

The Effect of Couple Conflict on Gambling Behavior: A Lab-Based Study

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A Thesis Submitted to
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in Applied Psychology.

August 2023, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Date: August 24, 2023

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Abstract

The first aim of this study was to improve our understanding of conflict and problem gambling behavior, by demonstrating the causal link of relationship conflict on problem gambling behavior through a laboratory experiment. Three moderated-mediation models were proposed. Couples in which both members gambled were randomly assigned to a conflict vs. neutral discussion followed by the opportunity to gamble on VLTs. The second aim was to understand the relationship between problem gambling and a variety of work outcomes, through a correlational design. Two mediations, unrelated to the conflict manipulation were proposed. Overall, the three experimental models were largely unsupported, with partial support for the third model. While one of the two work-related models was supported. A significant relationship was found between problem gambling and job performance, mediated by gambling-specific cyberloafing. This finding highlights the reality that addictions and addictive behavior can infiltrate organizations, lending support for the claim that gambling can have a negative impact on employees and organizational outcomes.

Keywords: problem gambling, dyadic conflict, partner control behavior, conflict styles, coping motives, absenteeism, cyberloafing

August 24, 2023

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Theoretical Background

There has been a proliferation of gambling internationally over the last two decades, where gambling is becoming a very common activity, with high recreational value in society (Williams & Volberg, 2013). Studies show that approximately 66-80% of people have gambled in the previous year, with the most commonly endorsed motives being gambling for fun, entertainment, or excitement (endorsed by 40.5% of gamblers; Wiebe et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2021; Williams & Volberg, 2013). Among those who gamble, only a relatively small subset will develop moderate to severe problem gambling tendencies, with estimated rates varying from 0.6% to 5% (Welte et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2021). Problem gambling is a broad term used to describe a range of gambling behaviors that create negative consequences in one or more major domains of life (i.e., interpersonal, financial, legal) that are associated with individual, social network, occupational, and/or community impairment (Ferris & Wynne, 2001). At the extreme level of severity, problem gambling can result in a diagnosis of gambling disorder, a behavioral addiction disorder included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Studies show that gambling disorder is often comorbid with some other diagnosis or diagnoses, most commonly substance use disorders (76%), anxiety disorders (60%), mood disorders (56%), personality disorders (42%), and impulse control disorders (42%) (Crockford & el-Guebley, 1998; Ibanez et al., 2001; Kessler et al., 2008; Petry et al., 2005). Suicide ideation and attempts in problem gamblers has been noted as a significant problem. A study by Petry and Kiluk (2002) found that in a sample of gamblers seeking treatment, those with suicide ideation spent more money gambling, reported greater gambling cravings, suffered from more psychiatric symptoms, experienced more days in

conflict, and overall were less satisfied with their lives. Ultimately, these difficulties likely bleed into problem gamblers' overall work functioning.

Problem gambling is an important public health issue, as the consequences extend beyond a personal level. Job disruption is one major consequence emerging from problem gambling, impacting the individual, their family, and society in general (Lesieur, 1998). Although most problem gamblers do not declare bankruptcy, the financial burden is chiefly held by the family, leading to marital discord, mental illness, and physical health problems (Lorenz & Yaffee, 1986, 1988). Embezzlement has been cited as one major concern among problem gamblers in the workplace, along with general exploitation of job resources. A striking statistic shows that among a sample of 184 Gamblers Anonymous members, the average amount of money stolen from a job was \$60,700, with 56% admitting to stealing (Lesieur & Anderson, 1995). Accordingly, it is estimated that 21-36% of gamblers in treatment have lost a job due to their gambling (Ladouceur et al., 1994; Meyer et al., 1995). Family members are deeply affected by the gambler's behavior, with almost half (i.e., 46%) of problem gambling helpline calls coming from significant others (Hodgins et al., 2007). Problem gambling has severe negative consequences affecting many areas of the gambler's own and their family members' quality of life, such as loss of financial stability, emotional, physical, and relational health. Financial stressors can include trying to get the family back on track with credit card debt, bank loans, illegal debts with bookies, job loss, and money owed to family and friends (Dickson-Swift et al., 2005). Moreover, job loss would likely intensify these financial stressors. Given gamblers' propensity to gamble during working hours (a phenomenon known as "cyberloafing"; Lim, 2002), regular use of sick days, and extended lunch breaks, they are more likely to perform poorly and subsequently be fired from/lose their job (Lesieur, 1977). Supporting this claim,

problem gamblers are subject to higher unemployment rates and are at higher risk of losing their jobs due to absenteeism and theft (Downs & Woolrych, 2010). Moreover, many problem gamblers have reported low engagement at work for tasks that require mental purpose and application (Downs & Woolrych, 2010). In terms of gambling affecting the family, romantic partners report anger and resentment toward the gambler (Hodgins et al., 2007; Lorenz & Yaffee, 1989), a loss of trust (Dickson-Swift et al., 2005), anxiety and hopelessness regarding the future (Hodgins et al., 2007), relationship distress (Abbott, 1995; Hodgins et al., 2007; Lorenz & Yaffee, 1986, 1989), and feelings of guilt and self-blame (Dickson-Swift et al., 2005). Moreover, due to the significant social and psychological distress, partners themselves engage in a variety of dysfunctional coping responses, such as excessive drinking, smoking, under or overeating, and impulsive spending (Lorenz & Shuttlesworth, 1983). Romantic partners also experience consequences to their physical and emotional health, including chronic and severe headaches, depression, anxiety, anger, and isolation (Lorenz & Yaffee, 1988). The National Gambling Impact Study (1999) found that 28% of a sample of 400 Gamblers Anonymous members reported being either separated or divorced as a direct result of their partners' gambling problems. It is important to note that Gamblers Anonymous can include both gamblers and their significant others.

Most research to date has examined how gambling behavior may adversely affect relationships. Although problem gambling does have a significant impact on the couple, there is evidence supporting the claim that relationship dynamics may also influence the development and exacerbation of problem gambling (Lee, 2002; Lorenz & Shuttlesworth, 1983). Unfortunately, relationship dynamics (particularly dyadic relationship conflict behaviors) are largely ignored in the literature as one of the crucial factors that can escalate gambling. In the

current study, interpersonal conflict can be defined as conflict involving two or more individuals who engage in negative behaviors (e.g., interruptions, disagreements, or negative expressions) that may be hostile or inconsiderate (Lambe et al., 2015). Relationship conflict is simply a form of interpersonal conflict that occurs specifically between two people in a romantic relationship. Although relationship conflict is inevitable and normative, conflict quality, quantity, and individuals' conflict style (i.e., avoiding, forcing, compromising, yielding, problem solving) affect relationship satisfaction (Cramer, 2000; Murray et al., 2003). Romantic conflict has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of relationship decline and dissolution (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Le et al., 2010; Rodrigues et al., 2013). More specifically, it is associated with reduced relationship satisfaction, anxiety and depressive symptoms, and psychological distress (Fincham & Beach, 1999; Mackinnon et al., 2012).

Specific to the gambling context, compared to romantic partners of non-gamblers, partners of gamblers report more romantic conflict, lower relationship satisfaction, and more distress (Ponti et al., 2021). In fact, romantic partners of gamblers are more at risk for one particularly severe form of conflict – i.e., intimate partner violence (IPV; Dowling et al., 2016). A recent study showed that problem gambling is prospectively associated with increased odds of both perpetrating IPV and being a victim of IPV (Roberts et al., 2018). According to data drawn from the US National Comorbidity Survey, problem gambling is not only associated with partner violence, but also severe marital violence and severe child abuse (Afifi et al., 2010). The only distinguishing factor between partner violence and marital violence is that marital violence requires the intimate partners be married. In contrast, the term IPV, encompasses both marital and partner violence, as it refers to any romantic partnership whether the couple is living together or living separately. In addition, all three types of violence (i.e., partner, marital, child) were

associated with increased odds of gambling problems. Although not directly tested, the Afifi et al. (2010) study alludes to the proposition that the relations between conflict and gambling are bidirectional in nature. Most commonly studied, is the proposition that gambling leads to an increase in romantic conflict, given the widely accepted idea that problem gambling behavior leads to negative outcomes for the individual (e.g., anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem) and the relationship (e.g., financial burdens, distrust, strain). Conversely, it has been more recently proposed that romantic conflict can lead to an increase in, or exacerbation of gambling. In this case, the way the couple engages in conflict (e.g., conflict style) and manages conflict (e.g., partner management strategies) may contribute to the degree or type of gambling behavior. Notably, there is evidence in the alcohol literature (Hagen et al., 2023) that people may engage in the addictive behavior (in this case gambling) to cope with the negative affect and negative outcomes that come from romantic conflict. Given the cross-sectional nature of the preliminary findings by Hagen et al. (2023), the mechanisms linking conflict to problem gambling remain unclear.

Recent studies suggest that difficulties in either family or work life result in spillover effects to the other domain, negatively impacting individuals' functioning in that role and their overall wellbeing (Eby et al., 2005; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Rantanen et al., 2008). Moreover, when difficulties at work or with family lead to increased conflicts in the opposing domain, these conflicts generate psychological distress (Shulman et al., 2014). In this case, it is likely that family conflict (e.g., child abuse and marital violence) among gamblers could result in spillover effects into gamblers' work roles.

However, it remains unknown exactly what mechanisms and processes are at play that relate dyadic conflict with gambling behavior. More generally, in all relational interactions, there

exist partner effects which occur when one person is affected by the behavior, response, or characteristics of their partner (Kenny & Cook, 1999). Suggestive evidence in the alcohol field demonstrates partner effects in that problem drinking and relationship dynamics are related through negative dyadic interaction processes that have destructive effects on the relationship such as, marital dissatisfaction and increased levels of marital violence (Marshall, 2003).

Employing motivational theory, Lambe et al. (2015) revealed that partner conflict was related to problem drinking through coping drinking motives in a sample of adult romantic dyads. Further supporting these findings, a lab-based experiment examined the association between relationship conflict and alcohol use among couples (Stewart, 2020). They found that couples in the conflict condition showed higher negative affect and lower positive affect compared to couples in the neutral condition, but only during (not before) the discussion. Moreover, women showed greater alcohol preference, but only in the conflict condition. Although there is limited data supporting this claim in the gambling field, in a recent study, Suomi et al. (2019) sought to clarify the relationship between victimization and perpetration of family violence in a population of treatment-seeking problem gamblers. Over half (60.8%) of participants reported some form of family violence within the past year. Notably, bidirectional violence was significantly more common than “perpetration” or “victimization” only violence, meaning both partners engaged in the violence. In the subset of participants ($n = 17$; 38.6%) that reported IPV, they also reported that conflict preceded gambling behavior in their general lives. In addition, in an open-ended question asking about how conflict and gambling behavior were related, the most commonly cited reason for gambling among participants in the IPV group was related to coping with stress in the home, or physically escaping the conflict or aggressive environment. Moreover, considering the suggestive evidence in the alcohol field, it may be that gambling, and conflict

trigger one another, eventually spiraling into a negative feedback loop that is difficult to rehabilitate (i.e., both gambling leading to conflict and conflict leading to gambling). For example, gambling behavior may put pressure on the relationship, exacerbating conflict. Then, the relationship conflict may in itself further exacerbate the gamblers' desire to gamble (to distract from or to relieve distress resulting from conflict), leading to an increase in gambling behavior.

Several gaps must be filled to improve our understanding of the link between relationship conflict and gambling behavior, to enhance theory development in this area, and to ultimately improve intervention for couples that engage in problem gambling. While some research explores the impact gambling has on relationship conflict (Afifi et al., 2010; Suomi et al., 2019), considerably less has addressed the reverse pathway (how relationship conflict triggers gambling). Only one recent study to my knowledge has begun to look at this reverse pathway, finding cross-sectional evidence that conflict does exacerbate gambling problems, through depressive affect and coping motives (Hagen et al. 2023). Moreover, most work has assessed relationship conflict from one partner's perspective, avoiding integrating of both partners' perspectives, even though conflict is inherently dyadic (Mackinnon et al., 2012).

It has been suggested that a common motivation for gambling is to cope and/or escape negative emotions (Wood & Griffiths, 2007). This body of research argues that individuals who use gambling to escape major life stressors and those with mental health struggles are most likely to develop problem gambling tendencies, and experience subsequent negative effects in their family, work, and social lives (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002; Wood & Griffiths, 2007). It stands to reason that with considerable family and/or relationship conflict, one's work life would be negatively affected. For example, research argues that gamblers' secrecy and deceit to conceal

their gambling-related debt becomes their recurrent response mechanism to families, friends, employers, and business partners to conceal all gambling-related problems (Downs & Woolrych, 2010). The ongoing secrecy ultimately becomes a key factor in damaging trust and contributes to increased conflict within these key relationships (Downs & Woolrych, 2010). Given that trust is known to be one of the most important components to the development and maintenance of well-functioning relationships (Simpson, 2007), a lack of trust within relationships brings a host of negative relational outcomes (i.e., decreased commitment, stability, investment, communication). Ultimately, the different stressors associated with gambling (e.g., financial, health, relational) begin to permeate different areas of family and work life, contributing to an increase in overall strain. In this case, the strain produced by gambling begins to make it difficult to comply with the demands of work and family life, becoming a main contributor to family-work conflict. This is synonymous with Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) theory of strain-based conflict, arguing that strain produced by one role (e.g., family) makes it difficult to meet the demands of the other role (e.g., work). It is possible that family-work conflict too may have a bi-directional relationship with gambling, such that the negative effects of gambling (e.g., financial, physical, mental health, violence) on the family would likely increase the inter-role demands between family and work, ultimately exacerbating gambling behavior. This cycle would likely continue, as the more conflict one experiences, whether it be family-work conflict or relationship conflict, the more likely the individual is to use gambling to cope or escape this experience.

Accordingly, this study has two aims that examine the exacerbation of gambling behavior. The first aim is to improve our understanding of relationship conflict and gambling behavior, by demonstrating the causal link relationship conflict has on gambling behavior through a laboratory experiment. Couples in which both members gamble (rather than one

partner who gambles) were selected to be part of this study to allow for double the amount of data points to increase the sample size, as the gambling population is difficult to recruit into lab-based studies (Williams et al., 2010). The couples were randomly assigned to a conflict vs. neutral discussion followed by the opportunity to gamble on VLTs. Accordingly, in the lab-based portion of this study, the outcome measure of gambling refers to the observed participant gambling behavior on the VLT machines (i.e., Time Play, Money Lost, Money Risked, and Max Bet). There are three theory-based hypothesized pathways which have been proposed to explain the conflict-to-gambling link among couples who engage in gambling behavior (Figures 1-3). More specifically, the conflict-to-gambling link among couples was informed by previous cross-sectional evidence from two initial studies this research team conducted under the same Gamblers Awareness Nova Scotia (GANS) grant. The first study found cross-sectional evidence that romantic conflict was linked to gambling problems, through depressive affect and coping motives (Hagen et al., 2023). While the second study extended the first study's findings by examining the chained mediational model in the dyadic context (gambler + partner), by exploring the gambler and their partner's indirect effects on behavior. This study managed to replicate the first study and demonstrated partner-cross-over effects, such that the gambler's conflict enactment led to an increase in gambling problems, through the partner's depressed affect and the gambler's coping motives (Stewart, 2022). Given these significant findings, the present study sought to extend and to test this relationship in a controlled laboratory setting as its first aim. The second aim was to understand the relationship between problem gambling and a variety of work outcomes (i.e., absenteeism, cyberloafing, family-work conflict, and job performance), through a correlational design. In this portion of the study, problem gambling behavior refers to the self-report measure of gambling behavior, using the Problem Gambling

Severity Index (PGSI). This measure categorizes gamblers into low-risk, moderate-risk, high-risk, and problem gamblers (Ferris & Wynne, 2001). The literature suggests that the effects of problem gambling are not specific to individuals' personal and family lives but extend beyond that to affect their work and society at large (Ferris & Wynne, 2001). This exploratory component was examined through two theory-based pathways (Figures 4 and 5), that sought to establish evidence of a relationship between problem gambling, job performance and absenteeism. Overall, this study will help improve our understanding of how conflict can work to exacerbate gambling and how problem gambling can lead to adverse work outcomes.

Autonomy as a Mediator Between Social Control Behavior and Problem Gambling

How couples solve problems and engage in conflict influences whether a current relationship is perceived as satisfactory by members of the couple and predicts whether the relationship will remain intact (Gottman & Driver, 2005). In relationships, social control is defined as any attempt to influence a close other (Lewis & Rock, 1999). Social control can occur directly or indirectly (Umberson, 1987). What are considered negative social control behaviors can show up as anything from nagging, complaining, withdrawing, or threatening (Yoshioka et al., 1992). A couple's interaction during a conflict discussion has been found to predict relationship dissolution, such that couples who employ more negative social control behavior (e.g., criticism, attacking, defensiveness, contempt) were more likely to divorce five years later (Gottman & Driver, 2005). Research shows that partners and families often employ controlling or punishing control strategies to influence the individual's behavior during conflict (Krishnan & Orford, 2002). These findings support the idea that conflict discussions in relationships tend to include more negative social control attempts, compared to non-conflictual discussions. Moreover, decades of research focusing on adult attachment and conflict finds that couples who

are anxiously and/or avoidantly attached experience more severe and intense conflict and tend to use hyperactivating and deactivating strategies, respectively (Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2019). More specifically, during conflict, anxiously attached individuals are inclined to use coercion, criticism, control, guilt, and blame to change their partner's behavior (i.e., hyperactivating strategies), while avoidantly attached individuals tend to withdraw, disengage, defend, and lack expressivity and empathy during a conflict (i.e., deactivating strategies; Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2019). Although a focus on adult attachment is out of the scope of this study, this area of research supports the assumption that couples in more conflictual relationships are likely to use maladaptive communication strategies.

It has been suggested that partners in high-autonomy relationships tend to approach relationship challenges as opportunities for improving, thus lowering the chance of relationship conflict (Knee et al., 2005). Autonomy refers to the belief and feeling of individual choice, with an endorsement of individual actions and behavior, that reflect one's true interests and values (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Hodgins and Knee (2002) posit that partners who feel authentically invested (i.e., demonstrating a high level of autonomy in within their relationship), react less defensively and with more understanding in conflict. Moreover, autonomy within the overall relationship has been found to predict perceived agreement and relationship satisfaction, ultimately leading an individual to perceive and report more adaptive behaviors within the relationship (Blais et al., 1990). Thus, it is possible that couples experiencing a significant amount of relationship conflict may lack autonomy, and that the conflict could further undermine their sense of individual autonomy (e.g., a conflict involving negative partner control strategies might undermine the gambler's sense of autonomy). Supporting this claim, studies have found that autonomous individuals were less likely to save face, blame, or react defensively in conflict

because when they feel a high level of autonomy, they become less fixated on needing to defend or protect their self-image (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003; Hodgins et al., 1996). Importantly, while autonomy exists as a trait (individual difference), it also can be experienced as a state-like variable, which can be ‘pulled down’ through conflict.

Interpersonal conflict is known to bring out the worst in people, leading to unusual or dramatized reactions and behavior (Cahn, 1992). When in conflict, people display automatic physiological reactions such as, rapid breathing, increased heartrate, tunnel vision, heightened stress, and cognitive impairment (Cahn, 1992). These reactions often precipitate negative emotional responses, subsequently increasing people’s destructive behavior (Cahn, 1992). There is a large body of literature, suggesting that interpersonal conflict is one of three main precipitants of addiction continuation and relapse (Leach & Kranzler, 2013). More specifically, when in recovery for any type of addiction, addictive patterns can be triggered by any type of conflict in a relationship. Interpersonal stress and conflict often exert destructive effects on addicts’ self-esteem, attachment, and confidence (Leach & Kranzler, 2013). Consistent with this statement, marital distress and spousal criticism have been found to predict the severity of relationship dysfunction and addiction relapse, along with worse overall outcomes in treatment-seeking addicts (Constantini et al., 1992; Maisto et al., 1988). Although this process has yet to be examined among gamblers, it is possible a couple’s conflictual discussion will act as a precipitating incident, leading to an increase in destructive behavior, such as gambling. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered.

H1a: Perceptions of negative partner control behavior (reported by the gambler) and observed gambling behavior are both expected to be higher in the conflict versus neutral

condition, while self-felt autonomy (reported by the gambler) is expected to be lower in the conflict condition.

