

Effects of Gambling Frequency and Perceived Risk or Benefit of Gambling on Undergraduate Students' Evaluations of and Anticipated Responses to Gamblers

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Abstract

Gambling is a common past time in the United States. Gambling destinations such as Las Vegas allow people to fantasize about the possibility of winning a life's fortune. Previous research on perceptions of gambling has demonstrated that when the *benefits* of gambling are salient, individuals' likelihood of participating in gambling activities increases, whereas if the risks of gambling are salient, individuals' likelihood of participating in gambling activities decreases (Wickwire et al.¹). However, to date, no research has examined how gamblers' beliefs about gambling (i.e., risks, benefits) and the frequency of gambling influences how the gambler is perceived. A total of 157 participants (112 female, 45 male) learned about an individual who chose not to gamble, gambled occasionally, or gambled frequently because of the perceived risks or benefits associated with gambling. Participants more positively evaluated (but did not anticipate responding more favorably to) the individual who chose *not* to gamble because he/she knew the risks versus focused on the benefits of gambling. In contrast, for individuals who occasionally or frequently gambled, there were no differences in the personality evaluation of (or anticipated response to) the individuals regardless of their beliefs about the risks or benefits of gambling.

Keywords: gambling, gambling beliefs, college students

1. Introduction

Americans spend roughly \$5 billion on gambling activities annually², with gambling being a popular past time in the United States with the average American losing \$400 per year in gambling activities³. Gambling destinations such as Las Vegas allow people to fantasize about the possibility of winning a life's fortune, yet every day people lose their life savings because of gambling addictions. College students, in particular, may not be fully educated about the dangers of problem gambling and may perceive gambling as desirable because statistics show they are 2-3 times more likely to develop a gambling addiction than adults⁴. Because adolescents tend to be more reward focused and assess risk differently than adults², the current study examined how late adolescents (i.e., college-aged students) perceive and evaluate others' beliefs about gambling (i.e., risks, benefits) and the frequency of their gambling.

College students may hold the misconception that "everyone" gambles and that they gamble frequently, and these misperceptions may influence how college students perceive gambling. Larimer and Neighbors⁵, hypothesized that college students overestimate how often their peers participate in gambling activities. Larimer and Neighbors⁴ also hypothesized that college students who report higher gambling frequency themselves would perceive their peers as frequent gamblers. The researchers asked 317 college students to complete the Gambling Quantity and Perceived Norms scale, as well as report how often they and their peers gambled. The results were consistent with prediction; college students perceived that their peers gambled more than their peers actually reported gambling, and the more

participants gambled themselves the more they perceived others as being frequent gamblers. Larimer and Neighbors⁵ demonstrated that college students misperceive their peers' gambling habits, and this misperception may influence the rate of college students' actual gambling.

In a study examining college students' (mis)conceptions about gambling, Wickwire et al.¹ studied why college students decide to start gambling. Participants included 302 undergraduate college students at a large urban university in Memphis, Tennessee. Wickwire et al.¹ hypothesized that if students viewed gambling as a highly risky behavior, they would be less inclined to gamble. Conversely, if students viewed gambling as a (potentially) highly beneficial behavior, students would be more inclined to gamble. Participants were first asked to rate the ease (or difficulty) and availability of buying lottery tickets. Participants were then asked about the perceived risk and benefit of various gambling activities (e.g., "gambling can lead to problems just like alcohol or other drugs can," "I could win a lot of money gambling," respectively). Participants who found gambling to be easily and highly accessible were more frequent gamblers. Wickwire et al.¹ also found that the greater perceived benefits of gambling, the more likely the participants were to participate in gambling activities, whereas the reverse was found for perceived risks of gambling. In sum, the Wickwire et al.¹ study demonstrates that perceptions of gambling as risky or beneficial influence the likelihood of college students' gambling behaviors.

