



Taking Back Your Life

WOMEN and PROBLEM GAMBLING

Diane Rae Davis, Ph.D.

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Editor's note

The stories in this book are true. Names, locations, and other identifying information have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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Foreword



I met Dr. Diane Davis in 2001 when she interviewed me about my gambling problem. She listened carefully while I shared my painful journey. Now she has authored *Taking Back Your Life: Women and Problem Gambling*, which I believe should be required reading for suffering gamblers and their families.

When we met, Diane had just launched a Web site to survey more than 250 women and how they reached a recovery stage, and she interviewed some of these women in person. Women shared their most intimate feelings, and Diane listened. Through the numerous interviews she conducted, she developed a typical timeline for female addiction to gambling, from the first coin dropped into a machine to the devastating “bottom”—the low point that the gambler eventually experiences. She describes the lengths the gambler will go to: hiding the problem, inventing lies, manipulating everyone around her. Diane also explains the various levels the gambler must work through to build a foundation for recovery. We learn through this book how we can take our lives back. Throughout these chapters, she notes the differences between male and female gamblers regarding guilt, emotions, and decisions. She uncovers the reasons gamblers escape into their addiction and why they feel it is a safe place.

My own recovery dates back more than seventeen years, and through the years I have read dozens of books on gambling, particularly on female gambling. Unfortunately there were not many books that helped. Most of them were written in technical language and focused on theories and statistics, not on real human experience. I needed a book that spoke to me, not one filled with psycho-babble. I needed to stop the pain now! This book meets that need.

Diane's book taught me how my brain processes the various factors associated with addiction, particularly the pleasure high. I realize now why I kept returning to the casino after constantly losing. Diane covers the difficult parts of working through recovery, offering suggestions on how to overcome these complex issues.

She describes the diagnostic instruments used to identify pathological gambling, which in turn help the gambler face the truth and make decisions. Admitting to the problem is a huge step. Her description of the Twelve Step program Gamblers Anonymous leaves no question unanswered and includes helpful examples of "working the Steps." The opportunity to identify with other gamblers and realize the availability of hope and strength is beneficial in the beginning of recovery. It is the first time many women are able to share the truth about their gambling addiction. The interviews excerpted in this book chart the women's journeys from these difficult first steps to the most satisfying part of recovery.

This book will be a great tool for all women struggling with gambling problems, but it will be particularly helpful for those in small towns, hidden in the outskirts of large cities and too far from meetings, counselors, or other types of recovery support. It will also speak to women in countries where help is not readily available, answering their questions as well. We are all aware that gambling is here to stay, and the help needed for recovery will increase.

The personal stories and information in this book will also be beneficial for the loved ones of problem gamblers. Diane describes the benefits of the Gam-Anon program, a Twelve Step program designed to support the family and friends of gamblers (similar to the relationship of Al-Anon to Alcoholics Anonymous). Gam-Anon members are offered answers to questions that have baffled them for years. Becoming a member of this program is a valuable tool to building and maintaining a more spiritual life for the family.

This book also lists resources and Web sites where further support and answers may be found.

Taking Back Your Life is about recovery and hope, and how the female gambler can reclaim her life. I highly recommend it for the gambler, for the counselor, for students in the addiction field in colleges and universities, and for everyone who wishes to understand gambling addiction.

■ ■ ■ **Marilyn Lancelot**

Marilyn Lancelot is the author of *Gripped by Gambling* and cofounder of the “Women Helping Women” Web site, www.femalegamblers.info.

Introduction



In the year 2000, I discovered one of my dearest friends was addicted to gambling. Her addiction had started out so innocently: one day, Sherry took her elderly mother on an outing to see the brand-new casino on the outskirts of her rural hometown. Later, when her mother became chronically ill, the casino became a place where Sherry could occasionally escape from the stress of caretaking. Like some casinos, this one was dry: it served no alcohol. Sherry is a recovering alcoholic of many years, and she was absolutely delighted to find an alcohol-free venue where she could still “get away from it all.”

