“It did not apply to me”: poker players’ perspectives of prevention messages

Adèle Morvannou¹ • Eva Monson¹ • Annie-Claude Savard² • Sylvia Kairouz³ • Élise Roy^{1,4} • Magali Dufour⁵

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Abstract

Objective Despite the risks associated with poker and its unique characteristics when compared with other forms of gambling, little knowledge exists of poker players’ perceptions of prevention strategies. The aim of this study was to explore poker players’ perceptions and understandings of existing problem gambling prevention strategies.

Methods This exploratory qualitative study is a secondary data analysis of interviews conducted as a part of a sequential mixed-methods research project, with 12 poker players.

Results Two main themes emerged from the thematic analysis highlighting a distinction between institutional and personal prevention strategies. When speaking about institutional prevention efforts, players were critical of existing formats, messages, and who these messages were being developed and disseminated by and for. Players believed existing messaging strategies demonstrate an overall lack of awareness concerning the reality of poker. Personal preventive strategies that players themselves put in place to reduce risks included money management, playing for free, maintaining a healthy play-life balance, and managing emotions, to be aware of their relationship with poker, as well as spotting paying opportunities.

Conclusions Given poker players’ lack of receptivity to existing prevention messaging, it is essential to consider the unique nature of poker and its players. It is also imperative to explore the potential benefits of collaborating with players when it comes to targeted prevention strategies.

Résumé

Objectif Malgré les risques associés au poker et ses caractéristiques uniques comparé aux autres formes de jeux de hasard et d’argent, la perception des joueurs de poker quant aux stratégies de prévention reste méconnue. L’objectif de cette étude est d’explorer les perceptions et la compréhension des joueurs de poker quant aux stratégies de prévention existantes pour les problèmes de jeu.

Méthode Cette étude qualitative exploratoire repose sur des analyses de données secondaires d’entrevues réalisées auprès de 12 joueurs de poker d’un projet empruntant un devis de recherche mixte séquentiel.

Résultats Deux thèmes principaux ont émergé de l’analyse thématique, soulignant la distinction entre les stratégies de prévention institutionnelles et personnelles. Lorsqu’il s’agit de prévention institutionnelle, les joueurs ont critiqué les formats, les messages et par qui les messages étaient élaborés et diffusés. Les joueurs ont estimé que les stratégies existantes démontraient un manque général de connaissance de la réalité du poker. Les stratégies de prévention personnelles que les joueurs mettent en place par eux-mêmes pour réduire les risques comprennent la gestion de l’argent, jouer gratuitement, maintenir un équilibre entre le poker et la

✉ Adèle Morvannou
Adele.Morvannou@usherbrooke.ca

¹ Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Université de Sherbrooke, Campus de Longueuil 150 Place Charles-Le Moyne, bureau 200, Longueuil, Québec J4K 0A8, Canada

² School of Social Work and Criminology, Université Laval, Pavillon Charles De Koninck 1030 avenue des sciences humaines, Local 5444, Québec G1V 0A6, Canada

³ Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Concordia University, 2070 rue Mackay, 3^{ème} étage, Montréal, QC H3G 2J1, Canada

⁴ Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec, Montréal, Québec, Canada

⁵ Department of Psychology, Université du Québec à Montréal, 405 Rue Sainte-Catherine Est, Montréal, QC H2L 2C4, Canada

vie personnelle et gérer ses émotions, prendre conscience de sa relation avec le poker, ainsi que le repérage des opportunités payantes.

Conclusions Étant donné le manque de réceptivité des joueurs de poker aux messages de prévention existants, il est essentiel de considérer la nature unique du poker et de ses joueurs. Il est également impératif d'explorer les avantages potentiels d'une collaboration avec les joueurs de poker lorsqu'il s'agit de stratégies de prévention ciblées.

Keywords Prevention · Harm reduction · Poker · Problem gambling · Qualitative · Players perspective

Mots-clés Prévention · Réduction des méfaits · Poker · Problèmes de jeu · Qualitatif · Perspective des joueurs

Introduction

Poker is the most publicized and popular form of gambling. Poker is distinct from other forms of gambling in various ways; research has highlighted that poker players' gambling behaviours tend to stand out in terms of intensity, especially with regard to the significant amounts of time and money involved (Kairouz et al. 2010) and players are at an increased risk of developing gambling problems (Barrault and Varescon 2013). Indeed, prevalence of gambling problems among poker players is relatively high, varying across studies from 5.6% to 17.2% (Barrault and Varescon 2013; Hopley et al. 2012). Due to the popularity of poker and the intensity associated with poker-specific gambling behaviour, important concerns have been raised by public health researchers, encouraging targeted research on this specific at-risk population (e.g., Kairouz et al. 2016; Laakasuo et al. 2015).