One possible link between dyadic conflict and gambling is through partner social control behavior. Krishnan and Orford (2002) identified eight typologies of control behaviors in a sample of gamblers and their partners ranging from ineffective coping (i.e., controlling, punishing, separating, limiting) to more effective coping (i.e., tolerant, supportive, talking, help-seeking). Problem gamblers' partners often engage in a variety of social control behaviors with the goal of limiting, constraining, or stopping their partner's gambling behavior. Social control behaviors have been examined in numerous different contexts, such as smoking cessation (Westmaas et al., 2002), general health behaviors such as exercising, eating healthy, and maintaining proper sleep hygiene (Tucker & Anders, 2001), IPV as a result of social control behaviors (Emery et al., 2017), and alcohol consumption (Umberson et al., 2018). Gambling falls under the Substance-Related and Addictive Behaviors section of the DSM-5 (APA, 2013), acknowledging it as comorbid with substance-related disorders and similar to them with regards to various symptom presentations, etiological factors (including genetic liability, and biological dysfunctions), and treatment approaches (Petry, 2016). Although gambling is known to occur less frequently than alcohol use, the findings from the alcohol literature may be applicable to the gambling context. More specifically, similar processes exist between alcohol use disorder and gambling disorder, such that impulsivity is at the root of a tendency to pursue short-term rewards, whether that is pursuing a substance (i.e., alcohol) or a behavior (i.e., gambling) in the early stages of addiction (Choi et al., 2014). If the addiction is established over an extended period of time, reward-based learning mechanisms begin to develop into compulsive behaviors (Leeman & Potenza, 2012). Moreover, those with any addictive behavior disorder tend to have

difficulties with self-control and present with similar difficulties in neurocognitive function, neurotransmitter activity, and similar neurochemistry (Leeman & Potenza, 2012). More generally, both substance dependence and problem gambling include diagnostic criteria related to continued engagement despite negative consequences, tolerance, withdrawal, and repeated attempts to quit in both the DSM-IV (APA, 2000) and DSM-5 (APA, 2013). Given these similarities, it is likely that similar processes in addictive behaviors involving substance use also apply to the gambling context. Only the alcohol field has begun to explore the effect that romantic conflict can have on an addictive behavior within a dyadic couple context, specific to the partner social control context. Partner social control strategies may take many forms; however, two types have been categorized among drinkers, namely punishment (e.g., threatening) and reward (e.g., praising non-drinking-oriented activity) (Rodriguez et al., 2013). Research suggests that punishing control strategies are much less effective than rewarding strategies, such that only punishing social control strategies are associated with greater drinking and lower relationship functioning (Rodriguez et al., 2013). Moreover, these punishing control strategies have the possibility of inadvertently escalating alcohol use, called “backfiring behavior” (Antoine et al., 2009; Craddock et al., 2015). Backfiring behavior refers to the drinker doing the opposite of what the partner is encouraging, that is, drinking more (Craddock et al., 2015). Conversely, rewarding social control strategies have been associated with an increase in an individual’s health-enhancing behaviors (Lewis & Butterfield, 2007). A meta-analytic review demonstrated that negative forms of social control strategies (i.e., punishing) are significantly associated with backfiring behaviors, whereas positive social control strategies (i.e., rewarding) are not (Craddock et al., 2015). The exact mechanism for why and how partners’ use of punishing social control strategies exacerbates drinking behavior has yet to be examined.

Moreover, no work has yet examined these regulation strategies in the causal link from partner conflict to addictive behavior generally, nor gambling specifically.

Self-determination theory posits that people have fundamental basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that contribute to people's motivation behind their choices (Deci & Ryan, 2002). In relation to gambling, self-determination theory suggests that partners' regulation strategies (particularly punishing social control strategies) will affect the gambler's perceived autonomy, ultimately affecting the motivational processes behind their gambling choices (Wild & Enzle, 2002). Accordingly, a feeling of control or coercion by a partner to change may operate against change, undermining the individual's feeling of autonomy, leading the individual to feel they do not have a choice. This might subsequently lower the individual's intrinsic motivation to change their behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2002) ultimately maintaining or exacerbating the individual's gambling. In the context of this study, it was hypothesized that a partner would exert more control behavior following a conflictual, rather than a neutral, discussion and that the lowered autonomy in the gambler may provoke increased gambling behavior, out of spite as a sort of revenge tactic, similar to the concept of backfiring behavior. Conversely, if people feel their autonomy is being supported by a partner (e.g., through the partner's use of reward strategies), their intrinsic motivation to change their behavior is subsequently enhanced (Deci & Ryan, 2002), leading to reductions in gambling. This theory has been applied to several health-behavior change contexts (e.g., physical activity, weight loss, medical adherence, smoking cessation, alcohol reduction, and career behavior), that often involve some level of social control/pressure to change from the partner (Gillison et al., 2019; Westmass et al., 2002). There is only one study to date that has examined gambling in relation to self-determination theory, finding that perceptions of autonomy were negatively associated with the degree of gambling

behavior, while perceptions of being controlled were associated with an increase in gambling behavior (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Thus, it is hypothesized that couples may exert unhelpful partner control strategies (i.e., punishment strategies such as yelling, threatening, or ignoring) during conflict with their partner which may inadvertently lead the partner to retaliate, increasing subsequent gambling behavior by reducing perceptions of autonomy/increasing perceptions of being controlled.

H1b: Self perceptions of negative partner control behavior will lead to an increase in observed gambling behavior, through lower self-felt autonomy.

Trait activation theory (TAT) argues that individual traits are engaged when solicited by the right type of situational cues (Tett et al., 2021). Traits are only expressed (manifested as behaviors) to the degree that the situation offers an opportunity for that trait to be expressed (Tett et al., 2021). For example, someone low in Honesty-Humility (trait) may only steal from the workplace (behavior) when left alone (situation). Situations can also be assessed for their degree of relevance to a certain trait. Accordingly, situational cues occur at different levels (task, social, and organizational) as competitors for the opportunity of trait expression (Tett et al., 2021). Thus, with multiple competing cues, the cue with the highest strength in the proper context is likely to activate a particular trait. Thus, it is not a question of trait or situation since they work harmoniously together to produce certain behaviors. However, research shows that trait-relevant situations tend to produce a main effect on behavior (Tett et al., 2021). For example, a high conflict situation is likely to increase reactive behavior in everyone present. Although this may not be the case every time, TAT offers an eloquent explanation for why people tend to respond to certain situations in similar ways, while considering their unique trait differences.

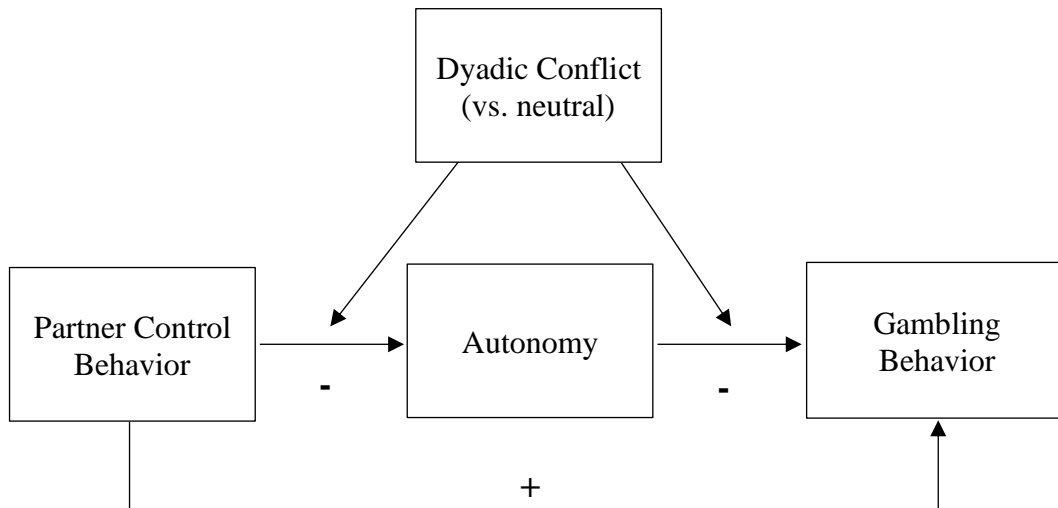
TAT has often been used uniquely to explain the trait-job performance relationship and person-job fit in workplace contexts (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett et al., 1999, 2013; Van Hove & Turban, 2015). For example, employees that are high in social dominance and hostile attributional style, tend to engage in more counter productive workplace behaviors (CWBs) when job stressors are high compared to low (O'Brien et al., 2021). Although TAT has not readily been applied to social contexts, it follows that a similar pattern may apply in a conflictual situation, outside of the workplace. In the case of the current study, it is hypothesized that the mediation effect will be triggered more in couples in the conflict condition compared to the neutral condition. Following the principles set out by TAT, the situational cue (conflict discussion) will trigger the manifestation of certain individual traits (partner control behavior). Accordingly, because it is more likely that people will engage in controlling behavior following a conflictual discussion, a partner will likely attribute their drop in autonomy to the controlling behavior more directly, subsequently leading to an exacerbation of gambling behavior. Rather, it is hypothesized that negative partner control behavior will be less likely to occur in a neutral discussion, so if a partner feels a drop in their autonomy, they are less likely to attribute that to their partner's behavior and will ultimately be less likely to feel upset and retaliate in the form of gambling. Although there is a lack of research regarding if partner control behavior can be experienced as a trait or a state, there is evidence that self-control, defined as the capacity to restrain and/or inhibit undesirable impulses and respond/react in a goal-oriented way is a trait (Zuo et al., 2020), and is important in the well-being and functioning of romantic relationships (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). Accordingly, negative partner control behavior could be seen as lacking self-control. More specifically, individuals who may lack self-control and choose to engage in punishing partner control behavior, are more likely to engage in this behavior with

their partner when a situational cue (e.g., conflict) demands this behavior. Although it is still possible that a neutral discussion may act as a situational cue, it is less likely that this cue will trigger the mediation process to the same degree. Ultimately, while the application of the TAT theory to a clinical situation is completely novel, similar interpersonal factors are at stake to those that are found in a workplace environment. Given that past research has not found a direct relationship between rewarding strategies and gambling behavior, examining rewarding partner management strategies will not be the focus in the current study. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered (see Figure 1).

H1c: The mediation effect between perceptions of negative partner control behavior, self-felt autonomy, and observed gambling behavior (H1b) is hypothesized to be stronger for those in the conflict condition compared to the neutral condition.

Figure 1

Moderated-Mediation Model 1: Dyadic Conflict Moderating the Relationship Between Negative Partner Control Behavior, Autonomy, and Gambling Behavior



Note. Figure depicts the mediating role of autonomy on the relationship between perceived partner control behavior and observed gambling behavior (observed gambling behavior in the lab), moderated by manipulated dyadic conflict.

Autonomy as a Mediator Between Partner Conflict Strategies and Problem Gambling

Conflict styles, also known as conflict management strategies, refer to the approaches people use when engaged in a conflict (DeDreu et al., 2001). Although situational and relational factors affect people's choice of conflict style, research indicates that people often have a dominant style (DeDreu et al., 2001). Dual concern theory argues that conflict style is a function of high versus low concern for self and concern for others (DeDreu et al., 2001). Accordingly, five different conflict styles exist that reflect a different combination of high versus low concern for self vs others. Of particular interest in this study are the two most ineffective conflict styles, forcing and avoiding. Forcing conflict style consists of a high concern for self and a low concern for others and is characterized by imposing one's own agenda onto others, using threats, lies, and persuasion to get the best outcome (DeDreu et al., 2001). In contrast, an avoiding conflict style consists of a low concern for self and a low concern for others and is characterized by suppressing the importance of issues by withdrawing, minimizing, and ignoring the problem, hoping the problem will disappear (DeDreu et al., 2001). It is generally understood that poorly managed conflict is one of the largest risk factors for relationship dissatisfaction and divorce (Gottman & Driver, 2005). Researchers have consistently reported that negative conflict styles (i.e., forcing and avoiding) result in lower relationship satisfaction and ineffective conflict resolution (Bisson, 2009; Cramer, 2000; Greeff & Bruyne, 2000). Moreover, both the forcing style and avoiding style are perceived as inappropriate and ineffective by others (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Effective conflict management strategies have been argued to be key to

preventing divorce (Orbuch et al., 2002; Sanders et al., 1999). Couples who display high levels of hostility in their relationship tend to use criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling when in conflict (Holman & Jarvis, 2003). These behaviors are well-aligned with the behaviors displayed when adopting an avoiding (i.e., defensiveness and stonewalling) or forcing (i.e., criticism and contempt) conflict style. Parallel to the argument made for negative partner control behavior in H1a, couples in conflictual relationships are likely to employ ineffective conflict styles (i.e., forcing and avoiding) to address conflict. Commonly cited behaviors that indicate an individual is adopting a forcing conflict style (e.g., interruption, contempt, condemnation) are very much in line with negative partner control behavior. This study acknowledges that although the behaviors may appear as similar, negative partner control behavior and forcing conflict style are separate constructs. While avoiding conflict style is in fact the opposite of a forcing style, the consequences are surprisingly similar. Evidence suggests that avoiding conflict is perceived by the other party as interfering with goal completion, in other words, interfering with solving the conflict (De Dreu et al., 2001; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Moreover, research in the workplace literature asserts that both those with a forcing style and those with an avoidant style experience higher levels of task conflict, relationship conflict, and stress (Friedman et al., 2000). The authors speculate that this is because the consequences of avoiding conflict tend to be similar to dominating during conflict, such that the other party is left feeling frustrated and unheard (Freidman et al., 2000). Within the negotiation literature, it is argued that avoidant conflict styles tend to produce a high level of resentment in the opposing party and paradoxically leads to more conflict and fixed viewpoints (Roloff & Cloven, 1990). There is literature to support the argument that employing an avoiding conflict style can be used as a protagonist approach to invoke fear in the other party, or as a revenge tactic (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002). Further, an

avoiding conflict style has been found to reinforce competitiveness and lower communication quality in both individuals (Chen & Tjosvold, 2002; Kim & Leung, 2012). Importantly, this study examined how both an avoidant conflict style and a forcing conflict style manifest during the laboratory conflict manipulation session. By testing these alternative pathways, clarity regarding the relationship among these variables will be captured. Thus, the following hypothesis was offered.

H2a: In addition to H1a, partner-rated forcing and avoiding conflict management strategies are expected to be higher in the conflict versus neutral condition.

A second possible link between dyadic conflict and degree of gambling behavior is through partner conflict management strategies (conflict style). Overall, it is well-established that partners' conflict styles affect how they handle conflict as a couple (Bisson, 2009; DeDreu et al., 2021; Gross & Guerrero, 2000). However, research has yet to connect conflict styles in a couple within a gambling context. It is implied that each conflict style is associated with a host of behaviors that display that particular conflict style (DeDreu et al., 2001). For example, an avoidant conflict style would be associated with behaviors that avoid conflict, such as evasiveness, indirectness, minimization, and/or denial (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Conversely, a forcing conflict style would encompass behaviors that aggressively push one's viewpoint (e.g., threatening, dominating, lying) and/or resist the other person's perspective (e.g., defensiveness). An extreme forcing style could even go as far as including damaging behaviors such as verbal or physical aggression (DeDreu et al., 2001). In the addiction literature, it has been shown that members of a couple try to control and/or change their partner's behavior by employing negative or punishing social control strategies (one form of partner management strategies; Craddock et al., 2015) and these strategies align relatively closely with forcing conflict behaviors (Guerrero

& Gross, 2014). Thus, it could be hypothesized that a partner's forcing conflict style would be associated with a variety of partner punishing control strategies, and that a similar mediational pathway to the first hypothesized model would exist for partner conflict style. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) would again suggest that a forcing conflict style would lead to a feeling of control or coercion by a partner, operating against their feeling of autonomy during the conflict, subsequently contributing to the maintenance of their gambling behavior. Moreover, following a conflictual discussion, a gambler would be more likely to retaliate against the feeling of loss of control (lack of autonomy), by attempting to gain back control by gambling.

An avoidant conflict style is hypothesized to operate differently within the conflict-to-gambling context, as with a low concern for self and others, it is anticipated that the partner would employ no obvious conflict strategies to defend their behavior, change the other's behavior, or solve the conflict altogether. More specifically, researchers examining negotiation theory have described conflict avoidance as involving the active choice to evade the topic, situation, or person (Oetzel et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2007). Although avoidance is defined by its inaction (i.e., evading the conflict by taking no action), avoidance is still considered a form of behavior and can be weaponized as the silent treatment or as stonewalling (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Stonewalling entails creating psychological or physical distance from a partner (i.e., withdrawing), by being unresponsive, uncommunicative, and/or uncooperative (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Stonewalling is associated with a host of negative relational outcomes (i.e., dissatisfaction, instability, emotional dysregulation, violence, divorce) and impedes effective conflict resolution (Cornelius et al., 2011; Fowler & Dillow, 2011; Gottman, 2008; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Therefore, an avoidant conflict style in a partner could possibly exacerbate the gambler's gambling behaviors, as by thwarting the gambler's effort to solve the conflict,

gambling behavior could be reinforced. Although no research exists that has examined this within the gambling context, research has shown that avoiding disagreements and conflict results in lower relationship satisfaction and a lack of intimacy (Cloven et al., 1994; Impett et al., 2010). Although conflict avoiders often believe that conflicts will resolve themselves, research consistently shows that this is not the case (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). In fact, avoiding conflict does not just result in the conflict not getting resolved, it is associated with minimization (Spitzberg et al., 1994), incompetence (Gottman & Levenson, 1988), ineffectiveness (Spitzberg et al., 1994), and what's called the "chilling effect" (Roloff & Cloven, 1990). The chilling effect refers to people becoming increasingly cold and withdrawn in a cyclical way (Roloff & Cloven, 1990). Research has termed this sequence the 'demand-withdraw' interaction pattern, where one partner wishes to engage in conflict and/or discuss the issue, while the other responds with avoidance (Gottman & Levenson, 1988). Research has typically shown that this interaction pattern escalates conflict and increases both parties' stubborn efforts, leading them to refuse to abandon their position or current conflict style (Gottman & Levenson, 1988). Ultimately, the demand-withdraw pattern is generally seen as a highly ineffective form of dyadic communication (Gottman & Levenson, 1988). Applying self-determination theory to the demand-withdraw pattern, it is plausible that both people will feel a lack of autonomy throughout the conflict when one or both members of the couple employ an avoidant conflict style. Moreover, the partner employing an avoidant conflict style may be using it to control the situation (i.e., stonewalling), leading the other partner to feel helpless and frustrated (Gottman & Levenson, 1992), subsequently leading to a pattern of behavior that decreases the gambler's autonomy. More specifically, the increase in frustration may provoke the gambler to retaliate against their partner and again attempt to gain back control by increasing their gambling behavior. Additionally, the

anxious partner experiences a decrease in autonomy, resulting from the avoidant partner's withdrawal behavior, which impedes the resolution of the conflictual issue. Thus, it is hypothesized that both members of a couple may utilize ineffective conflict styles (i.e., forcing and avoiding) during conflict which may inadvertently increase gambling behavior by reducing the gambler's perceptions of autonomy. Given that no research to date has connected avoidant behaviors with gambling behavior specifically, this hypothesis is more speculative compared to the hypothesis relating to forcing conflict style.

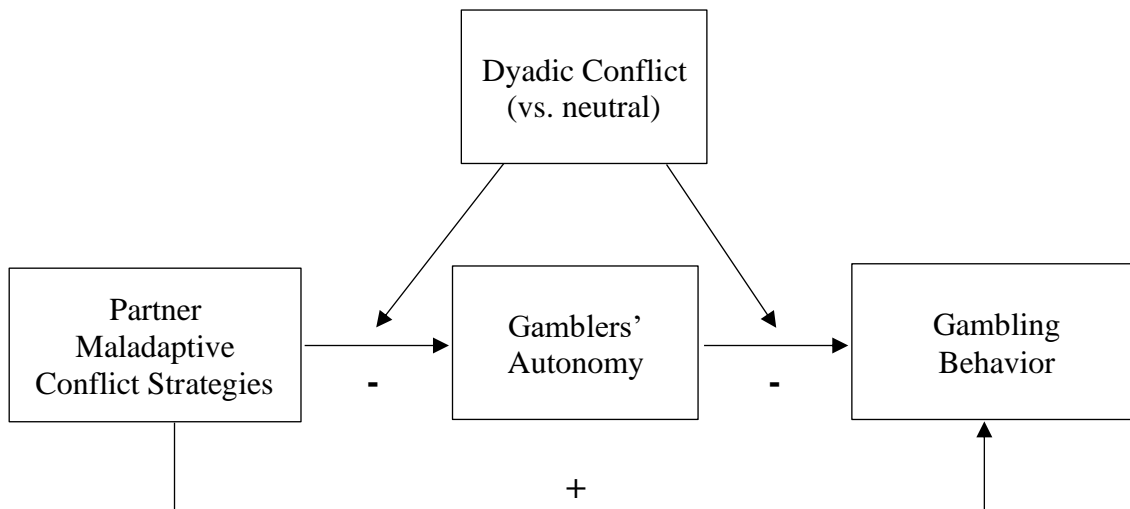
H2b: Partner-rated forcing and avoiding conflict management strategies will each lead to an increase in observed gambling behavior, through gamblers' lower self-felt autonomy.

Although there is evidence that people have a preferred conflict style that they use more readily, many interpersonal and intrapersonal factors affect which conflict style people select (De Dreu et al., 2001). Again, TAT theory may be applied to understand the following process. It is believed that the conflict discussion will act as a situational cue, giving more of an opportunity for partner forcing and avoiding conflict behavior to come forth. Following the same argumentation as previously stated in H1c, the situational cue (conflict discussion) will trigger the manifestation of certain individual traits (forcing or avoiding style), leading a retaliation in the form of maintenance or exacerbation of gambling behavior. Ultimately, partners will be more likely to select a maladaptive conflict style during a conflict discussion, compared to a neutral discussion. Theoretically, the effect that a partner's conflict style has on autonomy and subsequent gambling behavior should be negligible during a neutral discussion. Thus, the following hypothesis was offered (see Figure 2).

