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Society through Whist and Gaming

In 18th Century Britain

Card games had been an established form of entertainment in Britain since the 15th century. However, the trick taking card game whist grew in popularity during the 18th century. This caused a societal craze over the new game. The British aristocracy was especially drawn to this game, spending vast amounts of time and money playing the game. Gambling and idleness quickly became associated with whist causing British society to question the worth of this game. This caused a counterculture in British society to oppose what they saw as morally destitute game. The debate about the worth of whist in British society led to uncertainty about the behaviors a person should display in public while playing whist. In order to justify their own actions, male aristocratic whist players responded to the critics by developing an unofficial standard of proper and acceptable roles for whist players. The expected role for a whist player was dependent on their social class and their gender. Male aristocrats sought to portray themselves as enlightened intellectuals while limiting female whist players and portraying commoners as rooks and thieves.

Gambling and idleness had been always been a vice in British gaming society, but whist's popularity caused British society to attribute these vices to whist which made it the scapegoat for British gaming society's immorality. Card games were already viewed as immoral by the time whist became popular. Charles Cotton, the author of the most popular gaming guide of the second half of 17th century, introduced his guide by stating "Gaming is an enchanting witchery, gotten betwixt idleness and avarice: an itching disease that makes some scratch the

head, whilst others, as if they were bitten by a Tarantula, are laughing themselves to death.”¹

Before whist’s popularity, British society’s disapproval did not target any particular game because the vices were associated with card games in general. Since whist became the most played game during the 18th century, moralist’s complaints about the vices of gaming were now directed at whist.

British society became more skeptical of gaming starting in the 18th century when British elites founded restrictive and secret social clubs. After the Restoration, the British aristocracy formed social clubs for the purpose of social discourse. The clubs often met in taverns and coffeehouses. Club meetings were held in secret with only club members allowed to attend. Admittance into clubs was closely policed and new members were selected by current members. There were several critics of these clubs who claimed the club’s social functions were only a guise to allow the members to escape governmental and church scrutiny of sedition and blasphemy along with other sinful activities.² British society’s fears were not unfounded. The Hell- Fire Club were the most scandalous in their activities. The often-young members went against the accepted morals of their elders by having club meetings where sex, drunkenness, blasphemous discussions, and gaming took place. While the Hell-Fire Club comprised a small portion of the population, they represented a growing trend of society to indulge themselves in entertainment and luxury.³ One activity, club members would participate in during the 18th century was playing a game of whist. Thus, the scandalous and blasphemous activities that occurred at club meetings were associated with gaming which included whist. Whist was seen as

¹ Charles Cotton and Lucas Theophilus. *Games and Gamesters of the Restoration: The Complete Gamester* (London: G. Routledge and sons, 1674, 1714), 1.

² David S. Shields, "Anglo-American Clubs: Their Wit, Their Heterodoxy, Their Sedition," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1994): 293-295, doi:10.2307/2946865.

³ Evelyn Lord, *The Hell-Fire Club* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 69-73.

one of the factors which caused the immorality in clubs. This is illustrated in the recounting of the immoral behaviors of a whist player in church pamphlet. “After a few deals, a dispute arose about the state of the game Parsons asserted with oaths, that they were six, which the others denied.”⁴ Parson then swore an oath to Satan to prove his point which caused his death the next day. The Religious Tract Society which published the pamphlet targeted whist players specifically trying to warn them of their doomed fate if they continue to disregard religion. Whist was at the center of a conflict between a faction of society which favored self-pleasure and another that supported traditional morals of the nobility and church. As a result, the moralist faction of British society sought to discourage participation in whist which they saw as the representation of the vices plaguing society.

Gambling was a despised aspect of whist because of its potential to leave the nobility in financial ruin. The aristocracy’s main source of wealth stemmed from the amount of land they owned. The amount of land a family owned, correlated with its financial status.⁵ Since participation in clubs was a necessity for social engagement, many members of the nobility joined the gambling atmosphere of these social clubs. There was a difference in wealth distribution among nobles due to size of their estate. This meant nobles were often gambling well out of their pay grade. With nobles trying to keep up with social trends many whist players became addicted to gambling. The trope of a young heir squandering away his family fortune in these club settings became prevalent in British literature and pamphlets. In the play, *The Humors of Whist*, this idea is touched on when the young noble Stakeland gambles his inheritance and

⁴ William Dallaway, *An Account of the Awful Death of Richard Parsons* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1828), 2-3.

