

THE SPIN

Issue #8

Your Community Gambling Awareness Newsletter
A Spin on Gambling Myths and Thinking Errors

Reframing Gaming

Pathological gambling is a highly cognitive disorder characterized by specific thinking and behavioural patterns. Because gambling is calculated to produce random results within a reward system of set odds, persons who regularly take part in gambling activities develop playing patterns and distorted belief systems associated with outcomes. When this belief system dictates their gaming habits, they become invested emotionally, psychologically and financially in the activity and problems begin to appear.



The most common cognitive traps for problem gamblers include control, luck and “gambler’s fallacy”.

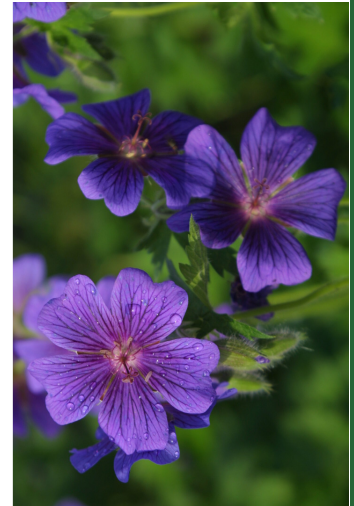
When gamblers develop an illusion of control, they believe that they have control over the outcome of the gambling activity. For instance, they may have experienced a win after noticing that their shoe was untied and therefore link the good fortune to their untied shoe. A pattern then evolves of untying their shoe laces before gambling.

Similarly, some gamblers start to identify what they believe are “lucky” signs or symbols.

The famous Tennessee Williams quote “Luck is believing you are lucky” suggests that the power is not in the symbol itself, but in the focus or belief that we give to the symbol.

“Gamblers Fallacy” occurs when a person believes that winning or losing is linked somehow to previous results. For example, on the roulette wheel, if the board shows that the colour red has come up the last few spins, some gamblers believe that the next spin will come up black because it is “due” even though the odds remain 50/50 on each individual spin.

Such distorted thinking patterns evolve innocently and lead to betting more money than intended and creates paths to impaired control and gambling problems.



Inside This Newsletter...

- Learn how slot machines really work
- Find out why nothing is truly “free” at the casino
- Read about the thinking errors that could lead to a gambling problem
- Discover the top 3 gambling myths in Ontario

No Free Lunch

As part of a marketing strategy, and what is essentially an attempt to induce patrons to return to the casino, Ontario’s government-owned casinos offer what are referred to as “freebies”, “perks” or “comps”. These complimentary gifts can range from free hotel rooms, meals, gifts, spa packages, cash vouchers, and tickets to various events among other items. A *Toronto Star* investigation in 2005 found the use of “freebies” was widespread and that since commercial casinos are operated by

private corporations the provincial government has no control over the distribution of “freebies” or “comps”. They also found that total revenues spent on “comps” in 2005, was \$319 million.



Receiving “comps” can be

very alluring. Gamblers report feeling great about being able to invite friends to spend a free night at a hotel, or receive free tickets to concerts. Gamblers report that these perks make them feel special and that they believe

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The Spin On Slots

The Spin interviewed Robert Simpson, CEO of the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre (OPGRC.org). Thanks Rob!

What are some incorrect beliefs that people hold concerning how slot machines work?

The most important one is the belief that if you have a string of losses (or a period of play where there is no big win) your chances for that big win get better. This comes from believing that the machine works like a conveyor belt, and each loss moves the next big win, wherever it is, that much closer. Under this view, winning is just a matter of patience – and, of course, your ability to keep putting money into it, even if you have exceeded your limit.

How do slot machines actually work?

Think of a large cylinder with 90,000 marbles in it – this is the best analogy for how the machine actually works. Each time you draw a losing mar-



Robert Simpson

ble, you must put it back in the cylinder and spin it (to randomize) again before you make your next draw. This metaphor illustrates the essential dynamics of play and dramatizes the way the odds are stacked against you.

How can slot machines be random and yet the odds are against the player?

Again, think of the cylinder – when it turns, the marbles get all mixed up such that there is no way of knowing or predicting where the winning marble is. You are just as well off choosing any marble, as they all have the same very low chance (1 in 90,000) of being the one you want. So the draw (or choice of marble) is a random selection from a pool that has fixed odds – the odds are set by the operator. They can be changed by adding more losing marbles into the cylinder (e.g. to make it 1 in 95,000), or by adding more winning ones (e.g. to make it 1 in 80,000). This is exactly how operators can offer slot machines with different odds or, if they wanted, to have

different odds in two machines that look exactly the same on the outside.

