winning any money. But of course what they are doing [is] those kids are being socially conditioned, behaviourally conditioned to actually know all the rules of the game, know how to play.*

*Of course anecdotally I know a number of children who just can't wait to be old enough to play on poker sites for instance. They've been playing for points for so long, being very good at it at least in their opinion and wanting to be able to monetise*

*their skills and make money from that.*

*Going back to the original point, is there any evidence that playing free games is in any way dangerous? All the studies that I'm aware of and okay there's only been three or four. But all of them have showed that playing free games is the number one risk factor of problem gambling in adolescence.*

*It's one of the things I work with many, many online gaming companies and what I've told them is that even for their free games it should actually be high in the registration process. There's been a feeling that we shouldn't worry that kids are playing for free. You're not losing any money but they're learning the rules of the game. They're being socially and behaviourally conditioned to play gambling type games and of course what we know is that some companies they operate what I would call a socially irresponsible process. They're making the kind of free and practice demonstration modes the chances of winning there are much higher than when you actually gamble on the real site.*

*There's two things that I've said to operators they need to do. One is whatever the odds of playing your real games they have to be reflected in the free play games as well. People play them all day and they realise I only win 20% of the time that has to be transferred between the free play and the real play. The second thing is that when you register is that even free games should be behind the registration. Even to play the free games you have to register. Most companies particularly the ones I work with have very strict age verification techniques. It's very hard for children to actually gamble on their own.*

*Having said that we know that there are parents out there that happily let their children gamble along with them. While that's happening of course children learn the passwords and whatever for adult's accounts. We also know there are some evidence that younger children use the debit and credit cards of older siblings to gamble on these types of things.*

*For me having written two books on adolescent gambling. I've spent well over twenty years studying adolescent gambling in all its forms. Social gambling and social gaming and being able to play for free is one of the things that I do have concerns about because it does seem to be that playing free games is as you as a gateway for some people to develop problems with gambling.*

*Right Casino: And for the sake of lay-people, I know you say that there have already been a small number of studies conducted but without having if you like empirical addiction figures given that social gambling is quite a new industry, how are these risk factors measured?*

*Dr Griffiths: Right. We do an adolescent national gambling survey. Typically [we] survey around about between eight thousand and eleven thousand children. It's done on a representative school-based survey. We ask them about their lottery playing habits, their slot machine playing habits, we ask them about their social media use, social networking, etc. What we do then is that we can obviously separate out people into different risk groups of non-gamblers, social gamblers, at risk gamblers, and problem gamblers. We use what's called the DSM criteria, which is the American Psychiatric Association criteria to measure problem and pathological gambling. Obviously this has been adapted for a child or adolescence audience.*

*The current figure, I mean the great news in terms of adolescent gambling is that the trend is downwards. For instance in the year 2000 the number of problem gamblers amongst the adolescent community and that is eleven to fifteen year old age group is 5%. In 2009, sorry in 2006 it had gone down to 3%. The latest survey showed it's down to 2% in terms of problem gambling. Of those thousands of children that are interviewed for those national studies the current rate is down from what it was ten years ago but it's still 2%, which is more than twice the adult problem gambling prevalence rate.*

*But when we look at those 2% of children that have problems, what we do we use a technique called multiple regression where we throw everything into the mix. We throw their socio-demographic features. Everything that we can think of is thrown into the mix and what comes out of that is the things that basically predict what is causing or has an association with problem gambling. The number one risk factor for problem gambling in the eleven to fifteen age group is playing free games. Either through a legitimate gambling website where they're playing a demonstration game or playing free games via Facebook.*

*Right Casino: Isn't there a slight contradiction there? It seems that the prevalence of free online games is adversely proportional, sorry. Inversely proportional to the number of younger adolescent people with a prevalence or predilection towards problem gambling? I mean you'd think that given that there are a greater variety of free games now available, we'd see an increase.*

*Right Casino: In the number of adolescent problem gamblers.*

*Dr Griffiths: The problem gamblers – we're only looking at two main activities, which is the lottery and slot machines.*

*Right Casino: Oh I see, okay.*

*Dr Griffiths: The issue there is one of the things I've argued is we may be starting to witness a displacement effect of children not going into amusement arcades or trying to buy a scratch card or a lottery ticket from a newsagent. They do things from their tablet, from their mobile phone. But the problem is that the way that particular survey is done. It's funded by the National Lottery Commission. They're most interested in children's lottery playing. Slot machines have always been examined because they have been the activity in terms of commercial activity. The only activity that they can legally do in terms of playing at seaside towns and family leisure centres.*

*When we're talking about problem gambling, we're not measuring problem gamblers in terms of their social gaming because that's not an activity that's even looked at at the moment in the context of those studies.*

*Right Casino: So do you feel if those figures were factored in then we would have a more realistic view of the gaming habits of the youth in Britain? The figures might paint a different story.*

*Dr Griffiths: Well no because children are still in a position they can't really gamble through social media yet. There's just not – we wouldn't have a higher – at the moment we don't have a higher prevalence of problem gambling.*

*My guess is that what kids do now is they do lots of things on Facebook. I look at my own kids. I get all my best ideas from my kids. I can't see any of my three kids at the moment would find gambling something they would want to do but they would definitely play lots and lots of games and want money to download apps. I think that the gambling add-on is something that will come to them when they're older.*

*But no, I don't think – I think those figures are representative of the fact that lots of companies like Camelot for instance have really tightened up in stopping children being able to gamble. There are now less opportunities for children for instance to gamble on slot machines. A lot of the single site premises have disappeared. You would expect to find a decrease.*

*But of course I think what's happened is that we've also seen that the prevalence of children playing the lottery, children playing slot machines has diminished over the last ten years. My argument for that is it's being displaced by children playing videogames, playing online roleplaying games, playing games on social media platforms.*

*Right Casino: In an essay on [livecasino.co.uk](http://livecasino.co.uk) we put forward two perspectives. On the one hand social gambling normalises gambling, thrusting an obscene vice into the public domain. But on the other hand you could argue that this more transparent social experience means individuals with a tendency towards problem play need not suffer in silence. Their actions are visible for all to see. Where do you stand on these arguments and what do you have to add?*

*Dr Griffiths: I think both of those are viable. I don't think it's an either or situation. You could have a situation like you say. What I love particularly in terms of the online world now [is] I have access to behavioural tracking data sets. We can see for the first time exactly what gamblers do.*

*For all these years I've spent interviewing people, doing surveys, and you ask people what they do online or what they do in terms of their gambling and they say I do this, this, and this and there's no way of verifying it. Now in terms of whether it's a*

*social media platform, whether it's an online roleplaying game, or whether it's a site like 888.com is that we can follow every single click. Every single thing that the gambler does. From the moment they log onto the site to the moment they log off.*

*In that sense in terms of transparency companies have that data and I believe they should be using that data to obviously protect players and to minimise harm. In terms of the impact on players themselves well the two positions that you have I think both of them are kind of viable. There's probably other kind of – well I don't think they are the only two options. There could be other things in terms of what happens in terms of people's behaviours. As I say, for youngsters I think that social conditioning that happens with games it looks very innocuous but of course when you add a money element onto it for a small minority it can become something that's a problem to them.*

*We know that youth in and of themselves are a vulnerable group. Whether it's alcohol use, cigarette use, underage sex, gambling. These are all what I would call a lifestyle cluster of risky behaviours that children or adolescence start to engage in. When you find a problem gambler you'll probably also find somebody that's taking illicit drugs, start drinking alcohol earlier, engaging in underage sex earlier.*

*You can't see gambling in isolation. It's one of those things that it's part of an adolescent development. It's a rite of passage. But a lot of these things if you are a parent that drinks and smokes and gambles in front of your children all the time it should be a surprise that when children reach adolescence they want to do those behaviours as well. It's what we call social hereditary factors. Social hereditary factors where basically children mimic what their parents or their guardians are doing.*

*Right Casino: Okay. So now I'm going to ask you a few questions about physical casinos in Britain. What is your view on British casinos branching out into Vegas style leisure and entertainment complexes? How do you feel the British casinos [have] evolved as a social space?*

*Dr Griffiths: The only stance there is here where I'm lucky because I travel all over the world and I see lots of casinos all over the world. When my international visitors come over here and I have to take them to a British casino, Nottingham here we've got five casinos. We're actually very lucky. We have outside London I think the biggest proportion of casinos outside of London. They cannot believe how small our casinos are, how limited it is in terms of what you can do in our casinos.*

*Of course if we want to compete on the international stage and bring in the kind of Atlantic City or Las Vegas type experience we're going to have to radically change our casino structure because at the moment even the biggest ones you could fit twenty or thirty of them into a typical type Las Vegas type casino.*

*Now obviously what the Gambling Act did, that was a step for me in the right direction in a sense that casinos became a place where people go to do lots of different things. Now I go – I now probably go to my casino once every six months. I do it less now. But when I go I go in and have my cheap cordon bleu meal, okay? It might be a tenner for really good quality food at a really cheap price. Slightly subsidised pints. They're cheaper than in the pub. I'll have two hours at the roulette table. When I walk out at the end of the evening I may have been in there four or five hours usually with friends, often with international visitors when I go. I walk out at the end of the night and I've probably spent £35, £40. That's actually cheaper than me watching Nottingham Forest lose. It's actually cheaper than me watching Noel Gallagher at the arena. For a night out to be fed, drunk, and have a good time £35, £40 compared to the things that I do is actually really good value. But I'm buying entertainment.*

