

# **The WAGER Vol. 7(4) - If You Do Not Gamble, Check This Box**

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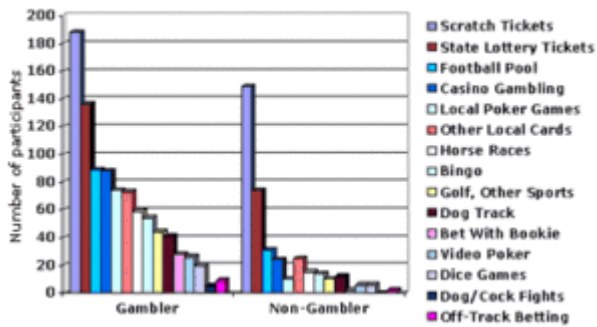
How many cigarettes does it take to call yourself a smoker? How many drinks does it take to be considered a drinker? How many lottery tickets do you have to buy to be a gambler? Often times, people identify themselves with labels that differ from the way they behave (Tagliacozzo, 1979). This week's WAGER discusses a study that investigated this interesting issue by identifying the gambling behaviors of people who reported that they did not gamble (Lange, 2001).

Participants were 449 undergraduates recruited from a psychology lecture course. The mean age was 20.6. Two thirds of the sample was female (N=304) and 86% were Caucasian (N=353).

The first section of the survey asked respondents how much they participated in 15 gambling activities during the past year. After providing this information, respondents answered the question: "If you gamble, please answer the following. If you do not gamble, CHECK THIS BOX and skip to Section IV." A total of 50.8% of the participants checked the box. The gambling behaviors of these "self-categorized non-gamblers" are described below.

Gamblers and non-gamblers engaged in almost all gambling activities on at least one occasion (Figure 1). One exception was dog/cock fight gambling, in which no self-categorized non-gamblers participated. Although some non-gamblers did participate in some of the same behaviors as the gamblers, in general, the frequency of participation was higher among individuals who reported that they gambled. For example, gamblers on average bought 27 instant scratch tickets and 14 lottery tickets during the past year, while non-gamblers averaged 9 scratch tickets and 5 lottery tickets during the past year.

Figure 1. Ever Participated in Gambling Activity at Least Once ("Gambler" and "Non-Gambler" are self-categorizations)



It is reasonable to expect that a few individuals would say that they didn't gamble because it was a low frequency event, but the data indicates that this is not the case. For example, almost the same number of gamblers (N=188) and non-gamblers (N=149) bought scratch tickets during the past year. There was also a high number of non-gamblers who bought lottery tickets (N=74), and they purchased them repeatedly (Mean=5 tickets a year). The possibility also exists that some types of activity simply were not considered as gambling (i.e. lottery tickets and scratch tickets). However, a substantial number of non-gamblers participated in activities that are commonly defined as gambling. For example, ten non-gamblers bet on golf and other sports an average 19 times during the past year; 31 non-gamblers participated in a football pool and 24 gambled in a casino.

Although limited to mostly white college students, this study illustrates the fluid nature of gambling definitions among an educated segment of the population and argues for the development of behavioral standards (i.e., frequency of behavior; monetary gains and losses) to define gambling. These gambling standards might parallel those used in substance abuse research. For example, the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) uses the question "have you had 3-4 drinks of alcohol on one drinking occasion?" An affirmative answer makes people eligible for the diagnosis of alcohol abuse or dependence. Clearly, self-defined categorization is not an accurate measure of gambling. Further, this research opens a pathway to better understanding how rates of gambling disorders among youthful segments of the population might be less than accurate.

## References

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- Tagliacozzo, R. (1979). Smokers' self-categorization and the reduction of

cognitive dissonance. *Addictive Behaviors*, 4(4), 393-399.