⁵ Michael W. McCahill, "Open Elites: Recruitment to the French Noblesse and the English Aristocracy in the Eighteenth Century," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 30, no. 4 (1998): 600-604. doi:10.2307/4053851.

loses it all in a game of whist. The response of his father when hearing this news reveals the attitude moralists felt towards whist and its impact on society.

How shocking to reflection when a Man seriously weighs the many Evils may flow from this reigning Vice of Gaming. It is grown out of all Parallel of former times, and improv'd into a Monster that is truly to be fear'd. It has poison'd the Honor of our Nobility and Gentry and like Liquor, as it stirs up all the Passions so it renders them capable of Meanness, any Fraud, any Villany. Assemblies and Coffee-houses that in themselves are useful and agreeable are now become the most dangerous places a young Person can frequent.⁶

This shows how the conflict between gamblers and moralists was also a conflict between generations as the older generation sought to hinder the gaming club life of the younger generation. Also, moralists saw gambling as the source of the vice in whist and gaming. The personification of gambling as a monster and poison illustrates the view of whist as an entity that is slowly killing the morals of society and allowing immorality to grow stronger. To the moralists, society's virtue was at risk due to whist gambling because the nobility risked losing their wealth and social dignity.

The moralists in British society believed that gaming was tearing apart the moral traditions and destroying the future of Britain's prosperity. In "The York Chronicle" a man known as Zamor complained to the newspaper about how gaming and gambling were leading the youths of society to suicide and destitute because of the self-inflicted financial ruin, the youth brought upon themselves. "In a fit of despondency he rushes upon his sword, and by this last act of insanity determines an useless existence, lost whilst he lived to the world, and only lamented for his un-christian resolution when he died"⁷ This passage suggests that the lifestyle of gaming and going to whist parties would lead only to sin and death. One of the games Zamor cited

⁶*The Humours of Whist: A Dramatic Satire, As Acted Every Day At White's and Other Coffee-Houses and Assemblies* (London: J. Roberts, 1743), 53.

⁷ Zamor. "On Gaming." *The York Chronicle; and Weekly Advertiser*, Jan. 15, 1772, 36.

causing this youth to kill himself was whist. Several other forms of leisure were mentioned when explain the youth death. This shows that whist was at the center of an attack on gaming in general. It was not so much the game whist itself but the consequences that the gaming society brought on itself, that the moralists thought were destroying society. This same idea was also shared in the *Humor of whist*, when the Alderman argued with Professor Whiston, a parody of Edmund Hoyle, over the worth of whist in society. “Yes Sir, - Every Thing that tends to the weaking our Morals, is a Weakener of Liberty, and to far may be said to be a Plot against it. Thus, by inculcating the Doctrine of Whist in a Scientifical Manner, it will become constitutional in our Youth, and by becoming consitutional, eradicate usefuller Studies; and by eradicating usefuller Studies, vitiate our Morals”⁸ This passage shows the concern moralists had with the lack of productivity among the youth and youths’ constant fixation with entertainment like whist. The moralists saw idleness created by consistent pursuit of gaming and whist entertainment as destroying the wellbeing of society. Not only is the future generation losing their fortunes gambling at whist, they are also not contributing anything productive to society. The older moralist generation saw their heirs spend their money while ruining the financial status that the older generation had productively maintained.

The advocates of whist sought to depict whist as an intellectual game and bring it into the fold of other respectable games of the aristocracy like chess. Chess had been for a long time a game that the nobility had regarded as respectable. Unlike card games which are primarily games of chance, chess is based purely on the intellect and skill of the players. This discouraged cheaters and rooks from being associated with chess because they could not rig the game. With

⁸ *The Humours of Whist: A Dramatic Satire, As Acted Every Day At White's and Other Coffee-Houses and Assemblies.* (London: J. Roberts, 1743), 25.

these two qualities, chess was considered a game for the nobility. This is shown in Charles Cotton's game guidebook when he stated, "Chess is a Royal game and more difficult to be understood than any other game whatever, and will take up sometimes in the playing so long a time that I have known two play a fortnight at times before the game hath been ended."⁹ Here chess is described as a royal game which indicates the game is fit for a king to play and therefore a respectable game. Also, the length of the game shows that society recognized the need for intellect and skill in order to play the game. This description of chess is similar to the descriptions of whist by whist advocates. Edmund Hoyle wrote the de facto treatise on whist causing the game to become the most popular card game of Britain of the second half of the 18th century.¹⁰ One of the reason why whist became so popular was because he was able to portray whist as an intellectual game for the nobility. Hoyle made whist a game of calculations. Before Hoyle's treatise on whist, the outcome of card games was viewed to be based solely on luck or God's will. Hoyle's presentation of the game as a series of logical calculations transformed whist and other card games into games of probability.¹¹ Now whist was a game of skill rather than a game of chance where the players determined the outcome. No longer was whist a lowly game filled with vices, but instead filled with intellect and calculations which were requirements to be an acceptable game to the aristocratic society.