Prevention can be employed to implement universal measures that seek to improve capacity and/or environmental resources for broad populations. Prevention is also a concept that can be applied at institutional (e.g., by authority figures) and person (e.g., by gambler) levels (SAMHSA 2019). It can also target select subgroups of individuals who are more likely than the general population to develop a problem because of the presence of certain risk factors (SAMHSA 2019). For example in 2013, the province of Quebec's gambling provider (Loto-Québec) launched a campaign entitled "The game must remain a game" (translated), aimed at promoting healthy gambling habits and specifically targeting the irrational beliefs of electronic gambling/gaming machines players (Cision 2013). Other forms of gambling such as poker have been specifically the subject of targeted messages promoting low-risk gambling, as evidenced by a video available on the Loto-Québec website entitled "Poker – a meeting with chance" which reminds players that "Even when bluffing, you do not control an important aspect of the game: chance" (Loto-Québec 2019). Many authors agree that, in terms of prevention, poker should be

distinguished from other forms of gambling (e.g., Khazaal et al. 2013). Yet, despite the known risks associated with poker and its unique characteristics when compared with other forms of gambling, few studies have developed knowledge concerning prevention for this specific at-risk population. One previous Australian study interested in "skilled" players (e.g., poker, sport betting) and prevention messages reported that messages should specifically be customized for skilled gamblers who prefer "blunt and straightforward language" and "individualized messages with their personal spend numbers" (Gainsbury et al. 2018, p. 7). Meanwhile, institutional prevention initiatives have been developed specifically for other forms of gambling, such as electronic gaming/gambling machines (e.g., Tanner et al. 2017; Williams et al. 2012). Players are key in accessing experiential knowledge that can help improve current prevention (e.g., Miller et al. 2018); as a result, exploring the unique perspectives of poker players is a logical next step to support the development of prevention likely to reach its target audience.

Studies of poker players over the past 10 years have highlighted the singularity of poker players and their experiences. Players are unique in terms of socio-demographic profile and motivations for gambling (e.g., Barrault and Varescon 2013; Dufour et al. 2012; Hopley et al. 2012). They are usually young, highly educated men (Hopley et al. 2012) who tend to play for different, yet specific, reasons such as social interaction, intellectual stimulation, competition, the adrenaline rush, and/or to make a living (Dufour et al. 2012). Players describe poker as distinct from other types of gambling and they wish to differentiate themselves from individuals who gamble on electronic gambling/gaming machines, particularly in the eyes of their family and friends, the general public, and researchers (Barrault et al. 2014; Dufour et al. 2012). Poker can also be differentiated from other gambling activities because of its increased competitiveness, community, and skill (e.g., Barrault et al. 2014). The skill component, as well as the social nature of poker, could

explain why players differentiate poker from other gambling forms and do not identify as “gamblers” (Vines and Linders 2016). Some poker players report feeling stigmatized and automatically perceived as problem gamblers because of the distorted and alarmist perspectives of non-players (Dufour et al. 2012; Vines and Linders 2016). As a result, players tend to be defensive when it comes to poker and intent on convincing non-players of the positive aspects of the game and distinguishing it from other forms of gambling (e.g., Gainsbury et al. 2018). Players’ impression of being judged might be a barrier to their receptiveness when it comes to prevention messaging (Dufour et al. 2012).

Exploring players’ perspectives could foster a better understanding of how poker players perceive and define prevention. Furthermore, this research has the potential to elucidate existing barriers and future opportunities that should be considered when developing recommendations for targeted prevention and harm reduction strategies. As such, the aim of this study is to explore poker players’ perceptions and understandings of existing problem gambling prevention strategies.