*The thing is there is difference between those people who go casinos because all they want to do is win money and people like myself who want a lovely social experience with friends that if I win is a complete bonus. We're in a situation now in this country where we could have had super casinos in this country and it was all because when Gordon Brown came in he was basically anti-gambling and decided that the one super casino that had been given to Manchester was going to go by the wayside.*

*Now people were really surprised that the super casino was even going to go to Manchester in the first place. But I think one of the reasons it went to Manchester because people like me, myself and a guy called Paul Bowring. We were the co-founders*

*Gam Care. We designed their social responsibility policy. I think the Labour government didn't want to bring in a super casino and have loads of people ending up with problems. They chose the site and the operators that would have the best infrastructure in terms of player protection, harm minimisation and social responsibility.*

*I was very proud to be part of that bid and everyone thought it would go to Blackpool or it would go to Sheffield or whatever. It went to Manchester and I think people actually did read the bids and they thought about the longer term psycho-social impacts of casinos.*

*Now I think at some point any government is going to realise if we want people to come to Britain and we want to compete on the international stage is that we're going to have to have super casinos. People do like to gamble. Now what I've said is that what you don't have is super casinos built right in the centre of a town. One of the things that Blackpool things that are going against their bid was that the casino where it was going to be placed was in one of the most socially deprived areas.*

*For me you have to have an out of town thing that people have to make a dedicated decision that they want to go. Now when I go to Las Vegas, okay I'm lucky that I go there for academic reasons as well. Basically most people that go to Las Vegas they know that they're going there to gamble. When you walk into a casino, you know that you're going to gamble. People have made a pre-commitment, a previous decision that's what they're going to do.*

*So in terms of this country I can see definitely a future Conservative or Labour government introducing maybe four to six super casinos across the country as something that will bring in tourists and actually will be something that will regenerate some of those areas.*

*As I said, I'm not anti-gambling in the slightest and if you like, if there's a – what can you call it? If there's a desire for people to gamble and they want to gamble on those types of things – why do we have so many people going to Las Vegas? Because we don't get that over here. It's a completely different culture experience. My guess is if we had those super casinos here people would go in droves to gamble there.*

*Right Casino: I mean the word on the street seems to be actually that people are gambling less in Vegas. They're still going. The number of tourists every year is actually increasing since the doldrums of 2008. But the motivation behind the visits are less gambling and more sort of holistic travel entertainment family holidays.*

*Dr Griffiths: No, I went there for a family holiday. Obviously my kids couldn't gamble so what did we do? We went to the Grand Canyon. We went to the Hoover Dam. There are loads of things around there that don't involve gambling. But I was there on Memorial weekend. Of course that was mostly young people age eighteen to thirty who were just there to gamble and that's all they were there to do. But of course there are other places.*

*I went to Macao last year. That is just – that is not a place in recession. Every year, year on year [an] increase in terms of people going there to gamble. What do Macao do differently? They have far more table games in proportion to slots whereas in Las Vegas it's predominately slot machines. Maybe it's the case people want different types of gambling experience and Las Vegas has to move and realise there are different ways that people gamble now.*

*Traditionally it's always been that slots make the money. But Macao has shown you that you can have a much, much greater proportion of table games and still be highly profitable.*

*Dr Griffiths: We did some research for some of the Canadian gaming organisations back in the mid-2000s. We talked about what we called a centralised gaming model, which is basically destination resort gambling. Saying it in a way that probably the most socially responsible way of controlling gambling is having a Mecca for people to come where there are just dozens and dozens of casinos. That's what people go to Las Vegas for is to see all the sights and sounds and experience the culture.*

*We could do something like this in this country but my kind of proviso that is has to be outside of a major city. It has to be somewhere that people effectively have got to travel to so they make a pre-commitment to do it. For me I think it's much better*

for instance to have maybe a thousand slot machines housed in a small number of locations rather than having two or three in lots and lots spread all over a particular city.

I think the problem we've got of course we've got lots of what I call ambient gambling experiences now. Where you could be going into one premises, so let's say to get some chips but you end up gambling. You didn't go in there to gamble but because there happens to be a gambling opportunity in there you take that kind of impulse of I think I'll have a go on that.

The thing about a casino or a bingo hall or amusement arcade or a bookmakers [is] when you walk in you know that you've gone into that particular location to gamble. So the idea of having a destination resort that has maybe fifteen to twenty different casinos I'm not anti that at all.

What you do have to think about though is the local indigenous population because those people are going to live there all the time. What are you going to do to protect those people in terms of gambling problems? You look at Las Vegas, why do the people who actually live in Las Vegas have the highest proportion of gambling problems in the world? Because they have absolute accessibility and saturation of gambling products in that area.

Right Casino: As you remember the Labour government's 2005 plans for a series of super casinos would have precipitated a shift to Vegas style complexes but these plans were shelved due to concerns over the social impact of these kinds of resorts or these complexes. You sort of already touched on it but I hoped that you could elaborate on your thoughts vis-a-vis this position?

Dr Griffiths: Well to be honest the real reason why super casinos were stopped is Gordon Brown – it was his first decision when he took over from Tony Blair. As a Presbyterian he was basically anti-gambling and that was a classic top down decision that was made. I know for a fact that Gordon Brown knew the head of Manchester City Council who got the super casino, basically told him this is what I'm going to do. We'll have to think of other ways that we can regenerate money in Manchester.

I'm sorry there's no – I don't think there's anything else but basically a single decision made by the top man for there not be a super casino. He probably thought that was a vote winner. Obviously I know in the run-up to the decision about who was going to get the super casino the papers were full of gambling stories.

I know in terms of the proportion of the media I did in the four years pre September the 1st right up to when the Gambling Act came in is that people wanted to know what the consequences of a super casino was going to be in their particular area. Of course I think a lot of people whether it was a faith group, whether it was anti-gambling groups who were basically saying this is going to cause mass problems on our doorstep.

My argument was there could be a potential to do that but I think there are lots of ways that we could minimise harm, bring in protective measures to minimise any of those people developing a problem.

In terms of regeneration of an area as well is that my guess is that the overall benefits would probably be more than the disadvantages. But of course we have to weigh up whether do we count is as in terms of number of people or the amount of money or whatever? There's different ways of working out a cost benefit analysis of doing something like that.

But yes, the decision not to go forward with the super casinos because each year the plans were revised. Initially it was going to be over twenty super casinos then it was down to eight then it was down to four then it was down to one. It just seemed to me that there was a lot of public pressure that communities were saying we don't want these casinos. But to be honest people didn't want the lottery. People did not want the national lottery. If you said now we're going to get rid of the national lottery now there would be a public outcry. It's so embedded within British culture. My guess is if you add a destination resort again what you'd have is something that England would probably be proud of.

Again even though I've spent my lifetime researching problem gambling doesn't mean that we shouldn't have a super casino. I'd say I'd be a hypocrite because I do gamble myself. I do go to destination resorts. I do gamble at destination resorts. Why



*shouldn't I have the opportunity to do that here in my own country?*

*As long as the operator is socially responsible in terms of how they advertise and market their products, decide what they're going to do in terms of protecting their clientele I've got no problems with that whatsoever.*

*Right Casino: Again, this draws on things we've been discussing without. But how do you think British casinos and British casino culture compares to that across the world? I know you've already said that you don't really feel that British casino culture is distinct?*

*Dr Griffiths: No. The problem with British casino culture is that we've not really got a British casino culture in a sense that our casinos are so small, parochial. Yes they offer – we've obviously got a hard-core clientele that goes to those casinos. But what's amazing is that here in Nottingham for instance. Our biggest casino when you walk in even on a Friday or Saturday night it still looks relatively empty. We haven't got a culture in this country that people go to casinos regularly.*

*We probably have a lot of high rollers in London etc. want to gamble high stakes and go out again. The typical kind of city casinos – my guess is it attracts a very small proportion of those local communities. They're not seen as a kind of destination. They're probably just not very exciting. You could walk past a lot of these casinos and not even know they were there. You can't walk past a Las Vegas or Atlantic City or a Macao casino without realising it's a casino.*

*I really – in terms of the prevalence of people that go in a casino, less than 5% have visited a casino in the last year. Those people may have visited just once. The number of regular casino goers is minimal. Now obviously that minimal amount is generating a lot of profits for the casino industry across the country. It means they're spending a lot for those that do go in there. But we really haven't got what I would call – we've got what...a hundred and twenty casinos approximately in this country? If we had ten super casinos I think that would probably generate more money and bring in more visitors and tourists and what have you. But I don't there is an identifiable British casino culture.*

*My guess is you ask a casino gambler and they'd disagree with me. I'm one of those 3% or 4% that go I do go more than once a year to a casino. Yes it's probably part of my job because obviously when I go in I play a slot machine in a casino I call it research. But the fact is that in terms of the British population they're not really a nation of casino gamblers, at least not yet.*

*Right Casino: And moving away from British casinos and British casino culture, if there is a British casino culture more generally. Casino design is often described as an exercise in psychology. What is your perspective on this?*

*Dr Griffiths: Well, any design of any commercial environment uses psychology, okay? When it comes to casino design and just basic gambling venue design, there are whole loads of things that are used in terms of basically either to get you into the casino in the first place and once you're in the casino to get you gambling more and more.*

*So for instance, tactics that are used in America for instance is giving free drinks. That's an on floor situational characteristic that is used to keep people gambling. Now we don't have it here in this country and in fact it's against Gambling Commission Guidelines to offer free alcohol.*