The changing view of whist from a game of vice into a game of intellect, can be illustrated by examining the spread of whist guidebooks and treatises. As mentioned before Edmund Hoyle wrote the standard for whist guidebooks. The language of Hoyle's treatise was

⁹ Charles Cotton and Lucas Theophilus, *Games and Gamesters of the Restoration: The Complete Gamester* (London: G. Routledge and sons, 1674, 1714), 24.

¹⁰ David Parlett and William Gosling, *The Oxford Guide to Card Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 218-219.

¹¹ Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 62-81.

designed to show the mathematical intellect needed to play the game successfully. “It is 2 to 1 that my Partner has not one certain Card. To apply this Calculation, let us suppose the right-hand Adversary leads a Suit, of which you have the King, and one small Card only, you may observe that it is 2 to 1 by putting on your King, that the left-hand Adversary cannot win it”¹² The popularity of Hoyle’s treatise and the growing number of whist players led to several other entrepreneurs to publish their own whist treatises. In these offshoots, the same mathematical intellectualism from Hoyle was replicated.¹³ Gradually, as more whist treatises were published the aristocracy’s view of whist as intellectual game was considered a non-controversial topic. This is shown in William Payne’s treaties on whist published towards the end of the century.

The Game of Whist is so happily compounded betwixt chance and skill, that it is generally esteemed the most curious and entertaining of the cards, and is therefore become a favorite amusement to person of the first consequence, and the most distinguished abilities: the great variety of hands and critical cases arising from such a number of cards, renders the game so nice and difficult, that much time and practice has heretofore been necessary to obtaining a tolerable degree of knowledge in it.¹⁴

When Hoyle first published his treatise, he merely implied the intellectualism needed for the game, but Payne informs his readers that in order to become a good whist player they need a fair amount of intellect. Also, this shows the acceptance of whist by the aristocracy and the success of transforming whist into a game for the intellectual elite.

In order to counteract this image that whist was a game for gamblers and slothful people British society sought to transform whist into a game for intellectuals. This effort to reimagine

¹²Edmond Hoyle, *Mr. Hoyle's Games of Whist* (London: Thomas Osborne; Henry Woodfall, and Richard Baldwin, 1763), 5.

¹³ P. Haslam, *Hints to Whist Players, for the Use of Private Parties* (Canterbury: Bristow printer, 1790), 6.

¹⁴ William Payne, *Maxims for Playing the Game of Whist: With All Necessary Calculations, and Laws of the Game*, (London: T. Payne and Son, 1790) 2-3.

whist as a respectable gentleman's game occurred concurrently with the intellectual conversations of the Enlightenment. Philosophers of the Enlightenment such as David Hume used his credibility as a respectable philosopher and economist to make whist an intellectual game. An example of this occurred when Hume wrote to General James Abercromby, a Whig MP, seeking his support and patronage. Hume sought to gain Abercromby's political support by flattering him about his skills as a general and a whist player. "You are equally eminent in the Arts of Peace & War. The Cabinet is no less a Scene of Glory to you than the Field. You are a Hero even in your Sports & Amusements; and discover a superior Genius in Whist as well as in a State Intrigue or in a Battle."¹⁵ The comparison between the skills of a good whist player and a good general emphasized the intellectual skill needed for both fields. Just like in chess, intellect is required to play whist. This shows that members of the nobility accepted the notion that whist was intellectual game. Therefore, members of the nobility came to believe that a whist player could have a justifiable reason for playing whist.

Another way in which the aristocracy praised whist was whist's association with England and not another country. Whist originated in England, first as a game called Ruff and Honors before evolving into a separate game. Before the popularity of whist, the card games the British aristocracy would play would be the French and Spanish card games such as quadrille or ombre. Even during the whist craze of the mid-18th century these French and Spanish card games still had dedicated players.¹⁶ However, these games had a stigma because of their foreign origins. While the idea of nationalism was not yet formed, the foundation was being created during the

¹⁵ David Hume, "David Hume to General James Abercromby: Friday, 18 August 1747," In *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, edited by Robert McNamee

¹⁶ David Parlett and William Gosling, *The Oxford Guide to Card Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 218-219.

