**The Relationship between Generalized Anxiety and Gambling Behaviors of Different Generations**

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**Introduction**

A whopping 85% of Americans have gambled at least once in their lives (National Council on Problem Gambling 2012). The increase of social media influence and internet access have contributed to the increasing size of the online gambling market, making gambling more accessible. The Las Vegas Strip remains the gambling hubbub of the country, while construction of casinos elsewhere has continued to increase. Though many individuals only engage in social gambling, the effects of a gambling addiction can be both physically and psychologically crippling. Addicted gamblers experience a plethora of issues in their lives: relationship, financial, legal, and general health problems (Mayo Clinic 2016). It is clear that gambling addiction is a serious problem that can become debilitating if left untreated. Many addicted gamblers also suffer serious mental health issues like depression, severe migraines, and even suicidal thoughts (Mayo Clinic 2016).

Poor mental health has thought to be linked to addiction. Specifically, anxiety is a mental illness that has been linked to addictive behaviors like gambling and betting (Lindberg et al. 2010). An increase in anxiety due to preexisting stressors has been linked to problem gambling (Coman et al. 1997). The study showed that linking anxiety to problem gambling perpetuates the addictive behavior. People who gamble learn that their anxiety is eased by gambling, so any time their anxiety is triggered, they seek gambling as a means of relief, perpetuating the addiction. Similarly, correlation analyses showed that anxiety was positively and significantly correlated with both gambling consequences and behaviors (Lindberg et al. 2011). More specifically, a study reported that anxiety-prone gamblers frequently spend time gambling on their own and identifies this as the correlation between anxiety and gambling problems. Many of the studies to date have focused on anxiety broadly as one of many psychological risk factors or mental illnesses in relation to gambling (Burton et al. 2000, Lindberg et al. 2011, Petry et al. 2007).

It has been found that adolescent gamblers reported increased levels of anxiety, social stress, depression, and more substance abuse than adolescent non-gamblers (Ste-Marie et al. 2006). Additionally, studies have shown that internet gambling has been significantly associated with poor mental health and occurs in alarmingly high rates among college students (Petry et al. 2007). Other studies have found that in elders and older adults, at-risk gambling has been correlated with an increase physical and mental illnesses and underwhelming social networks (Lichtenberg et al. 2009). While anxiety been linked to gambling and adolescent age groups, it remains unclear whether anxiety and gambling correlate across generational groups.

The goals of the present study include (1) investigating the relationship between gambling and anxiety and (2) determining if the relationship between gambling and anxiety differs across generational groups. That is, this study will examine whether individuals with anxiety are more prone to addictive gambling behaviors than those without anxiety, and whether these differences are consistent across ages and generations.

**Methods**

**Sample**

The sample from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC) Wave I (2006) gathers data on a nationally representative sample of the civilian, non-institutionalized adult population (18+) living in both typical and atypical living situations including traditional households, military personnel living off base, group accommodation housing, and college quarters. To account for minorities in the sample, NESARC oversampled Black, Hispanic, and young adults aged 18 to 24 years. NESARC data was collected face-to-face by computer assisted interviews conducted in the homes of participants. The Wave I sample used in this study contained 43,093 participants.

**Measures**

General anxiety diagnoses were made using the DSM-IV symptom criteria. Any lifetime incidence of anxiety was measured with the question: “Have you ever been diagnosed with anxiety?” Possible responses were coded dichotomously, with 1 (yes), 0 (no), and 9 (unknown). Questions about various gambling behaviors recorded the presence or lack of these behaviors. Gambling to get out of a bad mood was measured by the question, “Ever gamble to get out of a bad mood?” Gambling to forget one’s problems was measured with the question, “Ever gamble to forget your problems?” Having unsuccessfully tried to quit gambling previously was measured by the question, “More than once try to quit or cut down on gambling, but couldn’t do it?” Problems with a job or school was measured with the question, “Ever had job or school trouble because of gambling?” Each of these gambling behavior questions were also coded dichotomously and had possible responses of 1 (yes), 0 (no), and 9 (unknown). A variable reflecting generational groups was created by grouping ages and had possible groupings of 1 (participants under 25; Millennials), 2 (participants between 26 and 41; Gen X), 3(participants between 42 and 60; Baby Boomers), 4 (participants between 61 and 81; Silent Gen), and 5 (participants over 82; Greatest Gen).

**Predicted Results and Implications**

Anxiety is a common cofactor of gambling and should be taken more seriously as a possible cause or perpetuation of gambling behaviors. The hypothesis being tested states that if a participant has anxiety, despite the age group, the more likely he or she is to exhibit gambling behaviors. If the results support the hypothesis and determine that the presence of anxiety are more likely to exhibit gambling behavior, it will help mental health professionals provide better services to those struggling with gambling addictions, regardless of age. Rehabilitation programs for addiction can be long and expensive and may not be feasible for everyone for a multitude of reasons. If research finds that anxiety is correlated to gambling behavior, general therapy offers a more widely available treatment other than rehab that may produce the same effects and may be able to pinpoint the very issues that cause anxiety and alleviate urges to gamble. It would also be important for future research to pinpoint other common co-occurrences with gambling to offer alternative, more easily accessible treatments that may help those struggling with a gambling addiction.

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