*But things like floor layout. Like if you go into say the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, okay? If you want to go and watch say, which I did, REM in the arena there. It took me half an hour from when I walked in the entrance to get to the auditorium. In that half an hour I must have passed ten or fifteen thousand slot machines before I got there. Of course I had to pass it. When I came out I had to do it all the way back again.*

*In terms of what's happening as I'm walking through. Every time somebody wins on a slot machine, it plays a musical tune or hear the chunk, chunk, chunk. But the thing is of course you've got a thousand machines there maybe twenty of them are paying out and all you can hear is the sound of winning. The nine hundred and eighty machines that you can't hear the sound of losing.*

*This is all psychology that is used to maximise what we psychologists call the availability bias. It's about emphasising wins and de-emphasising losing. On the lottery show each week when it first started people like Dale Winton used to say hey, we've got Mrs Jones on this week. She won three point four million last week. Here's Mr Evans. He won two point one million last week. What they didn't show is here's the twenty nine point nine million people that didn't win a single thing last week.*

*Now that said there's another example of the availability bias. But things like the refreshments being on site, things like live entertainment. These are all designed to get people in. People might have come in to watch a show but of course they want you to have a gamble while you're there. They brought you into a fantastic restaurant to eat but while you're there they hope you'll spend some money gambling. These are all kinds of lost leaders but in terms of the way that it's designed, casino design is absolutely critical.*

*There's been a whole load of research on what we call service-scapes. Is looking at what the best environments are to take money off people in terms of lighting and colour. Things like colour are very important. Reds, oranges, yellows – these are exciting colours that are very much associated with gambling. It's ironic actually that someone like Gala Casino that I gamble at, their corporate colour is blue. From a psychological perspective that is a really calming colour. It's not probably the best in a gambling environment.*

*Things like we've done experiments here at Nottingham Trent University. For instance I'm very interested in how music affects gambling. What we've shown is if you play high beats per minute music while people are gambling they spend more money. We've manipulated light. We've shown that gamblers spend more under red – they'll gamble faster and spend more under red light than they will under white light.*

*In Las Vegas a number of experiments show that if you spray machines with certain types of odour they can increase the takings on the machine. These are all examples of environmental influence, okay? Now most of those actually I don't think have a massive impact on addiction. Don't have a massive impact on problem gambling. What these have an impact on is usually getting people to gamble on something in the first place. Okay? It may be a little bit in terms of maintaining but really it's the structural characteristics of the activity itself that dictate if you're vulnerable or susceptible whether you'll develop a problem.*

*But of course you get all these stories of supposedly casinos pumping oxygen in to keep people in. The fact that there's no clocks around so the people can't tell what time it is. All these things happen. There are psychological reasons why they happen. Most of those I don't think have a massive impact in terms of problem gambling. But they may actually keep someone like myself who is a social gambler in there a little bit longer, spending a little bit more money but it probably won't turn me into a problem gambler. It's more likely to be the structural characteristics.*

*Right Casino: In the next set of questions we're going to focus on specific casino games and particular gambling activities. Now you've done a lot of research surrounding the psychology of different casino games and one of your first projects involved studying slot games. Could you please summarise your key findings for us?*

*Dr Griffiths: Well I've never stopped researching slot machines. I've published papers on slot machines almost every year. My perspective comes from the factors when I first started I was looking at to what extent slot machines were being played by children, to what effect slot machines had on children. Most of my early studies showed that slot machines were the only commercial activity that children could gamble on. A small proportion did seem to have addictive-like patterns that you would find in either more traditional addictions or other types of gambling addictions that you find in adults. I've never stopped researching slot machines.*

*Now my research, I look at the individual factors, I look at the situational factors, the structural factors. What interests me most now is I think most people realise that there are always individual risk factors within a person themselves that make them more vulnerable to develop addictions of one sort or another. People talk about things like addictive personality, which I don't believe at all because I don't think there is a set of personality traits that predicts addiction and addiction alone.*

However there are certainly predisposing factors. We know there are genetic and biological factors, okay? Whether it's a slot machine player or whether it's horse race gambler for instance if you have a particular set of genetic markers. There's a gene called the DRD2 gene, nothing to do with Star Wars but it's one of these genes that is implicated in a lot of impulsive behaviours.

For instance a really classic study was done back in the 1990s. It showed that basically 50% of pathological gamblers had this particular genetic variant and that 25% of non-pathological gamblers had this particular genetic variant. There are two implications from that. One is that even if you haven't got the gene, you might still become a problem gambler because 50% of problem gamblers didn't have this genetic variation. It also shows that even if you've got this genetic variant it doesn't mean that you're automatically going to become a problem gambler. There are lots of other factors as well and of course I'm very much interested in what are the other psychological, structural, situational factors that develop.

Now when it comes to slot machines you hear this phrase that slot machines, fixed odds betting terminals, video lottery terminals, poker machines in Australia, people use this phrase that they're the crack cocaine of gambling. What they mean by that is that there's a high association basically between slot machines and problem gambling.

Now I wrote a paper this year and I wrote that basically the type of game is irrelevant in terms of developing addiction. People thought how could you say that Mark? There's all this evidence that is quite clearly it has to do with game. I said no it's not to do with the game. It's to do with the structural characteristics.

What my research on slot machines has shown is that the single most important factor in terms of whether people develop a problem or not. If you're that vulnerable or susceptible person. If you've got that biological genetic predisposition. If you have a particular set of psychological characteristics, the biggest single factor that will dictate whether you become addicted to a particular game is even frequency of the activity. What I mean by that is that typical slot machine in a pub you can gamble twelve times a minute on a typical pub slot machine.

Take the national lottery. You can only gamble or at least find out the result if you gamble twice a week on the national lottery. I've never met anybody addicted to the national lottery. You can't become addicted to something that you're only rewarded for twice a week. You can buy lots of tickets, but you can only find out the result of your gamble twice a week. Unless you're some bizarre person that gets a buzz from actually buying the lottery ticket in and of itself, is you can't become addicted to a discontinuous gambling activity. That's why I've never come across anybody addicted to football pools. I've never come across anybody addicted to a bi-weekly national lottery. But what you tend to find is that activities like horserace gambling or sports betting where you can gamble again and again and again and again. They are the activities that tend to be problematic.

Now the thing is people have looked at the research and said we find – what you find in all the research studies is that slot machines have a high association with problem gambling. People say well it must be the game then. But the thing is I could design you the safest slot machine in the world and I guarantee no one will ever become addicted to it. The only thing I would do is just change the structural characteristics and make sure that people could only press the button twice a week. No one will ever become addicted to the slot machine.

Now you say I might be being facetious. But the thing is I could design you the most addictive lottery game. We can take the lottery game as it is now, the bi-weekly game and instead of having the draw every twice a week we'll have the draw every two minutes. Now there are games like that. It's called Kino in the US. They have a fast action lottery draw where the draws are every two minutes. They're often played in post offices, supermarkets. I can tell you now people that play those types of games do develop problems if you're vulnerable or susceptible.

So it's not the game. It's not to demonise fixed odds betting terminals or to demonise slot machines. It's about the structural characteristics of how you design. If you design basically a high event frequency game and that can be a lottery, and that can be a slot machine. If you're vulnerable or susceptible there's a high risk you would develop a problem with that particular product.

*Dr Griffiths: Exactly. The event frequency there can be thirty or forty times a minute. I remember – this is a true story actually. In 1996 my work was used in the Dutch Parliament to decide whether slot machines, the spin of the reel should be three point five or three point six seconds because at the time obviously Holland had Guilders then instead of Euro. But of course the machine industry wanted it to be three point five seconds because obviously that tenth of a second in terms of the money they can make, the faster you make the reel spin the more money you make in the end. Because all those tenths of a second add up when you times it by the thousands and thousands of slot machines times the numbers of players playing them every single day across the year. That's just a tenth of a second.*

*But like you say, I've seen online slot machines can gamble thirty or forty times a minute. Now if you tie up event frequency with high accessibility. So the thing we also know about is that problem gambling is very much related to the opportunities to gamble within a particular area. So if you've got a high event frequency activity with a highly accessible product, those two factors alone if you're vulnerable or susceptible have a major impact in terms of developing a problem.*

*We know that again, I just gave you the example before. The highest prevalence of problem gambling in the world is Las Vegas because it's the most saturated environment and it's got gambling product. Of course now we all have Las Vegas in our front room in terms of the tablets, mobiles, Internet that we gamble on. We've got three thousand online gambling sites that we can go to at a push of a button. Effectively we now do have that high accessibility.*

*Now if you added another structural characteristic, jackpot size, we know that huge jackpots get people to gamble in the first place. That's a structural characteristic that is usually associated with acquisition. Getting people to gamble. We know on rollover weeks on the lottery far more people gamble when there's a rollover week. So if I wanted to design you the most addictive activity I'd design you a slot machine that has a chance of winning a million pounds per spin in a highly accessible area.*

*Of course where do you find those things? You find them in Las Vegas, Atlantic City. We're talking about situational and structural factors coming together. Then you start to throw in lots of other things.*

*We recently did a review and we found over seventy different structural characteristics within a slot machine. Another really important one is something that we call psychology of the near miss. In all slot machines, most scratch cards, in fact most games have what we call near miss experiences. Typically on a slot machine the reels are lined up – sorry. The reels are there and if you match three fruit symbols in a line, win a prize. Reel spins lemon. Reel spins lemon. Reel spins lemon just above or just below the pay line and that's a near miss.*