H2c: The mediation effect between partner maladaptive conflict management strategies (forcing and avoiding), self-felt autonomy, and observed gambling behavior (H2b) is hypothesized to be stronger for those in the conflict condition compared to the neutral condition.

Figure 2

Moderated-Mediation Model 2: Dyadic Conflict Moderating the Relationship Between Partner Conflict Style (Avoiding and Forcing), Autonomy, and Gambling Behavior



Note. Figure depicts the mediating role of gamblers' autonomy on the relationship between partner maladaptive conflict strategies and gambling behavior (observed gambling behavior in the lab), moderated by manipulated dyadic conflict.

Gambling Coping Motives as a Mediator Between Negative Affect and Problem Gambling

One of the most well-known and common responses to couple conflict is negative affect felt amongst both partners (Berscheid & Ammazalorso, 2001; Lindahl et al., 1997; Perusse et al., 2012). Negative affect can be defined as a subjective feeling or mood characterized by unpleasant emotions or emotional distress (Russell & Carroll, 1999). Negative affect has been

repeatedly shown to result from all types of conflict in different contexts, whether it be marital (Verhofstadt et al., 2005), work-family (Frone et al., 1994), or process-related conflict (Greer & Jehn, 2007). Process conflict refers to the disagreement and/or clash of opinion over the procedures or methods used to complete a task (Greer & Jehn, 2007). A common explanation for this phenomenon is that conflict produces high levels of arousal and subsequent negative affect because of a violation of partners' expectations and interference with individual goal achievement (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2001). Overall, researchers agree that conflictual and dissatisfied couples report more negative affect and have a higher degree of reciprocity of negative affect compared to less conflictual and more satisfied couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1986). Moreover, negative affect, along with emotional reactivity appear to predict partner aggression in response to conflict (Watkins et al., 2015). While emotional reactivity refers to the degree, frequency, and intensity of an emotional response to a challenge (Bylsma et al., 2008), negative affect simply refers to the experience of negative emotional states (Russell & Carroll, 1999). Together, one may experience negative emotional reactivity (NER). Fernet and colleagues' (2016) lab-based study found that conflictual and more violent couples tend to concede to their negative affect, resulting in aggression and violence as a resolution strategy during disagreements, when attempting to resolve conflict. These findings support the assertion that couples in the conflict condition will display higher levels of negative affect compared to couples in the neutral discussion condition.

When people experience negative affect, the most universal response is to try to escape and/or avoid this distressing emotion (Clary et al., 1998; Katz, 1960). According to the functionalist perspective, people engage in certain behaviors to satisfy their underlying motives (Clary et al., 1998; Katz, 1960). In this case, coping motives would be considered a type of

emotional motive, whereby the underlying reason for someone to carry out a certain behavior is to reduce a certain emotion (Cooper et al., 1988; Katz, 1960). Thus, a coping motive inherently requires that a person perceive a stimulus as threatening or distressing. Relevant to this study, if a person appraises a discussion to be threatening, they are more likely to engage in coping motives compared to if they appraise a discussion as neutral or non-threatening. In the absence of a threat, the need to cope effectively dissipates. Lending support to this proposition is the conventional understanding that appraising a situation or an event as positive will lead to a desire to pursue and the continued pursuit of the generated positive internal state (e.g., joy, excitement, happiness). In contrast, appraising a situation negatively will lead to negative internal states (e.g., despair, sadness, guilt) and will lead to a desire to avoid or a dread of the distress (Kelly et al., 2012). Following this logic, it is less likely for people to appraise a neutral discussion as negative, compared to a conflictual discussion. Therefore, it is expected that in the context of a conflictual discussion, there would be more of an opportunity for a negative appraisal to arise, prompting the need for coping motives compared to a neutral discussion.

H3a: Self-rated negative affect and self-rated coping motives (i.e., escaping negative affect) are expected to be higher in the conflict condition versus neutral condition.

A third possible link between dyadic conflict and gambling behavior is through negative affect and gambling coping motives (Hagen et al., 2023). Gambling coping motives refers to the reasons behind why an individual engages in gambling behavior. The motivational model of gambling (Stewart & Zack, 2008) identified three types of gambling motives that drive people to gamble. They all involve goals people are trying to achieve by gambling: enhancement motives (i.e., achieving positive emotions), social motives (i.e., maintaining/increasing affiliation), and coping motives (i.e., escaping negative emotions). An additional financial motive (i.e., to make

money) has also been identified in the literature as motivating future gambling behavior (Dechant, 2013; Schellenberg et al., 2016). Although enhancement motives most strongly predict gambling frequency, it is gambling to escape negative emotions (i.e., coping motives) that uniquely predicts problem gambling (Wardell et al., 2015). As with other addictive behaviors (Grant et al., 2007), gamblers may learn to expect a variety of reinforcing outcomes from their gambling behavior that may motivate future gambling for specific reasons (Stewart & Zack, 2008).

Coping motives (i.e., escaping negative emotions) have been found to function similarly across numerous different addictions, whereby they tend to drive and/or reinforce the addiction, such as smartphone addiction (Zhang et al., 2014), gaming addiction (Melodia et al., 2020), and alcohol addiction (Corbin et al., 2013). However, relatively few studies have examined coping motives within a dyadic conflict lens. One area that has begun to explore this link is the alcohol field. The association between dyadic conflict and addictive behavior through coping motives has been demonstrated specifically in the alcohol literature, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally (Lambe et al., 2015). Hagen et al. (2023) recently published a study that examined coping motives as a mediator between dyadic conflict and drinking behavior among a large sample ($N = 348$) of cohabiting couples. Employing actor-partner interdependence models (APIM), results demonstrated that dyadic conflict was associated with increased own drinking in distinguishable and indistinguishable (by gender) couples, through coping motives. Given the central role coping motives play in problem drinking, coping motives may be a potential mediator to explain the link between dyadic conflict and problem gambling. One plausible reason that coping motives drive the behavior that works to temporarily reduce and/or escape negative emotions is because engaging in the addictive behavior provides tension or dysphoria-

reducing effects that help people obtain certain desired outcomes (Beaudoin & Cox, 1999). According to Cooper et al.'s (1992) two-dimensional motivational model, people may drink to obtain a positive incentive (positive reinforcement), avoid a negative incentive (negative reinforcement), change something about themselves (e.g., mood state), or change something in their social environment (e.g., affiliation). To clarify, the motivational model contains two dimensions, each with two poles; when crossed, these poles yield the four motives described above. This model has been found to hold up in a gambling context (McGrath et al., 2010). Accordingly, gamblers are negatively reinforced and learn to escape negative emotions by gambling, corresponding to avoiding negative incentive and changing something about the self in the previously mentioned motivational model (Stewart & Zack, 2008). Thus, the role of negative affect becomes important to consider when examining the motivations behind gambling.

Research has also revealed that negative affect is associated with increased alcohol craving intensity, with the effect being more prominent among drinkers high in drinking coping motives (Waddell et al., 2021). A similar relationship is seen when considering stress, that different types of motives are associated with increased levels of weekday drinking and drinking-related problems (Corbin et al., 2013). One study sought to explore the links between conflict, coping motives, and alcohol-related problems in romantic partner dyads (Lambe et al., 2015). A significant indirect effect through coping motives was revealed in explaining the link of conflict to alcohol problems over time. Thus, members of a couple may use alcohol to cope with negative affect following conflict with their partner, which may in turn lead to escalations in drinking problems. While clear links exist between negative affect, coping motives, and problem drinking, research has only just begun to establish an association with romantic conflict, specifically in the

gambling field. A recent study conducted by Hagen et al. (2023) found support for their hypothesized mediational model, whereby romantic conflict and gambling-related problems were sequentially mediated through negative affect and, in turn coping motives. These preliminary findings offer support for the theorized model in the current study. Thus, it is hypothesized that following a conflict with their partner, gamblers may experience negative affect and subsequently use gambling to cope with this negative affect, in turn leading to escalations in gambling behavior.

H3b: Self-reported negative affect will lead to an increase in one's own observed gambling behavior, through higher self-reported coping motives (i.e., escaping negative affect).

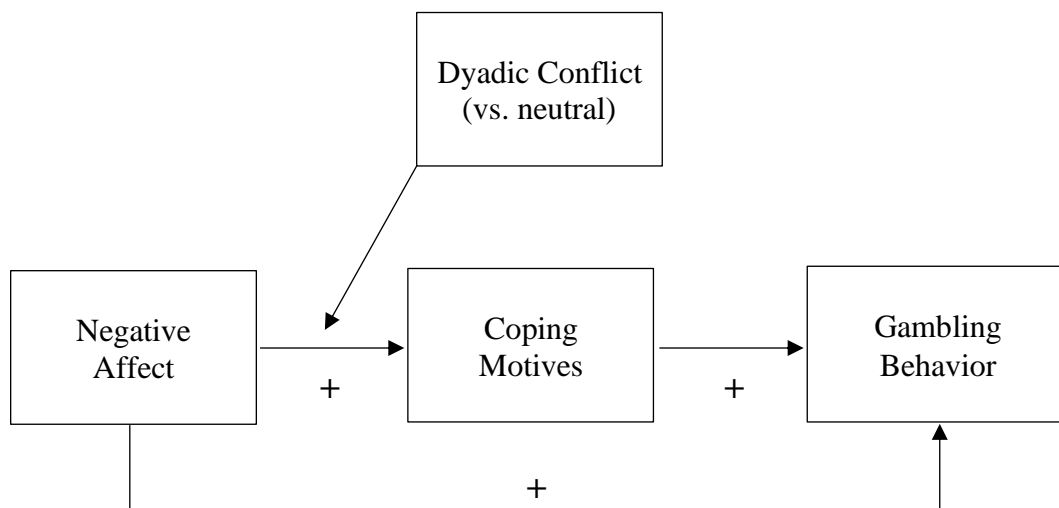
Similar to the argumentation provided for both H1c and H2c, there is more of an opportunity for negative affect to emerge in a conflictual discussion compared to a neutral discussion, subsequently activating the coping motives to gambling sequence. To elaborate on what was previously stated in H3a, negative affect is likely to be higher when couples are discussing a conflict, given the well-established research showing that negative affect is a universal response to conflict (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2001). Once negative affect is triggered, it is expected to generate an internal need to cope with (i.e., reduce or avoid) this distressing internal state. Amidst a population of gamblers, the ensuing behavior that is speculated to follow is an increase in gambling behavior, carried out as a way to avoid the negative internal state that the conflict produced. This sequence is not expected to occur among couples who have a neutral discussion. Inherently, a true neutral discussion would not generate strong negative affect, or else it would no longer fall under the definition of a neutral discussion. Foreseeably, if the couple appraises the neutral discussion as non-threatening, invoking a

relatively weak emotional response, it is anticipated that there would be less of an impetus to gamble to cope with or escape negative emotions, ultimately leading to less gambling behavior. Considering the dynamic nature of human communication, no matter if a couple is having a neutral or conflictual discussion, it is possible that the couple (or individual partner) may appraise a certain topic as more positive or negative than intended. Therefore, the negative affect to gambling sequence may arise in couples in the neutral discussion but to a much lesser degree, given that there is less opportunity for the discussion to trigger a negative internal state. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered.

H3c: The mediation effect between negative affect, coping motives, and observed gambling behavior (H3b) is hypothesized to be stronger for those in the conflict condition compared to the neutral condition.

Figure 3

Moderated-Mediation Model 3: Dyadic Conflict Moderating the Relationship Between Negative Affect, Autonomy, and Gambling Behavior



Note. Figure depicts the mediating role of coping gambling motives on the relationship between negative affect and gambling behavior (observed gambling behavior in the lab), moderated by manipulated dyadic conflict.

Problem Gamblers in the Workplace

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work increased substantially (Statistics Canada, 2022) as workplaces shifted to providing hybrid/flexible working options, to complete remote jobs. As the barrier between the previously separate work and home domains continues to reduce, employees are increasingly integrating their work and home lives. Since this shift, concerns have been raised regarding increased amounts of time employees spend performing personal activities (e.g., checking personal email, posting on social media) during work hours. Jeong et al. (2020) estimates that only 38% of employee's smartphone use is used for work purposes during work hours; that leaves 62% of time unaccounted for.

One less common type of personal activity that is performed at work is gambling. Many forms of gambling, particularly the most researched forms (e.g., casino-specific games such as Poker, VLT games), are not relevant to the workplace. However, one form of gambling that has grown substantially and is becoming increasingly relevant and apparent in the workplace is remote gambling (Griffiths, 2003). In recent years, the introduction and accessibility of remote gambling (i.e., internet gambling, interactive television gambling, telephone gambling) has increased dramatically in all countries, along with rates of problem gambling (Abbott, 2007; Griffiths, 2009). There are many reasons for why internet gambling is contributing to such an increase in gambling; some of these reasons include increased accessibility, promised anonymity, convenience, escape, internet disinhibition, associability (avoidance of social interactions to perform an already antisocial activity), and increased stimulation (Griffiths,

2003). Well-established forms of gambling (e.g., bingo, poker) that have historically been in-person, within gambling environments, are now becoming technologically driven and proliferating within the home (Griffiths, 2003) and workplace. Globally, internet gambling is still an emerging trend; thus, knowledge and understanding of its effects, specifically in the workplace, are sparse (Gainsbury, 2015). Internet gambling is of particular interest when considering gambling-related harm in the workplace, given that it can be performed anywhere, anytime, and elicits minimal attention from others.

The effects of gambling in the workplace remains an under-researched area despite the potential for far-reaching consequences (Griffiths, 2009). A few reasons why gambling is understudied in the workplace may be because a) employers are unwilling to admit it is a workplace issue, b) employers are unable to recognize or understand addiction, and c) gambling can be more difficult to identify than other types of addictions, as it is commonly described as a “hidden” addiction (Griffiths, 2009; Hawley et al., 2007). Langham et al. (2016) reason that gambling in the workplace incurs costs for the employer and society at large. These costs include productivity loss, expenses due to crime and fraud, training/development costs to replace employees dismissed for problem gambling, long-term unemployment costs, sick leave costs due to gambling and comorbid psychiatric disorders, and at the extreme end, organizational reputational destruction (Langham et al., 2016). Lowe (2004) posits that replacing an employee can cost up to one to two times their salary. Moreover, there is no assurance that the new hire won’t also struggle with a disorder that affects their work. Addressing gambling in the workplace is complex, as it is both costly to treat problem gamblers and/or dismiss problem gamblers in the workplace. The amount of harm related to gambling has yet to be accurately quantified in the workplace, as its effects are unclear (Langham et al., 2016).

While at work, gamblers spend time thinking about gambling (e.g., indebtedness), exhibit significant mood consequences (i.e., irritability, anxiety, and depression), and suffer from physical health consequences (e.g., intestinal disorders, severe headaches, asthma) related to their gambling (Lesieur 1998; Lorenz & Yaffee, 1988). Moreover, Lesieur (1998) speculates that gamblers engage in exploitative workplace behaviors. These behaviors include arriving late due to gambling, exploiting time and finances of the job, stealing/borrowing money from others in the workplace, extending lunch hours/break times to gamble, and taking sick days for gambling purposes. However, these claims have yet to be empirically tested. It is well-established that untreated addiction and health-related disorders are related to a host of negative workplace outcomes, such as absenteeism, reduced productivity and morale, employee theft and fraud, insurance and compensation claims, and overall errors in judgement (Fron, 2004; Elliott & Shelley, 2006; Hilton et al., 2009; Kessler et al., 2006; Lowe, 2004). This suggests that gambling behavior too would contribute to an increase in negative workplace behaviors. Thus, the aim of this portion of the study is to examine this emerging but under-studied area and develop a baseline understanding of the relationship between relevant work-related behaviors and gambling behavior. There are two theory-based hypothesized mediation pathways that are believed to explain the relationship between a) problem gambling and absenteeism, and b) problem gambling and job performance. These are illustrated in Figures 4 and 5 respectively and outlined below.

Family-Work Conflict as a Mediator Between Problem Gambling and Absenteeism

While many researchers speculate that gambling would lead to an increase in absenteeism, this association has not yet been empirically investigated within the workplace. Absenteeism refers to employee withdrawal behavior, characterized as habitual or frequent

absence or non-presence from work (Muchinsky, 1977). Absences can be planned, unplanned, or related to illness or medical reasons (Muchinsky, 1977). Although this connection has yet to be made, Askew et al. (2014) found empirical support linking cyberloafing and work withdrawal behaviors (i.e., absenteeism, leaving early, extended breaks, and withdrawal). Considering that online gambling is a well-known form of cyberloafing, this finding suggests that problem gambling would also be associated with absenteeism. Similarly, the impact of stress on absenteeism has consistently been shown, such that those reporting a high level of stress are more likely to be absent from work compared to those with low perceived stress (Jacobson et al., 1996). Due to the significant stress that one's own or one's partner's gambling can generate (i.e., financial, marital, emotional), it is plausible that gamblers may exhibit a higher level of absenteeism compared to their non-gambling counterparts. Accordingly, a qualitative study examining the impacts gambling has on family and work life, found evidence for participants' gambling behavior leading to unexplained absences from work to engage in gambling (e.g., leaving work early to gamble) along with absences due to the physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that gambling generated (Downs & Woolrych, 2010).

As internet gambling can be carried out at home or in the workplace, it is conceivable that it would increase family-work conflict. Family-work conflict is viewed as a form of inter-role conflict in which "*role pressures associated with membership in one organization are in conflict with pressures stemming from membership in other groups*" (Kahn et al., 1964, p. 20). From the family-work perspective, this type of conflict reflects the degree to which role responsibilities from the family to work domains are incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Accordingly, demands from one role, in this case, the family role, make performing at work more difficult. This study is focusing on the family-to-work perspective specifically (vs. the

work-to-family perspective), given that it is the most relevant to the overall goal of the study, that is, to understand the reciprocal relationship between couples' conflict and gambling behavior. Family-work conflict is widely acknowledged as multi-dimensional, consisting of strain-based, time-based, and behavior-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Strain-based conflict is particularly relevant to the gambling context because its psychological effects (e.g., irritability, tension, depression, and distress) are synonymous with known psychological effects of gambling (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Analogous to family-work conflict, gambling is also cross-domain; it can be enacted while at work (e.g., internet gambling), during time away from work (e.g., buying lottery tickets), and during home time (e.g., visiting a casino). Research does support the assertion that gambling is associated with family-work conflict. For example, Eby et al. (2020) found that gambling behavior predicted both strain-based gambling interference with work and gambling interference with nonwork. Moreover, both forms of interference predicted decreased cognitive engagement and role performance. These findings allude to the possibility that family-work conflict may have a reciprocal relationship with problem gambling. In another study examining the relationship between family-work conflict and gambling, results revealed that occupying roles of being both a married and working spouse, was associated with an increase in gambling (Van der Mass, 2016). Further supporting this finding, Frone (2000) more generally argues that family-work conflict is related to many different forms of substance abuse and behavioral addictions.

Thus, my first exploratory research question tested whether problem gambling is related to an increase in absenteeism, through an increase in the perception of family-work conflict (see Figure 4). The reason for including a measure of the partner's perception of absenteeism was to attempt to capture a secondary reporting of the participant's absenteeism. Given the intimate

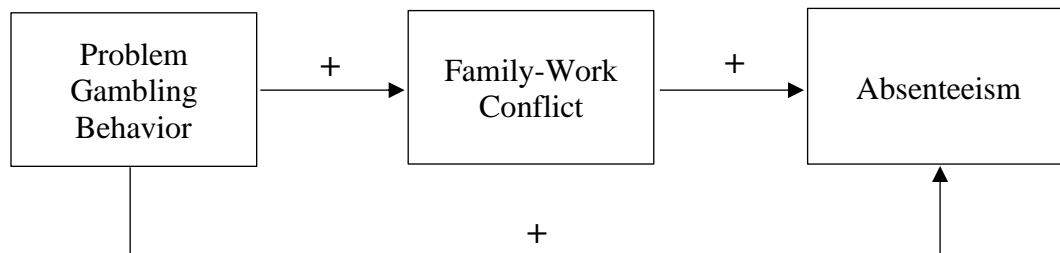
nature of a romantic relationship, it is conceivable that partners would be aware of each other's everyday behavior, such as choosing to go to work. It is expected that the self and partner ratings would correlate, even though it is possible that the self and the partner would remember their own and each other's behavior differently. Thus, the research question is as follows:

RQ1a: Is self-reported problem gambling behavior associated with greater self-reported absenteeism, through the self's perception of family-work conflict?

RQ1b: Is self-reported problem gambling behavior associated with greater partner's perception of absenteeism, through the self's perception of family-work conflict?

Figure 4

Mediation Model 1: Relationship Between Problem Gambling Behavior, Family-Work Conflict, and Absenteeism



Note. Figure depicts the mediating role of family-work conflict on the relationship between problem gambling behavior (self-report PGSI) and absenteeism.

