

❖ Other Voices ❖

In general, pathological gambling appears to affect up to 1% to 2% of the general population, and the subthreshold condition, termed *problem* or *Level 2 gambling*, affects another 3% to 4%. In certain high-risk populations, such as substance abusers, youth, minorities, and lower socioeconomic class groups, the percentages are even higher.

NANCY M. PETRY, *PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING: ETIOLOGY, COMORBIDITY, AND TREATMENT* (2005)

In the past century, gambling has undergone a profound transformation. From being regarded as an economically marginal, politically corrupt, and often morally dubious activity, it has, at the start of the twenty-first century, become a global player in the economies of North America, Europe, and Australasia. Today, the gambling industry is a billion-dollar enterprise, creating vast profits for commercial organizations and contributing massive amounts of revenue to both state and federal governments....

GERDA REITH, *INTRODUCTION TO GAMBLING: WHO WINS? WHO LOSES?* (2003)

Games of chance (card games, etc.) or *wagers* are not in themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement. Unfair wagers and cheating at games constitute grave matter, unless the damage inflicted is so slight that the one who suffers it cannot reasonably consider it significant.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, SECOND EDITION (1997), SECTION 2413

Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, destructive of good government and good stewardship. As an act of faith and concern, Christians should abstain from gambling and should strive to minister to those victimized by the practice. Where gambling has become addictive, the Church will encourage such individuals to receive therapeutic assistance so that the individual's energies may be redirected into positive and constructive ends. The Church acknowledges the dichotomy that can occur when opposing gambling while supporting American Indian tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Therefore, the Church's role is to create sacred space to allow for dialogue and education that will promote a holistic understanding of the American Indians' historic quest for survival. The Church's prophetic call is to promote standards of

justice and advocacy that would make it unnecessary and undesirable to resort to commercial gambling...as a recreation, as an escape, or as a means of producing public revenue or funds for support of charities or government.

THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH (2008), ¶163

Every action the government takes, every policy the government makes, conveys certain values to its citizens.... I worry that the overall effect of the education lottery is the teaching of more deleterious values, those that are corrosive to lively civil society and a flourishing democratic culture. In the first place, the lottery itself functions as a regressive tax, which places a heavier burden on the poor to pay for public services that everyone enjoys. But more visibly, the state aggressively markets lotteries with advertising campaigns designed to separate citizens from their rational faculties, their commitment to hard work and frugality, and their general responsibility toward future generations. As one Massachusetts lottery ad proclaimed: "Work is nothing but heart-attack-inducing drudgery." "This could be your ticket out," beckons a billboard in an impoverished neighborhood in Chicago, not far from another lottery billboard offering "How to Get from Washington Boulevard to Easy Street." At this point, the government has ceased being a protector and has become a barker, a huckster, a con man trying to convince viewers that the odds of winning are in their favor.

ERIC C. OWENS, "CIVIC VALUES AND 'EDUCATION LOTTERIES,'" GAMBLING: MAPPING THE AMERICAN MORAL LANDSCAPE (2009)

In order for a privileged few to enjoy luxury and extravagance while the many who create the wealth experience hardship, economic marginality, and insecurity, individual possession of wealth must be widely accepted as normal and appropriate.... At a time when chances for economic security are declining for most people in society, the state lottery stands out as a *new opportunity* for individual economic advancement. The mass media has been widely used to legitimate and promote lottery play, and states send the message that a life-altering opportunity is only one dollar away.... A primary theme in state lottery advertisements is that acquisition of wealth is a wonderful, transcendent experience – and that the opportunity is available to all.

DAVID NIBERT, HITTING THE LOTTERY JACKPOT: GOVERNMENT AND THE TAXING OF DREAMS (2000)

Every feature of a slot machine – its mathematical structure, visual graphics, sound dynamics, seating and screen ergonomics – is calibrated to increase a gambler's "time on device" and to encourage "play to extinction," which is industry jargon for playing until all your money is gone. The machines have evolved from handles and reels to buttons and screens, from coins to credit cards, from a few games a minute to hundreds. Inside, complicated algorithms perform a high-tech version of "loading the dice" – deceptions

no self-respecting casino would ever allow in table gambling. The machines are designed to exploit aspects of human psychology, and they do it well. In the eyes of the gaming industry, this may look like success, but it comes at great expense for gamblers.

The rise in slots gambling, fueled in large part by these technological developments, has led to much higher rates of gambling addiction. This is evident at Gamblers Anonymous meetings in Las Vegas, where the vast majority of participants are machine gamblers. These gamblers are motivated more by a need to escape reality than any desire for entertainment and excitement. Without the presence of social elements such as other players or a live dealer, they are able to exit the world and enter a state where everything fades away. Slot machines so completely concentrate players' attention on a series of game events that anything troubling about their life situations – physically, emotionally or socially – gets blotted out. Players enter what's known as the "machine zone," where even winning stops mattering; in fact, it can be unwelcome because it interrupts the flow of play. Such players only stop when their credits are consumed.

Discussion of problem gambling typically focuses on individual gamblers and their "predisposition" to addiction. This focus elides the fact that some activities are more addictive than others. The aim of the gambling industry is to increase its bottom line, not to create addicts. But in effect, its efforts to make slot machines so effective at extracting money from people yields a product that, for all intents and purposes, approaches every player as a potential addict – in other words, someone who won't stop playing until his or her means are depleted.

NATASHA DOW SCHÜLL, "BEWARE: 'MACHINE ZONE' AHEAD," *WASHINGTON POST* (JULY 6, 2008)

Perhaps the most important finding to surface here involves the central role of co-religionist networks. The percentage of one's close friends who are members of the same congregation bears an inverse association with the frequency of gambling, and this is true regardless of one's denomination.... Along with simply having close friends in the congregation, having a religious leader within one's close personal network also has a potent inverse relationship with gambling. These findings indicate that social relationships within congregations, which involve face-to-face interaction, may have substantial influence on individual behaviors such as gambling. Further, the status of network members also matters; persons who are close friends with religious leaders may be especially reluctant to engage in behavior that could potentially be considered deviant.

CHRISTOPHER G. ELLISON AND MICHAEL J. MCFARLAND, "RELIGION AND GAMBLING AMONG U.S. ADULTS: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TRADITIONS, BELIEFS, PRACTICES, AND NETWORKS," *JOURNAL FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION* (2011)