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Gambling and the Gambler A Review and Preliminary Findings

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Abstract

GAMBLING is one of the most frequent of man's endeavors. In various forms it occurs universally in all cultures, all ages, and is participated in widely by those of all societies and social strata. Anthropological studies reveal its frequent occurrence in the most primitive of societies, and our modern games of chance are frequently more sophisticated versions of games once played by our forebears. Gambling is held to have originated in primitive man's fascination with divination and primitive justice since, for the archaic mind, nothing, especially an uncertain event, is without cause and effect.¹ Here unpredictable events are determined by supernatural agencies to which one can magically appeal for favor or decision. This is illustrated in the identification of criminals by the casting of lots or by nut spinning in some precivilized cultures.¹

Gambling and the Gambler

A Review and Preliminary Findings

Darrell W. Bolen, MD, and William H. Boyd, MD, Los Angeles

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The best, as well as the worst, of modern man have been afflicted by the "gambling mania." The legendary and renowned physician, Jerome Cardan, was best known for his mastery of dice, and many held that his exorbitant fees were partly earned at craps played during medical consultation.² Artists, most notably, have been afflicted with the gambling passion. Dostoevsky's intemperate gaming is well-known and seemed an artistic necessity, for it was during the period of dejection and humiliation after losing everything that the creative spirit moved him with renewed force, enabling him to write.³ As a student, Richard Wagner was

given to transient, excessive gambling which caused him to comment, "The despair over my lack of good luck flared my passion into an insane craving."⁴ (p245)

Gambling constitutes an extensive American pastime. The extent, frequency, and monetary volume involved in various forms of gambling are unknown, but crude estimates are available. A Gallup poll once determined that 57% of American adults gamble at least occasionally.⁵ Blanche⁶ estimated that 50 million US citizens gambled regularly in the 1940's. Several billions of dollars are wagered annually on various forms of legalized gambling and considerably larger amounts are held to be wagered illegally. For instance, Wessel and his aides estimated that the annual US handle on all forms of illegal gambling was \$46.5 billion, a figure exceeding the national defense budget during that particular year, with a profit of approximately \$9 billion for the underworld operators.⁷ The deficiencies of the above statistical estimates are obvious but they do indicate the pervasive nature of man's interest and participation in gambling. Despite its frequency and extensiveness, gambling, and the gambler, have been given inadequate attention as noted by Ploscowe and Lukas who state:

It is extraordinary that despite such universal participation and interest in gambling, little basic material of an analytic or scientific character has been published concerning this absorbing subject. . . . Nobody has attempted to analyze and describe the various forms of gambling, as well as evaluate their moral, political,

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social, psychological, and economic implications.^{8(pviii)}
The present paper is an outgrowth of a

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