Cyberloafing as a Mediator Between Problem Gambling and Job Performance

Cyberloafing refers to an employees' actions of engaging in minor (e.g., personal e-mailing, shopping, social media, browsing) or major (e.g., blogging, gambling, gaming) personal online activities during work hours (Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Lim, 2002). Although less common than other forms, gambling is one well-known form of cyberloafing in the workplace (Blanchard & Henle, 2008). Research shows that an estimated 91% of employees engage in

some form of cyberloafing, with estimates showing that employees waste on average 3 hours per week (Greenfield & Davis, 2002) to 2.5 hours per day (Mills et al., 2001). Researchers have identified numerous reasons why people engage in cyberloafing in the workplace. Personal factors (e.g., sleep deprivation, conflict, family-related stressors, external locus of control) and work-related factors (e.g., workplace norms, perceptions of injustice, lack of engagement, work-related stressors, powerlessness) have been found to lead to cyberloafing behaviors (Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Henle & Blanchard, 2008; Krishnan & Lim, 2010; Lim, 2002). Moreover, people engage in cyberloafing as a coping mechanism, to escape job stress, resolve private life demands (e.g., organize weekend plans, deal with childcare concerns, address family conflict), and escape marital stress (Koay et al., 2017). As previously noted, gamblers tend to experience a significant number of stressors in their work and personal lives, related to their gambling behavior. These stressors may result in an increase in private life demands related to their gambling behavior (e.g., addressing conflict, financial difficulties, or health-related problems) compared to a population of non-gamblers.

More specifically, border theory argues that people try to obtain work life balance and reduce role conflicts (conflict between private life vs. work life demands) by crossing the border between work and non-work to satisfy both needs (Clark, 2000). This theory implies that people who have a high-level of stress or tasks to complete in either their work or family life, will be more likely to reduce this role conflict by addressing their home life demands at work and their work demands at home. Therefore, private demands may act as a source of motivation for employees to engage in cyberloafing while at work (Clark, 2000). Overall, these arguments suggest that gamblers may be more likely than non-gamblers to engage in cyberloafing to address their various private life demands and/or gamble during work hours.

In spite of the fact that cyberloafing is drawing increasing academic attention, there is limited empirical evidence for the impact of cyberloafing on the organization and the employee. Numerous reviews have reported mixed findings regarding the relationship between cyberloafing and job performance, such that various studies report cyberloafing as either having no impact, a negative impact, or a positive impact on job performance and productivity (Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Koay et al., 2019; Mercado et al., 2017; Syed et al., 2020; Tandon et al., 2021). Research supports the claim that among many factors, more severe forms of cyberloafing (i.e., gambling, gaming, pornography) tend to have more negative consequences in the workplace and for the employee compared to minor forms (i.e., emailing, social media) of cyberloafing (Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Lim & Chen, 2012). Researchers have indicated a need to start distinguishing between the different forms of cyberloafing, given that many previous findings have considered cyberloafing as one construct with a single factor. The literature involving gambling as a form of cyberloafing at work and its effect on job performance is severely lacking. Interestingly, there is only one study, of which I am aware, that directly tested the relationship between gambling and job performance. Smith and Smith (2011) examined employee morale and productivity throughout “March Madness” (a popular men’s basketball tournament that occurs throughout the month of March), a time where many people engage in sports betting (i.e., a form of gambling). The findings confirmed short term productivity losses among employees while gambling at work (i.e., throughout March Madness), but found unexpected long-term benefit to social cohesiveness. Inasmuch as the relationship between cyberloafing and job performance is unclear, and that this relationship has not been tested in a sample of gamblers, the following research question is exploratory. Overall, this is a new and intriguing area of research, and this study will shed some additional light on how gamblers show up to their work, and whether this relates to

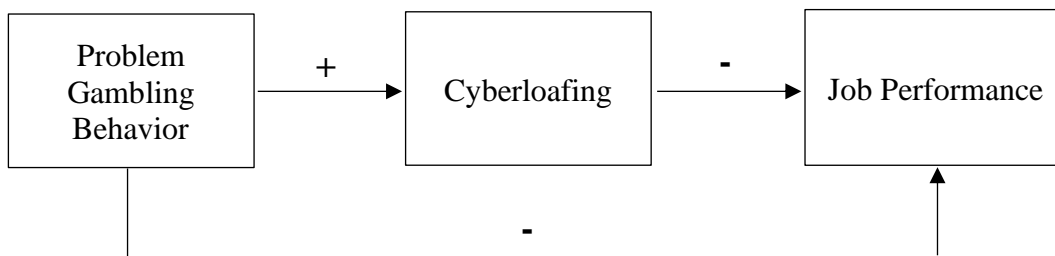
their engagement versus withdrawal behavior at work. The following research question asks if problem gambling leads to a decrease in job performance, through an increase in cyberloafing (see Figure 5).

RQ2a: Is self-rated problem gambling behavior associated with a decrease in self-rated job performance, through self-rated cyberloafing?

RQ2b: Is self-rated problem gambling behavior associated with a decrease in partner-rated job performance, through self-rated cyberloafing?

Figure 5

Mediation Model 2: Relationship Between Problem Gambling Behavior, Cyberloafing, and Job Performance



Note. Figure depicts the mediating role of cyberloafing on the relationship between problem gambling behavior (self-report PGSI) and job performance.

Method

Participants

A total of $n = 39$ ($N = 78$) adult romantic couples were invited to participate in a two-hour lab session that included completing a pre- and post-discussion questionnaire, a discussion with their partner, and the opportunity to gamble, conducted in Dr. Sherry Stewart’s Mood, Anxiety, and Addiction Comorbidity (MAAC) Lab at Dalhousie University. To be included in the study, participants had to be 19 years of age or older, currently in a romantic relationship of

any type (e.g., heterosexual, homosexual, married, cohabiting, dating) for at least three months, and working a minimum of 10 hours/week. In addition, couples were required to have one member that was a current regular gambler, defined as engaging in some form of gambling in the past year at a frequency of 1-7 times per week. The other member of the couple was required to have gambled at least once in their lifetime. Finally, both members were required to have experience using a VLT machine. If participants were abstaining from gambling, they were excluded from the study. The reasoning for these inclusion criteria was a) to ensure participants have been in a relationship long enough to have sufficient knowledge of their partner, b) be working part time to have the ability to report their work-related behaviors, and c) one partner gamble often enough to be considered a regular gambler. As previously stated, problem gambling can be described by a variety of behaviors and does not have the same criteria as a DSM-5 (APA, 2013) diagnosis of gambling disorder. Thus, this inclusion criteria sought to include individuals who would be considered problem gamblers (for at least one member of the couple), but not necessarily have a gambling addiction diagnosis. Participants were primarily recruited through the community and via Dalhousie's SONA system. Physical advertisements were posted in community locations where gamblers tended to go, such as bars that contained VLT machines (Cox et al., 2005). Online advertisements were posted on a variety of websites such as Haligonian, Kijiji, Facebook, Instagram, and Halifax Noise (see Appendix A). Participants (and their partners) were contacted by telephone for an eligibility screening to ensure they met all the inclusion criteria to participate in the study (see Appendix B).

There were 20 couples ($n = 40$, 51.3%) in the conflict condition and 19 couples ($n = 38$, 48.7%) in the neutral condition. The sample was evenly split across individuals identifying as male (48.7%) and female (48.8%). While the remaining 2.6% identified as non-binary. The

consistent gambler (i.e., the more regular gambler within the couple) was primarily male ($n = 33$, 84.6%). Participants reported being predominantly White ($n = 65$, 83.3%), with the remaining participants reporting being Black ($n = 8$, 10.3%), Middle Eastern ($n = 3$, 3.8%), Asian ($n = 1$, 1.3%), and Hispanic ($n = 1$, 1.3%). Participants ranged in age from 19 years to 69 years and were on average 36 years old ($SD = 14.10$). Individual annual income before taxes varied across the sample, with 38.5% ($n = 30$) reporting \$0 - \$40k, 42.3% ($n = 33$) reporting \$41k - \$80k, and 19.3% ($n = 15$) reporting \$81k - \$121k. Fifty-four percent ($n = 42$) of participants had completed college or university, while 24.4% ($n = 19$) had completed some college or university, 16.7% ($n = 13$) had completed Grade 12 or less, and the remaining four (5.1%) had selected “Other”. Healthcare/Social Services was the most commonly reported job sector ($n = 16$, 20.5%), followed by Professional/Technical Services ($n = 9$, 11.5%), Services/Goods Producing ($n = 9$, 11.5%), Business/Administration ($n = 7$, 9%), Construction/Manufacturing ($n = 7$, 9%), Finance/Insurance/Real Estate ($n = 6$, 7.7%), and Accommodation/Food Services ($n = 4$, 5.1%). The remaining participants reported their occupation as “Other” ($n = 20$, 25.6%). The majority of participants reported being in a monogamous relationship ($n = 77$, 98.7%) and the entire sample indicated that their relationship was either serious ($n = 24$, 30.8%) or very serious ($n = 54$, 69.2%) with the majority of couples reporting living with their partner ($n = 53$, 67.9%). On average, the 53+ year old participants indicated that they lived with their partner, lived with them for on average 6.95 years ($SD = 7.26$). All participants ($n = 78$) had been with their partner for an average of 6.07 years ($SD = 6.38$). Finally, the average number of hours worked per week was 33.11 ($SD = 14.10$).

Procedure

This study consisted of four components: a) pre-survey assessment, b) neutral/conflict topic discussion, c) post-survey assessment, and d) lab-based gambling assessment.

Pre-Survey Assessment. Prior to the self and partner-report questionnaires, participants were prompted to read and sign an informed consent form indicating their understanding of, and willingness to participate in, the study (see Appendix C). Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time and would receive partial compensation. A cover story for the lab-based gambling portion of the study was provided to the couple, so that they were not made aware that the intention of the study was to understand the effects of the discussion on their gambling behavior. Specifically, participants were told that they had up to 15 minutes to play a variety of VLT games on the machine and then complete an assessment of their experiences of the games to help the research team select the best VLT game for an upcoming study.

First, participants were each fitted with a heart rate vest and then individually completed a self-report questionnaire that captured demographic information, then completed the perceived problem gambling (PGSI) and the gambling motives questionnaire (GMQ). Participants subsequently completed a combination of self- and partner-report work-related measures of family-work conflict (only self-report), cyberloafing (only self-report), job performance (self-report and partner-report), and absenteeism (self-report and partner-report). Although partners would likely not know with certainty their partner's job performance or absenteeism, it was reasoned that partners would have some knowledge, based on behavioral observation and at home discussion about their partner's work behavior. The partner-rated measure was added to capture partner perceptions, as it is possible that they could be consistent with, or different from, the self-rated measures. Finally, participants completed the baseline measure of affect (VAS) directly before selecting a discussion topic.

Neutral/Conflict Topic Discussion. After completing the pre-survey assessments listed above, couples were randomly assigned to engage in a 15-minute discussion about either an unresolved relationship conflict or a discussion about a neutral topic. For both conditions, each member of the couple received a list of 26 topics, where 13 of the topics were common relationship topics that invoked conflict, taken from the *Couples' Issue Checklist* (Fales, 2012) and 13 were intended to act as neutral topics. This method for selecting a topic for the conflict discussion has been validated as a psychosocial stressor that elicits a subjective and physiological stress response (Heffner et al., 2004). Each member was instructed to sort all 26 topics into three categories: topics that invoked positive feelings, topics that invoked neutral feelings, and topics about an unresolved conflict that invoked negative feelings. The category that invoked negative feelings was used as the conflict condition, while the category that invoked neutral feelings was used as the neutral condition. The reason for asking participants to report topics that invoke positive feelings, was to avoid selecting a topic that was neither conflictual nor neutral. Any topic that was described by either or both member(s) of the couple as invoking positive emotions, was not selected. Once all topics were sorted, each participant ranked their top three topics in each category. Once completed, the participants gave their checklist to the researcher to be scored. The researcher compared the participants' checklists to find a match within both members' top-three ranked sources of unresolved conflict (topics that invoke negative feelings) or neutral (topics that invoke neutral feelings). The highest rated of the matches across both members of the couple was chosen by the researcher to be discussed, and couples were assigned to a topic according to their condition. In cases where couples did not have a direct match, the researcher would attempt to select a topic that was a partial match within their top three-rated topics. If there was no match within the top three ranked topics, the

researcher would randomly select a topic that both members of the couple agreed invoked conflictual (or neutral) feelings and try to find a topic that at least one member had ranked in their top three. If there was no match in the topic category (i.e., there existed not a single topic that both participants agreed invoked negative or neutral feelings regardless of rank) the researcher would randomly select a topic that at least one member assigned to the proper category, always ensuring that no topic that was rated by either couple as positive was selected. Previous research has primarily asked participants to discuss the events of their day (Levenson & Gottman, 1983; Sels et al., 2019; Vater & Schröder–Abé, 2015) as the neutral condition. This method does not ensure that the conversation is perceived as neutral by the couple. Having participants rank neutral topics rather than providing one option, allowed more certainty that the topic was in fact perceived as neutral for both members of the couple. The discussion was audio and video recorded using *The Noldus Observer XT Technology* and *FaceReader* for later observation and analysis that is outside of the scope of this study.

Post-Survey Assessment. Post-discussion, the couple completed a second questionnaire measuring their post-discussion affect (VAS) referencing participant affect following the discussion task, perceived level of autonomy during the discussion, partner control behavior (PMS-G), and conflict management strategies (DUTCH). Participants completed a self-report version of the VAS and the autonomy measure, and a partner-report version of the PMS-G and the DUTCH. For the DUTCH, participants independently reported their perception of their partner's conflict management strategies during the discussion.

Lab-Based Gambling Assessment. Upon completion of the second questionnaire, both members of the couple were provided the opportunity to gamble using the MAAC Lab's VLT machines for up to 15 minutes. Participants were provided \$50 pre-loaded in the VLT machine

and had the option to gamble to a maximum amount of time of 15 minutes and use as much of the \$50 as they wished. They were informed that they could keep any remaining money/unspent winnings, and this would be on top of their compensation for participation. Participants were given the choice to select any game, or combination of games on the VLT machine during their play. After the 15-minute VLT gambling elapsed, the couple was compensated for their time. Each member of the couple received \$80 for participating. Students in an eligible Dalhousie psychology or neuroscience course were given the option to accept up to 2.0 course credits (0.5 credit per half hour) for their participation in place of the \$80 compensation. Students also had the option to accept a combination of financial compensation and course credit, in one of three different forms. 1) \$20 in financial compensation and 1.5 course credits, 2) \$40 in financial compensation and 1.0 course credit, or 3) \$60 in financial compensation and 0.5 course credit. The study's data collection is currently still ongoing; thus, participants will be debriefed after the completion of the study as a whole and told the true purpose of the study.

Measures

Self and Partner-Report Assessments

Demographic Questionnaire. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire regarding their gender, ethnicity, occupation, level of schooling, and a variety of aspects related to their current romantic relationship.

Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). Problems or negative consequences emerging from gambling behavior were assessed using the 9-item Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) from the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) (Ferris & Wynne, 2001), a questionnaire designed to assess the severity of problem gambling. The PGSI asks questions such as “in the past 12 months, have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?” For each

item, the participant selects a response on a 4-point relative frequency scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*almost always*). The measure can be scored continuously or categorically to classify gamblers on their gambling severity: 0 = non-gambler/non-problem gambler, 1-2 = low risk gambler, 3-7 = moderate risk gambler, and 8+ = problem gambler. This study scored the PGSI as a continuous variable. Scores from the nine items were summed for a total score, which produced a possible range from 0 to 27, where higher scores indicated more problem gambling. The PGSI has high internal consistency, high concurrent validity with other problem gambling measures, and good construct validity. Participants completed a self-report version of this scale. The reliability of this scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .85.

Gambling Motives Questionnaire (GMQ). Gambling motives were assessed with the 15-item Gambling Motives Questionnaire (GMQ), an adaptation of the original Drinking Motives Questionnaire (Stewart & Zack, 2008). The GMQ contains three 5-item subscales tapping Coping (e.g., "To forget your worries"), Enhancement (e.g., "Because it's fun"), and Social (e.g., "To be sociable") motives for gambling. Each item is rated on a 4-point relative frequency scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*almost always*). This measure is scored by providing a mean score for each of the three sub-scales. A higher score indicates that the particular motive is highly relevant to the addictive behavior in question. Participants completed a self-report version of this scale. Only the Coping Motives scale was of interest in the present study. The reliability of the Coping Motives scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

Cyberloafing. Cyberloafing was assessed using one sub-scale of the five-factor cyberloafing scale created by Akbulut et al. (2016) and the 11-item scale by Lim (2002). The five-factor scale by Akbulut et al. (2016) assesses the frequency of contemporary cyberloafing behaviors during working hours and is measured on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from 1

(*never*) to 5 (*a great extent*). Participants were only assessed on the 4-item fifth factor, namely Gaming/Gambling (e.g., “I play online games”). In addition, participants completed the 11-item cyberloafing scale (by Lim, 2002), that assesses general cyberloafing, consisting of two sub-factors, browsing activities and email activities. This scale was modified to fit the wording of the Akbulut et al. (2016) scale. An example of an original item “Sports related Web sites,” was changed to “I visit sports related Web sites”. Participants completed a self-report version of this scale. All of the proposed cyberloafing scales were of interest in the present study. The reason for choosing two measures was to ensure general cyberloafing, along with gambling/gaming specific cyberloafing were captured. The reliability of the scale overall and the cyberloafing-specific scale was .84 for both scales.

Family-Work Conflict. Family-work conflict was assessed using the Family-Work Conflict (FWC) scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (1996). This scale contains 5 items and is measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This scale was modified to reflect language that is more general to any type of relationship, whether not living together, cohabiting, or married. An example item “The demands of my family or spouse/partner interfere with work-related activities” was modified to “The demands of my relationship interfere with work-related activities”. Participants completed a self-report version of this scale. The reliability of this scale yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .84.

Job Performance. Job performance was measured using a 3-item scale developed by Gilin Oore et al. (2016). Participants were told to think about the past 30 days and report how their supervisor or boss would rate their quality of work, amount of work, and overall job performance within the past month. Responses were captured using a 5-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*). Participants completed a self-report and a partner-

report version of this scale. The reliability of the self-rated and partner-rated scales yielded a Cronbach alphas of .86 and .83 respectively.

Absenteeism. Participants completed a measure assessing frequency of absenteeism at work, one of the most commonly used methods for measuring absenteeism (Badubi, 2017). More specifically, this assessment was made following the time lost method of working time, whereby the percentage and/or number of hours lost due to absence is recorded (Badubi, 2017).

Participants were asked about their own and their partner's average number of work hours lost in a typical work week. The self-rated item was the following "Please estimate how much work time you miss during a typical work week". While the partner-rated item read as "Please estimate how much work time your partner misses during a typical work week".

Discussion-Related Self and Partner-Report Assessments

Mood Visual Analogue Scale (VAS). The mood VAS is a ten-item measure that assessed participants' current mood state both pre- and post-discussion. Four items were used to assess positive affect: cheerful, happy, glad, and pleased and six items were used to assess negative affect: sad, depressed, blue, nervous, anxious, and tense (Birch et al., 2004; Grant et al., 2007). Participants were instructed to respond by drawing a vertical line on a 100 mm scale and placing it at the point between the anchors of "not at all" (scored as 0) to "extremely" (scored as 100) that best described their mood state in the requested time frame (pre- and post-discussion). Each item was scored as the number of mm from the far-left anchor to the participant's line. The positive and negative affect scales were each scored as the average across the relevant VAS items (possible range 0-100). While the entire scale (both positive and negative affect) was administered, negative affect was of primary interest in the present study. Participants completed a self-report version of this scale. The reliability of this scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .92.

Couples Issue Checklist. The Couple’s Issue Checklist is a list of 26 common reasons for conflict in couples (e.g., finances, jealousy, job, household chores), wherein members of a couple individually indicate their top three sources of unresolved conflict within their relationship in the past month (Fales, 2012). For the purposes of this study, the checklist was cut by 50%, retaining the top-rated conflictual topics chosen among couples, using data from a previous study conducted in the MAAC Lab (Gordon, 2020). The 13 neutral topics were chosen based on common neutral topics discussed in the literature (Levensen & Gottman, 1983; Vater & Schroder-Abe, 2015). In the present sample, the most commonly chosen conflictual topics were “My partner promising to do something and then not doing it” ($n = 8, 20.0\%$) followed by “Never having enough money/my partner not having a job” ($n = 6, 15.0\%$), and “Partner avoiding talking about difficult issues” ($n = 6, 15.0\%$). The most commonly chosen neutral topics were “Chores to do around the house” ($n = 8, 21.1\%$), “Whether to go out as a couple or with friends” ($n = 4, 10.5\%$), and “Not liking the way your partner drinks alcohol, smokes cigarettes, or uses marijuana or other drugs” ($n = 4, 10.5\%$). Importantly, topics could be considered conflictual or neutral depending on the couple and the way they ranked the topic. Therefore, some topics appeared in both the conflict and neutral condition (e.g., “Whether to go out as a couple or with friends”). Six (15.4%) couples agreed on their number one topic (both participants ranked their assigned discussion topic as first), 13 (33.3%) couples had similar rankings (both participants ranked their assigned discussion topic within their top three), 15 (38.5%) couples did not agree on ranking but on the category (participants had no topic that fit into both of their top three rankings but had a topic within the same category), and 5 (12.8%) couples did not agree on a ranking or a category (participants had no topic that they both agreed

was conflictual or neutral). Please refer to the Procedure regarding the process of how topics were chosen by the experimenter.

