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STATISTICS GAMBLING FACTS & STATS

by Felicia F. Campbell. *Business and Society Review*

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Dr. Campbell is an associate professor in the English Department at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. She is now completing a book on the psychology of gambling and is also chairing the Governor's Commission on the Status of People.

In a world fraught by deadly ecological problems, the idea of discussing the future of gambling may seem frivolous. Yet it is far from that.

As a fundamental human activity, it deserves to be studied without cultural or religious bias for the key that it may provide to survival.

We have been fed a lot of myths about our wish for homeostasis, which is really a state of bovine contentment. To attempt to achieve this state we consume mountains of pills and rivers of alcohol. Somehow we seem to feel that if we can deny our essential humanity long enough, we can solve our problems.

When we attempt to grow, we are considered mentally ill, masochistic, or naive. Outworn Freudian or Skinnerian approaches to human behavior are pushed at us, and we seriously consider the nightmare possibilities of Beyond Human Freedom and Dignity.

If we are to design for a healthy future, we must remove our blinders and examine the total human personality from the point of view of health, not sickness.

Consider gambling. It is a fundamental human

activity-- that is, people have always gambled, are gambling now, and will continue to gamble, in the future. Yet we are told that it is masochistic, sexually sublimative, and aberrant.

Gambling has been ubiquitous in human history, and the gambling impulse has served us well. It is part of "the adventurer within us"-- that part of ourselves which lusts for change, the wooing of the unknown, chance, danger, all that is new. It sends us to both the gaming tables and the moon, the laboratory and the numbers man. It is part of what makes us human.

My studies show that, contrary to popular belief, gambling is by and large beneficial to the gambler and increases rather than decreases his efficiency. It is beneficial in that it stimulates, offers hope, allows decision making, and, in many cases, provides the gambler with "peak experience," that godlike feeling when all of one's physical and emotional senses are "go."

In fairness, I should note that I was anticipated in these findings by Gerolamo Cardano, sixteenth-century universal genius, both physician and odds-maker, who prescribed gambling for melancholy and cares that one would otherwise be unable to endure, noting that "play may be beneficial in times of grief and . . . the law permits it to the sick and those in prison and those condemned to death."

This practice was most humane and was common in Nevada prisons as well as those of renaissance Italy until a few years ago. One ex-inmate of a Nevada prison told me that the altered state of consciousness produced by gambling was the only thing that kept him sane in the midst of the brutality, vermin, and bad food.

Moving from the prisons to society as a whole, we see the "preservative impulse" involved in gambling operate for every age and socioeconomic group.

Many elderly persons are passionate gamblers. I call them "elderly life seekers." What they seek is what most gamblers seek, involvement in the action. This is crucial to their sense of well-being in this society, which excludes them from the action of living and seeks to hide them away. Not only this, but while they play random games such as bingo and slot machines,

they have an equal chance with the rest of the participants for perhaps the first time in their lives. "I ain't won a lot of things in my life," one woman told me. While they play, they are wholly absorbed in the contest.

A colleague of mine moved to Las Vegas primarily so that her aged mother could gamble. She felt it a small price to pay for the measure of satisfaction that her mother received from gambling, although my colleague is herself bored by the whole casino scene.

The implications of this are that gambling can stimulate the elderly to renewed interest in life, and that homes for the aged would do well to allow their residents to gamble, keeping them alert and stimulated rather than dull and tranquilized.

Moving from the retired to the working class, we find the importance of the gamble is still in the action. In this case, however, the working-class individual sees his participation as a means of surmounting impotence, of feeling that he has a hand in his own destiny. Having little opportunity for decision making in his job, he feels that if he wins he has in some way controlled his world; if he loses, it is simply a tough break.

Some feel that gambling provides a measure of escape from unrewarding occupations. As one man said:

"All day long you do what them dumb bastard supervisors tell you. Don't make no difference whether it makes sense or not. Sometimes you just gotta get out of line."

Corporations concerned with efficiency and the mental well-being of employees involved in monotonous tasks might do well to incorporate some form of gambling break, keeping people interested and alert. The prizes need not be monetary, but could include time off, a really precious commodity to many.

I am not suggesting that we solve the world's problems by turning it into a giant casino. I am suggesting that in a time when we need imagination and creativity more desperately than at any previous time in history, we do wrong to suppress a whole element of human personality which may be a key to

these other elements, often attempting to deny its existence, while maintaining that the impulse to take a chance is masochistic.

People gamble, whether it is legal or not, because it helps them face the world more successfully than they could without the spark which it gives. Yet we treat gambling as the Victorians treated sex.

We must learn to accept and deal with out total humanity if we are to have any chance of creating, rather than a society in which the individual conforms, one geared to the growth of the individual, a society in which we may glory in our humanity rather than suffering constant guilt over our normal impulses.

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