*The thing we found in my research for instance, in my own research I used to measure people's heart rates while they were actually gambling. We used to get them to think aloud while they were gambling. What came through very clearly from that is that people get aroused not only when they won but also when they experienced these near misses. Or we also found gamblers start to create near misses themselves. So if I put a match, if I put a bet on tomorrow that England are going to beat Germany and it ends up being one-nil and it was a penalty that was given to Germany. As a hard-core gambler I might say I would have won my money if that referee hadn't given that stupid decision in the sixty seventh minute to award a penalty. I turn what was clearly a losing experience, I validate and I turn it into a one where I would have won if nothing happened.*

*So the question I'm always asked by people why do gamblers consistently gamble if they're constantly losing? Gamblers don't constantly lose. Gamblers constantly nearly win and that nearly winning is physiologically reinforcing. That's why slot machines are the perfect example of giving lots and lots of near miss experiences. They're preprogramed to do that. Scratch cards in terms of the way they're designed.*

*Any time you scratch off a scratch card you might scratch off the £25 quid, £25, you have another four things to scratch off hoping that £25 will come up. It doesn't come up but you still felt aroused that you nearly won on that. So that's a classic – when you've got high event frequency and you couple it with near miss and then you add in the sounds of the coins dropping into the tray, that acoustic, whether it's music playing or whatever.*

All these things have an impact in terms of changing your psychology. For instance, I did a lot of research in the late 90s early 2000s on the Simpsons slot machines. Here is this – what happened, when I first started researching the slot machines if you looked at the names of slot machines back in 1986 – 1987, they were called things like Cash Point, Cash Line, Action Bank, Piggy Bank, Money Belt. These are all names that suggested this is where you can get money from, not where you can lose it. There were names where I would call acoustically attractive names – Nifty Fifty, Naughty But Nice, Reel Fun spelled R-E-E-L. Basically all the machines obviously I don't think naming has any impact on addiction but it's an acquisitional factor that might get you to play.

But of course what we saw over the 2000s is that most slot machines started going over to basically using the psychology of familiarity. So you associate your slot machine with a popular TV program or popular film, popular game like Trivial Pursuit or Monopoly. Popular videogame like Sonic the Hedgehog or whatever. All the machines were linked and what they were basically saying is that you know something about me already before you've even played. You've played Sonic or you've played Monopoly or you've watched Coronation Street or East Enders.

You walk into a pub and you hear the [humming Simpsons theme song] – you hear the Simpsons theme tune. You immediately know what it is. Here's the Simpsons. It appeals right across gender, age, I mean they're just universally popular.

There were at least five different Simpson's slot machines. You put your money in a Simpsons slot machine and Crusty the Clown says 'I knew you'd come crawling back.' A bit of humour. You're just at a point where you've gambled your money and you lose, Homer shouts out 'Doh!' just at the point you lose. Reduces the guilt about the fact that you just lost.

Loads of machines use verbal interaction cues, use humour as a way of minimising the fact that you're losing. It's just brilliant psychology that's used in the design of machines.

Now for me it all comes back to the single most important factor is event frequency. It's how often you can gamble on that product. If you can't gamble on that product regularly you can't develop a problem. Again it's a really important point. It's not the slot machines or fixed odds betting terminals are more addictive it's that they are games that are designed with high event frequencies and that's associated with problem gambling.

Right Casino: In your research you've drawn parallels between slot game and videogame addiction. I wondered if maybe you could elaborate on that connection?

Dr Griffiths: Yes, what became very clear when I started my PhD was when I was going into amusement arcades a lot of my original research was just pure observational research. What I started to notice is that there wasn't a great deal of difference between the typical adolescent slot machine player and the typical adolescent videogame player. The only real difference is that obviously videogames tend to be far more skilful than slot machines. I describe in a 1991 paper – I got lambasted at the time for this – but I described videogames as a non-financial form of gambling, which seems a paradox given that the whole basis of gambling is based on to win more money. But I argued that behaviourally these two activities were almost identical. The only difference was that money was used – you gambled slot machines to win money but you play videogames to gain points.

Now in terms of things like the near miss. A near miss is used all the time in videogames. Designers put near miss, near win elements. The thing is when you just fail to do something the only way that you can get rid of that frustration what we call cognitive regret is to play straight again. And that's what happens with slot machines as well. When we just lost basically it's just pressing the button, pressing the button. That's what happens on videogames as well. In terms of what we call operative conditioning, the idea of having small unpredictable rewards keeps people persisting for longer. We find that in videogames and we find that in slot machines.

What I basically did I wrote paper after paper showing that in terms of event frequency, in terms of the psychology of the near miss, in terms of colours, in terms of sound. I remember doing an experiment where I got people to play Tetris with and without music and measured their heart rates. I found that even though people found the Tetris theme annoying is that they were far more aroused when the music was on playing it than when it was off.

*Now things like that the influence of sound, the influence of colour, the even frequency, operative conditioning. What I'm saying is that all these things the only real difference between videogames and slot machines were the skill level and the fact that one is played for points and one is played for money. In fact every hard core slot machine player – remember on a typical slot machine, if you go into a pub the most you can win is maybe £70. It's just infinitesimally small compared to most of the gambling activities where you can win a lot more. Most hard-core slot machine players do not play to win money. They play with money rather than for it and their whole philosophy is to stay on the machine as long as possible using the least amount of money. That's identical to what videogame players do. They put their – when I was playing Space Invaders and Galaxy I'd put my 10 pence in and I would see how long I could make that ten pence last. Slot machine players do the same thing. They walk into an arcade with £10. A good day is when they make that £10 pound last five hours. A bad day is when that £10 pound goes in ten minutes. Okay?*

*Now the thing about slot machine players and videogame players, in slot machines the money is a way of keeping score. When I talked about this idea of videogame playing being a nonfinancial form of gambling, obviously I came from a world where I had spent four years researching gambling and then realised there were commonalities in the psychology of videogame playing. I didn't come at it from the other way.*

*Now of course gambling and gaming is starting to converge. All the kind of psychological techniques that are used in terms of repetitive play in videogames are used in slot machines.*

*Right Casino: I suppose that's X-Box.*

*Dr Griffiths: Yes exactly. It just operates on operating conditioning. That's exactly what it is. If I want – the thing is that even with near misses, they have to be at a certain level. Some of my colleagues in Canada they found out the optimum percentage for near misses to work is between about 37% to 42%. Thing is if you get near misses all the time it's a bit like cry wolf. You know that you never win. But what they do is like an optimum level. Around about a third, just over a third of times you get a near miss is enough to keep you playing again and again.*

*Now videogames work on the same principle. They give you a lot of near winning experiences. I say the psychological feelings in terms of what people feel while they're playing slot machines or videogames seem to be very similar. The body's physiology in terms of arousal while you're playing or escape and relaxing, de-stressing. These are all commonalities that you find. That's why I do as much on videogame addiction as I do on slots now. I think in terms of what's happening with youngsters is they're probably now playing more games than gambling type games. Whereas ten years ago you would have got a small proportion playing slots and buying scratch cards etc. We've got less happening now and they're probably playing more social games and more videogames because that's what they can do at home.*

*Right Casino: Okay. Moving away from slots now. Blackjack and roulette remain the most popular casino games. How do you account for their popularity from a psychological perspective? What gratifications do they offer gamblers?*

*Dr Griffiths: The first thing I have to say is that people talk about the psychology of gambling and really there isn't a psychology of gambling because the psychology of playing a slot machine is totally different than the psychology of playing poker, which is a totally different psychology of horseracing, which is totally different than the psychology of playing roulette.*

*Roulette obviously, I play roulette and I never play roulette to win money. For me it's about maximising the amount I'm prepared to lose. Typically I mean in the casino here, I go to my Gala Casino. They still have fifty pence chips. Typically what I do, I'll put £5 worth of fifty pence chips all over the board. I've probably got two thirds of the numbers covered, okay? Now that strategy means that basically with just £20 I can usually make that last two or three hours, okay? That's what I do. I try to maximise play. Occasionally I've done that strategy and I've lost everything in fifteen minutes. When I've lost, I've lost and I stop playing.*

*Now the psychology of playing poker. Obviously poker, blackjack these are games that if you're good and you know what you're doing you do actually have a good chance of winning. We wouldn't have the same people winning the world poker*

*championships again and again and again if it wasn't a game of skill. Now obviously there are chance elements in terms of the cards that you're dealt and that's what you do. The psychology is playing with the hand that you've been dealt.*

*But blackjack, what I find amazing is that when Edward Thorpe wrote his 1962 book on how to win at blackjack and showed basically if you're a good card counter you had a better odds winning than the casino. Now of course when you get card counters who go into the casino, the casino does lots of things including having at least eight or ten decks, and there your memory's got to be superb but really they see card counting as cheating. For me that's skill. But what they do is anyone that's caught card counting is classed as a cheater, which to me is just despicable beyond anything I can think of. The thing is even with card counting you have to do it for a long time even to get a small profit.*

*So Dominick O'Brien, the world memory champion, he went out and spent eight weeks in Vegas and he came out after eight weeks. I think he won sort of \$8,000 to \$10,000 over eight weeks. In terms of making a living you can't make your living card counting.*

*Poker of course is a much more skilful game. Obviously it's as much about the psychology of making your opponents think you've got certain cards or not got cards as much as what you're being dealt. So there's loads of psychology in poker but of course poker is a zero sum game. There are winners and expensive losers. There are a very small number of consistent winners and there are an incredibly large amount of consistent losers.*