Autonomy. Autonomy was assessed using an adapted autonomy sub-scale from the 6-item Need Satisfaction Scale (Hadden & Smith, 2019). This sub-scale contains 2 items (“I felt that my choices were based on my own interests and values”, “I felt that my choices expressed my ‘true self’”). This sub-scale was used to assess the extent to which participants perceived that their need for autonomy was met during the discussion and is measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Participants completed a self-report version of this scale. The reliability of this scale yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .80.

Partner Management Strategies - Gambling (PMS-G). Partner control behavior was measured with the Partner Management Strategies – Gambling (PMS-G) scale. The PMS-G was a new measure developed for the previous study under this GANS grant, adapted from the original PMS measure in the alcohol field (Rodriguez et al., 2013) that aimed to broaden the measure to include populations outside of the alcohol field, specifically tailored to strategies that are relevant to gamblers. The PMS-G is a two factor 19-item questionnaire that measures rewarding social control strategies (e.g., “Praising me when I do not gamble”) and punishing social control strategies (e.g., “Threatening to disclose the behavior they don’t like to someone else”). The items are parallel to the original PMS scale, but language such as “drink” was replaced with “gamble”. Participants completed a partner-report version of this scale. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate how often their partner engaged in the control strategies during their discussion on a 7-point relative frequency scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very often*). Given this adapted version of the scale has yet to be validated, the parallel items were assigned to their respective sub-scale according to the scales from the original alcohol PMS

scale. Thus, the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) from the original PMS scale was used as a guide. I conducted a reliability analysis on the entire scale (including and excluding the cross-loaded items), along with an item analysis. The versions of the scales containing no cross-loaded items had lower reliability than the versions including the cross-loaded items. Therefore, the version of the scale (including both the punishing and rewarding sub-scales) including the cross-loaded items was selected. Moreover, including the cross-loaded items aligned most closely with the original alcohol PMS scale. Therefore, the rewarding 7-item PMS-G sub-scale had a final reliability of .73 and the 12-item punishing sub-scale had a final reliability of .83. Only the punishing sub-scale was analyzed in this thesis, while the rewarding sub-scale was collected for the broader project.

The Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (DUTCH). Conflict style among both members of the couple was assessed using the Dutch Test for Conflict Handling (i.e., the DUTCH; DeDreu et al., 2001). The DUTCH is a 20-item questionnaire that measures five dimensions of conflict management described by dual concern theory. Participants completed a partner-report version of this scale. The four-item subscales include avoidance (e.g., “They avoided a confrontation about our differences”), yielding (e.g., “They gave in to my wishes”), forcing (e.g., “They pushed their own point of view”), problem solving (e.g., “They examined ideas from both sides to find a mutually optimal solution”), and compromise (e.g., “They strived whenever possible towards a fifty-fifty compromise”). Each item was rated on a 5-point frequency scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Only the avoiding and forcing sub-scales were used in the present study. The reliability of the avoiding and forcing conflict style sub-scales yielded Cronbach alphas of .85 and .84 respectively.

Observational Assessment

Lab-Based Gambling Behavior. Post-discussion, both members of the couple were provided the opportunity to gamble using the MAAC Lab's VLT machines for 15 minutes. Participants were given \$50 for gambling and had the option to gamble to a maximum amount of time of 15 minutes and use as much of the \$50 as they wished. They were informed that they could keep any remaining money, and this would be on top of their compensation for participation. Further, participants were informed that the VLT machines were real commercial machines with similar payouts. The largest payout from the MAAC Lab's VLT machine for this study was \$720. Participants were given the choice to select any game, or combination of games on the VLT machine during their play. The participants were not provided with any information regarding the odds of the payout. The length of time spent gambling (Time Play), the amount of money lost from the original \$50 (Money Lost), the amount of money risked during VLT play (Money Risked), and the number of times the participant selected the max bet option (Max Bet) were recorded as gambling outcomes. The Max Bet button allows a player to automatically bet the maximum number of credits and/or amount of money allowed per spin on the VLT machine. Both VLTs in this study had a Max Bet option of \$2.50. Participants could choose to select this button multiple times during any game, at any time until they ran out of money. These outcome measures are well-established indicators of gambling behavior that numerous other experimental studies have used (Dixon et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2019; Mutti-Packer et al., 2022).

Results

All five models were tested using Mplus 8.0 to control for the dyadic nature of the data, by identifying the dyad as the unit of analysis. This meant that each member of the dyad was listed in their own row in the dataset and assigned a dyad ID. By identifying the dyad as a unit of analysis, Mplus adjusts the error terms and correlations acknowledging that each dyad is a social

unit that are more similar. The moderated-mediation models (Figures 1 through 3) were analyzed using Structure Equation Modelling (SEM) as 1-1-1 multilevel mediations (Preacher et al., 2010). All models contained Level 1 variables (perceived self or partner behavior), moderated by a Level 2 (dyad) variable (Experimental Condition: Conflict vs. Neutral). The moderated mediations were set up to provide a significance test for the difference of the $a*b$ path between the two groups (conflict and neutral). The Chi-Square Difference (in Fit) test compared the fit between two models, one of which constrained the $a*b$ path to be equal for both groups, and one model that freed the $a*b$ to vary. Accordingly, the strength of the differences between the a and b paths combine to affect the overall significance test. All variables were input as measured variables, rather than latent variables, given the small sample size (Preacher et al., 2010). The gambling outcome variables for the three moderated-mediation models were measured using four separate indications of gambling behavior (i.e., Time Played, Money Risked, Money Lost, and Max Bet). Each of the four outcome measures were tested separately in each model, given that all four measures were not significantly intercorrelated (see Table 1 for intercorrelations of all variables).

Comparison of Current Sample to Norm Data

The mean PGSI score was 4.78 ($SD = 3.82$) indicating the sample was in the “moderate risk” category for gambling severity. Regarding the distribution of the category of PGSI scores, 12 participants (15.4%) were categorized as non-problem gamblers (PGSI = 0), 16 (20.5%) participants were categorized as low-risk gamblers (PGSI = 1-2), 31 (39.7%) participants were categorized as moderate-risk gamblers (PGSI 3-7), and the remaining 19 (24.3%) participants were categorized as high-risk gamblers (PGSI 8 +). This was calculated in accordance with the well-established PGSI cut-off scores (Ferris & Wynne, 2001). For the first cross-sectional study

(Hagen et al., 2023) conducted under the GANS grant examining the link between romantic conflict and gambling problems, that sample was on average classified as moderate risk, as the mean PGSI score was 6.77 ($SD = 8.05$), which is above the average in the current study. Accordingly, a one sample t -test indicated that the current sample was significantly lower than the mean from Hagen et al.'s (2023) study on the PGSI, ($t(77) = -4.60, p < .001$). However, in comparison to the second study conducted under the GANS grant (Stewart, 2022), a one sample t -test revealed that the current sample's level of gambling severity ($M = 4.78, SD = 3.82$) was significantly higher than that of the comparison study ($M = 3.25, SD = 5.82; t(77) = 3.54, p < .001$). Ultimately, this study managed to recruit a sample of gamblers that fell into the moderate-risk category, in line with the previous two studies conducted under the GANS grant.

To better understand the current sample's relative relationship conflict level, the sample was compared against a variety of similar studies on the following variables: coping motives, DUTCH conflict styles (avoiding and forcing), and family-work conflict. To compare the current sample's level of coping motives and conflict styles to the same cross-sectional (Hagen et al., 2023) and dyadic mediational (Stewart, 2022) studies that were conducted under the GANS grant, scores were summed to allow for proper comparison. A one sample t -test revealed that the current sample's level of coping motives ($M = 7.03, SD = 2.78$) was significantly lower than that of the first cross-sectional study ($M = 11.61, SD = 4.48; t(77) = -14.55, p < .001$) and the second dyadic study ($M = 9.04, SD = 3.65; t(77) = -6.40, p < .001$). Conflict style was compared against data from a thesis (Gordon, 2020) conducted previously in the MAAC lab prior to COVID-19 that examined alcohol preference and conflict style, using the DUTCH measure among a sample of dyads. A one sample t -test showed that the current sample ($M = 9.26, SD = 3.75$) exhibited significantly less ($t(77) = -3.80, p < .001$) forcing conflict behavior compared to the comparison

study ($M = 10.87$, $SD = 3.32$). However, the current sample ($M = 10.83$, $SD = 4.25$) did not significantly differ in levels of avoiding conflict behavior compared to Gordon's (2020) sample ($M = 10.97$, $SD = 3.52$; $t(77) = -.28$, $p < .78$). While there are no studies to my knowledge that exist that examine family-work conflict within a gambling context, in comparison to a study using the same scale examining general family-work conflict in virtual workers (Galanti et al., 2021), a one sample t -test indicated that the average family-work conflict reported in the current sample ($M = 1.43$, $SD = .66$) was significantly less than the other study ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.14$; $t(77) = -9.94$, $p < .001$). Considering that this sample exhibited relatively low levels of coping motives, forcing conflict style, and family-work conflict in comparison to other samples, it can be inferred that this sample consisted of relatively well-bonded and low-conflict couples.

Assumption Testing

Prior to testing hypotheses, the data was screened for data entry errors, multivariate outliers, linearity, normality, and multicollinearity. All multivariate outliers were tested for each set of hypotheses, including only the relevant hypothesis set within each analysis. There were four multivariate outliers across all three moderated-mediation models. Three of the four outliers were not influential, as indicated by Cook's distance. Thus, the one influential outlier was removed, and the two non-influential outliers were kept in the sample, as they represented normal variations within the data. Inspections of scatterplots indicated that the variables met the assumption of homoscedasticity and linearity. Overall, the data was relatively normally distributed, with minimal skewness and kurtosis for most variables, excluding Family-Work Conflict and Max Bet. Family-Work Conflict displayed moderate levels of skewness (2.64, $SE = .27$) and a high level of kurtosis (10.12, $SE = .54$). Similarly, Max Bet also displayed high levels of skewness (3.85, $SE = .28$) and kurtosis (16.69, $SE = .55$). All Durbin-Watson statistics for

each set of hypotheses were close to 2 (ranging from 1.6 to 2.3), indicating that the variables were not autocorrelated. Finally, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was near 1.0 (ranging from 1.0 to 1.1) for each set of hypotheses, indicating the absence of multicollinearity. Given the lack of autocorrelation and multicollinearity, it is expected that the skewness and kurtosis of the variables listed above had minimal impact on the validity of the analyses. It is unlikely that the non-normality of the data from this sample increased the likelihood of a Type I error; rather, it is more likely that it could have contributed to a loss of statistical power (Fayers, 2011).

Overall, the number of effects that were found is sparse. Most of the mediations and all the moderated-mediation effects were not significant across the data set as a whole. Given the novelty and experimental nature of the study, to inform future research, I will only be interpreting results that are significant for the overall sample. For example, in the moderated-mediation results that are separate for each group (conflict vs. neutral), there are a couple of results that show significant a, b, or c' paths that are not significant in the overall mediation containing both groups.

Manipulation Check

A two-way 2 (Condition: Conflict vs. Neutral) x 2 (Time: Pre-Discussion vs. Post-Discussion) Mixed ANOVA was conducted in SPSS Statistics to further understand the effectiveness of the manipulation (i.e., conflict) of participant mood (negative affect). Condition was the between-subjects variable and Time was the within-subjects variable. Results revealed that there was a significant main effect of time on negative affect $F(1, 76) = 9.97, p = .002$, such that pre-discussion negative affect scores were significantly higher ($M = 19.84, SE = 1.82$) than post-discussion scores ($M = 15.07, SE = 1.78$). However, there was no main effect of condition on negative affect $F(1, 76) = 2.27, p = .14$. There was also no significant interaction between

condition and time $F(1,76) = .04, p = .84$ (see Figure 6). As a follow-up, the same analysis was conducted for positive affect, to confirm if the neutral condition invoked the appropriate emotions (i.e., neutral) or if it inadvertently invoked positive emotions. Results revealed that there was no significant main effect of condition on positive affect $F(1, 76) = .52, p = .47$ and no significant main effect of time on positive affect $F(1, 76) = .29, p = .59$. Additionally, there was also no significant interaction between condition and time $F(1, 76) = .52, p = .47$. The lack of mean differences indicates that the manipulation was successful at ensuring the neutral condition did not inadvertently invoke positive affect.

Model 1: Partner Control Behavior → Autonomy → Observed Gambling Behavior

H1a posited that negative partner control behavior and observed gambling behavior would be higher in the conflict condition, while self-felt autonomy was expected to be lower in the conflict condition. The results revealed no significant condition effects on any of these variables (see Table 2). However, significant mean differences ($\chi^2(1) = 4.67, p = .03$) were found for one of the four gambling outcome variables, notably money risked, whereby money risked was higher in the neutral condition ($M = 83.90, SE = 43.29$), compared to the conflict condition ($M = 72.26, SE = 61.69$). Thus, H1a was not supported. H1b theorized that self-perceptions of negative partner control behavior would lead to an increase in gambling behavior, through lower self-felt autonomy. No significant results were found for any of the four gambling outcome variables. However, simple effects (for the sample as a whole) showed that partner control behavior led to lower self-felt autonomy, but this effect did not carry through to impact gambling (see Table 3). H1c posited that this effect would be stronger for those randomized to the conflict condition compared to those randomized to the neutral condition. Although this hypothesis was not supported, simple effects (in each condition) showed that partner control behavior led to

lower self-felt autonomy for those in the neutral condition. Similarly, this effect did not carry through to impact gambling. See Table 4 for the full breakdown of results.

Model 2: Partner Conflict Style → Autonomy → Observed Gambling Behavior

In addition to H1a, H2a posited that partner forcing and avoiding conflict style would be higher in the conflict condition. I found no evidence of condition effects on these variables, thus; H2a was not supported (see Table 2). H2b theorized that partner (i) avoiding and (ii) forcing conflict style would each lead to an increase in gambling behavior, through lower self-felt autonomy. Simple effects were found, such that higher partner avoiding behavior led to lower self-felt autonomy but did not carry through to impact gambling (see Table 5). This simple effect did not differ by experimental condition; thus, no moderated mediation was found to support H2ci (see Table 7). Counter to what was found for H2bi, more partner forcing behavior led to more money risked, while controlling for the indirect effect through autonomy ($b = 21.62$, $SE = 10.17$, $p = .03$). Opposite to what was expected, this direct effect was found for participants in the neutral condition, such that the more participants perceived their partner to be using a forcing conflict style, the longer they spent gambling ($b = 1.40$, $SE = .54$, $p = .01$) and the more money they risked ($b = 27.21$, $SE = 12.52$, $p = .03$). Thus, H2cii was not supported. See Table 8 for a full breakdown of results.

Model 3: Negative Affect → Coping Motives → Observed Gambling Behavior

H3a hypothesized group differences in self-negative affect and self-coping motives (i.e., escaping negative affect), expecting them to be higher in the conflict condition. Results demonstrated mean differences ($\chi^2(1) = 6.42$, $p = .01$), where the conflict condition ($M = 19.92$, $SE = 17.28$) had higher negative affect compared to the neutral condition ($M = 14.99$, $SE = 10.14$) post-discussion. However, there were no group differences for coping motives. Thus, H3a

was partially supported. These results can be found in Table 2. H3b theorized that self-negative affect would lead to an increase in gambling behavior, through higher self-gambling coping motives (escaping negative affect). Results indicated a significant relationship between coping motives and money lost ($b = 11.44, SE = 4.20, p = .01$), such that participants using more coping motives lost more money. The opposite was found for max bet, whereby there was a negative relationship between coping motives and the use of the max bet option ($b = -5.20, SE = 1.51, p = .001$). Overall, hypothesis 3b was not supported (see Table 9). In line with the findings from H3b, the significant positive relationship between coping motives and money lost ($b = 9.97, SE = 5.08, p = .049$), and negative relationship between coping motives and max bet ($b = -4.28, SE = 1.34, p < .001$) was only apparent in the neutral group. Nevertheless, H3c was not supported, as no moderated-mediation effects were found (see Table 10).

Model 4: Problem Gambling → Family-Work Conflict → Absenteeism

The same process was followed using SEM multilevel mediation to test the work outcomes, controlling for the dyadic nature of the data in Mplus. These exploratory analyses were meant to only provide initial evidence of potential processes rather than causal or sequential evidence (Mackinnon, 2008). RQ1a and RQ1b theorized that self-problem gambling behavior (measured using the PGSI) would be associated with greater self-rated absenteeism (and partner-rated absenteeism) through the self's perception of family-work conflict. Results demonstrated no support for RQ1a (indirect effect $b = .01, SE = .01, p = .48$) or RQ1b (indirect effect $b = .01, SE = .01, p = .26$). See Table 11 for a full breakdown of results. As a follow-up analysis, a Chi-Square Test of Association was conducted to understand the correspondence between couple members' reports of absenteeism. To do this, self and partner-rated absenteeism were recoded as binary variables, indicating the presence or absence of absenteeism. Results revealed a

significant association between self and partner absenteeism ratings ($\chi^2(1) = 17.49, p < .001$). Effect size was calculated using the Phi coefficient, as this analysis contained two categorical variables. A large effect size was found (.47). More specifically, from the overall sample ($N = 78$), 54 participants reported they were not absent, and their partner agreed with them, while 10 participants reported being absent and their partner agreed with them. Therefore, a total of 64 participants (82.1%) agreed on their absenteeism rating.

Model 5: Problem Gambling → Cyberloafing → Job Performance

Finally, RQ2a and RQ2b hypothesized that self-rated problem gambling behavior would be associated with a decrease in self (partner) rated job performance, through increased self-rated cyberloafing. Using the general cyberloafing scale (i.e., includes emailing, browsing, and gambling/gaming activities), no mediation effects were found for RQ2a (indirect effect $b = -.01, SE = .004, p = .21$) or RQ2b ($b = -.004, SE = .004, p = .32$). However, when testing the gambling/gaming cyberloafing scale alone, a significant mediation was found, whereby participants problem gambling behavior was found to be associated with a decrease in self-rated job performance, through increased gambling/gaming cyberloafing (indirect effect $b = -.01, SE = .01, p = .04$). Thus, RQ2a was found to be supported (see Table 13).

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for All Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. GMQ Coping	1.42	.55	.83																	
2. PMS Punishing	1.58	.69	.26*	.84																
3. VAS Negative	17.52	14.56	-.04	.16	.92															
4. DUTCH Avoid	2.71	1.06	-.16	.01	.21	.85														
5. DUTCH Force	2.31	.94	.13	.52**	.13	.12	.84													
6. Time Play	8.88	4.16	.05	.02	.12	.03	-.06	-												
7. Money Risked	77.93	54.18	.09	.10	-.11	.08	.11	.33**	-											
8. Money Lost	27.56	22.22	.21	.08	-.12	-.03	.16	-.14	.16	-										
9. Max Bet	6.54	14.61	-.18	-.02	-.10	.02	.08	-.09	.55**	.02	-									
10. PGSI	4.78	3.82	.63**	.33**	-.05	.02	.28*	-.01	.25*	.29*	.00	.85								
11. Autonomy	6.01	.97	.15	-.28*	-.07	-.31**	-.22	.24*	.09	-.01	-.10	-.01	.80							
12. Self-Absenteeism	.63	1.40	.02	.07	-.07	-.14	-.06	-.22	-.13	-.03	.10	-.04	-.09	-						
13. Partner-Absenteeism	1.05	.95	-.23*	.01	.08	.08	.03	-.09	-.09	.02	.04	-.09	-.14	.42**	-					
14. Gambling-CY	1.75	.93	.29*	.42**	-.09	-.17	.33**	-.09	.07	.17	.01	.41**	.06	.14	-.07	.84				
15. FWC	1.43	.66	.15	.42**	.16	-.03	.27*	-.02	-.10	-.01	-.12	.19	.01	.13	.08	.37**	.84			
16. Self-JP	4.44	.55	.03	-.11	-.18	-.20	-.25*	.12	.11	-.22	.07	-.07	.11	-.21	-.25*	-.22	-.17	.86		
17. Partner-JP	4.59	.54	.01	-.08	.05	-.07	-.30**	.20	.12	-.08	-.05	.01	.18	-.24*	-.40**	-.10	-.12	.50**	.83	
18. Condition	-	-	.32**	.02	-.15	-.28*	.07	.07	.11	.09	-.08	.25*	.11	-.05	-.14	.08	.12	.15	-.01	-

Note. PGSI = Problem Gambling Severity Index; Gambling-CY = Gambling/Gaming Cyberloafing Scale; FWC = Family-Work

Conflict; Self-JP = Self-Rated Job Performance; Partner-JP = Partner-Rated Job performance. Scale reliabilities are shown in bold on

the diagonal. $N = 78$. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 2*Mean Differences by Condition for Hypotheses H1a, H2a, and H3a*

		Conflict			Neutral			<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>			
IV	Partner Control Behavior	40	1.57	.69	38	1.60	.68	.69	1	.41
IV	Avoiding Conflict Style	40	2.99	1.11	38	2.41	.90	.02	1	.89
IV	Forcing Conflict Style	40	2.25	.94	38	2.38	.92	.83	1	.36
IV	Negative Affect (Post)	40	19.92	17.28	38	14.99	10.14	6.42	1	.01*
M	Coping Motives	40	1.25	.29	37	1.60	.68	.30	1	.58
M	Autonomy	39	5.91	.92	37	6.11	.99	.001	1	.98
DV	Time Play	40	8.60	4.26	38	9.17	3.97	.02	1	.88
DV	Money Risked	40	72.26	61.69	40	83.90	43.29	4.67	1	.03*
DV	Money Lost	40	25.53	21.98	40	29.70	22.00	.60	1	.44
DV	Max Bet	38	7.74	16.44	38	5.34	12.17	.001	1	.98

Note. The Wald is a Chi-Square Difference (in Fit) test that compared the fit of the model constraining the means (i.e., the coefficient parameter) to be equal between the conditions, with the fit of a model that freed them to vary.