Li et al.⁶ extended the research by Wickwire et al.¹ by examining if risk perception deters gambling. Li et al.⁶ hypothesized that "risk perception... would negatively effect [*sic*] the intention to gamble", and that this relationship would be influenced by type of gambling. A sample of 373 participants completed a measure assessing their perceptions of the risks associated with gambling and gambling intention for 13 different types of gambling (e.g., horse racing, blackjack, slot machines). For 9 of the 13 types of gambling (i.e., Chinese lottery, Stud poker, Roulette, Greyhound racing, Football lottery, Baccarat, Blackjack, Slot machine, and Mahjong) perceived risk negatively affected participants' intentions to gamble. Results supported the hypothesis that risk perception reduces gambling intentions, especially for some types of gambling activities.

Previous research on gambling intentions has demonstrated that when the risks of gambling are salient, individuals' likelihood of participating in gambling activities decreases¹. However, to date, little research has examined how individuals evaluate and anticipate responding to others who gamble, based on the gambler's beliefs about gambling (i.e., risks, benefits) and frequency of gambling. The current study examined the independent and interactive roles of gambling beliefs and gambling frequency on individuals' evaluations of, and anticipated response to, gamblers. It was predicted that participants would more favorably evaluate and anticipate responding more favorably to an individual who chose not to gamble than the target who occasionally or frequently gambled. It was also predicted that participants would more positively evaluate and anticipate responding more favorably to a target who focused on the risks of gambling than a target who focused on the benefits of gambling. Finally, it was predicted that participants would most positively evaluate and anticipate responding the most favorably to a target who understood the risks of gambling and therefore chose not to gamble.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

One hundred and fifty-seven undergraduate students (45 male, 112 female), from a mid-sized private university in the Midwest, participated in the current study in exchange for research participation credit in their psychology class. Participants ranged in age from 18-23 ($M_{age} = 19.96$, $SD = 1.10$), with the majority of students in their first three years of study (79.0%). Although the majority of participants reported they do not gamble (55.4%), 13.4% reporting gambling at least once per year, and 32.4% of participants reported gambling between 1 and 5 times per year.

2.2. Design

The study was conducted in small groups as a 2 (Gambling Beliefs: Benefits, Risks) x 3 (Gambling Frequency: No Gambling, Occasional Gambling, Frequent Gambling) between-subjects design. The independent variables are Gambling Beliefs and Gambling Frequency. The dependent variables are Personality Evaluation and Anticipated Response.

2.3 Materials

2.3.1. *gambling beliefs and frequency of gambling scenarios*

Six scenarios, written for this study, described the gambling beliefs and gambling frequency of a college student. The scenarios described a college student who chooses not to gamble, to gamble occasionally, or to gamble frequently because of the potential benefits or risks associated with gambling. The risks of gambling described that gambling can lead to problems just like using drugs or alcohol and can also cause financial troubles. The benefits of gambling described that gambling can be fun and exciting, can help relieve anger, and can also solve financial troubles.

2.3.2. *personality evaluation*

A 20-item personality adjective (e.g., careful, impulsive) checklist (Gough⁷) assessed participants' perceptions of the student gambler's personality ($\alpha = .92$). Participants rated the accuracy of each personality adjective for describing the student gambler using a scale ranging from 1 (*Very Inaccurate*) to 7 (*Very Accurate*). After reverse scoring the 8 negatively keyed adjectives, ratings were averaged with higher scores reflecting more positive personality attributions about the gambler.

2.3.3. *anticipated response*

Nine items ($\alpha = .74$), written for this study, assessed participants' global perceptions of the gambler (e.g., "I would want to be friends with Avery."). Items were rated using a scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). Ratings were averaged, with higher ratings reflecting a more positive anticipated response to the gambler.

2.4 Procedure

University IRB approval was obtained prior to conducting the study. After participants read an informed consent document they were randomly assigned to read one of the six Gambling Beliefs and Frequency of Gambling scenarios. After reading a scenario, participants completed the Personality Evaluation and Anticipated Response questionnaires. Participants were then asked to respond to two manipulation check questions to assess their knowledge of the independent variables manipulated within the scenario (i.e., Gambling Beliefs and Gambling Frequency). Once these tasks were completed, participants completed a demographics form that assessed their age, gender, year in school, and how often they gamble per year. Participants were thanked for their time and debriefed.

3. Results

Prior to data analysis, examination of the manipulation check items revealed that 8 participants failed to correctly identify the independent variables manipulated within the scenario they read. These 8 participant's data were excluded from the analyses reported next (4 for failure to accurately recall the frequency in which the student gambled and 4 for failure to accurately recall the student's belief about gambling).