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“Depend on the rabbit’s foot if you will, but remember, it didn’t work for the rabbit.”

R.E. Shay

“Luck is believing you are lucky.”

Tennessee Williams

“I’m a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it.”

Thomas Jefferson

“The safest way to double your money is to fold it over once and put it in your pocket.”

Frank McKinney Hubbard

Stinking Thinking

Our brains try to make sense out of things – that is the way that we are made. When we look at random events or items, we want to see patterns. Consider the billions of stars in the sky. When we gaze up into the heavens, we often look for patterns and constellations such as the Big Dipper. We tend to want to connect the dots and make sense out of random events. We’ve all looked at the clouds and saw faces or images in them.

Naturally, there are a number of cognitive distortions or thinking errors that occur when people gamble. Sometimes these errors in thinking can lead to problems. Here are a few examples of

these thinking errors: **MAGNIFIED GAMBLING SKILL** occurs when one overrates their ability to win. They seem to have exaggerated self-confidence despite persistent losses and they often spend a great deal of effort to acquire special knowledge and develop gambling systems. **SUPERSTITIOUS THINKING OR BEHAVIOUR:** Examples of this include bringing along certain objects such as a hat or stuffed animal when gambling because it is felt that this object will confer good luck or increase the probability of winning. People may also perform specific actions or rituals because they feel that it will increase their likelihood of winning.

Examples can include seating preference, machine preference, rubbing hands, speaking out loud certain words, chants or songs, or touching a machine prior to play. **ATTRIBUTION ERRORS** are common amongst gamblers. This type of thinking error involves the gambler attributing wins to their skill or ability and attributing losses to situational factors such as someone else’s behaviour or luck. **GAMBLER’S FALLACY** is probably one of the most familiar thinking errors. This occurs when gamblers interpret losses as an indication that a win is just around the next corner. Unfortunately, this often leads them to “chase that win” when they probably should pack up and call it a night.

Gambling Craving Helpline (24 hours): 1-519-824-1010 Ext. COPE (2673)



Dear Spin



Dear Spin,

I'm 23 years old and I've been playing poker for the past couple of years. I love Texas Hold'em. The game is exciting and I'm a great poker player. This isn't just my opinion. Other poker players have told me this. I've been studying the game for a while and I watch poker on TV constantly. I've really honed my skills and I practice all the time with buddies. I always "clean their clock." To me this is just practice for the casino where my skill really counts.

I'm great at bluffing and I can read everyone's "tells." There is one guy that always plays with his ring when he's bluffing. I've got his number. Everyone knows me at the tables and I've made a lot of friends. This really makes me feel important. I'm so skilled that I can see myself winning a Poker Championship in the near future. If that guy from Waterloo, can win 1.4 million, I certainly can.

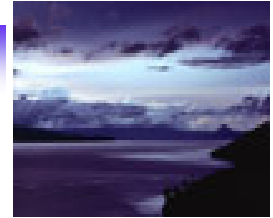
Still, I've noticed that I've had some losing streaks lately and I need more and more money to stay in the game. Right now I'm just trying to win back my initial investment. I've gone through all my savings and I've maxed out my credit cards. The problem is you need money to make money and I'm not sure where I can get more money to get me back in the action. I've been reading more and more books on *How to Win at Poker* since my losing streak and it hasn't helped yet. I know that I'm feeling more desperate when I play and I'm on the "tilt." My girlfriend says that lately I've been irritable, distant and moody.

Up until now I've found poker as a quick and easy way to make money. Maybe I just need to try harder and get my head back in the game. Any words of wisdom?

Signed Rounder

Word Search: Stinking Thinking?

G	S	G	T	I	K	C	P	X	W
R	E	L	H	S	Y	S	T	E	M
N	I	U	I	A	U	R	K	S	U
O	C	S	N	U	G	Y	S	E	J
I	U	R	K	L	N	E	X	I	V
S	J	A	I	U	I	N	E	B	F
U	B	N	N	C	S	O	M	E	P
L	K	D	G	K	A	M	B	E	G
L	X	O	T	Y	H	L	M	R	Z
I	L	M	G	I	C	O	Q	F	H



- ILLUSION
- LUCKY
- CHASING
- FREEBIES
- SYSTEM
- RANDOM
- MONEY
- THINKING

Dear Rounder,

usually go over your limit and it usually leads to bigger losses. I would encourage you to take a step back and think about this.