During the many weekends when she commuted to her mother’s home to help her, Sherry sometimes tucked her in at night and then headed out to the casino for a few hours of “not thinking about what was happening.” The respite excuse morphed into pure escapism as her mother’s condition deteriorated. Once Sherry sat down to the Wheel of Fortune game and started placing bets, she didn’t have a thought about her mother or the problems ahead. The flashing lights, the buzzing of the crowd, and the occasional alignment of a small winning combination lulled her into a kind of trance. Once in a while she won more money than she lost, but winning was not really the point anymore. She had found a successful way to escape.

After her mother’s death, the inheritance Sherry received provided a means to keep on gambling—and for higher stakes. Sherry discovered many more casinos beyond the one in her old hometown. In fact, within fifty miles of her own home she found five of them, one a major “destination resort.”

Instead of facing the grief of her mother’s death, Sherry just

kept on gambling. “The inheritance didn’t seem like real money anyway,” she says. During the next few years, she periodically tried to limit the money and time she spent gambling and was amazed at the difficulty of that task. She tried various methods that made sense to her, but nothing worked. Leaving her credit cards at home only resulted in a forty-mile round trip to get them after she ran out of cash at the casino. When she told herself she would only spend two hours at the casino, she found that she didn’t leave until hours later when her money had run out.

When Sherry finally told me what was going on, she had been gambling for five years. I was astounded. I thought I knew her so well. How had she managed to keep this hidden for so long? How was she able to continue to work full-time and lead what looked like a normal life? And what kind of friend was I? I hadn’t even noticed. Sherry was still struggling, so my first thought was to read the research literature and find out what was working for other women. Much to my surprise, I found very little written about women with gambling problems, and even less on how they successfully stopped.

Sherry’s experience opened my eyes to a compulsive behavior facing women in our country, a problem I had not imagined before. I wondered how women were recovering from this problem, or *if* they were recovering. These questions became more important to me as I learned about the many women in longtime recovery from alcohol and drugs who then succumb to a gambling addiction. I was well aware of the proliferation of casinos in our country, but I had naively assumed that it was mostly men who were gambling there. A walk through the several casinos in the area made it clear that women were gambling as never before. And when they found themselves in trouble, many of them—like my friend Sherry—had trouble finding anyone to guide or encourage them in the recovery process. The local Gamblers Anonymous

groups at that time consisted primarily of men. In contrast to the local Alcoholics Anonymous groups, there was no core of women who had worked the Twelve Steps and were available for sponsorship. No gambling addiction treatment programs were available locally, or even within Washington state.

What started as mere questions about how to help and support my friend grew into a broader quest for answers on this important topic. I decided to try to find out for myself whether and how women were recovering from compulsive gambling. Since I am a university professor, I naturally turned to the tools of academia for my search. At that time, most of the articles on gambling research were based on male experience, and finding information about the unique experiences of women proved extremely difficult. I decided to use the Internet to find women who had successfully quit their problem gambling and were willing to share their stories about how they did it.

The Internet Survey

That July, with the help of my university's media and technical staff, I launched a Web site designed to recruit women to respond to a survey and share their experience about how they recovered from gambling problems. ("Recovery" is a term used in Twelve Step programs to indicate people who are not only abstinent from an addictive behavior, but are also working on becoming a better person, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally.) In the survey, I asked participants to respond only if they had six months or more of abstinence from compulsive gambling. The Web site stated the purpose of the study and described how to participate in a 79-item survey (reprinted in the appendix) and/or a personal interview. It assured responders of their anonymity: their email addresses would be blocked from my view. It also included a project approval statement from the Human Subjects Review Board

and links to various problem gambling sites that might be helpful to the respondents.

Of all the challenges involved with formulating this project, one of the most delicate was finding four women on campus at my university who would agree to have their pictures posted on the home page of a Web site on compulsive gambling. We finally solved the problem by screening their faces so they could not be recognized.

Publicizing the Web site so women in recovery could find it was another challenge. It took several months to be picked up by the major Internet search engines such as Google. Eventually, we had direct links from the National Council on Problem Gambling site, various state agency sites, and several other sites that help problem gamblers, such as “Women Helping Women” at www.femalegamblers.info.