Table 3*Mediation Results for Hypothesis 1b (Partner Control Behavior → Autonomy → Observed Gambling Behavior)*

	Time Play				Money Risked				Money Lost				Max Bet			
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect
<i>Estimate</i>	-.50	.30	.05	-.15	-.51	9.10	19.99	-4.59	-.51	.53	5.30	-.27	-.50	-1.68	-1.29	.85
<i>SE</i>	.21	.46	.69	.25	.21	5.91	12.31	3.01	.21	2.91	5.66	1.47	.21	1.71	2.59	1.06
<i>p</i>	.02*	.52	.95	.55	.02*	.12	.10	.13	.02*	.86	.35	.86	.02*	.32	.62	.42

Note. Estimate = unstandardized beta weight; Indirect = a*b pathway. The a path is partner control behavior to autonomy. The b path is autonomy to gambling behavior. The c' path partner control behavior to gambling behavior, controlling for the indirect path through autonomy. $N = 78$.

Table 4

Moderated-Mediation Results for Hypothesis 1c (Partner Control Behavior → Autonomy → Observed Gambling Behavior)

	Conflict				Neutral				Moderated-Mediation Test		
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	Wald	df	p
Time Play									.30	1	.58
<i>Estimate</i>	-.42	.30	-1.18	-.12	-.62	.63	1.73	-.39			
<i>SE</i>	.31	.64	.52	.30	.28	.64	1.46	.39			
<i>p</i>	.18	.65	.02*	.68	.03*	.33	.24	.31			
Money Risked									.09	1	.76
<i>Estimate</i>	-.41	10.55	14.68	-4.28	-.70	9.08	27.61	-6.36			
<i>SE</i>	.32	8.13	14.36	2.62	.25	8.12	18.72	6.32			
<i>p</i>	.20	.20	.31	.10	.004*	.26	.14	.31			
Money Lost									2.67	1	.10
<i>Estimate</i>	-.41	4.82	2.84	-1.97	-.76	-3.63	7.03	2.75			
<i>SE</i>	.31	3.47	6.27	1.35	.24	3.71	6.77	2.55			
<i>p</i>	.19	.16	.65	.15	.002*	.33	.30	.28			
Max Bet									.38	1	.54
<i>Estimate</i>	-.41	-.65	-.63	.27	-.76	-2.62	-2.53	2.00			
<i>SE</i>	.35	3.50	3.95	1.62	.24	2.67	1.93	2.28			
<i>p</i>	.24	.85	.87	.87	.002*	.33	.19	.38			

Note. Indirect = a*b pathway. The Wald Test examined the significance of the indirect effect between the conflict and neutral groups.

N = 78.

Table 5

Mediation Results for Hypothesis 2bi (Partner-Rated Avoiding Conflict Strategies → Autonomy → Observed Gambling Behavior)

	Time Play				Money Risked				Money Lost				Max Bet			
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect
<i>Estimate</i>	-.28	.49	.41	-.14	-.28	7.66	5.06	-2.11	-.28	-.61	-.79	.17	-.28	-1.53	-.23	.42
<i>SE</i>	.12	.44	.29	-1.00	.12	6.01	4.14	1.84	.12	2.89	2.49	.79	.12	1.52	1.36	.45
<i>p</i>	.02*	.27	.16	.32	.02*	.20	.22	.25	.02*	.83	.75	.83	.02*	.31	.87	.35

Note. Estimate = unstandardized beta weight; Indirect = a*b pathway. The a path is avoiding conflict strategies to autonomy. The b path is autonomy to gambling behavior. The c' path is avoiding conflict strategies to gambling behavior, controlling for the indirect path through autonomy. *N* = 78.

Table 6

Mediation Results for Hypothesis 2bii (Partner-Rated Forcing Conflict Strategies → Autonomy → Observed Gambling Behavior)

	Time Play				Money Risked				Money Lost				Max Bet			
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect
<i>Estimate</i>	-.29	.37	.52	-.11	-.31	8.43	21.62	-2.61	-.30	.12	3.87	-.04	-.33	-1.06	2.50	.35
<i>SE</i>	.20	.44	.61	.16	.18	5.81	10.17	2.26	.18	2.80	5.82	.85	.19	1.51	3.37	.53
<i>p</i>	.14	.40	.39	.50	.09	.15	.03*	.25	.09	.97	.51	.97	.08	.49	.46	.52

Note. Estimate = unstandardized beta weight; Indirect = a*b pathway. The a path is forcing conflict strategies to autonomy. The b path is autonomy to gambling behavior. The c' path is forcing conflict strategies to gambling behavior, controlling for the indirect path through autonomy. *N* = 78.

Table 7

Moderated-Mediation Results for Hypothesis 2ci (Partner-Rated Avoiding Conflict Strategies → Autonomy → Observed Gambling Behavior)

	Conflict				Neutral				Moderated-Mediation Test		
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	Wald	df	p
Time Play									.03	1	.87
<i>Estimate</i>	-.24	.63	.50	-.15	-.33	.32	.35	-.11			
<i>SE</i>	.13	.69	.35	.18	.23	.55	.61	.18			
<i>p</i>	.07	.37	.16	.41	.16	.56	.57	.56			
Money Risked									.02	1	.90
<i>Estimate</i>	-.23	11.48	4.21	-2.66	-.33	6.69	11.94	-2.21			
<i>SE</i>	.13	8.93	4.91	2.66	.23	6.53	7.61	2.31			
<i>p</i>	.07	.20	.39	.32	.16	.31	.12	.34			
Money Lost									2.27	1	.13
<i>Estimate</i>	-.24	5.64	2.20	-1.33	-.35	-6.27	-4.07	2.22			
<i>SE</i>	.13	3.94	2.97	1.35	.23	3.30	3.74	1.93			
<i>p</i>	.07	.15	.46	.32	.13	.06	.28	.25			
Max Bet									.16	1	.69
<i>Estimate</i>	-.23	-.95	-1.53	.22	-.35	-1.60	1.53	.56			
<i>SE</i>	.13	2.17	2.43	.50	.24	1.81	3.09	.67			
<i>p</i>	.07	.66	.53	.66	.15	.38	.62	.41			

Note. Indirect = a*b pathway. The Wald Test examined the significance of the indirect effect between the conflict and neutral groups.

N = 78.

Table 8

Moderated-Mediation Results for Hypothesis 2cii (Partner-Rated Forcing Conflict Strategies → Autonomy → Observed Gambling Behavior)

	Conflict				Neutral				Moderated-Mediation Test		
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	Wald	df	p
Time Play									.14	1	.71
<i>Estimate</i>	-.14	.43	-.65	-.06	-.34	.51	1.40	-.17			
<i>SE</i>	.34	.73	1.13	.17	.23	.54	.54	.25			
<i>p</i>	.67	.56	.57	.71	.14	.34	.01*	.49			
Money Risked									.39	1	.53
<i>Estimate</i>	-.09	9.14	9.38	-.83	-.41	8.84	27.21	-3.62			
<i>SE</i>	.36	8.68	16.50	3.11	.22	6.91	12.52	3.19			
<i>p</i>	.80	.29	.57	.79	.06	.20	.03*	.26			
Money Lost									1.15	1	.28
<i>Estimate</i>	-.09	4.57	8.64	-.45	-.40	-5.46	-2.11	2.20			
<i>SE</i>	.35	3.22	6.96	1.68	.22	3.65	7.27	1.82			
<i>p</i>	.78	.16	.22	.79	.07	.14	.77	.23			
Max Bet									.53	1	.47
<i>Estimate</i>	-.17	.01	6.62	-.002	-.38	-2.34	-1.61	.90			
<i>SE</i>	.34	2.10	7.07	.36	.24	2.50	1.76	1.19			
<i>p</i>	.61	.99	.35	.99	.11	.35	.36	.45			

Note. Indirect = a*b pathway. The Wald Test examined the significance of the indirect effect between the conflict and neutral groups.

N = 78.

Table 9*Mediation Results for Hypothesis 3b (Negative Affect → Coping Motives → Observed Gambling Behavior)*

	Time Play				Money Risked				Money Lost				Max Bet			
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect
<i>Estimate</i>	.004	-.73	.04	-.003	.004	1.36	-.11	.01	.003	11.44	.30	.04	.004	-5.20	-.11	-.02
<i>SE</i>	.01	.62	.03	.006	.01	9.02	.75	.03	.01	4.20	.25	.08	.007	1.51	.13	.03
<i>p</i>	.51	.24	.22	.55	.57	.88	.89	.88	.65	.01*	.24	.63	.59	.001*	.38	.58

Note. Estimate = unstandardized beta weight; Indirect = a*b pathway. The a path is negative affect to coping motives. The b path is coping motives to gambling behavior. The c' path is negative affect to gambling behavior, controlling for the indirect path through coping motives. $N = 78$.

Table 10

Moderated-Mediation Results for Hypothesis 3c (Negative Affect → Coping Motives → Observed Gambling Behavior)

	Conflict				Neutral				Moderated-Mediation Test		
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect	Wald	df	p
Time Play									.20	1	.67
<i>Estimate</i>	.000	-1.77	.03	.000	.01	-.51	.05	-.01			
<i>SE</i>	.004	2.04	.05	.01	.01	.61	.05	.01			
<i>p</i>	.96	.39	.48	.96	.35	.40	.28	.55			
Money Risked									.23	1	.63
<i>Estimate</i>	.000	-13.40	.48	-.004	.01	5.46	-.85	.06			
<i>SE</i>	.004	22.72	.97	.05	.01	7.67	.59	.11			
<i>p</i>	.94	.56	.62	.94	.38	.48	.15	.62			
Money Lost									.63	1	.43
<i>Estimate</i>	.000	10.47	.58	-.004	.01	9.97	.19	.10			
<i>SE</i>	.01	9.19	.27	.05	.01	5.08	.34	.13			
<i>p</i>	.93	.26	.03*	.93	.37	.049*	.57	.42			
Max Bet									.56	1	.45
<i>Estimate</i>	.000	-8.57	-.26	.002	.01	-4.28	.11	-.04			
<i>SE</i>	.004	5.91	.22	.03	.01	1.34	.06	.05			
<i>p</i>	.96	.15	.24	.96	.36	<.001*	.08	.39			

Note. Indirect = a*b pathway. The Wald Test examined the significance of the indirect effect between the conflict and neutral groups.

N = 78.

Table 11*Mediation Results for RQ1a and RQ1b (Problem Gambling Behavior → Family-Work Conflict**→ Absenteeism)*

	Self-Rated Absenteeism				Partner-Rated Absenteeism			
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect
<i>Estimate</i>	.03	.19	.02	.01	.03	.41	-.08	.01
<i>SE</i>	.03	.23	.04	.01	.03	.38	.07	.01
<i>p</i>	.28	.41	.65	.48	.29	.29	.20	.26

Note. Estimate = unstandardized beta weight; Indirect = a*b pathway. The a path is problem gambling behavior to FWC. The b path is FWC to absenteeism. The c' path is problem gambling behavior to absenteeism, controlling for the indirect path through family-work conflict. $N = 78$.

Table 12*Mediation Results for RQ2a and RQ2b (Problem Gambling Behavior → General Cyberloafing**→ Job Performance)*

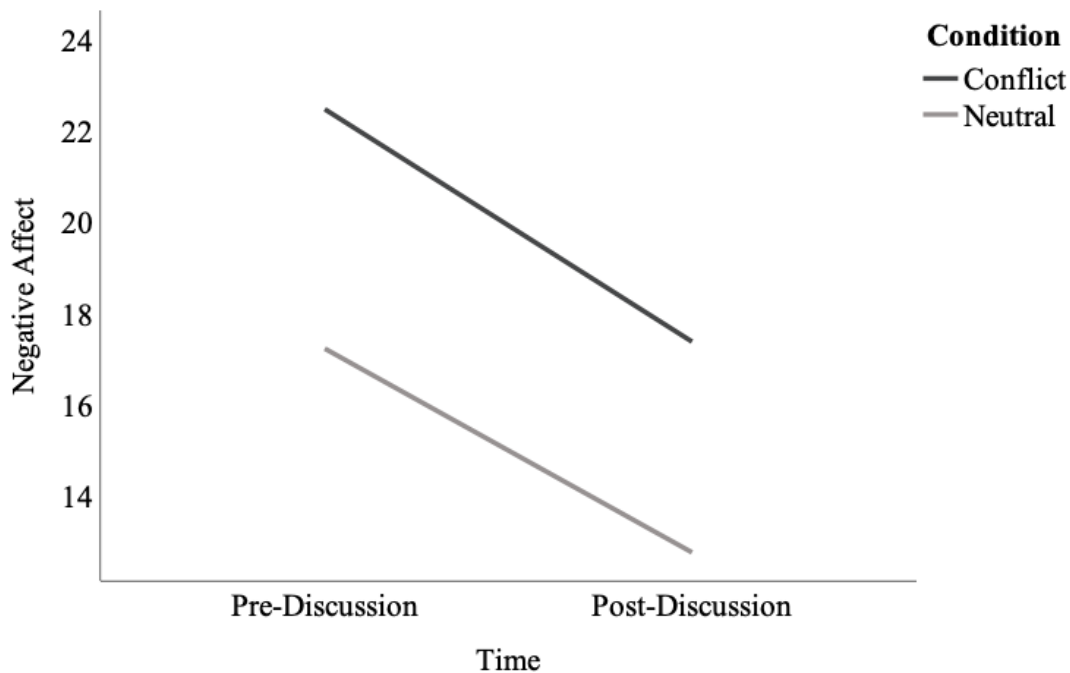
	Self-Rated Job Performance				Partner-Rated Job Performance			
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect
<i>Estimate</i>	.04	-.13	-.01	-.01	.04	-.11	.01	-.004
<i>SE</i>	.03	.09	.02	.004	.03	.09	.02	.004
<i>P</i>	.14	.13	.62	.21	.14	.22	.64	.32

Note. Estimate = unstandardized beta weight; Indirect = a*b pathway. The a path is problem gambling behavior to general cyberloafing. The b path is general cyberloafing to job performance. The c' path is problem gambling behavior to job performance, controlling for the indirect path through general cyberloafing. $N = 78$.

Table 13*Mediation Results for RQ2a and RQ2b (Gambling/Gaming Cyberloafing Sub-Scale Only)*

	Self-Rated Job Performance				Partner-Rated Job Performance			
	a	b	c'	Indirect	a	b	c'	Indirect
<i>Estimate</i>	.11	-.12	-.001	-.01	.11	-.04	.01	-.01
<i>SE</i>	.04	.06	.02	.01	.04	.06	.02	.01
<i>P</i>	.006*	.03*	.97	.04*	.005*	.49	.65	.50

Note. Estimate = unstandardized beta weight; Indirect = a*b pathway. The a path is problem gambling behavior to gambling-gaming cyberloafing. The b path is gambling-gaming cyberloafing to job performance. The c' path is problem gambling behavior to job performance, controlling for the indirect path through gambling/gaming cyberloafing. $N = 78$.

Figure 6*Condition Group Means on Negative Affect*

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to examine whether and how relationship conflict exacerbates gambling behavior. The first aim was to improve our understanding of the reciprocal relationship between couple conflict and gambling behavior by establishing a causal link through a laboratory experiment. The three theory-based pathways believed to explain the conflict-to-gambling link among couples were informed by previous cross-sectional evidence from the alcohol field, along with preliminary evidence from two initial studies this research team conducted under the same Gamblers Awareness Nova Scotia (GANS) grant. The first study found cross-sectional evidence that romantic conflict was linked to gambling problems, through negative affect and coping motives, such that individuals were likely to respond to negative affect following romantic conflict, by gambling to cope (Hagen et al., 2023). The second study extended the first study's findings by examining the chained mediational model in the dyadic context (gambler + partner), by exploring the gambler and their partner's indirect effects on gambling behavior. This study managed to replicate the first study and demonstrated partner-cross-over effects, such that the gambler's conflict enactment led to an increase in gambling problems, through the partner's depressed affect and the gambler's coping motives (Stewart, 2022). Further, the partner's conflict enactment led to an increase in gambling problems for the gambler, through the gambler's depressed affect. Overall, the cross-over effects highlight the importance for both couple members to intervene with partner conflict and partner depressed affect. Given these significant findings, this study sought to extend and to test this relationship in a controlled laboratory setting to establish a causal link from romantic conflict to gambling behavior. The first moderated-mediated pathway hypothesized that negative partner control behavior would lead to increased gambling behavior, through reduced autonomy. The second

pathway theorized a similar relationship, such that conflict style (avoiding and forcing) would lead to increased gambling behavior, through reduced autonomy. The third pathway hypothesized a relationship between negative affect and gambling behavior, mediated by coping motives as in the earlier work by Hagen et al. (2023) and Stewart et al. (2022).

Model 1: Autonomy as a Mediator of Partner Control Behavior and Gambling Behavior

Overall, I found limited evidence to support this hypothesis. In terms of H1b, I found that higher negative partner control behavior led to lower self-felt autonomy. Although H1c was not supported, results indicated that the previously mentioned finding (H1b) was significant for those in the neutral condition, and that this effect did not carry through to impact gambling. This is counter to what would have been expected as I had hypothesized that conflict would exacerbate the mediation of negative partner control behavior to gambling through lowered autonomy. A possible explanation for why negative partner control behavior led to lower autonomy only in the neutral condition could be that because the couple was talking about a topic deemed non-conflictual, if one partner began exhibiting negative/controlling behavior, it could have upset their partner more than if it were a conflictual topic, as there would be no reasonable attribution for the controlling behavior. When in conflict, people engage in an attributional process to explain the cause of the situation or events to themselves (Meier et al., 2013). Depending on the attribution (i.e., what they attributed to the situation), different emotions will be evoked and will affect how they respond (Meier et al., 2013). In general, it is believed that interpersonal conflict (relationship conflict) is attributable to the conflict partner, while disagreements on the content of a task (task conflict) is attributed to the situation (Jehn, 1995). However, there is evidence that task and relationship conflict interact, such that task conflict predicts lower relationship quality, only in the absence of relationship conflict (Meier et al., 2013). Thus, when no other causes for a

disagreement or a conflict are apparent, the conflict partner will receive full attribution. In relation to the present study, if one partner exhibited negative controlling behavior in a situation where no obvious conflict should have emerged (neutral condition), the other partner would be more likely to attribute the conflict solely to their partner (rather than the task - discussion). This would result in the partner feeling a stronger sense of being controlled and less freedom, attributed solely to their partner, leading to a drop in autonomy. However, because the test of moderated mediation was not statistically significant and it is ambiguous whether the manipulation was effective, these interpretations are speculative.

Model 2: Autonomy as a Mediator of Conflict Style and Gambling Behavior

Although the second proposed pathway (Conflict Style – Autonomy – Gambling Behavior) was largely unsupported, there were a few significant individual paths worthy of note. Mediation analyses revealed that partner avoiding behavior led to a decrease in autonomy but did not carry through to affect gambling behavior. This suggests that partner withdrawal of positives (which is a form of punishment) leads to lower autonomy in the other partner. Previously, I hypothesized that partner forcing behavior would lead to a feeling of being controlled, operating against a feeling of autonomy, using Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). However, it could be that it is in fact partner withdrawal behavior, a more hidden form of punishing behavior, that leads to the partner feeling stuck, that they lack control in the situation and cannot bring forth change or repair. It is possible that when a person actively withdraws from their partner during a conversation, they leave their partner feeling as though they have no choice (a lack of autonomy) because they no longer can communicate with their partner to fulfill their goal, whether that goal is solving a conflict, deciding on what to eat for dinner, or simply connecting with their partner while discussing the news. There is evidence in the negotiation

literature that avoiding conflict results in an escalation of conflict, as it prevents the expression of people's interests and opinions (Rahim & Katz, 2020; Wang et al., 2007). Moreover, the workplace literature also highlights that conflict avoiders experience more task and relationship conflict (Friedman et al., 2000). Nevertheless, it is interesting that the effect of avoidant conflict style on lowered autonomy did not translate into increased gambling behavior. Since this sample consisted of relatively low moderate-risk gamblers, it is likely that their partner's avoidant behavior and lowered autonomy was not strong enough to elicit maladaptive behavior (i.e., gambling) and that maybe in a group of high-risk to problem gamblers this effect would carry through. No research to my knowledge has directly examined the effect partner avoidant behavior has on addictive behavior. However, it is well-established in the attachment literature that people with an avoidant attachment style tend to provoke frustration and anger in their partners, leading to aggressive responding, resentment, and contempt (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Roloff & Cloven, 1990). It has also been argued that partners of those who withdraw often, interpret them withdrawing as devaluing them and the relationship, contributing to an increase in negative emotion (Loving et al., 2009). It could be interesting to further examine how the interaction of partner attachment styles could affect gambling behavior.