As soon as we start to look at gambling as an easy way to make money, we can become a hostage to it. Most people with a gambling problem have the false belief that they are the ones that are going to win big. While some people do win big, the majority of people lose. David Williams, who won the 2004 World Series of Poker, stated, "What people don't see is that for every person like me, there are thousands of people losing money." The media heavily promotes the winners and in

many cases they are treated like rock stars or celebrities. This adds to the appeal and lure of the game. This publicity overshadows the fact that becoming a professional poker player is very rare. I want you to have all the facts to help you make decisions about your play.

You're right! Poker players with greater skills do, of course, have an advantage. But remember the game involves both chance and skill. Let's not underestimate chance as it's a variable that you can't predict. The research has shown that players who focus on their skill and downplay the chance factor are at greater risk of developing problems. When you suffer a "bad beat" and chance becomes a factor this can lead to emotionally-driven and risky gambling behaviour. This is what you're describing now with being on the "tilt." Being moody and irritable can be a sign of problem gambling. Once you're on the tilt it is very easy to start chasing losses. When you chase your losses, you

Texas Hold'em is exciting, tense, and cool but it is like any other game. You can win and you can lose. If you're going to play, you might want to think about some of the things I've mentioned. It might be important to know that as a young man you are at a greater risk of developing problems. The research indicates that 6.9% of 18-24 year olds have problems

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No Free Lunch...

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that they are getting something for free. Gamblers also report that “freebies” can entice them to go to the casino more often, and when they think about it, they often end up spending more money gambling than the complimentary gift is worth.

Low risk gambling is about viewing your time at the casino as entertainment and understanding that the more often you gamble, the more you will lose. Being offered

“freebies” or “comps” is already an indication that you have been spending considerable amounts of time and money at the casino. So is there a free lunch? “Freebies” can be enjoyable, if viewed from the perspective that this is part of an entertainment package that you are paying for. The ultimate question to ask yourself is, can I afford the time and money I am spending at the casino and can I afford the “freebies”?



COMMON GAMBLING THINKING ERRORS

If you have ever thought any of the following, you might be at risk of developing a gambling problem.

“I can win back the money that I lost.”

“I can borrow money and pay it back.”

“I’ve come up with a winning system.”

The Top 3 Gambling Myths in Ontario

“Gambling can be a good way to get rich.”

(11% of Ontario adults agreed)

“The more you gamble, the more likely you are to win a lot of money.”

(8.7% of Ontario adults agreed)

“Gambling is an easy way to make money.”

(7.3% of Ontario adults agreed)

Source: Responsible Gambling Council Survey November 2007

The Spin on Slots...

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Where can people get more information on how slot machines work? The OPGRC, in partnership with the Ontario Lottery & Gaming (OLG.ca) are developing a Slots Animation to show how slots work. Basically, the bottom line is not to play beyond your limit, because it virtually guarantees you will lose money you can’t afford to – and this is the beginning of a process that leads to becoming a problem gambler.

Dear Spun...

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with gambling.

If you think you need help call the Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline (OPGH) 1-888-230-3505 and they can connect you to a Problem Gambling Counsellor in your community. It takes courage to ask for my advice. Good on ya’

Signed Spun

Sponsored by the Central Ontario Networking Group of Problem Gambling Counsellors. For more information, please contact one of the following for service in your area:

Halton Region

ADAPT - Halton Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Assessment, Prevention and Treatment

Tel: 905-639-6537
Ilona Lampi:
ilampi@haltonadapt.org
www.haltonadapt.org



Peel Region

William Osler Health Centre
Addiction Counselling Service
Tel: 905-796-3005
Donna Macrae: donna_macrae@oslerhc.org

Waterloo Region

St. Mary’s Counselling Service

Tel: 519-745-2585
Susan McLaren: smclaren@smgh.ca
Noëlla Taylor: ntaylor@smgh.ca
www.smgh.ca

Wellington - Dufferin Counties
Homewood Community Addiction Services

Tel: 519-836-5733
Michelle Nogueira:
nogumich@homewood.org
Jennifer Will:
willjenn@homewood.org
www.homewood.org