

# **The WAGER 6(1) - Is There More To Gambling Than Just Winning Money?... Bingo!**

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A previous WAGER postulated that men actively involved with dogfighting remain engaged with this activity not solely because of the money they can win gambling on fighting dogs, but rather, because they can acquire a sense of masculinity from the betting on dogs that show "gameness" (i.e., manliness). Within this context, gambling serves at least dual purposes (i.e., gambling can be beneficial to the bettor in ways other than monetarily), since it provides not only an opportunity to win or lose, but also supplies an opportunity to enhance the bettor's social status in the community.

Data collected by Chapple and Nofziger (2000) in bingo clubs, churches, and casino bingo parlors in the southwestern United States reveal a similar dual purpose principle, suggesting it might apply to gambling activities other than dogfighting. Bingo playing research respondents (n=13) randomly selected and interviewed by Chapple and Nofziger (2000) readily admitted that they were drawn to bingo because of the potential money they might win. When asked what they considered "fun" about bingo, most research respondents referred to the amount of money that a particular game was worth (Chapple & Nofziger, 2000). Also, respondents considered other games that paid the most money to be the most fun to play. Furthermore, these respondents stated that both potential and realized winning streaks also inspired them to play bingo. These streaks translated into greater winnings over an extended period of time. The excerpt below taken from the notes of Chapple and Nofziger (2000) reflect these sentiments.

*...[she] was on a 'really good streak' and tells me that Thursday she went to the casino and that she didn't have any money that night to spend but that she did have some of 'those coupon books' (used for free bingo sheets)... and actually won \$300. With some of that money, she bought a game and won another \$250. She then said that she played Friday night and won then, too. Saturday, she didn't win, but she did win here today (Sunday-almost four days straight of playing bingo) (p. 506).*

However, many of the same respondents claiming to be attracted to bingo due to its potential monetary rewards also cited the social benefits derived from gambling on bingo. Indeed, respondents of retirement age considered bingo as the means by which they remained socially occupied during their "senior years" (Chapple & Nofziger, 2000).

According to Nofziger and Chapple (2000), these women considered bingo a tool to cure boredom, not simply a gambling activity by which they could win money. Other middle-aged women used bingo playing as an opportunity to gather socially with friends. One woman stated that she and another participant split winnings among themselves because they play only for fun. Two other women said they convene weekly with five or six other bingo-playing women, not to win money, but to share food and stories within a small group environment. Still other women classified their bingo involvement in terms of charity. These women felt that gambling-related funds acquired by churches, schools, and other local institutions through charitable bingo games made the games less about winning and more about giving.

Chapple and Nofziger (2000) rightfully acknowledge that their methodology was less than adequate to isolate a singular motivation energizing the respondents' desire to play bingo. The study sample was very small, and their results were not meaningfully or statistically associated with the three bingo environments under examination. Consequently, at best, we must consider their conclusions with regard to participant bingo playing motivation as preliminary and exploratory. The methodological weaknesses of this ethnographic research might be less relevant than for most studies. There is no singular reason why bingo players in clubs, churches, or casinos engage in bingo play. Furthermore, a multi-motivational hypothesis suggests that the social benefits of bingo playing might

outweigh the monetary benefits. If so, taken together, the research on dogfighting and bingo-playing begins to suggest a new and different understanding of disordered gambling etiology and maintenance.

Indeed, the data gathered by Chapple and Nofziger (2000) suggest that bingo players, overwhelmingly middle-aged and elderly females<sup>1</sup>, play for both the monetary and social aspects of the game. Data suggest that the social aspects, however, might be more influential than money in motivating bingo participants to frequently return to the game. Specifically, the money available to win from bingo games is not usually excessive (i.e., unless players get involved in high stakes bingo games), and the odds of winning these bingo games arguably are similar to other games of chance regardless of skill, luck, and regularity of attendance and play. However, the socializing aspect of playing bingo remains reliable for its participants according to their reports. These participants report avoiding communal isolation and befriending demographically similar women in a safe environment by playing bingo. Betting on dogfighting also is a social event that provides the players an opportunity to affiliate and identify with masculine counterparts. These opportunities for social bonding and identification remain constant in both gambling environments regardless of whether the betting yields winning or losing.

Bingo and dog fighting have important implications for our current understanding of disordered gambling and its diagnostic criteria. Both activities potentially challenge the current role of winning or losing in the etiology of gambling disorders. For instance, if elderly female bingo players consistently place less emphasis on bingo's potential monetary benefits and more on its social profits, win or lose, can these women develop into problem or pathological gamblers as defined currently by DSM-IV? Alternatively, consider the women cited in Chapple and Nofziger (2000) who have been attending the same bingo hall for fifty years. Despite the ascendancy of gambling compared with other previously more important activities, can we classify these women as problem gamblers because their social outlet happens to involve a certified and socially accepted form of gambling-even if they lose more money than they can afford? If we do classify these players as disordered, is the disorder the result of the social isolation often associated with advancing age, or rather is it the result of an irrepressible or pathological impulse to gamble? These are complex questions with even more complicated implications. Future research must begin to consider the multidimensional role of gambling in serving multidimensional masters: winning

and losing versus social stimulation and identification.

[1] Within the research venues selected in the present study, Chapple and Nofziger (2000) observed very few men playing bingo. However, they note that some men play bingo in the casino and social halls that served alcohol. The investigators do not mention the reason for not approaching these men.

## **References**

Chapple, C., & Nofziger, S. (2000). Bingo!: Hints of deviance in the accounts of sociability and profit of bingo players. *Deviant Behavior*, 21, 489-517.

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