To test the hypothesis that participants would report the most favorable evaluations of and responses to an individual who knows the risks of gambling and therefore chooses not to gamble, 2 (Gambling Beliefs: Benefits, Risks) x 3 (Gambling Frequency: No Gambling, Occasional Gambling, Frequent Gambling) between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted. A separate ANOVA was conducted for each dependent variable: Personality Evaluation and Anticipated Response.

For the dependent variable of Personality Evaluation, the results revealed a significant main effect of Gambling Beliefs, $F(1, 151) = 5.43, p = .021, \eta_p^2 = .04$, with participants reporting more favorable personality evaluations of a student who gambles while knowing the *risks* ($M = 4.30, SD = .97$) than a student who gambles because of the benefits ($M = 4.14, SD = .75$). The main effect of Gambling Frequency was also significant, $F(2, 151) = 71.02, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .48$, with participants reporting that students who choose not to gamble ($M = 4.97, SD = .73$) possess more positive

personality qualities than students who occasionally gamble ($M = 4.18, SD = .68$), who possess more positive personality qualities than students who frequently gamble ($M = 3.54, SD = .50$). The main effects were qualified by a significant Gambling Beliefs x Gambling Frequency interaction, $F(2, 151) = 4.20, p = .017, \eta_p^2 = .04$. As seen in Figure 1, post hoc t -tests revealed that for the student who chose *not to gamble*, participants attributed more positive personality qualities to the student who knew the risks versus focused on the benefits, $t(49) = -3.23, p < .01$. In contrast, for students who gambled *occasionally* or *frequently*, there was no difference in the personality qualities attributed to the students whether they knew the risks or focused on the benefits, $t(52) = -1.03, p = .31$ and $t(50) = 0.75, p = .46$, respectively.