The survey site was fully functional and online from the latter part of 2000 through 2001. During that time, 264 women from all over the United States with varying lengths of abstinence completed the survey; 136 of them had not gambled at all for six months or more (for an average of about three years). These were the consistently abstinent women I had been seeking, and this book focuses on their data and their stories.

Fifteen of the 136 were recruited for personal in-depth interviews. These women were extremely generous with their time and willingness to tell me the details of their harrowing journey through compulsive gambling to recovery. Excerpts from these interviews appear throughout this book to illustrate these women’s experiences. Great care has been taken to keep the interviewees anonymous by giving them different names and removing any identifying information.

The goal of the Internet survey was to give voice to these women’s experience in three general areas:

1. How did gambling become a problem for you?
2. How did you stop gambling?
3. How were social supports (family members, friends, professional help, self-help) helpful or not helpful in your recovery?

The survey asked about demographics, education, and family history; the patterns, extent, and consequences of the gambling problem; and recovery steps. The women were also asked to describe in detail what had been most helpful, and to speculate on what they would have liked from helping professionals. Many of the survey questions were open-ended and designed to encourage participants to elaborate on their answers. For example, to the question “What is your meaning of recovery?” one woman referred to a new alertness to life, including “the sound of the woodpecker outside my door.” Responses to the open-ended questions are included throughout the book.

It’s important to note that the respondents and interviewees do not represent an average group of women who are experiencing or recovering from gambling problems. Rather, they are what’s called a “convenience sample” in research terms, that is, they were available and willing to respond. Compared to national averages, these women were better educated, attended more professional treatment and Gamblers Anonymous meetings, and were primarily white and middle-class. However, these attributes did not protect them from gambling’s wide-ranging consequences—consequences common to compulsive gamblers regardless of age, income, or race. The respondents reported high gambling debts (on average \$46,670), lost jobs, suicide attempts, bad checks and forged checks, bankruptcies, embezzlement, and prison terms, as well as emotional, mental, and physical deterioration. But all these women overcame their addiction’s grip, and its devastating consequences, and stopped gambling. I’m happy to report that my

friend Sherry is one of these women, and her story is woven into the book with those of the other women I interviewed.

What I learned through the survey forms the core of this book. I can't say that the findings were a great surprise to me, although I didn't go into the project with preconceived notions. I am a professor in my university's school of social work, not an expert in gambling addiction. However, what I did learn was informative and enlightening. The respondents do not represent all female gamblers, nor do their recovery experiences necessarily reflect the latest scientific findings on gambling addiction or best practices in the field. The stories and experiences they described were about how recovery worked for them. As a researcher and as an individual who knew others struggling with problem gambling, I knew it was important to share their stories with others. To that end, their personal histories are the backbone of the book.

From the beginning, academics and professionals in the field of gambling treatment have expressed great interest in the project. My friend Sherry and I were not alone in identifying a gap in knowledge about the recovery process of women with this problem. In 2001, I presented preliminary results at the National Council on Problem Gambling Conference, and in 2002 presented the research findings at a National Conference of Social Work Educators with my colleague Dr. Lisa Avery. Lisa and I also published two journal articles on the research in *Social Work and the Addictions* in 2002 and 2008.

One of the most interesting experiences I had in bringing this research to light was serving as a panelist for the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at a Columbia University conference, "High Stakes: Substance Abuse and Gambling," in June 2001. The distinguished guests on the panels included the CEO of Harrah's casino hotel chain, researchers from Harvard, and Leslie Stahl of CBS News as one of the moderators. I was a little starstruck

and, before my panel session, worried about what I could possibly contribute in such company. Then the (male) panel moderator turned to me, looked me directly in the eye, and said, “Now, Dr. Davis . . . is there really something special about women?” I responded very sincerely with “Yes sir, yes, there really is.” I relaxed and smiled as the audience laughed, and then explained what was special about women *recovering from compulsive gambling*.