Methods

This exploratory qualitative study is a secondary data analysis of the qualitative component of a sequential mixed-methods research project. Conducted in Québec, Canada, between 2009 and 2016, the overarching aim of this study was to examine passion and its association with problem gambling behaviours among poker players. For a detailed description of recruitment methods, see Morvannou et al. (2018).

Participants

Participants were originally recruited from various locations where poker players meet to play (i.e., casinos, tournaments in bars, and in poker halls), through online poker sites and through ads placed in local newspapers. They had to meet the following inclusion criteria: have reported playing poker for money in the past year, self-identify as poker players, be at least 18 years old, and speak French or English. A select number of poker players ($n = 20$) were approached to take part in additional in-depth interviews. As the primary focus of these interviews was the topic of passion, participants had to report a specific level of passion (harmonious passion ≥ 3.4 ; obsessive ≥ 1.2) according to the Gambling Passion Scale (Rousseau et al. 2002) (see Morvannou et al. 2018 for more details). To achieve diversity in player profiles, the qualitative sample comprised at least one participant from each of the four categories (“non-problem”, “low-risk”, “moderate-risk”, “problem”

gamblers) of the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI; Ferris and Wynne 2001). Of the 20 players who were contacted to participate in the interviews, 12 players accepted and were interviewed between April and September 2016.

Procedure

All semi-structured individual interviews were 45 to 90 minutes long and took place either by video communication software over the Internet or by telephone, depending on the participants’ preference. All interviews were conducted and recorded by the first author, who has extensive experience in interviewing techniques.

The interview guide consisted of a series of open-ended questions designed to catalyze discussion of participants’ poker experiences. Clarifying questions, reflections, and summaries were used to ensure comprehension (Paillé and Mucchielli 2012). The guide was centred around three themes: (a) the passion of poker (e.g., “What do you think of the term *passion* when it comes to poker?”), (b) the evolution of passion and poker practices (e.g., “Describe your present sense of passion for poker”), and (c) the prevention of risks linked to poker (e.g., “What do you think about prevention targeted towards poker players?”). This final set of questions is the focus of these analyses.

After each interview, the interviewer took field notes including observations about participants’ attitudes and significant/missing content. These field notes have, among other things, made it possible to contextualize the information collected during analysis. Each participant received a bookstore gift card worth CAD\$30 as compensation. The study was approved by the Comité d’éthique de la recherche des Lettres et Sciences Humaines of the Université de Sherbrooke (N/Ref. 2014-79/Morvannou/).

Analyses

Digital audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by a qualified professional trained in transcription and a thematic content analysis (Paillé and Mucchielli 2012) was conducted to code and compare findings using NVivo V.8 software (Richards 2008). For the present analysis, the full content of the verbatim was considered with a focus on prevention of gambling problems. Inductive analysis was carried out continuously (Fortin 2010). Consultation between authors to reach an agreement on the emerging themes took place during the analysis stage (Graneheim and Lundman 2004). Study participants were anonymized by randomly assigning them numbers and then fictitious first names.

Results

Sample characteristics

All participants ($n = 12$) were men aged 21 to 40 years ($M = 28.33$, $SD = 6.43$) and just over half reported being in a relationship. Half of the participants reported having college-level education, five had at least a bachelor's degree, and one participant had a secondary-level education. The average income of participants was CAD\$40,071 ($SD = 14,789$). The average number of years of poker experience among participants was 9.5 ($SD = 7.7$; [2–32]). All participants reported playing poker during the past 12 months, with nine players reporting having played once per month. Half of the participants reported that they were occasional players and the other half reported being professional players either at the time of the interview or in the past. The majority of participants ($n = 10$) were either primarily, or exclusively, online poker players. Participants were diverse in profile when it came to gambling problems: two participants were “non-problem” gamblers, one was a “low-risk” gambler, seven were “moderate-risk” gamblers, and two were “problem” gamblers.

Two main themes emerged from the analysis highlighting a distinction between institutional and personal prevention strategies. When speaking about institutional prevention efforts, players were critical of existing formats, messages, and who these messages were being developed and disseminated by and for. Personal preventive strategies that players themselves put in place to reduce risks were also elaborated.

Players' perceptions of the institutional preventive efforts

“It did not apply to me”

Some players spontaneously expressed their opinions on prevention initiatives displayed in public spaces.