Mediation analyses also revealed that partner forcing behavior led to more money risked, while controlling for autonomy. When examining this relationship between both groups (conflict and neutral condition), increased partner forcing behavior led to longer time spent gambling and more money risked for the neutral condition only, but again not through autonomy.

Although these findings are relatively in line with what was expected, there must be another variable that explains this link. An alternative explanation could be that partner forcing behavior could lead to increased gambling through self-medication, a similar concept to coping motives.

Self-medication theory for addictive disorders posits that the addictive substance or behavior works to relieve or change a range of negative affective states (Khantzian, 1997). More specifically, individuals choose a particular substance or behavior because of its ability to relieve, augment, or control emotions that they cannot control on their own (Khantzian, 1990). Although this theory is primarily applied to substance use contexts, it could be used to explain a lesser severe version of the motivation to escape emotions that one is unable to control on their own. Self-medicating in this context would refer to gambling to self-regulate and/or control their emotions, following their partners forcing conflict behavior. It is conceivable that partner forcing behavior may elicit negative emotions in a partner, especially during a neutral discussion when there is no obvious attributable reason for the negative behavior. In this case, a partner may want to forget and/or escape their emotions by self-medicating (i.e., gambling), as behavioral addictions such as gambling, are known to arouse feelings of relief and pleasure (Grant et al., 2010). Accordingly, research has found that following conflict, there is an increase in risk taking propensity (Atkinson, 1957; Ghosh, 1993). Finally, a similar attributional explanation from the first model could be applied in this context, whereby in a neutral discussion, there is no obvious attributional reason for why a partner would be engaging in forcing conflict behavior, leading the partner to attribute the conflict solely to their partner (rather than the discussion), leading them to engage in negative behavior (i.e., gambling).

TAT theory (Tett et al., 2021) was applied to explain why the mediational effect would be triggered more in couples in the conflict condition compared to the neutral condition for Models 1 and 2 in the current study. More specifically, this theory sought to explain how the situational cue (conflict discussion) would trigger the manifestation of certain individual traits (i.e., partner control behavior, avoiding conflict style, and forcing conflict style), resulting in the

exacerbation of gambling behavior. To my knowledge, this is the first study to apply this theory to a clinically-oriented context, outside of an organizational context. Although no moderated mediation effects were found for either Model 1 or 2, meaning there were no differences in situational cue between the conflict and neutral groups, it does not necessarily call into question the utility of the TAT theory. Importantly, the efficacy of the manipulation is ambiguous, such that although the conflict and neutral groups significantly differed in levels of negative affect, negative affect decreased significantly from pre to post discussion among both the conflict and neutral groups. Thus, it is possible that the situational cue (invoking conflict) was not strong enough to elicit the desired traits (e.g., avoiding and forcing conflict style) to be expressed. It is also possible that a laboratory context could have worked against the activation of the desired traits, as TAT theory is primarily employed to explain behavior manifestation in less controlled, more natural contexts (such as in the workplace). Finally, it is also possible that the knowledge of being audio and video recorded during the discussion task could have acted as a competing situational cue, leading participants to suppress certain traits and change their behavior in response to their awareness of being watched (i.e., Hawthorne effect). Overall, a stronger and more effective manipulation of situational cues (conflict vs. neutral condition) is needed to demonstrate TAT's ability to explain the behavioral sequence in a clinical laboratory setting.

Model 3: Coping Motives as a Mediator of Negative Affect and Gambling Behavior

While controlling for the dyadic nature of the data, results revealed that in line with H3a, the conflict group exhibited higher negative affect post discussion compared to the neutral group. Considering the data showed group differences in negative affect, such that the conflict condition had higher scores post-discussion compared to the neutral condition, coupled with the Mixed ANOVA showing that both groups displayed a significant decrease in negative affect post

discussion, suggests that the manipulation could have been less effective at evoking couple conflict than intended. Ultimately, the efficacy of the manipulation is ambiguous, as negative affect should not have been higher pre-discussion. Nevertheless, results revealed that participants' positive affect was unchanged from pre to post discussion, suggesting that the method was successful at producing a proper control group. As explained in the Method section, participants had the opportunity to assign topics according to the category that produced the corresponding affect for them (positive, negative, or neutral), and then rank the topics by severity. This methodology was meant to ensure there was a true control condition, where the discussion was truly neutral in emotional tone. To my knowledge, this study is the first to design the dyadic discussion methodology in this manner. Ultimately, the revised manipulation was not effective at invoking higher negative affect (e.g., conflict) but was successful at safeguarding against eliciting positive affect. All results taken together; it is likely that the manipulation was not strong enough to elicit the desired effects.

There were some notable challenges with the manipulation that could have contributed to it being less effective in the current study. First, the negative affect measure asked participants to report what they were feeling in the current moment (after the discussion) rather than what they were feeling during the discussion. Consequently, what could have been captured is the resolution of negative emotions after talking through an unresolved conflict, resulting in an unexpected decrease in negative affect. This could have worked against seeing group differences in coping motives or in gambling behavior. Second, due to a lack of habituation data because of the heart rate vests malfunctioning, it is possible that couples were not sufficiently habituated to the novel environment in the laboratory. Although participants took approximately 30 minutes to complete the pre-surveys (considered a calming task) prior to completing the negative affect

measure and the Couples Issue Checklist, it is still possible that they were not properly habituated. Moreover, the invasive fitting of the heart rate vests (i.e., participants having to put the heart rate vest on under their clothing) could have also induced greater negative affect, providing another explanation for why negative affect was higher at baseline in both groups. Third, one possibility for why negative affect decreased in both groups following the discussion task, is that simply communicating with a partner may have had a calming or positive effect on the participants' emotions, ultimately decreasing negative affect. It is well-established that simply communicating with a partner builds connection and can lead to numerous positive relationship outcomes, such as improved attachment (Givertz & Safford, 2011), satisfaction (Burlinson & Denton, 1997), and intimacy (Emmers-Sommer, 2004). Nevertheless, the positive effects of communication in relationships does depend on the type of communication patterns and communication style each partner is exerting (Overall & McNulty, 2017). Given that this study was conducted directly after months of isolation due to COVID-19, couples may have perceived a laboratory experiment as a new and novel activity to do together, increasing their likelihood of communicating effectively. Research supports the claim that participating in shared novel activities increases overall relational quality, more specifically promoting desire and satisfaction in established romantic couples (Aron et al., 2002; Muise et al., 2019; Raposo et al., 2020). Conversely, the increased social tension and anxiety that has been seen in post-COVID interactions, in addition to the uncertainty and awkwardness that could be felt in a laboratory setting, could have resulted in couples feeling a sense of ease when they had the opportunity to communicate and interact with their partner in the experiment.

Previous research using very similar conflict manipulation methodologies has been successful at eliciting desired affective outcomes like increased negative affect (Levenson &

Gottman, 1983; Vater & Schroder-Abe, 2015; Rehman et al., 2011). Nevertheless, this method comes with its limitations. It has been previously proposed that couples should be assigned the same neutral topic, to reduce variability in emotional responding. This has been commonly done in the social psychology literature, using a topic such as weekend plans (e.g., Levenson & Gottman, 1983). Although it tends to produce the desired manipulation in terms of eliciting greater negative affect in the conflict condition than in the “neutral” control condition, this “neutral” control tends to induce positive emotions (Power et al., 2006). Studies like Levenson and Gottman (1983) have used the “neutral” topic as a warmup to prepare the couple for the conflictual discussion, therefore implying that the neutral topic was being utilized to make couples feel at ease (i.e., Sels et al., 2019; Vater & Schroder-Abe, 2015). Consequently, it is possible that with a truly neutral condition, some of the research findings using this method would not find the same effects. Despite these speculations, the results suggest that this specific population of couples were generally well-bonded, happy, and satisfied (indicated by below normative scores on FWC and forcing conflict style). Thus, it could be that couples high in distress may not have wanted or had the emotional capability to come to a study that required a conflictual discussion. Addressing the relationship distress may have required all their available attention, reducing the likelihood that they would engage in other activities in general, such as research. Perhaps future research could consider recruiting from clinical sources to reach the more distressed couples.

Although there was no evidence of moderated mediation for H3c, results revealed that in line with what was expected, increased coping motives led to increased money lost. However, increased coping motives led to a decrease in the number of times the max bet option was selected, in the opposite direction of what was predicted. This study used four different observed

outcomes as indicators of problem gambling, namely time spent gambling, money lost, money risked, and number of times selecting the max bet option. Although they are all prevalent and regularly used indicators of gambling, they are not all examining the same aspects of gambling behavior. More specifically, the number of times selecting the max bet option, along with a common indicator (amount wagered) are considered indices of risk taking (Flepp et al., 2021; Rudisser et al., 2017; Suhonen & Saastamoinen, 2018). Amount wagered was not a variable of interest in this study, as the design of the laboratory experiment did not allow participants to wager their own money, rather participants were all provided with a fixed amount of \$50 to wager. The more an individual gambles to cope might not be reflected in increased risk taking, but rather other aspects of gambling, such as money lost. To explain the negative relationship that was found, there is literature that suggests that people high in neuroticism (e.g., anxious people) are more likely to engage in coping-related addictive behaviors, and these individuals tend to be risk-averse (Chinneck et al., 2018; Marciano et al., 2022; Marengo et al., 2020; Oehler & Widlich, 2018). This might explain why coping motives are associated with lower scores on the risk-taking index of gambling (Max Bet), compared to the other indices. Overall, these results suggest that the link between gambling coping motives to degree of gambling behavior must occur through a route other than risk taking during gambling.

Another possible reason for why the manipulation had limited effects is that this study used a trait-based measure of gambling motives (i.e., GMQ) that was positioned before the manipulation (the conflict vs. neutral discussion). Future research could consider using a state-based measure and asking participants the motives behind their gambling after the discussion task. Accordingly, future research may investigate the mediation effects of coping motives (as a state measure) on the relationship between romantic conflict and gambling behavior.

Model 4: Family-Work Conflict as a Mediator of Problem Gambling and Absenteeism

The second aim of this study sought to understand the relationship between problem gambling and work outcomes, given the extensive negative effects gambling can have on individuals' family and work lives. Two theory-based pathways were tested. The first mediational pathway examined the relationship between problem gambling and absenteeism, through family-work conflict. Overall, there is consistent evidence in the workplace literature that individuals exhibiting a high level of stress are more likely to be absent from work (Jacobson et al., 1996). Additionally, there is evidence of gambling behavior producing strain-based interference with work (Eby et al., 2020), along with evidence of role-based strain between gambling and being a married/working spouse (Van der Mass, 2016). Considering the negative effects problem gambling generates within the individual and the family (i.e., anxiety, depression, increased conflict, poor communication, money difficulties), it is conceivable that gamblers would tend to be absent from work more often due to gambling and family-related stressors.

I found no significant effects for the first mediational pathway (neither the individual pathways nor the indirect effect), examining problem gambling, family-work conflict, and absenteeism. For both the self and partner ratings of absenteeism, many couples reported 0 hours missed, exhibiting low variability. This study examined absenteeism using only a single item, asking participants to estimate the number of hours missed during a typical work week. Whilst measures like this one (e.g., Ronan, 1963) are regularly used by researchers, single item measures commonly lack content validity and have poor stability over time. Absenteeism is also known to be difficult to measure accurately. Muchinsky (1977) notes that absenteeism is an ambiguous construct, given the lack of agreement on what "employee withdrawal behavior"

refers to and its overarching lack of reliable and valid measurement. One possibility for obtaining more accurate and objective absenteeism ratings could be to partner with workplaces, as most organizations track absenteeism in employees (e.g., sick days).

Moreover, with the recent shift to remote work, it is possible that what constitutes absenteeism may have shifted, with the lines being even more blurred as to which behaviors are truly indicative of workplace withdrawal behavior. People also tend to underreport their absenteeism (Johns & Miraglia, 2015) due to social desirability effects, as absenteeism is generally regarded negatively. Partner-rated absenteeism was added as a secondary hypothesis to this study to try to mitigate this problem. Nevertheless, one possible reason for finding a lack of effects is on account of measurement difficulty. It is likely that this study failed to capture the intricacies of employee absenteeism, by only using a single-item measure that asked about the frequency of time lost in an average work week. Future research may consider using a measure that better captures the overall construct of absenteeism (e.g., examining attitudinal withdrawal, frequency, and severity of time lost) to improve the reliability of self and partner-reported absenteeism (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1971; Huse & Taylor, 1962).

Overall, participants reported very minimal family-work conflict, in comparison to other studies, indicating that the overall sample consisted of relatively low-conflict, well-bonded couples. Research is extremely mixed regarding the increase or decrease of family-work conflict during and following COVID-19. While many researchers found that family-work conflict increased (Karakose et al., 2021; Elahi et al., 2022), others found evidence of a decrease in family-work conflict (Graham et al., 2021; Toscano et al., 2022). Further, research examining the current state of remote work, following the shift due to COVID-19, is still underway. Therefore, our understanding of how workplace constructs operate has likely shifted. Although many

factors are at play that may influence family-work conflict (e.g., autonomy, having children, work design, conflict), it is possible that the increase in remote work and hybrid arrangements has mitigated, or acted as a protective factor against the negative effects that family-work conflict exerts on work outcomes. In a sample of gamblers specifically, working from home may allow for more time to deal with gambling-related stressors (e.g., physical, and mental health concerns, marital conflict, financial difficulties). Future research may benefit from clarifying how these constructs may have shifted to adapt to the new workplace, prior to applying them to a gambling context. Once a greater understanding of how these constructs interact among a sample of average workers is achieved, we can then move towards understanding how they may differ for a population of gamblers. Given that little is known about the adverse effects of problem gambling on workplace outcomes, it would be misguided to completely discard the proposed theory based on the results of this study alone. Accordingly, it is possible that the proposed mediations may hold in a sample of high-risk/problem gamblers.

Model 5: Cyberloafing as a Mediator of Problem Gambling and Job Performance

The second mediational pathway tested whether problem gambling was related to job performance, through cyberloafing. To my knowledge, this is the first study that has attempted to link problem gambling to cyberloafing and job performance. In so much as online gambling is one form of cyberloafing, this study sought to examine the impact of all forms of cyberloafing, including that of online gambling. Although numerous reasons for why people engage in cyberloafing in the workplace have been identified, one notable reason related to this study suggests that cyberloafing acts as a coping mechanism to escape personal stress, job stress, and to resolve private work demands (Koay et al., 2017). Similar to the reasoning offered in the previous hypothesis, the significant stressors that gamblers experience are likely to result in an

increase in overall stress and private life demands that may interfere with their work and require their immediate attention. Although the impact that cyberloafing exerts on organizational outcomes has received mixed findings in the literature, there is some agreement that severe forms of cyberloafing (e.g., online gambling) have more negative consequences on workplace outcomes (Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Lim & Chen, 2012).

Overall, cyberloafing was found to mediate the relationship between problem gambling and self-rated job performance, but only for the gambling/gaming cyberloafing scale specifically. There was no significant mediation when considering general cyberloafing behavior, indicating that gamblers are not all-encompassing cyber-loafers who slack off at work more than the general population. Rather, these findings allude to the probability that those who gamble may lack the self-control to adequately control their gambling behavior, resulting in them gambling at inappropriate times, such as during working hours. It is conceivable that in a sample of truly problematic gamblers, this effect could be even stronger, as problem gamblers would be more likely to gamble more frequently and at a higher level, even during working hours. This could have far-reaching consequences for workplaces, as job performance would likely decrease. Accordingly, organizations may want to consider stepping in, by offering targeted interventions for problem gambling. Overall, this finding is one of the first to establish preliminary cross-sectional evidence of an association between problem gambling and job performance, through gambling-gaming specific cyberloafing. Future research may choose to further examine this relationship, particularly in a sample of high-risk and/or true problem gamblers.

Limitations

There were several limitations that affected the results of this study. As alluded to previously, the manipulation was likely weakened, due to several factors. The post-manipulation

measure of negative affect asked how participants felt after the discussion, rather than asking how they felt during the discussion. This oversight could have led to the possibility of capturing the resolution of negative feelings, after talking through an unresolved conflict, explaining why negative affect decreased following the conflictual discussion. Further, it is likely that the manipulation task (The Couples Issue Checklist) was too complex for many participants. In an estimated 60% of the sessions, participants struggled to comprehend how to complete the checklist and rank the topics, requiring the experimenter to re-explain the task (sometimes numerous times). In addition, there were numerous difficulties and inconsistencies getting the heart rate vests functioning properly, specifically getting them to sync to the system at the beginning of many of the lab sessions. New ways of putting on the vests, syncing the vests, changing the heart rate monitor in the vests were trialed throughout the study. The lack of consistency led to delays in starting the lab sessions and could have contributed to participant discomfort with adjusting the vests. Further, the baseline heart rate was taken without a habituation period, potentially contributing to an inappropriate baseline for negative affect. The purpose behind utilizing a heart rate vest, rather than a less invasive method such as a less intrusive wearable device (e.g., Fitbit, Oura Ring, Garmin) was because the vest was set up to sync with the laboratory audio and visual system, ensuring the data was captured most accurately and effectively. Despite the clear benefits this system provided the research team, the act of removing one's clothing in an already stressful and unfamiliar setting could have provoked participants' negative affect prior to even starting the experiment. Accordingly, a less invasive and simpler method should be used to measure heart rate, such as the use of a Fitbit, that allows for a proper habituation period. However, this would need to be balanced against the decreased accuracy of this psychophysiology method. Next, at various points throughout the study, the

VLT machines experienced a paper jam or would re-start suddenly. This sometimes resulted in a delay in having the participants gamble directly following their discussion, which could have affected their gambling behavior by increasing the delay between the manipulation and outcome assessment. Although technological failures are difficult to prevent, specific training on managing the VLT machines could be offered to the research assistants to help mitigate this difficulty.

Regarding the overall implementation of the study, the script that all research assistants followed when guiding participants through their lab session, lacked specificity, and was altered several times throughout the study. Given the length of the session and the complexity of the experiment, small discrepancies and/or new pitfalls would appear, prompting a change or an addition to the script. Going forward, the script could be made more specific with a more precise description of what to do in each circumstance. Additionally, several research assistants were trained (i.e., 8) throughout the study, as some assistants left mid-way through, with others joining as replacements. Although all research assistants were trained, there may have existed individual variability with how each person would run a session. Going forward, it would be better to have a smaller group of fully trained research assistants for the entirety of the study to decrease individual variability.

Notably, this study sought to recruit a sample of predominantly high-risk to problem gamblers. However, participants were classified at the low end of moderate-risk gamblers. It is possible that those with more gambling problems experience more troubles with their partner and are perhaps unwilling to bring their partner into a laboratory setting to be studied, to avoid further conflict. Another alternative explanation is that problem gamblers may be hiding their gambling from their partner. Accordingly, future research should consider recruiting from a

clinical sample of gamblers, ensuring the study would happen before treatment begins (e.g., those on the waitlist). This study also chose to examine the conflict-to-gambling relationship among a group of couples who were both gamblers. It could be that high-risk or problem gamblers are more likely to be with a non-gambler or a low-risk gambler. The findings may be quite different among couples where one partner is a gambler and the other not, as the relationship dynamics could be very different. It is possible that these hypotheses hold for only gambler-non-gambler partner pairings.

As with all laboratory experiments, ecological validity is also a consideration. For this study specifically, a real gambling/casino setting has numerous VLTs and other casino games, where people are free to interact and communicate while gambling. The MAAC gambling lab is set up to be as realistic as possible (i.e., to resemble a small bar with VLTs) but participants were not permitted to speak to one another or to drink while playing the VLT games. Nevertheless, conducting this study in a controlled environment allowed for the reduction of common issues associated with self-report data (e.g., social desirability effects, confounds) for our gambling outcome measures. A limitation with the current design of the study was that participants did not have to gamble their own hard-earned money, as they were given \$50 pre-loaded in the VLT machine. It is possible that participants gambled differently or did not feel as great of a loss when gambling, as they were essentially gambling with “free money”. Nevertheless, it is a step toward increased ecological validity, relative to studies where participants played with preassigned credits rather than real money. Future research should continue in this direction by prioritizing ecological validity when designing lab-based gambling experiments, aiming to evoke the emotions and behavior gamblers would display in a naturalistic gambling setting more closely.

Implications and Conclusion

The two broad aims of this study were to first further our understanding of how couple conflict can exacerbate gambling behavior, along with establishing a baseline understanding of how problem gambling relates to work outcomes. The importance of exploring these relationships is exemplified by the negative outcomes associated with problem gambling for the self (e.g., low self-esteem, anxiety, depression), for relationships (e.g., impaired family and other interpersonal relationships, divorce, increased violence, financial difficulties), and at work (e.g., increased cyberloafing, reduced productivity, theft). Overall, the hypotheses involving the conflict manipulation (Models 1 through 3) were largely unsupported, likely because the weakened manipulation minimized the impacts on variables above and beyond negative affect. Nonetheless, predicted effects of punishing partner control strategies and avoidant/forcing conflict management strategies did reduce autonomy, along with forcing conflict management strategies showing an increase in gambling behavior. Although effects for Models 1 through 3 were tested in each discussion condition (conflict vs, neutral) separately, this probing was not supported with evidence of moderated mediation. Thus, findings that the effects were evident only in the neutral condition must be interpreted with caution. This is particularly relevant given the mixed support for the efficacy of the experimental manipulation of conflict.