18th century.¹⁷ Thus, the British were upset that card games like quadrille and ombre were foreign and did not show British culture. Also, during the course of the 18th century, Britain was often at war with France and Spain. Whist's growth in popularity occurred during the same time as Britain's war against France during the War of Austrian Succession. The repeated wars against France and Spain along with the inception of nationalism caused the British to distance themselves from these card games. "Nothing so plain. There's Ombre and Quadrill, they are light and superficial partaking of the Humour of their airy Inventors the French."¹⁸ However, whist originated in England and was a game that could be proudly played during times of war as nationalist sentiments grew. "Now Whist, my Lord is the only genuine old English Game, which shews the Genius of the Nation as to its Understanding as much as Chevy Chace, or Britons Strike Bome does to its Music."¹⁹ Whist advocates used the negative image of ombre and quadrille to further their efforts of transforming whist into a respectable game. Instead of playing cheap card games from enemy nations, British society was now offered an alternative game portrayed as a symbol of Britain's intellectual superiority.

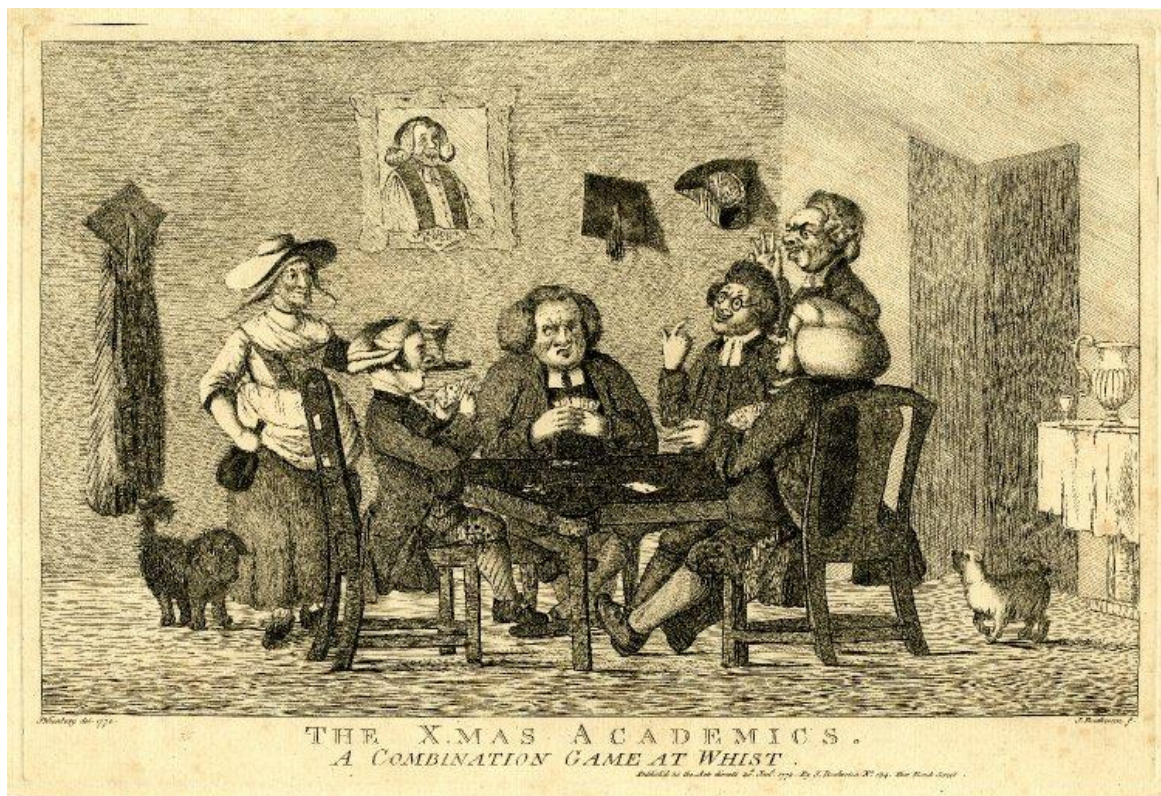
The efforts of the whist advocates to reshape whist into a game for the intellectual elites were not met with complete acceptance from all of society. Several critics of the whist advocates pointed out the hypocrisy of the arguments made by whist supporters. One of the arguments that critics made about the advocates' interpretation of the game was how the nobility was always portrayed as intellectuals. This did not reflect the reality of nobles' participation as rooks and

¹⁷Michael Wintle. "Emergent Nationalism in European Maps of the Eighteenth Century." *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815*, edited by Jensen Lotte, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 271. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8pzcpr.17.

