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Exploring gambling craving through the Elaborated Intrusion Theory of desire: A mixed method study

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Background and aims: Gambling disorder is a well-established behavioral addiction, which has been aligned to substance-related addictions in the DSM-5. While craving is now recognized as a criterion for substance related addictions in the last edition of the DSM, it was not retained for gambling disorder. Research is thus needed to test whether established models of craving can be applied to gambling craving. In this context, the current study aims to explore gambling craving based on the rationale provided by the Elaborated Intrusion Theory of Desire (EIT), a recent yet recognized cognitive model of craving. *Methods:* A mixed-method study was conducted among 31 regular and problem gamblers. The qualitative part consisted in 10 open questions focused on the triggers and the components involved in the EIT. The quantitative part consisted of a

questionnaire designed to assess the triggers promoting gambling behaviors, and inspired from the substance abuse literature. *Results:* Thematic analysis reveals 5 categories of answers: affect (positive and negative), cues, images, thoughts and physiological sensations. The descriptive analyses highlighted the most relevant triggers (e.g., spontaneous thoughts, boredom, visual imagery) and phenomenological characteristics (e.g., visual imagery, course of the craving episode) associated to gambling craving. *Discussion and Conclusions:* The use of a mixed approach allowed us to better understand the phenomenology of gambling craving and confirms the relevance of the EIT applied to gambling. This study supports the use of psychological interventions, derived from the EIT, which aim to interfere with mental imagery to reduce the vividness of craving episodes.