*But of course anything that's got skill in people think that, if I practice and I play, I can get better. We have an example here at this university. Somebody left to become a professional poker player. Now my guess is that for every one [person] who leaves and is successful there's another nine hundred and ninety nine that don't have any success at all in terms of making a living out of it. So the psychology of poker to me it's just very easy to understand. Here is something it's a bit like any other skilled game. If you practice, you persist, put in the hours, you could potentially make money from it. But the bottom line is that even the people who maybe call themselves professional, they might have to play fourteen hours a day just to make a living. Yet if they got out a job that they could work seven hours a day they could probably make just as much by putting in less effort and energy to do that.*

*But really that's – I'm a psychologist. I'm very much interested in the psychology of all of this but it's amazing how many games, even the ones that are truly chance based people develop skill orientations. There's a whole load of social psychological research that shows even with things like – let's say you buy a lottery ticket. There's an experiment showing that if you personally bought a lottery ticket if someone says how much would you sell it for, if you've chosen it yourself you ask for more money than if somebody was assigned to you. It shows that somehow you've actually actively picked that lottery and had some choice in what happened. It's a skill orientation where there clearly is no skill orientation at all.*

*We know even in chance events like scratch cards [and] lotteries that some people develop skill orientation. That might be linked to potential problem gambling in some people. Like slots in this country. [During] a lot of my work I didn't realise anything about adaptive logic and the fact that we didn't have a random number generator until the mid-2000s. So all of my work going right back to my first published papers in the late 1980s, effectively I was assuming that the slot machines I was talking about were the same as the ones that were in America. A lot of my conclusions that I made actually were not – all these players were telling me that it was skilful to do this, this, and this and I rubbished them in the papers saying it was a chance event. They actually knew what they were talking about. I had to then go back and basically revalidate everything that I had done in the first fifteen years of my research because I built it on the wrong premise.*

*The thing is even when I go now and I talk in America or Canada and I talk about people give these myths about slot machine players but I'll go they're not myths in the UK. They say no, that's rubbish. They're chance. I go no they're not because we don't use a random number generator. The idea of watching a machine fill up with lots of other people's money without them winning anything does mean it's more likely that when you go on that it doesn't guarantee but you are more likely to get a pay out if you've just seen the machine fill up with hundreds of pounds of somebody else's money. Of course in America and Canada they'll say no, that's not the point. Really there is a different psychology for every different form of gambling.*

*Say roulette is one of those that people talk about the double up strategy. That double up strategy obviously does work if you have an unlimited amount of money. I remember a true story. I was in my local casino and seven reds had come up on the roulette in a row. Of course then people were putting loads of money on black. They basically were applying the law of averages in the short term to the playing situation. It's classic gambler's fallacy. What we're talking about here is people just expect a black to come up because there's been seven reds in a row. Can't be another red. Of course there was another red and there was another red. There were eleven reds in a row. The most that I've personally experienced.*

*Of course if you've got an unlimited amount of money just betting on basically double the amount each time you will eventually get your money back and more. But you could be literally into hundreds of thousands of pounds before doing that. If you were gambling eleven or twelve times in a row and it was going against you. It's amazing if you start at one and double it, double it, double it how quickly the money goes up.*

*With roulette for me, it isn't about winning. For me it's about taking part and maximising my fun while I'm doing it. Again, a really good example [was] in Stockholm where we all got given a hundred Krona. Every conference delegate was given a hundred Krona to play in the Casino Cosmopol where we were staying. At the end of the night I came out and I had something like four hundred and fifty Krona something about £40 plus. That was a complete bonus. I came out a winner, especially because it wasn't even my money to start with. It was absolutely brilliant.*

*But roulette is a completely different psychology. Some people just play the numbers. Some people just play the colours. Some people are just all about the number, their lucky number or whatever. But that's completely different psychology than poker because obviously there's no skill in roulette whatsoever.*

*Right Casino: You mentioned the gambler's fallacy. Could you quickly explain what's meant by this and how it affects players on a psychological level?*

*Dr Griffiths: Yes, we in psychology we talk about heuristics, okay? Now heuristics are these things, another word for it is rules of thumb and what gamblers love doing is, particularly when it comes to something like simple heads or tails or red or black on a roulette wheel, they look at past behaviour that's happened on the wheel or whatever and they try to extrapolate what they think will happen. Basically what they're doing is applying the law of averages – the law of averages are infinite and they're trying to apply it to a short term situation.*

*For instance if you're in a coin tossing game and there have been five heads in a row, people will probably say well the law of averages is that tails have got to come up next. Even though there's an independent 50/50 chance of another same side of the coin coming down again. Of course that's all these things are totally independent of each other. You could theoretically get thirty heads in a row. It's unlikely but you can and of course that's what people do in gambling situations. There's two ways that people will go. If you've seen red come up seven times on a row on a roulette wheel, some gamblers will say oh that's a hot streak for reds. I'm going to put all my money on red because reds are having a hot streak. Other people will say the gambler's fallacy, the law of averages has got to be black next go. The thing is both of those put their money on and if they win they'll go see, my logic worked out for me. Or if it doesn't work out.*

*The thing about heuristics is no predicative validity to them. You can't work out before whether they're going to help you or not. You can only use them retrospectively. But really people just don't realise that most gambling activities are purely chance and that each event is independent of the last one. That's why as I say you see the gambler's fallacy particularly now roulette is the classic one where you see where people use it all the time. If three or four colours have come up the same you usually bet against that colour on the next one.*

*Right Casino: In recent years the online casino industry has witnessed a rise in [the] popularity of live casinos and live games. How do you explain this popularity? Are consumers just more likely to trust a live game over a virtual game?*

*Dr Griffiths: Yes. I think it's very simple. I always say that when I play an online slot machine or I play an online roulette wheel I'm basically playing with imaginary dice. It's just on the pure behest of what that computer program is.*



*If I gamble on the Internet then I gamble on a football match or a race. Something I know that the event hopefully isn't rigged. At the end I feel I've got an equal chance of winning it. The thing about live dealers is, if that roulette wheel is spinning right in front of you live, okay? I'm more likely to – and I play roulette – I'd be more likely to do it than a pre-programmed...let's say what I feel is playing with imaginary dice. It really is about enhancing trust between the gambler and the gambling operator.*

*I think people want to some people want that kind of feeling of a live experience sitting in their front room. If you've got a situation where you can still see the sights and the sounds, that's the thing. I love the actual offline gambling experience. I love walking into a casino, feeling the lights, the noises, the sounds. I'm sorry – with the best wheel in the world you can't recreate that in an online situation. But for me it isn't about winning money but I think most online gamblers they are there for playing poker or playing on Betfair or whatever. They're wanting to win money. I just think playing with live dealers or whatever enhances that experience and makes them think there's less chance of it being rigged.*

*Right Casino: You were talking about roulette being a chance game. Recently there was a paper published about a pair of mathematicians who claimed to be able to use chaos theory to boost a player's edge to 20%, which in European games approximately ten times the...*

*Dr Griffiths: No idea. Don't know what – I can't comment because I don't know their system. As far as I'm aware, obviously loads of people have come up with systems saying that – there was one a few years ago where people could basically work out, well they claimed they could work out what quadrant a ball would fall in based on how fast the ball was spinning [and] where the ball was put in. Of course what you do is put all your chips on the quadrant you think that it's going to fall in.*

*Now obviously at the end of the day a roulette wheel is something that works on physics so that's not to say that somebody couldn't come up with a mathematical formula but you'd have to know so many variables. In the time that it takes to do that, I'm not saying that the technology isn't there to do it, but to me it sounds incredibly sophisticated and my guess is the number of people that are able to do that would be very small. That's not to say that it's impossible to increase your winnings but in the end I'm a psychologist and most people don't have lots of fancy gizmos to help you do that.*

*Right Casino: That's the difficulty. They said it's theoretically possible but you have to cart an array of high-speed cameras into the casino to pull that off.*

*Dr Griffiths: Again, if you've got all the bases covered and you know where the ball first went in and whatever I'm sure you could mathematically work – I doubt you could do it to the number but I think the idea of working out the quadrant is probably theoretically possible.*

*Right Casino: We're going to move onto the question of gambling policy in Britain. To start with, how would you summarise the British government's policy to gambling over the past fifteen years? You've mentioned the ideological stance that Gordon Brown took on gambling. Do you think this is representative of the way that the British government has treated gambling in recent decades?*

*Dr Griffiths: Yes, but the interesting thing if you look at it over the last fifteen years as opposed to one incoming prime minister at one point in time, it's quite clear that there's been a policy of basically liberalisation [and] deregulation. I think what you see around the world is that governments have woken up to the fact that gambling is a fantastic way to raise the state's coffers in a way that people don't see that you're raising taxes. You put taxes on gambling [and] people don't see it as a tax.*

*The irony is of course there are some forms of gambling that [people] claim to be regressive forms of taxation. A lottery for instance. Most people, all the research points to the fact the lowest socio-economic groups that spend far more of their disposable income playing the lottery. Therefore a disproportionate amount of taxation goes back from those that can at least afford to do it.*

*Right Casino: Tax on the poor basically?*

*Dr Griffiths: Yes. I mean there was a lovely Viz. You know how Viz have their top tips. You know they had tip for John Major, [who] was the prime minister at the time. It was something like, 'why don't you have a tax on everyone that's innumerate and call it the national lottery?'*

*That's the thing you see, people just really don't understand – sorry I'm trailing off of policy. People just basically don't understand what one in forty million actually is. Giving somebody the odds, which you should do in terms of being socially responsible. But you would get better odds of Elvis landing on the back of the Loch Ness monster. I mean one in forty million.*

*We've done surveys. A lot of surveys have been done showing that people think if they put the same numbers for the rest of their life on the national lottery their numbers will come up at some point. That is a tribute to public innumeracy in terms of not understanding what one in forty million actually means.*