Aware but unaffected

Some participants were aware of gambling prevention messaging but considered it irrelevant for poker players. Furthermore, according to them, these messages are ineffective as they target players with gambling problems, a category of players with whom they do not identify because they perceive playing with control:

We have often seen Loto-Québec's ads: “play moderately”. They did not affect me much. Honestly, I see myself – and maybe that's the problem – maybe above that. Maybe players who play, maybe even those who play too much,

don't feel like they are playing too much. It's hard to feel targeted when we tell ourselves: “No, no. I do not have that problem”. (Pierre, age 36, online poker player)

Other participants seemed less capable of explaining why they considered existing prevention strategies ineffective; they just seemed to be unconcerned by the problems mentioned within prevention messaging.

Lack of knowledge and credibility behind preventive messages

Players reported that prevention messages were designed for players of other forms of gambling and that they, as poker players, were not the target audience:

Of course, everything we see in terms of prevention with gambling is very general, I would say that it did not apply to me. I thought it was done in a general way, it did not affect me in particular. Often poker players really consider themselves different than other gamblers. [i.e., other forms of gambling] [...] I would say that most poker players really differentiate themselves from casino players. (Valentin, age 25, online poker player)

According to these players, the inefficiency of institutional prevention measures could therefore be due, in part, to the lack of consideration given to the distinct characteristics of poker compared with other forms of gambling:

Players always hear talk of prevention, problems, I do not know if ... probably they find it redundant, they tell themselves that the message comes from a source that does not really know their reality. [...] It's not credible and it's always the same message said differently. (Valentin, age 25, online poker player)

It is therefore important to explore what distinguishes poker from other forms of gambling.

Lack of knowledge of the player's experience

Participants raised a number of points about risky poker practices and potential harm that they observed with other players.

Not taking it seriously and lack of skill

Multiple players pointed out that, according to them, poker players who have a gambling problem are often differentiated from their peers by their lack of seriousness, that is to say a lack of effort to improve their skills:

I'd say that I really feel like I'm on the other side of the coin, always having taken this seriously, never really doing anything crazy, never straying from the straight and narrow, or anything like that. Then, on the contrary, the players who might have a problem are those who do the complete opposite, who are not serious, who aren't trying to improve, who might lose control sometimes, but I'd say that I have a hard time putting myself in that situation. (Marc, age 32, online poker player)

One player describes that the lack of interest in the rational aspect of poker can be an indicator of gambling problems. Several participants also mention that poker players who develop problems are mainly those who, despite consistent losses, continue to play. As such, participants compared the way those who develop poker-related problems relate to the game to those who develop problems related to other types of gambling activities:

Poker might be a strategy game, but if you don't know how to play and you just want to "gamble", your problem is the same as if you were playing roulette. (Mathis, age 29, online poker player)

The role of money

Study participants highlighted that it is the monetary aspect of poker that makes the game "obsessive" and risky:

Let's say we're playing just for fun, there wouldn't be this same obsession. But since it's connected to money, we know humans' fascination with money. It makes me think that it's really this the part that makes people so obsessed. (Paul, age 28, online poker player)

For this reason, playing in cash games is identified by some participants as an activity that is particularly popular with poker players who they think have gambling problems. One player equates cash games to other forms of gambling where one can rejoin the game to make up for losses, unlike in tournaments.

Control over time and life balance

Many participants reported that time is a central element to understanding how loss of control manifests for some poker players:

The obsessive aspect that you mention, I would have experienced it without being obsessive at the monetary level but in terms of time spent on it, I experienced that, like I told you, in the early years. As soon as I had 5-10 minutes, for example, I'd be in traffic, playing a game, either on my phone or my laptop. (Pierre, age 36, online poker player)

This overinvestment of time into poker is also closely linked to a player's disengagement from different spheres of life such as family and social life.

I haven't lost much, but it's the time, that you say: "Ouch, it's completely idiotic how much time I lost there". I used to do nothing more than that in my spare time, you know, when I was alone or whatever. Instead of saying: "Well, I'll call my friends and we'll go play pool or we'll do such and such activity. We'll go to the movies. We'll watch movie". No, no, no. I would get on my computer and all. "Ah, there's a tournament." I get on, go, and ... (Mathis, age 29, online poker player)

Unique characteristics and nature of poker

Many participants reported that it was essential to consider the characteristics of poker such as the skill component, the structural characteristics of playing against other players, and the competitive aspect of poker the game which lead them to consider it like a sport.