Hope, Hope, and More Hope

This is a book about recovery and hope. But it is also a book about human suffering and the relentless pursuit of some kind of fix for the broken parts of our lives, whether we gamble or not. The purpose of the book is to share the hope of recovery for women everywhere, especially those who are still entrenched in the world of gambling and are feeling very alone.

There has been a significant increase in research on women and compulsive gambling since I conducted my Internet study in 2000 and 2001. This too inspires hope that academia and research are catching up with the reality that women are experiencing gambling problems almost as much as men are. Unfortunately, the research on what works to help people with problem gambling is still very limited. That is why these women’s stories, telling what *did* work, need to be shared.

This book also notes some pertinent research findings available in areas that were not covered in the survey. These areas include national trends around women and gambling, factors that may influence a woman’s gambling behavior, treatment developments, and ideas to help prevent compulsive gambling.

About This Book

The book has two parts, with chapters that mirror the major sections of the Internet survey. The first part, “The Road to Problem

Gambling,” discusses how the survey respondents progressed from recreational to self-destructive gambling. Chapter 1 explores today’s realities about women: the rising numbers of female gamblers, why they are so invisible, and how their gambling problems differ from men’s. Chapter 2 addresses the question “How could a nice girl like you get hooked on such a self-destructive behavior as compulsive gambling?” Chapter 3 offers questions, cues, and stories to help you consider whether gambling is a problem in your life or the life of a loved one. Chapter 4 describes the costs and consequences of the survey respondents’ gambling behavior, and what kinds of experiences helped them to stop.

The purpose of part 2, “Finding Your Way Out: Recovery Options,” is to suggest a variety of recovery paths that are grounded both in research and in the real-life experience of the recovering women. It soon becomes clear that although women have some commonalities that affect the context of their addiction and recovery, their personal experience may dictate very different goals, different methods for achieving them, and different measurements of success. This section covers the phenomena of relapse and the bumps along the way to success (chapter 5), Gamblers Anonymous (chapter 6), professional help (chapter 7), what it’s like to get well “on your own” (chapter 8), and support from family members and friends (chapter 9). Chapter 10 describes how the women have maintained their recovery through the challenges of their new lives, and some of the rewards of doing just that.

Remember, this is a book about recovery and hope. The purpose is twofold: (1) to share the hope of recovery for women everywhere, especially those who are feeling very alone and still finding their way, and (2) to offer concrete details about how the women actually stopped gambling and built a better life for themselves in recovery. They didn’t all do the same thing. Many relied on Gamblers Anonymous for support, but some did not. Some went

to professional treatment, but some recovered “on their own.” It becomes clear that there are many paths to recovery that can work, and many have common themes. As you meet the women who are traveling these paths, you may discover a way out of your own problem with gambling. A common saying in Twelve Step groups that applies to this book is “Take what you like and leave the rest.” Becoming aware of the many women who made it to the other side can spark the hope that begins your own journey to recovery, and the details of how they did it may suggest what steps might work for you.

Although the book is primarily focused on women, there is something here for men as well. Human suffering is not gendered; nor is the relentless pursuit of a fix for the broken part of our lives. Nor is the hope of recovery. The fact that these women took their lives back from what many agree is a “cunning, baffling, and powerful” problem can be a beacon of light for us all.

My heartfelt thanks go to the women who took the time to answer the Internet survey and to the women who allowed me to interview them in more depth. I sincerely hope I have captured the spirit of their inspiring journeys.

PART 1: The Road to Problem Gambling



CHAPTER 1

The Feminization of Gambling

“It’s not that we don’t like men. It’s just that we don’t identify with all their issues, and they don’t identify with ours.” ■■■ Marilyn, age 72

This is a book about how to take your life back from compulsive gambling. It is written for women, about women, and based on the real stories of ordinary yet desperate women who succeeded in their efforts to stop gambling. Although the book is written especially for women struggling with compulsive gambling, others are invited and welcome to read on, especially family members of these women, and professionals and academics who want to know more. The primary focus is on women, however. This chapter will explain why.