¹⁸ *The Humours of Whist: A Dramatic Satire, As Acted Every Day At White's and Other Coffee-Houses and Assemblies*. London: J. Roberts, 1743. 32

¹⁹ *The Humours of Whist: A Dramatic Satire, As Acted Every Day At White's and Other Coffee-Houses and Assemblies*. London: J. Roberts, 1743. 32

sharper. In an illustration called the X-mas Academics, a party of four Cambridge scholars played a game of whist. However, one pair is cheating by having another person signal to his partner the number of trumps in his hand. The grumpy expression the opposing team shows their dissatisfaction of repeatedly losing tricks to the other team. Also, a portrait of Edmund Hoyle sits in the back of the coffeehouse. This indicates that all four of these academics are followers of Hoyle's intellectual concept of whist. With whist advocates lauding the Hoyle intellectuals of the game, this satirized picture of academics cheating at a game of whist shows the hypocrisy of the ideals the whist advocates praised and the reality of how they played the game.



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This same criticism of whist as intellectual game can be seen in the satirical play, *Humor of Whist*. One of the characters is called Sir Calculation and Puzzle. He is a satirized version of

²⁰ Figure A, British Museum, The Xmas Academics. A Combination Game at Whist, J,6.51

aristocratic followers of Hoyle. Much like the X-Mas Academics, Sir Calculation and Puzzle represent the hypocrisy of Hoyle's interpretation of whist and the effort of the nobility to transform whist into an intellectual game. When Sir Calculation and Puzzle played a game of whist he invoked the language of Hoyle in order to portray himself as an intellectual whist player. "So I, according to the Judgement of the Game, led a Club, my Partner takes it with the King. Then it was exactly 481 for us to 22 against them. He returns the same Suit: I win it with my Queen and return it again"²¹ However, despite acting like an intellectual, Sir Calculation and Puzzle is really bad at the game and his dedication to Hoyle cost him several games. He attributes his losses to bad luck such as a dog eating the losing card of his opponent. This illustrates the flawed logic of the advocates of whist. According to the advocates of whist, the game is based on the skill and intellect of a player and has nothing to do with chance. Yet, intellectuals like Sir Calculation and Puzzle still believed in luck. This shows how the rhetoric of the whist advocates was not met with general acceptance among the entire British society. It also shows how the whist advocates' rhetoric did not completely reflect the reality of the whist gaming community.

Unlike men who had no limits on their whist gaming habits, women had societal restrictions on their behavior in whist culture. Women were expected to restrain themselves from certain whist practices such as gambling. The restraints on women taught male whist players how to play whist respectably in society. In addition, when female whist players deviated from societal expectations, they were more scrutinized by British society. Men dominated coffeehouse culture and while women were not excluded from these coffeehouses, they did not serve as the

²¹ *The Humours of Whist: A Dramatic Satire, As Acted Every Day At White's and Other Coffee-Houses and Assemblies.* London: J. Roberts, 1743. 13

primary setting for women playing whist.²² Instead women played whist at hosted parties, social gatherings, and on some rare occasions within the context of coffeehouses. Thus, while not participating in the coffeehouse clubs, women still were active in the whist gaming community. With the growth of popularity of whist in the 18th century, women would need to know how to play if they wanted to keep up with the latest social trends. Thus, women often played whist and both sexes played whist together during social gatherings. With women participating in whist gaming, British society formed restrictions and guidelines for whist women that separated their role from the male dominated, chaotic and intellectual coffeehouse.

Taverns and coffeehouses were known for their chaotic and immoral atmosphere. It was in these settings that well to-do gentlemen would gamble away their fortunes and devote most of their time to playing whist. As previously shown, British society despised these whist behaviors. Female whist players were not supposed to exhibit these behaviors. Instead they were supposed to influence male players to end their bad whist habits. One of the tactic female whist players employed to influence male whist players was the prospect of marriage. In a letter to the editor in “Lady’s Magazine” a reader gave the desired qualification for a husband. “No enthusiasm for whist, and no gambler or drunkard. I am happy to say I can give perfect satisfaction in all these points, which are very properly noticed here, as nine-tenths of all family-miseries proceed from one or other of those causes.”²³ The undesirable quality is gambling and excessive whist playing. Therefore, it was the despised whist behaviors and not whist itself that were the target of this complaint. The “Lady’s Magazine” is extorting its female audience to avoid courting men that

²² Brian Cowan. "What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England." *History Workshop Journal*, no. 51 (2001): 143-145. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289724>.