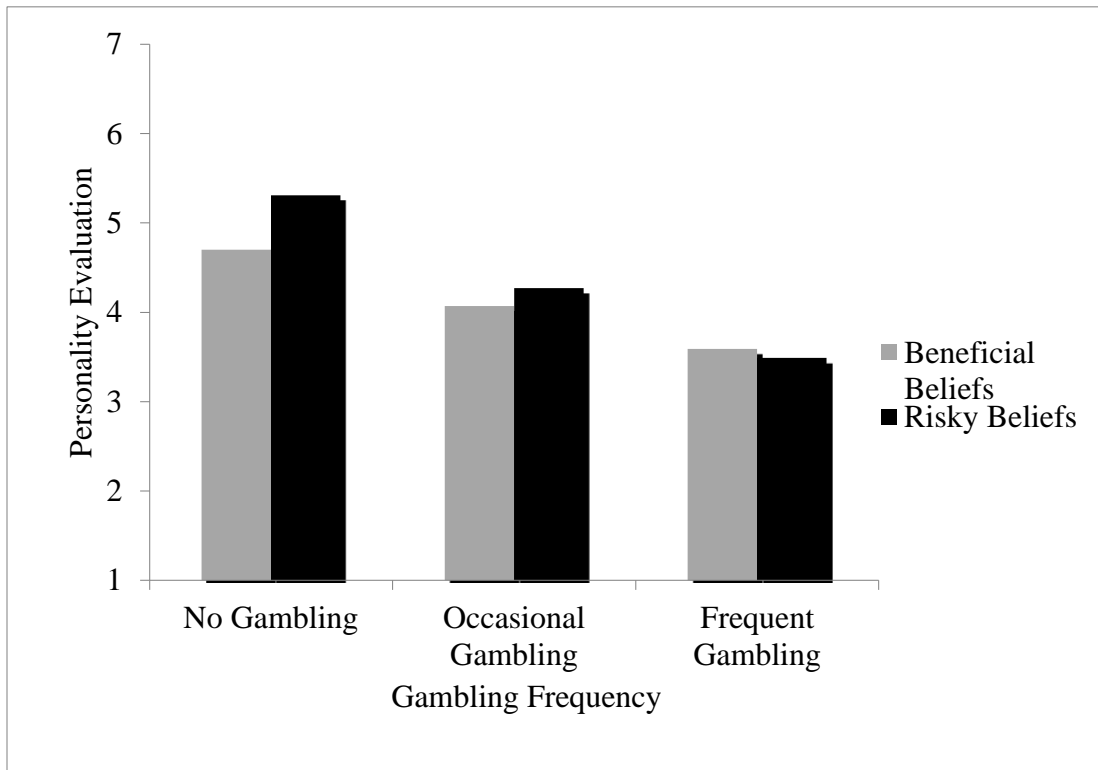


Figure 1. Interaction between Gambling Frequency and Gambling Beliefs on Personality Evaluation scores. For the student who chose not to gamble, participants attributed more positive personality qualities to the student who knew the risks versus focused on the benefits. For students who gambled occasionally or frequently, there was no difference in the personality qualities attributed to the students whether they knew the risks or focused on the benefits.

For the dependent variable of Anticipated Response, the results revealed no significant main effect for Gambling Beliefs, $F(1, 151) = .50, p > .05, \eta_p^2 = .01$. However, a significant main effect for Gambling Frequency emerged, $F(2, 151) = 41.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$, with participants anticipating responding more favorably to individuals who choose not to gamble ($M = 4.58, SD = .87$) than individuals who occasionally gambled ($M = 3.95, SD = .65$), and participants anticipated responding more favorably to those who occasionally gambled than those who frequently gambled ($M = 3.30, SD = .63$). The interaction between Gambling Beliefs and Gambling Frequency was not significant, $F(2, 151) = 2.23, p > .05, \eta_p^2 = .02$.

4. Discussion

The current study examined the independent and interactive influences of gambling beliefs (i.e., risks, benefits) and gambling frequency (i.e., no gambling, occasional gambling, frequent gambling) on the personality evaluation of gamblers and the anticipated response to other's gambling behaviors. The *independent* effects of gambling beliefs and

gambling frequency revealed that more favorable personality evaluations were made of individuals who 1) understood the risks versus focused on the benefits of gambling and 2) chose not to gamble versus gambled occasionally or frequently, respectively. The interactive effects of gambling beliefs and gambling frequency revealed that the personality of individuals who chose *not* gamble because of the *risks*, versus focused on the benefits, were evaluated relatively favorably. The findings reveal that college-aged students more positively evaluate and anticipate responding more favorably to individuals who choose not to gamble because they understand the risks of gambling.

One purpose of the current study was to examine evaluations of the frequency of others' gambling. Consistent with the hypothesis, participants reported more favorable personality evaluations of, and anticipated responding more favorably to, the individual who chose not gamble (especially when the individual understood the risks of gambling) compared to individuals who occasionally or frequently gambled. Participants appear to value individuals who resist the temptation to gamble and perceive them as more responsible and having more self-control than individuals who gamble occasionally or frequently. Considering that frequent gamblers tend to be more impulsive (Cohn et al.⁸), college students, in the current study, may be devaluing the characteristics (i.e., impulsivity) perceived to be associated with gambling. Future research could examine if impulsive gambling behaviors (e.g., chasing losses) are perceived more negatively than less impulsive gambling behaviors (e.g., setting limits to monetary losses).

The current study revealed that college students reported relatively favorable personality evaluations of individuals who understood the risks, versus focused on the benefits, of gambling. Wickwire et al.¹ demonstrated that the more participants perceived risks in gambling, the less likely they were to actually participate in gambling activities. The perceived risks associated with gambling appear to provide individuals with some certainty that gambling is not socially desirable. It would be worthwhile for future research to manipulate the degree of perceived risk of a gambling activity to further examine how risk perception influences evaluations of gambling. For example, future research could manipulate the percent of money a target individual intends to spend on gambling, relative to his/her gross income. It is possible that higher percentages of income spent on gambling are perceived more negatively, especially if the gambler has other income requiring obligations (e.g., family, house).

4.1 Conclusion

The present findings contribute to the understanding of the role of gambling beliefs and gambling frequency on evaluations of other's gambling. College-aged students appear to value peers who choose not to gamble and are aware of the risks associated with gambling. Although there are many strengths of the current study, additional research should be conducted in more naturalistic settings to examine the specific instances under which various gambling activities are (de)valued.

5. References

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