Women Gamblers: Almost Invisible in Their Misery

You cannot tell by looking at a woman that she has spent all of her last paycheck at the casino the night before, or that she is thinking about how she can feed the kids with no money, or figuring out where she can ask for a loan. Even close family members can be deceived up to a point—and tragically, sometimes that point

is suicide. You cannot smell gambling on her breath, and her eyes don't dilate no matter how big her problem is. You won't see much of her in past research studies on gambling, and you will see too little of her in formal treatment programs. You may see her with a roomful of recovering women at a Gamblers Anonymous meeting in a few cities, but in many meetings throughout the country, men will still outnumber her. She may show up at a health clinic with gastrointestinal problems related to uncontrolled gambling, or at a mental health clinic for anxiety or depression, but it is very unlikely she will receive any professional recognition of what's really wrong unless she specifically admits her gambling problems. Even if she does, there is far too little organized treatment, social policy, or research focusing directly on helping women avoid or address compulsive gambling problems.

This book intends to make the problem more visible. Thirty years ago, it was just dawning on the general public and professional treatment programs that women were experiencing alcohol and drug problems, just as men were. A new era finally began, one that included women in research and program development, and that also promoted the more generous understanding that substance addiction is not a moral issue and is treatable. The hidden shame carried by women who were alcoholic or drug addicted diminished as more women went public with the reality of their lives. In the same way, visibility and understanding are critical elements in helping women come forth and get help with their gambling problems. The women in the Internet survey I conducted in 2000 and 2001, although anonymous, have "gone public" through this book—gone public with their real experience of gambling problems and their solutions. An even more important purpose of the book is to offer hope that women *can* and *do* take their lives back from this debilitating problem.

Women Are Gambling as Never Before

But then, so are men. According to a recent national poll, two out of three Americans gambled in the last twelve months.¹ Twenty-five years ago, only Nevada and New Jersey had legalized gambling. Today, nearly 900 casinos are operating in twenty-nine states, state-operated electronic slot machines are available at any bar in Oregon, and every state but Utah and Hawaii has some form of legalized gambling. Some speculate that state governments are now “addicted” to the gambling revenue that produced \$20 billion in 2005. Add to that the estimated \$13 billion bet online the same year on games such as Texas Hold ’Em and the \$22.7 billion in Native American casino revenue,² and we get a sense of why the American public is told in countless advertisements that there are so many good reasons to gamble.

How did we come so far and so fast? Some readers of this book will remember the time when legalized gambling was restricted to Nevada (which legalized it in 1931). In the 1960s, state governments were pressured to find more operating money without raising taxes. State-run lotteries began to look more attractive. New Hampshire (1964), New York (1967), and New Jersey (1971) were the beginning of a national trend. Today, thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia have operating lotteries. It is the only form of commercial gambling in the United States that is a government monopoly.

Legal casino gambling in states other than Nevada began developing during the 1970s and 1980s. New Jersey’s Atlantic City, a rundown resort area, was revitalized by legal casino gambling beginning in 1978. Native American tribal casinos became legal after the 1987 U.S. Supreme Court decision *California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians* ruled that states couldn’t regulate commercial gambling on Indian reservations. The next year, Congress

passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which requires tribes to negotiate a gambling compact with the state they reside in. Native American casinos rapidly developed and expanded. According to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission Report (1999), the revenues from tribal gambling grew over thirtyfold from 1988 to 1997, while the revenues from non-tribal casinos merely doubled over the same time period.³

Another boost was provided by riverboat casinos, which began operating in Iowa in 1991. By the end of that decade, more than ninety riverboat and dockside casinos were operating on the Mississippi River from Iowa to the state of Mississippi. Part of the draw for riverboat casinos was that they were strategically located to bring in revenues from out-of-state visitors. On top of all this, Internet gambling has become accessible to millions of Americans, and according to the Pew Research Center in 2006, it is the fastest growing segment of the gambling market today. In 2004 alone, Internet gamblers nationwide spent \$8 billion on an estimated 1,800 Web sites, and the numbers continue to skyrocket.⁴ Although Congress passed the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act in October 2006, which prohibited U. S. citizens from using credit cards and bank transfers in Web-based gambling transactions, enforcement has been totally lax. Potential gamblers continue to be lured to sites that make it possible to gamble with alternative types of credit, such as electronic checks, money orders, and credit cards processed in other countries.