²³ “The Lady's Magazine or entertaining companion for the fair sex, appropriated solely to their use and amusement”, vol. 21, 1790. 549

have these traits. By instilling in the female population these standards for marriage they demonstrated to male whist players the intolerance British society had for these traits. The reforming part of British society hoped the threat of male whist player chances at marriage would be enough incentive for them to change their whist habits. British society placed the burden of correcting whist gambling on women. This also limited the acceptable behaviors for female whist players. Male whist players could gamble all day at whist even though it was despised by society. British society attributed excessive gambling to men and expected only men to gamble. Female players, however, did not have the option of being able to gamble all day at whist because that was the problem British society expected them to fix.

Women who failed to meet this expectation of a virtuous whist player were scorned by society. In order to teach new female whist players about these expectations numerous publications in the 18th century warned women about the consequences of entering into the vices of whist. One of the more common scare tactics employed by these publishers were stories about men who would take advantage of female whist players with large gambling debts. One example was a story about a Marchioness who either had to sleep with her creditor or face total poverty because of her whist gambling debts. "I will sustain the losses you have met with, and the jewels and diamonds I have received shall be immediately restored to you, provided you will grant me only one favor."²⁴ At the end of the story the Marchioness was in total financial ruin and British society would have labeled her as a prostitute.²⁵ These stories were designed to prevent female whist players from deviating from their assigned role as the embodiment of proper restraint and

²⁴ "The Lady's Magazine or entertaining companion for the fair sex, appropriated solely to their use and amusement", vol. 21, 1790. 432

²⁵ Brian Cowan. "What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England. *History Workshop Journal*", no. 51 (2001): 142. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289724>.

etiquette in gaming. If females deviated from this social role, then they would lose their social standing and honor among their peers. It was in this way women were restricted in their gaming habits.

At the same time, these stories were also a way for British society to use women to instruct male whist players about acceptable whist gaming. The trope of a female whist player enticed into gambling debt was portrayed in a coffeehouse play. In the play, the female whist player, Arabella, has two male whist suitors each seeking her affection. Captain Rookwood sought to control Arabella by being the creditor of her gambling debt just as the Marchioness was controlled in the previous paragraph. Thus, Rookwood portrayed rook qualities of cheating and gambling which were despised by society. These qualities were not acceptable to British society because the qualities sought to destroy the restrictions society had placed on female whist players and enable women to practice the vices of whist rather than its virtues. This societal expectation was voiced during the play when Arabella stated to Rookwood “But there are obligations, Captain which a Women of Honor ought not to receive.”²⁶ John Medium, Arabella’s other suitor, illustrates to the audience the acceptable behavior for a male whist player. John Medium in the play only gambles at whist for social entertainment. He also saves Arabella from her debt to Captain Rookwood, restoring her honor in society. John Medium exhibited the good qualities that were listed in “Lady’s Magazine” by not giving into the vices of whist. As result of these good qualities he was rewarded with winning Arabella’s affection. Although Arabella was the victim in the play. Arabella’s femininity was used to teach the audience how to play whist properly. Since the play was shown in male dominated coffeehouses, the two representations of

²⁶ *The Humours of Whist: A Dramatic Satire, As Acted Every Day At White's and Other Coffee-Houses and Assemblies.* London: J. Roberts, 1743. 43

suitors were designed to teach them the respectable way to play whist. However, this lesson would not be effective without the use of women as a prize for their change in behavior.

Women were expected to be the voice of reason in the whist community. They were also expected to be the voice of reason in games of whist and they were expected to look after themselves in addition to taking care of their male family members in gaming. This ties into the topic of women during the conversations of the Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment several of the philosophers began to question the nature of society's system of morals. Locke claimed that there was no innate morality and it was instead merely a reflection of the cultural and societal expectation that members of society self-policed themselves due to the fear of being punished. However, Locke's pupil, Lord Shaftesbury, created a more popular counterargument. Shaftesbury claimed that morality was based on the balance of the innate human desire to achieve affection through self-affection or affection for other people. The virtue could be determined by this balance. The implications of these moral definitions for women were their main method of achieving moral virtue by showing affection towards family and personal ties.²⁷ With virtue and morality being tied to family affection, women had a societal burden to care for and protect their family or be seen as an immoral person. Thus, when sectors of British society complained about the vices of whist their solution was for women to fulfill their role as caretaker of the family. Since women could only achieve virtue through familial affection, becoming the voice of reason to whist players within their family was logical to many. The magazine, "The Female Spectator" extorts women to fulfill this role, "that it is never too late to retrieve that character which all women of true understanding value themselves upon; and be also a kind of