First, players emphasize that poker is not based solely on chance like other forms of gambling and involves a skill component, which occupies an important place in their discourse. This aspect of poker encompasses acquisition of knowledge, strategy development, and opportunity for improvement:

I am passionate about the skills I can develop in poker. Conversely, if I go play Blackjack or Baccarat, there are not any great skills I can develop. Some will probably tell me that there is. But I am not passionate about gambling. I am passionate about the skills that poker forces me to develop to become better. (Pascal, age 36, land-based poker player)

One of the participants even goes so far as to compare poker to a meritocracy where individuals are rewarded according to their merit (i.e., the work and time they invest).

Another peculiarity of poker is the fact that players do not play against the house like in other forms of gambling but rather against one another. This particularity is not

trivial since, for some, it influences their overall perception of the nature of poker itself based on the objectives of each player, be it to win or to socialize. Finally, some participants said that competing with others, combined with skill development, contributes to making poker an activity whose nature is similar to a competitive sport where age has no impact.

Personal strategies to reduce risks

Money management

Players proposed different strategies such as budget management, playing small amounts as a novice to poker, choosing a table where other players are less experienced, and finding a balance between spending in other areas of life and on poker:

In prevention with poker players, “bankroll management” is the first thing they need to learn. [...] Then after that, what we call the “table selection”. So, choose the types of tournaments you’re good at, tables where you know you can make money because you’ve “spotted” a given player that you know is exploitable. (Pascal, age 36, land-based poker player)

Play for free

One player also suggested playing free or low-value games to improve their skills while minimizing financial risks:

That’s why I play free games. You also need \$5 games to reduce the risks yet at the same time you’ll improve because you’re playing more often. Then, after that, if you see that you’re in control and that it’s going well, then you can move on “Ok I was playing \$5 games and winning, ok I’ll go up to \$10.” And you continue like that. (Phil, age 21, online poker player)

Healthy lifestyle and emotional management

Participants emphasized the importance of having a healthy lifestyle to maintain control over their behaviour and emotions. A player makes the connection between a healthy lifestyle and protecting himself from negative emotions when losing at poker:

If you haven’t slept for 48 hours and something stressful comes up, you’ll likely lose control faster because you don’t have strength. So, it has to do with my state of health too. [...] It’s sleeping eight hours a day, eating

healthy, exercising, and having a healthy lifestyle and not getting drunk every day, sleeping badly, eating poutine. (Paul, age 28, online poker player)

“To be aware of my relationship with poker”

Several participants reported questioning themselves, as a way of maintaining awareness of their relationship with poker. For example, having participated in research on gambling permitted them to question what motivates them to play and the place of poker in their life, as well as to put into perspective the risks associated with poker:

So, answering those questions [reference to the annual telephone call made as part of the longitudinal study], well, it taught me something more about myself. So, I tell myself, if I can think aloud with someone about poker, if I can get to know myself better, to be aware of my relationship with poker. [...] It allows me to review what place poker occupies in my life a bit. “Is it healthy? Should I keep playing?” (Paul, age 28, online poker player)

In addition, several individuals also reported that participating in gambling research had helped them to regularly keep a log of the time they invested in playing poker and allowed them to maintain a certain level of self-awareness, which served as a form of prevention:

If you make a profit every day, you know the problem with that is maybe the time that you’re losing on it. At that point, it’s no longer about the money. Maybe it’s that you’re closing yourself off and you’re going to lose your friends. [...] I would say that the only moments where I was a bit more aware and affected were really when I got called once per year [reference to the annual phone call made as part of the longitudinal study] and I “recapped” it. (Pierre, age 36, online poker player)

Spotting paying opportunities

To minimize the risk of losing, some players explained having to manage the game opportunities according to the players present and their skills. Thus, they will tend to avoid tables (both online and land-based) where only players more competent than them are present, and to play more against novice or beginner players, for example:

Sometimes you want to play at a given time but it’s five good, winning players, and it makes it so that you don’t

want to play against them. It makes it so that you're dependent on the traffic, so you wait for there to be as many bad players as possible, and then you play. (Paul, age 28, online poker player)