Despite the lack of research findings, previous cross-sectional evidence has found support for the proposed theories. In so much that this sample consisted of a population of moderate-risk gamblers that were seemingly low-conflict and well-bonded couples, there is a need to re-examine these theories in a sample of high-risk and/or problem gamblers and consider recruiting a sample of couples, consisting of gambler/non-gambler pairings.

Regarding the second aim of the study, one of the two proposed mediations was supported. Cyberloafing was found to mediate the relationship between problem gambling and

self-rated job performance, for the gambling/gaming cyberloafing scale specifically. Given that this mediational effect was found in a sample of low-moderate risk gamblers, this suggests relevance for a broad range of people in the workplace. This finding highlights the reality that addictions and addictive behavior can infiltrate organizations, lending support for the claim that gambling can have a negative impact on employees, and subsequently negatively affect organizational outcomes. Workplaces can work to establish safe and healthy work environments and attempt to mitigate the negative impact gambling has, by offering targeted interventions to address problematic gambling. Future research may consider examining this relationship longitudinally, specifically in a sample of high-risk and/or problem gamblers. Additionally, future studies may consider examining the impact gambling behavior has on other employee outcomes (e.g., engagement, commitment) and at the organization level (e.g., productivity, expenditures). Overall, interventions for gambling should involve an understanding of people's holistic life and gambling's impact on the relationship/family unit as well as examining further the impacts of relationship factors on their problem gambling behavior. Successful treatment of problem gambling should involve romantic partners and consider the impact that gambling behavior has on employment and career success, as work is a foundational part of life that provides us with purpose and meaning in life.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Advertisement

Dalhousie University Research Study

The *Dalhousie Mood, Anxiety, and Addiction Co-Morbidity (MAAC) Lab* is looking for participants for a couple's study!

Study Requirements:

- Have been in a relationship for at least 3 months
- 19 years or older
- You gamble at least 1x a week
- Your partner has gambled at least once in their life
- You both have experience gambling on a VLT
- Work a minimum of 10 hours per week

Please contact the MAAC lab Research Coordinator:
Pam Collins at 902-494-6488 / pam.collins@dal.ca

Replies to this Ad and participation in the study will be strictly confidential. Couples will be compensated \$80 each and/or University credit points for a 2-hour study.

Appendix B – Recruitment Message for SONA Participants

Hello, based on your completion of the pre-screen on SONA, you may be eligible for our study looking at communication dynamics in couples. The study takes approximately 2 hours to complete, and takes part in the Dalhousie Mood, Anxiety and Alcohol Co-Morbidity (MAAC) Lab. As compensation for your time, you and your partner will each receive \$80 plus keep any winnings, and/or eligible credit points. Please email the MAAC Lab Research Coordinator at pam.collins@dal.ca for a telephone screening.

Appendix C – Telephone Screening

Hello, may I talk to _____? How are you? My name is _____, and I am a research assistant for Dr. Sherry Stewart at Dalhousie University. I am calling you because you left a message on our machine the other day about our research study. Is this right?

This research will be conducted on the Dalhousie University campus in our MAAC Lab. Couples will be randomly assigned to a conflict vs. neutral discussion followed by the opportunity to rate various games on a VLT machine. The study will take approximately 2 hours to complete, and you will each receive \$80 remuneration in cash (or eligible credit points) and \$50 to gamble on a VLT playing a variety of games.

At this point, we are scheduling appointments for our study. The following series of questions are for determining if you can be included into the study. Some of these questions are of a personal nature. Please be assured that your answers will be immediately discarded if you are deemed ineligible for the study.

(1) How old are you? _____

If under 19 → go to (Z)

(2) Are you currently in a romantic relationship? Yes____ No____

If no → go to (Z)

(3) Have you been in your current romantic relationship for at least 3 months? Yes____

No____

If no → go to (Z)

(4) Have you ever gambled on a VLT machine? Yes____ No____

If no → go to (Z)

(5) Has your current romantic partner ever gambled on a VLT machine? Yes____ No____

If no → go to (Z)

(6) Are you currently abstaining from gambling? Yes____ No____

If yes → go to (Z)

(7) Do you work a minimum of 10 hours per week? Yes____ No____

If no → go to (Z)

Thank you so much! You are eligible to participate in this study. Now I can schedule a research session for you.

(Z) Sorry, but you are not eligible for this study. Thank you for your time and your interest.

Appendix D – Informed Consent (Main Gambler)

Project Title: The Effects of Dyadic Conflict and Gambling Behavior on Work Outcomes

Lead Researcher:

Dr. Sherry Stewart
Co-Supervisor
Department of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience
Dalhousie University
Email: sherry.stewart@dal.ca

Co-Investigators:

Dr. Debra Gilin, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS;
Dr. Lindsey Rodriguez, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, FL;
Dr. Simon Sherry, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS;
Dr. Sean Mackinnon, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS;
Dr. Igor Yakovenko, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS;
Dr. Raquel Nogueira-Arjona, Sussex University, UK.

Student Researcher:

Christine Novitsky, B.A. (Hons.)
Graduate Student
Department of Psychology
Saint Mary's University
Email: christine.novitsky@smu.ca

Funding Provided By: Gambling Awareness Nova Scotia (GANS)

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by Dr. Sherry Stewart, who is a researcher at Dalhousie University. Your participation is voluntary.

Purpose of the Research Study: Our objective of this study is to examine behavioral interactions in conflict discussion in romantic dyads. In a separate add on to this study, we also wish to have you, as a gambler, play a few different games on our VLT machines to rate the ease of play and enjoyment. This rating will be used in another upcoming study once we have had a chance to analyze responses and game preferences.

Who Can Take Part in the Research Study: We are looking for a total of 60 adult romantic couples in which both members gamble. You can be in the study if you are 19 years of age or older, currently be in a romantic relationship of any type (e.g., heterosexual, homosexual, married, cohabiting, dating, etc.) for at least three months, and be working a minimum of 10 hours per week. Couples must contain one member that is a current regular gambler, defined as gambling at least 1-7 times per week, and have experience gambling using VLT machines. The other member of the couple is required to have gambled at least once in their lifetime using a VLT machine. Both members of the couple should not be currently abstaining from gambling.

What You Will Be Asked to Do: If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to attend one visit to the MAAC lab in the Department of Psychology at Dalhousie University for approximately 2 hours. During the visit you will be asked to read and sign the informed consent. Then you will be fitted with a vest that will measure your heart rate throughout the study. This study will involve a single in-laboratory session consisting of 3 parts each described in more detail below:

1. **Part 1:** You will complete a series of online questionnaires on feelings, relationships, work, and lifestyle behaviors including gambling. Demographic information will also be collected. Completing these questionnaires will take approximately 45 minutes. We ask that you and your partner complete the task separately and do not converse during this task.
2. **Part 2:** After completion of the questionnaires, you and your partner will be asked to engage in a 15-minute discussion either about an everyday topic or an unresolved problem topic you two have experienced in your relationship. During this time, a researcher in a different room will be observing your conversation with your partner via video and audio recording.
3. **Part 3:** You and your partner will be provided the opportunity to play VLT games for up to 15 minutes. Afterwards, you will be asked about your perceptions of the VLT games you chose to play. During this time, a researcher in a different room will be observing you and your partner's game play via video and audio recording. We ask that you and your partner complete the task separately and do not converse while playing the VLTs.

Upon completion, you will receive your compensation and provided the opportunity to discuss any concerns you may have. You will be debriefed and given a summary of the study findings at a later date, once all participants have been completed the study.

Possible Benefits of Taking Part in This Research: Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others, such as an increased understanding of how couples cope with conflict, which will eventually be helpful in informing interventions for solving relationship conflict.

Possible Risks of Taking Part in This Research: Although we usually find it unlikely, you could experience slight discomfort being asked questions about your psychological and behavioral reactions to the questionnaires, as some questions are about your romantic interactions, and about your gambling. For example:

- You may experience distress as a result of discussing an unresolved problem with your romantic partner or from completing questionnaires about your gambling.
- If you are a Dalhousie student, you may feel pressures to participate in the SONA Subject Pool so you can receive credit points.
- You may feel uncomfortable knowing the conversation with your partner, and your

video game playing are being audio and video recorded.

There is also a potential conflict of interest if you personally know the research assistant conducting your in-laboratory session. If this is the case, another research assistant will conduct the experiment to ensure you do not feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, you may not feel comfortable knowing that you and your partner's interaction is being both video and audio recorded. If this is the case, you can request that video and audio recording data be withdrawn.

Information Gathered: Your information will not be shared outside the research team. You will be given an ID number at the beginning of the study. All data files from this study will contain only this ID number. Your personal contact information (i.e., name or contact information) will not be part of study data files. The online questionnaires will not be stored with your personal information (e.g., name, email address). Electronic versions of the data will be kept in a password protected computer in the locked MAAC lab of Dr. Stewart. Electronic versions of the data will not include your name or contact information. We will keep any written data files for this study for a total of 5 years, after which time they will be destroyed via Shredder Company. The only people who will have access to your raw data are trained research assistants, Dr. Sherry Stewart, and co-investigators (Dr. Sean MacKinnon and Dr. Debra Gilin).

Your responses are kept secret from your romantic partner. You will not be able to see the responses of your partner (and they cannot see your responses). We encourage you not to discuss your responses to the questionnaires with your romantic partner until the completion of the study, as this may change your future responses. Your individual data will not be presented in any written reports. All data will be summarized and presented at the group level so that no single person can be identified from the results.

Compensation: Each member of the couple will receive \$80 for participating in the study. You will also each receive \$50 to play the VLT games, for up to 15 minutes. Whatever you win over and above that \$50, and whatever money is left over, you may keep. Students in an eligible Dalhousie psychology or neuroscience course will have the option to accept up to 2.0 course credits (0.5 credit per half hour) for their participation in place of the \$80 compensation. Students will also have the option to accept a combination of financial compensation and course credit, in one of three different forms. 1) \$20 in financial compensation and 1.5 course credits, 2) \$40 in financial compensation and 1.0 course credit, or 3) \$60 in financial compensation and 0.5 course credit.

Options if You Change Your Mind About Taking Part in The Research: You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to participate now, but then later decide you are no longer interested, you may still withdraw from the study. To withdraw from the study, please contact Dr. Sherry Stewart or Christine Novitsky, and let one of them know that you'd like your data to be removed from the study. Once you receive your compensation, you will be allotted one week to decide if you would like to withdraw your data from the current study.

Research Participants Rights and Protection: The Dalhousie University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research with the guidance of the TCPS 2 based on three core principles:

Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice. If you have any questions or concerns at any time about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, please contact ethics@dal.ca or 902-494-3423.

Should you wish to discuss the project or your participation in more detail please feel free to contact one of the researchers via e-mail or phone.

Dissemination of Research Results: We will provide you with a debriefing and a short description of group results when the study is finished. No individual results will be provided. You can obtain these results by calling 902-494-6488 and speaking with Pam Collins (Dr. Stewart's Lab Coordinator).

Agreement: I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree to take part in this research study.

I understand that I have been asked to take part in a study in the MAAC Lab at Dalhousie University for approximately 2 hours, and that part of the study will be recorded on videotape.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time without penalty.

I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Name

Signature

Date

Please provide a phone number and/or email address below so that we can debrief you on the study after we reach 60 couples and send you a summary of the study results.

Email: _____

Phone: _____

If you have any questions you need answered before signing, please call 902-943-3661. Once you sign the informed consent, please save a copy for yourself and send the signed consent form to Pam Collins (the MAAC Lab Research Coordinator at pam.collins@dal.ca), or bring it with you to the MAAC Lab.

Appendix E – Informed Consent (Partner)

Project Title: The Effects of Dyadic Conflict and Gambling Behavior on Work Outcomes

Lead Researcher:

Dr. Sherry Stewart
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Co-Investigators:

Dr. Debra Gilin, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS;
Dr. Lindsey Rodriguez, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, FL;
Dr. Simon Sherry, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS;
Dr. Sean Mackinnon, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS;
Dr. Igor Yakovenko, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS;
Dr. Raquel Nogueira-Arjona, Sussex University, UK.

Student Researcher:

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Department of Psychology
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Funding Provided By: Gambling Awareness Nova Scotia (GANS)

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by Dr. Sherry Stewart, who is a researcher at Dalhousie University. Your participation is voluntary.

Purpose of the Research Study: Our objective of this study is to examine behavioral interactions in conflict discussion in romantic dyads. In a separate add on to this study, we also wish to have you, as a gambler, play a few different games on our VLT machines to rate the ease of play and enjoyment. This rating will be used in another upcoming study once we have had a chance to analyze responses and game preferences.

Who Can Take Part in the Research Study: We are looking for a total of 60 adult romantic couples in which both members gamble. You can be in the study if you are 19 years of age or older, currently be in a romantic relationship of any type (e.g., heterosexual, homosexual, married, cohabiting, dating, etc.) for at least three months, and be working a minimum of 10 hours per week. Couples must contain one member that is a current regular gambler, defined as gambling at least 1-7 times per week, and have experience gambling using VLT machines. The other member of the couple is required to have gambled at least once in their lifetime using a VLT machine. Both members of the couple should not be currently abstaining from gambling.

What You Will Be Asked to Do: If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to attend one visit to the MAAC lab in the Department of Psychology at Dalhousie University for approximately 2 hours. During the visit you will be asked to read and sign the informed consent. Then you will be fitted with a vest that will measure your heart rate throughout the study. This study will involve a single in-laboratory session consisting of 3 parts each described in more detail below:

1. **Part 1:** You will complete a series of online questionnaires on feelings, relationships, work, and lifestyle behaviors including gambling. Demographic information will also be collected. Completing these questionnaires will take approximately 45 minutes. We ask that you and your partner complete the task separately and do not converse during this task.
2. **Part 2:** After completion of the questionnaires, you and your partner will be asked to engage in a 15-minute discussion either about an everyday topic or an unresolved problem topic you two have experienced in your relationship. During this time, a researcher in a different room will be observing your conversation with your partner via video and audio recording.
3. **Part 3:** You and your partner will be provided the opportunity to play VLT games for up to 15 minutes. Afterwards, you will be asked about your perceptions of the VLT games you chose to play. During this time, a researcher in a different room will be observing you and your partner's game play via video and audio recording. We ask that you and your partner complete the task separately and do not converse while playing the VLTs.

Upon completion, you will receive your compensation and provided the opportunity to discuss any concerns you may have. You will be debriefed and given a summary of the study findings at a later date, once all participants have been completed the study.

Possible Benefits of Taking Part in This Research: Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others, such as an increased understanding of how couples cope with conflict, which will eventually be helpful in informing interventions for solving relationship conflict.

Possible Risks of Taking Part in This Research: Although we usually find it unlikely, you could experience slight discomfort being asked questions about your psychological and behavioral reactions to the questionnaires, as some questions are about your romantic interactions, and about your gambling. For example:

- You may experience distress as a result of discussing an unresolved problem with your romantic partner or from completing questionnaires about your gambling.
- If you are a Dalhousie student, you may feel pressures to participate in the SONA Subject Pool so you can receive credit points.
- You may feel uncomfortable knowing the conversation with your partner, and your

video game playing are being audio and video recorded.

There is also a potential conflict of interest if you personally know the research assistant conducting your in-laboratory session. If this is the case, another research assistant will conduct the experiment to ensure you do not feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, you may not feel comfortable knowing that you and your partner's interaction is being both video and audio recorded. If this is the case, you can request that video and audio recording data be withdrawn.

Information Gathered: Your information will not be shared outside the research team. You will be given an ID number at the beginning of the study. All data files from this study will contain only this ID number. Your personal contact information (i.e., name or contact information) will not be part of study data files. The online questionnaires will not be stored with your personal information (e.g., name, email address). Electronic versions of the data will be kept in a password protected computer in the locked MAAC lab of Dr. Stewart. Electronic versions of the data will not include your name or contact information. We will keep any written data files for this study for a total of 5 years, after which time they will be destroyed via Shredder Company. The only people who will have access to your raw data are trained research assistants, Dr. Sherry Stewart, and co-investigators (Dr. Sean MacKinnon and Dr. Debra Gilin).

Your responses are kept secret from your romantic partner. You will not be able to see the responses of your partner (and they cannot see your responses). We encourage you not to discuss your responses to the questionnaires with your romantic partner until the completion of the study, as this may change your future responses. Your individual data will not be presented in any written reports. All data will be summarized and presented at the group level so that no single person can be identified from the results.

Compensation: Each member of the couple will receive \$80 for participating in the study. You will also each receive \$50 to play the VLT games, for up to 15 minutes. Whatever you win over and above that \$50, and whatever money is left over, you may keep. Students in an eligible Dalhousie psychology or neuroscience course will have the option to accept up to 2.0 course credits (0.5 credit per half hour) for their participation in place of the \$80 compensation. Students will also have the option to accept a combination of financial compensation and course credit, in one of three different forms. 1) \$20 in financial compensation and 1.5 course credits, 2) \$40 in financial compensation and 1.0 course credit, or 3) \$60 in financial compensation and 0.5 course credit.

Options if You Change Your Mind About Taking Part in The Research: You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to participate now, but then later decide you are no longer interested, you may still withdraw from the study. To withdraw from the study, please contact Dr. Sherry Stewart or Christine Novitsky, and let one of them know that you'd like your data to be removed from the study. Once you receive your compensation, you will be allotted one week to decide if you would like to withdraw your data from the current study.

Research Participants Rights and Protection: The Dalhousie University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research with the guidance of the TCPS 2 based on three core principles:

Appendix F – Participant Resources

Please note that you can contact/refer to the following agencies if you need to talk to someone regarding concerns about your mental health.

Resource Name	Contact Information
Mental Health Crisis Line	Call: 1-888-429-8167 (Toll-free)
Canadian Mental Health Association (Nova Scotia Division)	Website: http://www.novascotia.cmha.ca Call: 1-877-466-6606 (Toll-free)
Nova Scotia Health Authority	Website: http://www.nshealth.ca/mental-health-addictions Nearest Location: http://www.nshealth.ca/service-details/Community%20Mental%20Health%20Services
Dalhousie Student Counselling Services (For Dalhousie University Students)	Call: 902-494-2171 to make an appointment
The Counselling Centre (For Saint Mary’s University Students)	Call: 902-420-5615 to make an appointment
MSVU Counselling Services (For Mount Saint Vincent University Students)	Call: 902-457-6567 Email: counselling@msvu.ca
NS Gambling Hotline	Call: 902-252-3132 or visit http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/ga/addresses

Appendix G – Debrief Script

Hello, I am _____ calling from the Dalhousie MAAC Laboratory about the study “The Effects of Dyadic Conflict and Gambling Behavior on Work Outcomes” that you participated in on [DATE]. Do you have a few minutes to discuss the study with me? I would like to tell you about the purpose of the study and provide the opportunity for you to ask me any questions about the study.

Did you perceive any relation between the discussion and the VLT rating task? If yes, please explain what you perceived the relation to be:

Initially you were told that this study consisted of three parts: (1) assess your various behaviors and work outcomes through several self-reported questionnaires (2) the behavioral interactions that occur in romantic couples discussing an everyday topic versus those discussing a problem topic and (3) rating VLT games. However, the overall purpose of this research study was to gain a better understanding of how conflict between two members of a couple, and the motivation behind gambling, affect couples’ actual gambling behaviors in the lab.

We were interested in how the topic of discussion (i.e., neutral vs conflict-related topic) interacted with your and your partner’s primary motivations for gambling and how this affected you and your partner’s gambling. In the “VLT-rating task,” we were interested in your amount of betting and length of play. The purpose of having your interaction videotaped was to assess whether certain behaviors you and your partner engaged in were different whether the discussion was about a conflict or a neutral topic. The purpose of the heart rate vest, as mentioned in the session, was to provide a physiological measure that would allow us to compare couples in the neutral versus conflict condition in terms of their arousal levels.

This study has important implications, in that it will help us build new models of the cycle between conflict and gambling within intimate relationships. Clinically, the study can potentially help to identify couples’ conflict as an important variable that could be targeted in gambling interventions delivered in couple’s therapy.

As research psychologists, we take the issue of deception very seriously. We thought very carefully about whether to initially mislead you about the true purpose of this research study. On the one hand, we did not want to mislead you because of the potential harm it might do. On the other hand, if we told you that the 15-minute discussion with your romantic partner might affect how much you gambled on the VLTs, it might have been very difficult for you to act naturally. Thus, the experiment would not be valid. For these reasons, we chose to include the mild deception about the true purpose of this study.

We just want to make sure you are still ok with us including your data in the study. (You have up to 1 week to have us remove your data if you are not ok with this).

If you have any future questions, please contact us at 902-494-6488. Thank you for participating in the study and for your time today.