²⁷ Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment In Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44-49.

reprimand to the men, for the little account they make of a female capacity, and the slender efforts made even by those whose business and interest it is to cultivate the talents they find in us.”²⁸ While confining women to the domestic atmosphere of the family the new debates of the Enlightenment empowered women within the family. Women’s role as a virtuous caretaker helped to include women in whist gaming culture as they were expected by society to be the virtuous example for their male relatives. Whether Locke’s or Shaftesbury’s claims on morality were adopted by the whole of society, the burden was still placed on women to be the virtuous example to men.

Female whist players were warned about not fulfilling societal expected behaviors. One of the methods used to discourage females was illustrations. In figure B, the illustration shows the unacceptable behaviors of a female whist player. The whist tokens used to keep track of how many points a team earned are guineas. Whist tokens could be anything from wooden chips to loose coins. The women flaunted her wealth to society by displaying guineas as whist tokens. This display of wealth indicated her status as a gambler. The candlelight needed to play the game suggests that she spends most of the night gambling at whist. In the illustrations she is also portrayed as a rook/sharper. She and her teammate currently have six points out of the ten needed to win. Out of the seven tricks played so far, she has taken three of them. She might also secure a fourth trick that is in play. It is hard to determine her rook status without seeing her partner’s hand, but regardless she has done quite well in the game so far. Both gambling and cheating were considered the vices of whist, and traits female whist players were supposed to rescue men from. Women’s behavior in social settings, such as whist, determined their virtue and morality. In this illustration since she has forsaken her virtue and her expected role, she has

²⁸ “The Female Spectator” vol. 2, (London: 1744),284

also forsaken her role with British society and as a woman. As punishment for her whist behavior she is stripped of her beauty and her innocence.



When the nobility created the different roles of whist players, they depicted the commoners as rooks and sharpers. The aristocracy assigned this role to commoners in order to ensure that whist remained a game only for the intellectual nobility. Before whist was popular among the aristocracy, it was a game of the commoners. In 1674, Charles Cotton did not give a detailed description of whist. “Ruff and Honours (alias Slamm) and Whist, are games so commonly known in England in all parts thereof, that every child almost of eight years old hath a competent knowledg in that recreation, and therefore I am unwilling to speak any thing more of

²⁹ Figure B, British Museum 1851,0901.414

them than this”³⁰ Whist was still being developed as a game at this time. Cotton’s lack of interest in whist was because the game was still primarily a game played by commoners. Since *The Complete Gamester*, was written for an aristocratic audience, the brief mention was sufficient for a game the nobility viewed as a simple childish commoner’s game. Thus, whist remained primarily a commoners’ game until Edmund Hoyle’s *Treatise of Whist* caused the nobility’s interest in the game to grow. At the same time, the nobility was confronted with commoners joining the ranks of the nobility. Financed by trade, high middle-class commoners bought land titles from the nobility. Even without a landed title their wealth was great enough for these upper middle-class commoners to fund luxuries similar to those enjoyed by the nobility.³¹ As previously shown, the aristocracy promoted whist as an intellectual game that was respectable for members of the gentry. With the growing financial status of the commoners and their roots in whist, the nobility sought to distance these wealthy commoners from their social circle by depicting them as the embodiment of the vices of whist. In the *Humors of Whist*, this fear was satirized in the play. The two commoners in the play, Lurchum and Shuffle, are rooks who infiltrated the social circle of the aristocracy. “Thou knowest we have the Honour to be admitted into the best Company, which neither our Birth or Fortunes entitle us to, merely for our Reputation as good Whist-Players.”³² They used their skill at whist to cause the nobles like Sir Puzzle- Calculation to lose the game. Lurchum and Shuffle’s greatest fear is that the new whist treatise will put them out of the business of swindling the nobles. Depicting commoners as crooks secretly infiltrating their social circle built on the fear the nobility had of the new middle-

³⁰ Charles Cotton and Theophilus Lucas. *Games and Gamesters of the Restoration: The Complete Gamester* (London: G. Routledge and sons, 1674, 1714), 55.

³¹ Evelyn Lord, *The Hell-Fire Club* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 133-134.