Some participants adopted strategies to track and understand their long-term results and to situate their skills in relation to other players:

Just because you lost your last 100 games doesn't mean you're not good. I have paid hundreds of dollars an hour to be coached by superstars and the question they'll ask you is: "Where is your edge?" Can you quantify the behaviour that you embody, which is different from the behaviour of others, which gives you an advantage? (Peter, age 40, land-based poker player)

Discussion

This qualitative study is the first, to our knowledge, to explore poker players' perceptions of existing institutional and personal prevention strategies. When asked about their views on prevention specific to poker, players instinctively referred to broader public/institutional prevention messages created and disseminated by those outside the poker community. Poker players within this study displayed an overall negative reaction to this institutional prevention type messaging for several reasons.

First, they explained that even if they were aware of the messages, they were unaffected as the true targets of these messages were problem gamblers and they did not identify as such. They also believed these messages were aimed at players of other forms of gambling (e.g., electronic gambling/gaming machines), and not skill-based forms of gambling such as poker. In addition, poker players not only consider the game, and themselves, distinct from other forms of gambling and gamblers but also consider themselves exclusive in their reality. This creates problems for existing prevention messaging. Previous strategies have primarily been designed to address all types of players regardless of their preferred form of gambling, and this type of messaging does not seem to resonate with poker players. This result aligns with that of previous studies which have reported that poker players do not self-identify as problem gamblers and definitely do not see themselves as equal to individuals who gamble on chance-based forms of gambling (Vines and Linders 2016). Feeling continually portrayed as addicts by those outside the poker community, such as family, friends, and even researchers, means players are regularly defending their identity (Barrault et al. 2014; Vines and Linders 2016) and this may explain why poker players reacted with immediate indifference to

prevention messaging. This being said, to our knowledge, few studies have fully explored how different types of gamblers react to institutional prevention messaging (Gainsbury et al. 2018).

Second, results demonstrated that players felt these messages displayed an overall sense of ignorance of the reality of poker and that there was a lack of credibility for those in charge of prevention messaging. Given that players often seek guidance from a third party to evaluate their own relationship with poker and that mentorship is a known and respected strategy employed within the community (Parke and Griffiths 2011), maybe the integration of more renowned poker players within prevention campaigns would make them more effective, as this has previously been shown to draw awareness to specific causes within other fields (e.g., cancer; Pavelko et al. 2017).

The results also highlighted how poker players have independently implemented personal prevention strategies. While the players do not define these strategies as prevention, they are exactly that. These personal strategies are described by players in much more positive terms in contrast to institutional prevention. Poker players described numerous strategies they employ, such as managing their money, being aware of their relationship with poker, playing for free, balancing poker and other activities as a way of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, managing emotions, and spotting paying opportunities. These elements echo previous studies that have outlined what differentiates poker from other gambling activities (i.e., skill component) (e.g., Khazaal et al. 2013; McCormack and Griffiths 2013), and the importance for players being disciplined (Vines and Linders 2016). Some previous studies conducted with online gamblers have reported differences in the gambling behaviours and the responsiveness to prevention tools. Compared with other gamblers, poker players demonstrate fewer chasing losses (Gainsbury et al. 2018) and respond better to time limit tools than monetary limit-setting tools (Auer and Griffiths 2013). In fact, electronic gaming machine gamblers use preferably money management (e.g., only gamble on low-stake machines) and try to set money limits on their gambling (Rodda et al. 2019). Within the current study, strategies are often part of a desire to maintain control of play and improve ability and bankroll. The implementation of these strategies is not based on a fear of developing gambling problems but on the desire to improve and enjoy poker without losing too much money. As a result, if existing institutional prevention strategies remain narrowly focused on the risk of becoming a problem gambler, it is understandable that such messages will not resonate with poker players as they do not associate themselves with such pejorative labels. This is a prime example of how prevention messaging may be targeted, but not tailored to the poker community. Up until now, no prevention strategies elaborated on or integrated the existing poker player strategies. These results

highlight the need to fully understand the players' experience and to ensure consistency between individual experiences and institutional prevention strategies. Strategies outlined within this study are critical for creating effective recommendations for targeted and effective prevention strategies. When developing effective prevention, there is a need to consider what strategies are employed by some players.