The results of the unprecedented increase in gambling venues over the last thirty years are still being argued. In 2004, the economic and social costs of gambling—treatment for addiction, domestic violence, increased crime, bankruptcies, job loss—was estimated by economist Earl Grinols to be \$54 billion a year.⁵ On the other hand, there are positives: more state funds to pay for goods and services, more job opportunities, and the increased ability of

those Native American governments who have developed casinos to enhance opportunity for their tribal members.

Gambling Problems for Women Are Increasing

For most people, gambling does not become a problem. They are the ones who can go to Las Vegas with their kids and truly experience “family entertainment”: see the shows, take advantage of the cheap buffets, and spend a limited amount of money on the slot machines. If they happen to win anything, they are likely to go home and brag about it instead of putting all the winnings back into the machine. However, according to the National Research Council, gambling does become problematic for about 3 to 7 percent of those who gambled in the past year.⁶

These estimates have been criticized as being too low because many researchers rely on telephone interviews for their surveys. A problem gambler is more likely to be in a casino or card room than at home evenings and weekends answering a telephone survey. If the problem is bad enough, she’s unlikely to even have a phone. And such a person is likely to minimize the problem, especially talking to a stranger. But the gambling industry benefits when the problem is underestimated: it can make a case for expanding gambling, blame problems on the weakness of a few individuals, and ignore the social costs.

On the whole, men are more likely to be pathological, problem, or at-risk gamblers, but women are catching up fast. Men and women gamble at almost the same rate in areas where slot machines or video poker machines are located in restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, or places readily accessible to women. For example, in three states where electronic gaming machines are easily accessible, close to half of all problem and pathological gamblers are women: 51 percent in Montana (1998), 50 percent in Louisiana (1999), and 45 percent in Oregon (2000). Nor is the trend restricted to the

United States. In Australia, the rate of women problem gamblers rose from 14 to 41 percent between 1991 and 1999.⁷

Evidence from various state telephone Helpline surveys also suggests that women have been calling for help with increasing frequency. The Arizona Council on Compulsive Gambling reports that women make about 60 percent of its Helpline calls,⁸ and the Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling reports a 31 to 37 percent increase in Helpline calls from women from 1996 to 2002.⁹

Gambling for Women: Acceptable as a Pastime, Still Unacceptable as a Problem

Historically, gambling was the province of men. As recently as the 1970s, men dominated the racetracks, off-track betting sites, sports betting, and card games, as well as the casinos in Atlantic City and Nevada. The old “know when to hold ’em, know when to fold ’em” image of male gamblers coexisted with the popular cultural notion that men were the risk-takers. Respectable middle-class women were seen as caretakers and keepers of the hearth, and more likely to show up at charity bingos.

The unprecedented expansion of legal gambling opportunities throughout the United States changed all that in the last thirty years. Gambling has been sanitized into “gaming” and has become much more attractive to women: many venues provide a safe place for women to come alone. Accessibility, perks, and amenities have improved. Some casinos now offer day care and hourly babysitting for children as young as six weeks old, fun centers for children, and full-service spas.

Two other dramatic trends in recent decades have impacted the way women are perceived in relation to gambling. Cultural ideas about a “woman’s place” became less potent with the rapid increase of women in the American workplace. In addition, almost every state now uses some form of gambling revenue to shore

up its budgets. To reach their goals, state governments are framing gambling as a civic function to help build schools; no longer is it off limits for a “respectable” woman.

Although the current culture is more approving of women gambling in general, negative attitudes persist about women with problems in this area. When a woman is gambling instead of fulfilling her cultural role of homemaker, mother, caretaker, or employee, society does not approve. Neither does the woman herself, who holds the same societal values. The women who responded to the 2000–2001 Internet survey expressed a great deal of shame and regret over their inability to carry on their female roles while in the midst of their gambling problems. When asked what they regret the most, many noted the impact on their families:

- “Gambling robbed me of my soul, values, and I caused my family to worry about me.”
- “I caused my family so much mental anguish, especially my son.”
- “I lost me, and I lost so much time with my children.”
- “I most regret hurting my husband, and the lies I have told him about the money.”