*But anyway, going back to policy. The basic British policy has been to liberalise and to deregulate mainly because it's a way of bringing in extra money and it doesn't affect the typical base rated tax that people are paying. Now I personally think that in terms of things like super casinos and more gambling opportunities you will see more and more happening. The bottom line now is that there are so many debates about whether there should be more bookmakers on the high street. I do court case after court case in terms of betting shop applications.*

*Now the thing is, adding one more betting shop in an area where there are six already makes no difference to problem gambling, particularly when people have got hundreds of bookmakers on their mobile phone or in their home or work place. The fact is that [a] offline high street bookmaker has far more in terms of protective social measures than anything online. That's why I just think the arguments are null and void about the opening of more and more offline opportunities because there are just masses online.*

*But really the whole policy has been what I call the drip, drip, drip effect. Occasionally you get these little bumps where at the moment there's a lot of talk about reducing the number of betting shops in the high street. This looks like it's an anti-gambling policy. Hillary Benner has recently said it's even not about – he just wants to see a reduction because he says the high streets don't look very good for having bookmakers in it. It's not even an argument about causing problems. He's just saying that high streets shouldn't have bookmakers because they don't look very good on the high street.*

*But the policy is and it will continue to be liberalisation and deregulation until of course something happens where there's a public backlash. You get these cycles of prohibition and deregulation. You see it with alcohol. You see it with drugs. You see it with gambling. It's amazing what happens around the world.*

*For instance like Canada, they pour more money into gambling research, gambling education, gambling prevention than any other country in the world that I can think of. It all started when basically a senior minister's son in one particular jurisdiction tried to commit suicide because of his gambling problems. Of course that was in Quebec.*

*So Quebec said right, we're going to put \$10 million aside for research into gambling for treatment and prevention. As soon as Quebec put \$10 million Ontario said, well we're going to put in \$12 million. As soon as Ontario put in \$12 million British Columbia said, we're going to put in \$14 million. There's so much competitiveness between the states as being seen as doing something good. People like one of my colleagues for instance have published a lot of papers. He's moved over to Canada because they're awash with money for research prevention and education.*

*I mean that's an example where one event is going to kick-start a whole sequence of having a country that is very well funded for researching in this area.*

*Right Casino: What do you believe is the government's primary agenda in regards to gambling legislation? A 2010 deluxe study revealed the industry generates seven hundred million pounds a year in taxes and presumably that's increased with the proliferation of things like mobile gambling. Is the government's primary concern when it legislates in ways that restrict the*

*gambling to protect players or are they simply trying to generate taxation?*

*Dr Griffiths: Like I've already said most governments are aware that if you basically tax gambling lots of money comes in and that's why most countries – now obviously Britain is no different from that in the sense that people want to gamble. We'll legally provide gambling opportunities for them to do so but we'll also take a cut of the profits you make.*

*Having said that the Gambling Commission will say that we're not going to allow this to happen unless we can show it isn't an avenue for crime, that children and vulnerable people aren't exploited, that harm minimisation and player protection measures are in place. I don't think the government would want to do anything where it negatively impacts on society.*

*All these decisions they kind of make a cost benefit analysis of the positive versus the negatives. I personally believe that in most gambling situations the positives outweigh the negatives. If that wasn't the case we wouldn't have mass gambling everywhere.*

*The bottom line is that most people who gamble do not have problems. Most people who drink alcohol don't have problems. That's not to say that those small minority don't occur and that we shouldn't think about protecting those vulnerable and susceptible people.*

*Right Casino: How do you interpret the debate between pro-gambling lobbies and those people in organisations calling for further impositions and restrictions on the gambling industry? Where do those voices come from and what kind of positions do they tend to take?*

*Dr Griffiths: The thing is any consumptive industry whether it's nicotine, whether it's drinking, whether it's gambling you'll always get people who are diametrically opposed in terms of whether we should be offering this product or this service to the nation as a whole.*

*Obviously in terms of the kind of anti-gambling lobby a lot of it comes from either religious beliefs or beliefs that are founded on personal experiences of people [who] have undergone that. I think we live in a mature society now and that gambling has always been around. Trying to for instance limit it or basically prohibit it means it just gets taken underground. I think we have a very mature attitude that the vast majority of the British public if you include the lottery do gamble. Even if they might not think they're gambling we quite clearly are more of a nation of gamblers than not a nation of gamblers.*

*Obviously we know that in terms of the gambling lobbying industry there are lots of connections between government departments and I think what's quite interesting I've twice been on the All Party Gambling Scrutiny Committee. There are – last time I went up before them I think there were twenty one members and eighteen of those members held directorships of gambling companies, were non-executive directors of gambling companies lobbied on behalf of the gambling industry. It just seems to me that in terms of potential for corruption to happen people can look at that and say the only people sitting on this committee are those who have a vested interest in the continuance of the gambling industry. But having said that if the public really didn't want lots of gambling opportunities you would find that at the ballot box basically. The bottom line is that most people don't have a really strong opinion on whether gambling should be – I think most people wouldn't want gambling to be prohibited. It's a knee jerk reaction that wouldn't serve anybody.*

*Having said that we are living in an age where people can gamble more on lots of different things that we never imagined when legislation was first introduced. When in the last National Lottery Act came in I think nobody could foresee mass Internet gambling, gambling via mobile phones, gambling on interactive television. I mean legislation always seems to be two steps behind technological innovation. Obviously with technological innovation that's usually about increasing the participation rates in gambling somehow and therefore we do have to have what I would describe as responsible gambling measures in place to help minimise the harm.*

*Right Casino: Now in your work and in this interview you've already acknowledged concerns surrounding fixed odds betting terminals but you say they certainly shouldn't be banned. Could you please explain this position for us?*

*Dr Griffiths: I don't believe any gambling – I don't think any form of gambling should be banned unless there is scientific evidence that it affects far more than it...again it's positives and negatives.*

*The point is, fixed odd betting terminals are located within bookmaker shops or occasionally within some casinos, okay? These are dedicated gambling environments. You can't walk into a bookmaker and not expect gambling experiences and gambling products to be offered for people to play.*

*Now obviously the debate around fixed odd betting terminals is that people can lose huge amounts of money in very short amount of time. The bookmaking industry believe it or not have listened to these concerns and I know for a fact because I've just redrafted the Association of British Bookmakers Code of Conduct on social responsibility. Anyone who now wants to be a member of the Associated British Bookmakers will now have to put limit-setting fixtures on its fixed odds betting terminals, which will mean that people have to make a pre-commitment in terms of how much they're prepared to lose in both in terms of money and in terms of time. Now to me this seems an ideal situation.*

*Now the thing about most forms of gambling is when you're in the midst of gambling, when you're actually there gambling, is that rationality goes out the window. The adrenaline is pumping. You feel completely different than when you make a cold decision and you step back and make a decision. Most people who pre-commit say 'I don't want to lose more than £50 a month on a fixed odd betting terminal.' In the very near future they will be able to, on a fixed odd betting terminal, set the limits that they are prepared to lose. Once you reach those limits you can't play them anymore.*

*That doesn't stop them then going to another shop and gambling there. Of course in any of this kind of situation you're only as strong as your weakest link. But to be honest you can play fixed odds betting terminal type games on the Internet all day long. You can self-exclude from one site and just go onto another. People have got to take some responsibility for their own gambling actions. My concerns are is that I wouldn't be advertising fixed odds betting terminals in the middle of Coronation Street. I just want a sensible advertising and marketing policy around particular forms of gambling.*

*We know that based on what I said to you earlier is that the structural characteristics of an FOBT are such that vulnerable or susceptible people will increase the chances they could develop a problem with that type of game because it's something you can play over and over and over again. But that's not to ban them. Loads of people play slot machines, play fixed odds betting terminals [and] have no problem whatsoever. Banning just isn't the way forward because there would just be an underground market for FOBTs. People that want to play them will find other places to play them. It's about the industry taking more responsibility in terms of protecting [players and] knowing that their product – I mean it's a bit like alcohol. Every alcohol bottle has the percentage proof on it and gambling has to do the same. They have to make people aware of all the potential problems so that people can make an informed choice about whether they want to play them in the first place.*

*Right Casino: That segways quite nicely into the last question. Gambling advertising has come under a lot of scrutiny over the past year. The EBC reported on a Coral advert being inadvertently screened on a children's television channel. You can't even watch a football match these days without being bombarded with gambling ads during intervals. Who do you think should take responsibility for this sometimes unethical advertising? Gambling operators or the media? And following on from that, how do you think the government should be looking into regulate gambling advertising?*

*Dr Griffiths: Okay, there are a number of issues there. The first thing is we have very strict guidelines that the advertising standard authorities set out. The Gambling Commission also have their own set of guidelines about what should and shouldn't be in particular adverts. For instance, nobody under the age of twenty five is supposed to be in an advert. There should be nothing about that gambling will solve life's problems in any way. For instance there was a particularly, what I think despicable campaign that was running in France. Eric Cantona was the front for the Partoosh Company and their strapline is 'Bet to Forget.' Now for me that is just socially irresponsible in terms of what gambling should be about.*

*We had one recently in this country, the health lottery. All the adverts, there was a lot of complaints about it. It said mortgage? What mortgage? With the health lottery advertising. Again the idea that gambling is going to solve all your financial problems*