Public health theoretical models and conceptual frameworks of prevention have been highly focused on framing poker as an addiction that positions poker players at risk of harm (e.g., financial, social, or health harms). Existing prevention models conceptualize poker like all other games, and this has led to an oversimplified and inadequate understanding of the game and its players. This traditional framing is at odds with how poker players within this study experienced themselves and their poker playing. As such, poker players present a somewhat unique public health concern within the realm of gamblers, as they are not only at risk of addiction (from a research standpoint) but also at additional risk of isolation given the insular nature of their community, making them an incredibly difficult group to target for prevention and treatment using traditional models and methods. Players do not see themselves as at risk of addiction, but instead conceptualize their risk in terms of money/time loss and play-life balance. Their understanding of risk, their game, and their self-prevention methods demonstrate the need to provide help to this population of gamblers in a way that supports their understandings of their reality.

Generally, theoretical models and conceptual frameworks of prevention have long converged on the central idea that knowing one's target audience, i.e., their definition of the problem and how they prevent it themselves, before deploying preventive messages is essential (Dorais 2017). For example, Brisson's (2014) conceptualization of prevention centres on a discussion of power dynamics between those who instigate prevention and those individuals who are the intended target. The gambling field would likely benefit from a better understanding of Brisson's four-point continuum: "to act on" which corresponds to defining what poses a problem for the individual and put in place measures to be taken; "to act for" where the problem is defined for the individual and measures are legitimized according to a certain standard; "to act with" where the problem and the measures are jointly defined; and the acknowledgement of the autonomy of individuals and their "capacity to act" (i.e., agency). On this last point, individuals define the problem themselves and independently determine the appropriate measures, thus demonstrating self-management (Brisson 2014). Within the gambling field, prevention does not seem to be framed with poker players' specificities or empowerment in mind. To make recommendations for targeted and effective prevention strategies, it is thus essential to consider both the characteristics of poker (e.g., skill component, structural characteristics, and competitive aspect

of poker) and poker players (e.g., identity). Consideration should also be given to when framing prevention messaging through different individual lenses versus institutional prevention might be more or less beneficial given the gambling activity and/or gambler in question. Moreover, results from this study suggest that moving forward, there may be a need to rebrand existing prevention strategies and terminology. Going beyond consideration of the ideas from this study may be fruitful, perhaps even integrating, or mirroring, the specific language used by poker players such as "serious", "aware", "never straying from the straight and narrow", "improve", and "control" that would cultivate an additional interest in prevention messaging. One recent study with poker players highlighted the importance of terms when it comes to discussing problem gambling (Morvannou 2017). These ideas should be explored in future studies of effective targeted prevention. Future research should consider taking a participatory approach to prevention messaging specifically including a diversity of players who play with relatively high frequency on different forms of poker (online, mobile, offline). It would also be important to include a group component for discussions to allow for a contrast of opinions from different players within the poker community and that when the time comes, messages be created together within these groups.

This study has some limitations. Players were recruited as part of a study focused more broadly on the subject of passion for poker and not specifically to discuss prevention. As a result, the topic of prevention would have likely been investigated further if this had been the main focus of the interviews and as such, while saturation was achieved for issues covered by the main focus of the study, this may not be the case for topics related to prevention. However, this is the first study that gives poker players the opportunity to express their point of view on current prevention and highlighted the need and importance of talking to poker players when developing strategies. Although the sample of participants consists only of men, this was unintentionally achieved by selecting the players by reasoned choice from the convenience sample of the broader study. Given the lived experience of women poker players is known to differ greatly from that of men (e.g., Abarbanel and Bernhard 2012), future research should specifically seek out women poker players as participants in order to give them the opportunity to voice their opinion on this incredibly important topic.

Conclusions

This study allows for a better understanding of poker players' perceptions of prevention strategies carried out by existing authorities and insight into how they define the risks and the prevention strategies that they themselves put in place. Our results indicate that despite being well aware of prevention

messaging, poker players feel the messages do not concern them. Specific suggestions arise from the results:

- Implement messages based on the desire to improve and enjoy poker without losing too much money;
- Integrate more renowned poker players within prevention campaigns;
- Include poker players in the construction of prevention messages to incorporate their understandings of their reality;
- Rebrand existing prevention strategies and terminology (e.g., integrating, or mirroring, the specific language used by poker players).

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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