

Research Note

Personality and Problem Gambling**David Malkin, PhD***Remand Centre, Metropolitan Prison Complex Canning Vale, Western
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Abstract

Matched groups of problem and social gamblers were compared in terms of their locus of control and their responses to the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. Contrary to previous studies no significant differences occurred on the locus of control measure. It was hypothesized that problem gamblers would be more extraverted and intuitive than social gamblers. However, none of the four scales on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator showed a significant difference between the groups. These findings and the results of earlier studies are compared and discussed. Earlier studies are difficult to interpret because of inappropriate or inconsistent controls. It is suggested that future personality studies of problem gamblers differentiate between different types of gambling and different types of problem gamblers.

INTRODUCTION

In this study we examine the personality characteristics of problem gamblers by comparing the responses of problem gamblers with those of a matched group of social gamblers on two inventories, an Australian version of Rotter's (1966) Internal/External Locus of Control Questionnaire (Richardson, 1968) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1962).

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The first inventory was chosen in order to clarify the often hypothesized relationship between high externality of control and problem gambling. Although Moran (1970) found a significantly external orientation for all types of problem gamblers, Carey (1968) did not.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was developed by Myers (1962) to measure the variables in Jung's personality typology. Four scales comprise this test: Extraversion-Introversion, Sensing-Intuition, Thinking-Feeling, and Judgment-Perception. All of these scales are of relevance to hypotheses regarding the personality of problem gamblers.

The Extraversion-Introversion Index measures whether the individual characteristically directs perception onto the environment or the world of ideas and concepts. From the previous literature (e.g., Bergler, 1957; Roston, 1961) we would expect problem gamblers to score more highly toward the extraverted end of the scale than social gamblers.

The Sensing-Intuition Scale measures whether the individual primarily uses one or other of the five senses to become aware of external events or relies on the process of intuition. The latter is understood as "indirect perception by the way of the unconscious with emphasis on ideas or associations which the unconscious track onto the outside things perceived" (Myers, 1962, p. 2). Clearly the problem gambler may be inferred as being intuitive in that, as several psychoanalytic theorists (e.g., Galdston, 1960) have observed, there is an element of seeking signs from fate in terms of gambling outcomes.

The Thinking-Feeling Index is said to reflect the person's preference between style of judgment. The "thinking" individual discriminates impersonally between true or false (or logical inference). The "feeling" person discriminates between valued and not valued. The fact that a problem gambler can gamble for so long against such improbable odds of winning would suggest that he or she is more likely to be at the feeling end of the scale.

Finally the Judgment-Perception dimension measures the tendency to want to evaluate information and stimuli coming in (Judgment) versus uncritical acceptance of input received (Perception). Since the consequences of the outcome of betting may be carefully judged in terms of the "judgment" of fate and because judgment must be exercised in placing a bet in the first place, it is hypothesized that problem gamblers will be more judgmental than social gamblers.

In summary, we hypothesize that the problem gamblers can be more extremely classified as Extraverted-Intuitive-Feeling-Judgmental than social gamblers.

METHODS

Subjects

Sixteen members of Gamblers Anonymous (GA) and 16 social gamblers participated in the study conducted in July 1981. Social gamblers were defined

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Table 1

Characteristics of Problem and Social Gamblers

	Problem gamblers	Social gamblers
Mean age	33.6	33.4
Mean number score	10.6	10.7
Mean SES category	4.9	4.9
Estimated losses, \$	45,500	1,245
Mean no. years gambling	13.1	16.0
No. married	8	10
No. divorced/separated	4	3
No. committing crimes for gambling	7	0

for the purposes of this study as "men who bet on horses (the commonest feature of the G.A. group) not more frequently than twice weekly or less frequently than once every three months and who reported that they had never regarded their gambling as a problem." This type of gambler was to be matched on the characteristics of age, number ability, race, and socioeconomic status with a corresponding member of the group gathered from GA. Social gamblers were recruited from outside local Totalisator Agency Board Offices (Off-Track Betting Shops).

A Personal History Questionnaire was administered. This provided information on marital status, age, and gambling history.

Number ability was measured on a number series test previously used as a test of intelligence (Richardson and Stanton, 1973). This test, from Lumsden (1959), is a 20-item unidimensional measure and has a time limit of 3 minutes. Socioeconomic status was determined using the protocol of Hall and Jones (1950).