While men may certainly experience similar regrets, they are more likely to focus on financial losses than relationship losses. Women in the Internet survey, while also experiencing financial ruin, reported that losing the ability to connect emotionally to family and friends is even more devastating.

Women’s Issues Differ from Men’s

As Marilyn, an Internet survey participant, puts it: “It’s not that we don’t like men. It’s just that we don’t identify with all their issues, and they don’t identify with ours.” One big difference is that women have a historical economic disadvantage. Some researchers

suggest this plays a part in a woman's motivation to gamble: the possibility of winning money that she has no other way to earn or acquire can be a powerful incentive.

Casinos are especially attractive to women because they are relatively safe for women who are alone, and they provide a temporary escape from bad moods, boredom, and loneliness. Casinos are among the very few places where women in this culture can go by themselves and experience safety, anonymity, and social approval.

Gambling is a way for some women to rebel against feminine duties and obligations. An addiction therapist (female) who works full-time with problem gamblers explores this idea:

■■■ *Almost every female client I have seen states that gambling is in some manner a way of her "letting go of her obligations;" "rebel-ling;" "doing what I want, finally, after taking care of everyone else all my life." Many of my clients have experienced abusive relationships and lasting loneliness. Several are grandmothers, many are divorced, and a few are young and with partners. The crux of this rebellion seems to be the end result of feeling emotionally and physically responsible to others first and themselves last. When the pressure cap finally blows, and the woman says, "Screw you, world, watch me do what I want!" she finds herself "asserting" her autonomy in a casino or bingo game, etc.¹⁰ ■■■*

For some women, gambling can be a weapon of power and revenge. A study of women who gamble in the Canadian province of Ontario found that 28 percent of them reported financial abuse from their partner, and 24 percent admitted to "setting aside money my partner doesn't know about." Half of the 365 women surveyed responded that being able "to do what I want with my money" was a reason for gambling.¹¹

Other gender disparities show up when people enter professional

treatment: women report more physical neglect, more emotional and sexual abuse, and are more likely to be depressed and experience anxiety. Indeed, in many areas of life, women's experience differs from that of men, so it makes sense that they experience gambling problems and the challenges of recovery differently as well.

Information on Women and Gambling Is Scant

Because women with gambling problems were nowhere to be found in research studies at that time, it became clear to me that there was a big hole in the information available to women who were caught in that cycle and wanted to find a way out. Upon learning of my friend Sherry's problem in 2000, I went to several mainstream bookstores and found very little on compulsive gambling, and nothing focused on women. In one store, I was directed to the section that featured books on how to win at poker and slots! Thankfully, there are now more research studies that include women. But we still lack real first-person accounts of how women are actually stopping problem gambling. That's where this book comes in.

Up-to-date, guided support to help women with a gambling problem achieve the rewards of a hopeful life, free of obsession

TODAY, MORE THAN FIVE MILLION WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

struggle with problem gambling, and this number continues to increase as casinos, online card rooms, and other venues continue to multiply.

In this groundbreaking book, addiction expert Diane Rae Davis, Ph.D., offers women everywhere the support they need to face this debilitating problem and take the necessary steps to regain control of their lives. Offering information on preventing relapse, finding support groups, and healing relationships with loved ones, Davis uses the most up-to-date research and methods for treatment to help women gamblers

- identify what makes them vulnerable to addiction
- recognize the costs and consequences of gambling behaviors
- see what it means to “hit bottom”
- determine how to begin and continue on the road to recovery using a virtual toolbox of techniques

Each section of this user-friendly guide highlights real success stories of women who have gone through the same issues and treatment strategies, and who have discovered the rewards of beating a gambling problem and reclaimed hope for their lives.



Diane Rae Davis, Ph.D., is a professor in the School of Social Work and Human Services at Eastern Washington University. She has researched and written extensively on addiction and recovery, specifically with regard to women in recovery from compulsive gambling.

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