*should never be used in adverts.*

*Now I'm a believer that we live in a grown-up, mature society. I personally believe that the gambling industry should have a right to market and advertise their products but it should be done in a way that kind of looks at scientific evidence for associations of problems with those particular activities. For instance there's no evidence that the National Lottery causes any problems at all really. You get the odd person that maybe spends too much in terms of the amount of tickets. But really there shouldn't be – I'm happy to see the national lottery advertised in the middle of Coronation Street. It's a discontinuous form of activity that doesn't tend to cause problems. I have more problems for instance having scratch cards advertised.*

*The interesting thing is – this is a true story – In 1996 the home office produced a document. It was a consultation document and they defined the idea of this difference between hard and soft gambling and it was particularly related to advertising. Basically they were saying is that the situation we've got now with the lottery is that'll allow soft forms of gambling to be advertised on television. The definition of a hard form of gambling and I mentioned it earlier, basically the hard gambling was defined as any activity that involved high or rapid staking.*

*Now I wrote to the home office and I said to them I've just seen your new definition of what a hard form of gambling is and by that definition scratch cards are a hard form of gambling yet you're advertising it through every program on ITV in a typical night. They wrote back to me and said, 'Dear Dr Griffiths, thank you for your letter. I can assure you that scratch cards are not a hard form of gambling because they are sold in respectable outlets.' So I wrote back and said does that mean you could put a roulette wheel in Tesco it suddenly becomes a soft form of gambling? Of course they didn't bother to answer that particular one.*

*The idea that where you sell something defines what is a hard or soft form of gambling is ludicrous. But in terms of advertising we've now got a situation because of the Gambling Act that's the one major difference people will have realised from the Gambling Act is that the freedom to advertise loads of different forms of gambling activity is widespread now. If you sit down tonight, if there's not a football match on TV what you'll get is that before ten o'clock loads of adverts for online bingo then after ten o'clock loads of adverts for online casinos and online poker. Obviously targeting women before the ten o'clock watershed kind of thing and men after the ten thirty watershed.*

*In adult programming I haven't got a problem, okay? But my kids now, they're typically up until nine o'clock, I don't think they should be bombarded with adverts. I do think in terms of advertising and marketing is that it can be advertised to adults in arenas where adults would normally be doing things but my own personal opinion is it shouldn't be in a situation where lots of children and adolescents can watch it.*

*Right Casino: We've already ascertained that you feel it's socially irresponsible to advertise gambling at times in which underage viewers might encounter gambling advertising. Do you feel at the same time gambling brands are socially irresponsible when they advertise on the billboards, at major sporting events, which are broadcast during the day when children might see them?*

*Dr Griffiths: Well, the thing is at the moment we have a loophole and a lull, which means that even during the day if there's a major sporting event companies like Bet 365, William Hill and Corals can advertise their gambling products in before and during a football match.*

*Personally I don't think that is right. I know I've got three children myself. I don't like it that they're bombarded with gambling advertising. The thing is they've got a father who is a professor of gambling studies and I can actually explain to them the ins and outs of gambling. For instance we had a situation recently where my son did say to me that he said that Van Percy was going to score a hat trick for Man United in this particular game and he did. He said to me if I would have put the bet on that I would have won whatever the amount of money was. I said what about all the times you said to me that Rooney was going to score? I went through all these things. The thing is you're only remembering the one that you would have won. This is what happens with gambling all the time.*

Now the thing about things like billboards at sporting matches, you're not going to stop that. My guess is that most people are really watching the game rather than watching the electronic adverts that are flashing across the billboards. Same with when you're watching the game hopefully most people are watching a game rather than the adverts there. Sport and betting are inextricably linked. You can't stop it. If you look at for instance when Manchester United I think were sponsored by Vodafone at one point and were discussing how Vodafone and online gambling services could be linked to the Manchester United faithful. Those kinds of linkups are going to happen more and more. Obviously a lot of gambling firms sponsor football clubs. There is a little bit concession there is that football clubs won't sell a children's shirt that's got a gambling sponsor on it. That's not to say that the children can't see who's the gambling sponsor. Some of them might not even realise are a gambling sponsor. Here in Nottingham we have Victor Chandler supporting Nottingham Forest. My guess is that most kids don't know that Victor Chandler is a betting outlet.

The thing is you can't stop this and there has to be some parental responsibility here in educating your children. But I personally and I've said this for a long time, gambling's an adult activity. If we're going to advertise and market it, it has to be to adults. For me I think an easy way to start won't eliminate it but after the nine o'clock watershed would be a good place to start.

Right Casino: And finally, let's talk about obviously the hottest topic in terms of representation of gambling: 'Problem gambling and addiction.' Problem gambling has obviously received lots of attention recently, particularly with high profile footballers documenting their latest addiction in the popular media. How do you define problem gambling versus say gambling addiction or gambling compulsion? Could you possibly elaborate on that for me?

Dr Griffiths: I can. The thing is every researcher in the area probably has a different personal definition of what for instance a problem gambling is.

Dr Griffiths: When we do research, problem gambling or pathological gambling or addictive gambling is always used as what we call an operational definition. Typically what we have at the moment is there are two particular screens that are used in the British Gambling Prevalence survey. So we use what's called the diagnostic and statistical manual of the American Psychiatric Association. That currently has nine items and if you endorse four or more of those nine items you are classed as a pathological gambler. If you endorse two or three of those items you're classed as a problem gambler. If you don't endorse any items or just one item then you're basically classed as a non-problem gambler.

In terms of do I think that reliably picks up people who genuinely have problems? There is a lot of debate about that. I think personally if you only score three items out of the nine criteria...I think you can score those three and not necessarily have any major problems in your life. My guess is though if you're scoring, endorsing five or six of those items.

There would be items like has gambling become the single most important thing in your life? Does it compromise your relationship, your work? Often these are about the consequences of that particular gambling behaviour.

Now me personally, because I work in the areas of gambling addiction, videogame addiction, Internet addiction, sex addiction, workaholism, I use the same criteria across all my work, okay? I basically have six criteria. For me for somebody to be a gambling addict what I would expect is that gambling is the single most important thing in that person's life and they would do it to neglect almost everything else in their life. They use gambling as a way of consistently and reliably shifting their mood state either to get buzzed up, high, aroused or to do the exact opposite. To tranquilise, to escape, to numb, to de-stress, to relax. I would expect the behaviour to build up over time needing more and more of that activity. It's what we call tolerance. For gamblers what you tend to find is that over time they gamble with bigger and bigger amounts of money for longer and longer periods. I would expect that they have withdrawal symptoms if they're unable to gamble. I do mean genuine withdrawal symptoms. So on psychological level I expect people to be moody and irritable if they're unable to gamble. On a physiological level I'd expect them to have nausea, hand sweats, stomach cramps, anxiety attacks. All the kinds of things you'll find with other more traditional withdrawal symptoms.

The most important thing is something that I call conflict and what I mean by here is that this activity is so conflicting in this

person's life it compromises their relationships, their jobs, their hobbies. They basically do this activity to the neglect of everything else, okay? Even to the point of they experience what I can intra-psychic conflict. Conflict within themselves. They know that they are doing this -activity too much. They know they should probably cut down and stop but they feel unable to do so and they experience a subjective loss of control.

Finally we've got relapse is that people have managed to give up gambling for two days, two weeks, two months, even two years is that once if they start doing it again they quickly get back into the cycle they were in before.

For me there are six components there. Salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. If I find a person and I don't care whether the behaviour is gambling, videogame playing, sex, work. If those six components are there I would operationally define that person as addicted to that activity.

Now the thing about the British Gambling Prevalence survey that we do the number of people that endorse each of those six because those six items are actually embedded within the questions that we use in the British Gambling Prevalence survey. Typically the number of people, so we take the British Gambling Prevalence survey, we typically survey between eight and nine and a half thousand people. In that we typically find that maybe just under 1% have a problem with their gambling. That equates to about sixty people out of – only sixty people out of all the people we've surveyed have got a gambling problem, okay?

Now out of those sixty the number out of those sixty people that fulfil what I consider to be the six basic criteria to class them as an addict maybe just a handful. Maybe four or five. The problem is and it's the way that these things are often reported. The media will say the British Gambling Prevalence survey is just come out. It's found that 0.9% of people were classed as a problem gambler using what was then the DSM formal criteria and they interpret that as just under 1% have a gambling addiction. What I was saying before is that all gambling addicts are problem gamblers but not all problem gamblers are addicts. There's a very different distinction.

And also people talk about compulsive gambling. Well compulsive gambling technically means is that you engage in gambling but you don't want to. You have a compulsive need to do it but you don't actually want to do it. I can tell you now that most addicted gamblers they do want to gamble. There's no compulsion to it. They really love gambling and they want to gamble. The thing is compulsive gambling, addictive gambling, problem gambling and even so called pathological gambling these are all different things and you could line fifty psychologists up in a room and we'll all give you a slightly different definition of what it is to be pathological, to be addicted, to be compulsive, or have a problem.

To me a problem gambler is anybody who says they have a problem with their gambling. If they say I'm a problem gambler because I spend too much money that is problem gambling. Now that's not a very good criterion in terms of how does this affect somebody's life, but that's not to take away the person's own perception is they have a problem with it. If they say well I have a problem with this because my work productivity is down because I gamble too much. That could be a problem gambler but overall it may not affect their life that much here or there.

That's why I think the rates that we have for problem gambling because in the last survey there were ten criteria then that have changed now since the last survey. There were ten criteria and you had to score five or more to be a pathological gambler, three or four to be a problem gambler. Now the number of people scoring five or more was infinitesimally small. I think we had maybe four or five individuals that classed as a pathological gambler and they really would be somebody that would equate to a gambling addict. But most people where problem gamblers only scoring endorsing three or four items.