³² *The Humours of Whist: A Dramatic Satire, As Acted Every Day At White's and Other Coffee-Houses and Assemblies* (London: J. Roberts, 1743), 13.

class which was gradually integrating into this once exclusive circle. Slandering commoners with allegations of rook activities ensured the nobles' continued status as intellectual elites.

The fear of commoners infiltrating the ranks of the nobility was used to deter the nobility from participating in the vices of whist. This fear is shown in the "Female Spectator" a magazine targeted towards the female nobility. One of those fears was having to marry wealthy commoners for money or selling their titles to pay off their large gambling debts

THIS very abuse of the power of tolerating gaming, one would imagine, should make ladies, who have the good fortune not to be under such necessities, not only forbear having any such thing at their assemblies, but also excite their compassion to relieve the distresses of those of their own rank, who are obliged to prostitute their titles for a skreen to such vile Purposes.³³

The sentiment shown in the article suggests that women, out of their passion and care for their families, will marry or sell off their titles most likely to the new middle class to meet their family's financial needs. The language the author used indicates that the act of forced association with commoners is equal to forcing their female relatives into prostitution. This type of diction would make members of the nobility reconsider their gaming habits to protect the well-being of their families. This shows the separate class identities that the British aristocracy desired. The differentiation between the aristocracy and commoners could not be maintained if members of the aristocracy lost their status or commoners rose up in the social ranks. The nobility viewed themselves as an intellectual group that was above the vices of whist which were associated with commoners. If whist gambling and the other vices brought the nobility down to the same social level as commoners, then their ideal version of themselves and whist would be

³³ "The Female Spectator" vol. 2, (London: 1744),282

nothing more than an illusion. Therefore, articles like this implored the British aristocracy not to sacrifice their noble status at the whist table.

Nobles were ostracized by their class if they were seen demonstrating the vices of whist and rook qualities that delegated to the commoners. The sinful noble then became a rook and lost his social status as an intellectual whist player. The advocates of whist were trying to depict whist as an intellectual game suited for the gentry. Having members of the nobility continuing to flaunt the vices of whist would undermine their efforts to transform the image of whist. The response of the supporters of whist to this problem was demoting aristocratic rooks and gamblers to the status of commoners. In *Humor of Whist*, the two aristocratic rook characters are Lord Bubble-boy and Captain Rookwood. As mentioned before, Captain Rookwood was punished for his rook status when he tried to secure Arabella's hand in marriage. Lord Bubble-boy on the other hand did not receive any direct punishment for his actions and escaped justice. However, in his condolence speech after Young (Harry) Stakeland lost his fortune to Lord Bubble-boy, Lord Stakeland reveals that the victor is Young Stakeland because he held on to his honor. "No, Harry – You have still preserved the noblest and best Part of your Brith-served the noblest and best Part of your Brith-right – your Honour. Had you descended to become Associate with your vile Undoers, and carn an infamous Subsistence by those base Arsts, which have undone yourself, you had indeed become an Alien to by Blood and Favour."³⁴ Despite the popularity of whist and the increased noble participation in playing whist they still could not officially support the vices of gaming. Preserving the image of a distinguished and distinct noble class was still a value the aristocracy desired. Rook nobles like Lord Bubble-boy risked blurring the lines between

³⁴ *The Humours of Whist: A Dramatic Satire, As Acted Every Day At White's and Other Coffee-Houses and Assemblies* (London: J. Roberts, 1743), 49.

commoners and nobility. If the nobility did not discourage aristocratic rooks, then they would lose their image as a separate entity from commoners who maintained were the incarnation of the vices of gambling. Therefore, Lord Stakeland praises his son on his conduct even though he lost his fortune.

The popularity of whist caused British society to question, what were the respectable forms of leisure and entertainment and the changes in social classes and identity were. Gambling and idleness, once scorned vices, were now becoming more tolerable to society because of the efforts of whist advocates to mask the unacceptable traits of whist in aura of intellectualism. Still, not all British society accepted the supporters of whist version of a respectable form of gaming. The efforts of whist advocates, consisting mostly of aristocratic males, to legitimize the game caused some new societal expectations about acceptable behaviors for whist players. These acceptable behaviors were dependent on the social class and gender of the whist player, with aristocratic men being intellectual thinkers of whist, women being the role model for male whist players, and commoners being the villainous rook.

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Figure A, British Museum, The Xmas Academics. A Combination Game at Whist, J,6.51

Figure B, British Museum 1851,0901.414

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³⁵ Evelyn Lord, *The Hell-Fire Club* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), page number.

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