Table 1 shows the subjects' age, number score, and socioeconomic status and other demographic characteristics.

It was hoped initially to match each group exactly but it soon became apparent that subject availability would not permit this. Eventually, it was decided that ± 3 years would be acceptable in terms of matching age; \pm one group for matching socioeconomic status; and \pm one point for matching the ability to compute number series.

Ashton (1979) states that correlational analysis indicates that, for heavy gamblers, years of gambling had a positive relationship with risk taking. It is fortunate that no significant difference on that variable exists between the test and control groups ($t = 0.78$, $df, 30$, $p > 0.05$).

Table 2
Myers-Briggs Scores

		Mean score (100 = midpoint) of scale)	t value (df 30)	P
Extraversion-Intraversion	Problem gamblers	99.5	0.08	NSa
	Social gamblers	100.1		
Sensing-Intuition	Problem gamblers	74.6	1.25	NS
	Social gamblers	84.2		
Thinking-Feeling	Problem gamblers	103.0	1.24	NS
	Social gamblers	110.4		
Judgment-Perception	Problem gamblers	97.0	0.23	NS
	Social gamblers	99.0		

aNS = not significant.

RESULTS

No significant differences emerged between the two groups on the locus of control measure ($X_{PG} = 6.44$, $X_{SG} = 6.19$, $t = 0.26$, $df = 30$, $p > 0.05$). Both means were marginally toward the internal locus of control end of the continuum. Table 2 shows the means and t values for each of the four scales on the Myers-Briggs Test.

No significant differences were observed. Both groups of gamblers are central on most scales except the Sensing-Intuition Scale, where they scored toward the sensing end.

DISCUSSION

The finding that there was no significant difference in locus of control between our problem gambling sample and our matched social gambling controls does not support the clinical observations of Bergler (1957) and other psychoanalytic theorists or replicate Moran's (1970) empirical findings. Carey (1968), however, also showed no significant elevation in the level of external control by the problem gamblers. Although further research is required it would seem that external locus of control is a personality variable which will not distinguish problem gamblers from their social gambling counterparts.

Lester (1980) suggests that gambling behavior might be related to belief in an internal locus of control in some circumstances. "People who gamble in ways

that involve skill in judgment might be expected to believe in an internal locus of control, whereas those who gamble in ways that involve luck might be expected to believe in an external locus of control" (p. 22). After testing students he concluded that those who are externally orientated had gambled more at activities in which chance plays a large role than internally oriented students (e.g., lotteries and slot machines). They had also gambled less at activities in which skill and judgment can play a large role (e.g., poker). Gambling on horses involves luck and judgment and thus it is not surprising that the subjects in the present study were marginally internally oriented. It would seem that the importance of locus of control in relation to the development of problem gambling may relate to the selection of gambling activity rather than as an overall personality trait associated with addiction.

Our results also did not confirm our hypothesis about the problem gambling personality type which would be measured by the Myers-Briggs Test. No significant differences emerged between the two groups on any of the scales. Furthermore both groups scored close to the indifference point on all but the Sensing-Intuition continuum. Here both groups scored toward the sensing end.

From earlier studies (e.g., Roston, 1961; Moran, 1970; Dell et al., 1981) it was confidently predicted that a difference in the two groups scores on the Intraversion-Extraversion Scale could have been observed. However, only Roston (1961) used other than the validating sample for the test employed as a control. His controls were psychiatric patients and normal males. It would appear that until research incorporating appropriate controls

and a variety of tests is undertaken, the relationship between intraversion-extraversion and problem gambling must remain a hypothesis.

In summary, it would appear that, contrary to expectations derived from earlier reports, neither locus of control nor intraversion-extraversion or sensingintuition appear to differentiate a tendency to problem gambling on horse races. This appears to be so when comparisons are made between responses of problem gamblers and a matched control group of social gamblers. Seeking a general relationship between problem gambling and personality may be a fruitless task. Problem gambling, like alcoholism, does not seem to be a unitary phenomenon. It has in the past been divided into a variety of categories (e.g., Moran, 1970) and it may be that responses to personality inventories varies according to the problem's typology. Further, as we have already indicated, personality may well be expressed in the type of gambling undertaken. This, too, will need to be differentiated in future analyses.

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