Right Casino: Given these figures do you feel that the issue of problem gambling is overstated? And also following on from that to say I understand that the gambling prevalence survey has been cancelled this year?

Dr Griffiths: It's been – it's not just been cancelled this year. It's cancelled full stop at the moment.

Right Casino: Oh okay, can you explain why?

*Dr Griffiths: Well I think they think that the Gambling Commission runs their own omnibus surveys that go every month and to be honest what comes out in those is they sample a thousand people. The results aren't that different from what we find in the National Gambling Survey. Really it's just about saving money. It's not to say there won't be another one in the future. They typically happen once every four or five years. We had one in '99, one in 2007, one in 2011. So I mean I hope there's another in the future.*

*But to be honest the biggest difference we have between the current survey and the previous one is there was a 50% increase in problem gambling. Now obviously the report itself and I was one of the co-authors of that report, we were told very specifically by the Gambling Commission that we weren't to speculate why that increase might have happened. I personally think that the biggest noticeable increase between the 2007 survey and the 2011 was the fact that advertising came in 2007, September 2007. That's the biggest noticeable difference plus of course more opportunities to gamble online and remotely. So those two things I think probably accounted.*

*Now if you're saying should we be worried? The answer is that just under 1% of British adults still equates to around half a million people and if half a million people truly have a gambling problem that's something that society should be concerned about. Now we can argue 'til the cows come home whether it's half a per cent, 0.8%, 1.2%. To me that's irrelevant. The bottom line out and I get calls every week, emails every week from people where gambling has just destroyed their lives. For them it's as real as somebody addicted to drugs and alcohol. I work at the Coalface and I did something very naughty a number of years ago because the Slot Machine Association told me that there was – this was a long time ago. This is going back to the mid-90s. They told me that there was no evidence that gambling caused any problems whatsoever and that we didn't need a gambling helpline at all. Every person that basically contacted me I gave them BACTOR's number. I said here's the helpline even though it wasn't. Then they rang me and said why are you keep sending all these problem gamblers to us? I said you told me there wasn't any.*

*Anyway, but what happened was shortly after that we formed GamCare and now we do have a national telephone helpline. We get over fifty thousand and calls a year to that. To me that's not an insignificant problem that we can sweep under the carpet. That's not to say that every one of those are addicted to gambling because my guess is not but obviously it's causing problems for people. It's often we get the wives of husbands or parents of children, well adolescents who have problems.*

*So it's something that we should be concerned about but I think the good news is internationally we have one of the lowest gambling prevalence rates amongst adults in the world. Unfortunately we have one of the highest adolescent gambling rates in the world. Although as I say the good news it is coming down.*

*Right Casino: We've talked a lot about the individual impact of problem gambling, a loosely defined term and individual responsibility in regulating one's own gambling practices. But to what extent does society at large bear the brunt of gambling addiction? Presumably it's very different from say alcohol addiction, which is associated with high medical costs and a noticeable strain on the penal system. Is gambling addiction more or less carried by individuals rather than by the rest of society?*

*Dr Griffiths: I would say that often a lot of gambling problems do result in lots of – I can tell you now that gambling is associated with lots of criminal consequences. I certainly know in terms of medical consequences. The thing is though you don't report to treatment saying, 'I've got a gambling problem.' It might be that I'm severely depressed or I'm highly anxious and it's gambling that's causing those problems. That's not what's down on the doctor's sheet of what you're being treated for.*

*Yes obviously gambling is unlike say other drugs in the sense that people don't overdose on gambling. But having said that I've written a number of – I wrote the British Medical Association's kind of opinion document on problem gambling in this country. I've written articles and editorials to the British Medical Journal arguing that gambling is a health issue for those it affects.*

*Now often it can be because of the consequences of financial ruin in terms of people feeling suicidal, people feeling panic attacks, anxiety attacks, depression. These are all things that are genuine being caused by gambling problems. I don't see*



*why – people seem to think that the attitude that the people I speak to say well, they've caused it themselves. How is that different from someone who goes skiing and breaks their leg?*

*The point is you've put yourself in a position where something medically has gone wrong because you are in a high-risk situation. We still treat smokers for cancer. We still alcoholics. You could argue all those are self-inflicted to some extent but there does seem to be this kind of difference between people's perceptions of gambling compared to other types of potential addictive activity. But I would argue that there are costs to the criminal system, to the health system but most of them just go unnoticed because they're classed as something else.*

*Again, I was just going to say I've written loads of articles for legal magazines etc. and I've appeared in courts a number of a times on the behalf of individuals who have a gambling problem. One of the things that comes through there is if you're in court and you say I did this because I had an alcohol problem or I did this because I have a gambling problem. Saying you have an alcohol problem gets you a lighter sentence.*

*So again if people have got co-dependency and we often find that gamblers sometimes have problems with alcohol and nicotine and other things. If you present it in that criminal situation that it's something that basically a judge or a jury understands is that you're given more leniency than if it's to do with gambling. Again that's the idea that sometimes it's a hidden addiction is that because it's not – it has been medically recognised now but still in a court situation it doesn't get the same kind of weight as if you've got another addictive type of problem.*

*Right Casino: Okay. Just to finish, in your writings you say that operators should pursue cutting edge protocols to ensure player protection. Could you briefly outline your vision for a fair, socially responsible and sustainable gambling industry?*

*Dr Griffiths: Well I don't know whether my vision is sustainable. I've researched this area for so long now and I started talking about responsible gambling back in the mid-1990s and people hadn't even heard of this. Didn't even know the words responsible gambling or social responsibility within the gambling industry.*

*Now of course you can't get an operating license unless you're showing, at least in this country unless you're showing what you're doing in terms of being socially responsible in terms of player protection and harm minimisation.*

*I've spent much of my recent research trying to advocate there are things that operators can do to help players make informed choices. They can help players that get into trouble. You can help players not into trouble but give them the kind of what I call a kind of seatbelt approach by allowing them to set limits or temporarily exclude themselves from a gambling situation. Basically to empower people – basically to get people to pre-commit about how much they want to gamble in terms of time and money.*

*We've now got the technology of course particularly through with online we've got behavioural tracking data. We can actually do that offline. We've got now a couple of countries, Norway and Sweden both introduced player cards, which means that any form of gambling activity they do they have to show the player card. Basically it logs everything that you do. Through behavioural tracking I know it's kind of Big Brother-ish but it's there. Once gamblers realise it's there to actually protect them and to hopefully intervene when people are getting into trouble.*

*Now in this country we just don't – the idea of an ID card is not something that's very popular. My guess is if we tried to introduce the player card here straightaway that just wouldn't happen. We have to do things in stages. I think what's happening now is that every sector in this country has its own kind of code of conduct in terms of what they should do in terms of either terms of game design.*

*For instance one of the products that I developed is that we have over thirty companies worldwide using it. A tool called Gam Guard. This basically assesses the riskiness of a game based on the structural characteristics that have been designed into that game. So companies have a basically a traffic light system. It would be the red, yellow, or green about whether that product they're going to put out in the market is likely to be problematic to a risky or vulnerable susceptible individual.*

*Companies can then make a decision about whether they want to change the characteristics, if you like to make it safer. Whether they want to still introduce it but decide they're not going to market it heavily or they're only going to put it into a dedicated gambling environment or whatever.*

*Companies in terms of game design can be socially responsible. They can be socially responsible in terms of how they protect their customers. So if a customer comes to them and says I think I'm developing a problem. What do I do? They should have referral through to known gambling treatment or counselling services. If a gambler comes to them and says I want to not gamble for this next month. Can you exclude me? They should either temporary or permanent exclusion should be given to the gamblers without any fuss at all. If people want to set limits it's harder to do it offline but you could do it certainly with player cards. But online for instance now we've got loads of companies using limit setting in terms of initial deposit amounts, in terms of how much money they want to lose either per day, per month, over a year. We've got time limit.*

*And the great thing is we've just done some research and we got a player database of over a million online gamblers. We found that these limit setting features do work with the people that most need them i.e. the most gaming intense people.*

*So really, a lot of it is kind of common sense but obviously what you don't want to do is be so heavy handed that it stops people who have no problems whatsoever engaging in the activity. That's the balance you have to kind of weigh up.*

*But to be honest now I think jurisdictions all around the world, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, here in Britain, other European countries, to get an operating license people will just have to do this as the norm. And if people want to gamble they're going to have to expect – just as the way we get into a car and there are seatbelts, airbags and whatever. All these tools they are there hopefully that you never use but should that situation arise that you reach a crisis point they all come into fruition.*

*That's the analogy that I have is that when we were told in 1974 by Jimmy Saville to clunk click every trip; it's taken twenty years. I can't think apart from ironically taxi drivers, people that just don't put their seatbelts on as soon as they get into the car. It's become second nature. I think responsible gambling features and measures and protocols, the more you introduce and the more you just make it part of the experience people will just come to accept it. It's going to take time. It won't happen overnight.*

*Things are starting to happen already and people probably don't even know it. But yes, for me we're not there yet but I think we've come a great way. It's been radically shifted. Last ten years to come from a situation where no company was really talking about responsible gambling to every major company now having a code of conduct and a whole set of things they have to do.*

*The lottery sector they now have a whole accreditation program now around levels of social responsibility. It's on four levels and of course all the major companies are trying to get to level four. I think we've got ten companies in the world that have reached level four in terms of protecting its customers. I would hope that would be shifted across to other sectors.*

*Right Casino: Thank you very much Dr Griffiths.*