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## GAMBLING

Gambling is a behavior in which a person puts something of value at risk. When gambling is offered as a commercial product, a person risks money on the outcome of some event, with the possibility of receiving a monetary return if a certain outcome occurs. Governments at the state level offer some forms of gambling and regulate all others. Casinos typically offer slot machines, video poker machines, and a variety of table games (e.g., blackjack, craps, baccarat). Many state governments in the United States offer lotteries, in which people buy tickets with a very small chance of winning a very large jackpot. Other forms of gambling (e.g., betting on horse racing and greyhound racing) are available in several states. Online casino gambling and poker have become very popular in recent years. Some forms of gambling represent games of skill (e.g., casino table games, poker), whereas others are purely games of chance (e.g., lotteries, slot machines).

People who gamble typically see it as a form of entertainment. Gambling is an *experience good* such as watching a movie or a football game, and not a *tangible product*, such as computers or shirts. People are willing to pay for experience goods because the experience itself provides benefits. For example, casino games may be fun to play, often have a social aspect, and offer a chance to win money. Many casinos are built with amenities such as hotels, live theater shows, and restaurants that gamblers also can enjoy. Lotteries offer a chance to win a very large amount of money (usually millions of dollars); many people enjoy thinking about what they would do if they won a large jackpot.

However, by their nature, gambling products have a negative *expected value* for the player. This means that, on

average, the players of such games are expected to lose. Casino games typically have an expected value of around -5%, depending on the game, whereas lotteries have an expected value of around -50%. This means that for each \$100 bet placed at a casino, the casino keeps an average of \$5; for each \$100 of lottery tickets purchased, the government selling the lottery keeps an average of about \$50. Typically the Website hosting a poker game will keep a small percentage of each hand's total bets. The *house* is able to keep these amounts, on average, and this represents the income they receive for providing the games, facilities, and other costs of doing business. Some players *will* win, but most gamblers understand that casino games and lotteries have, on average, a negative expected value. For people to be willing to gamble, then, they must expect the benefits of playing (e.g., the chance of winning, the enjoyment, any social interactions) to exceed their expected losses, which can be thought of as the *price of gambling*. Just as a person must pay \$10 or more to watch a movie at the theater, he or she expects to lose some money to the casino for playing its games.

## GAMBLING OVER THE LIFE COURSE

Research by psychologists has focused on gambling among adolescents, adults, and senior citizens. This research is still in its infancy, but rates of gambling participation are a major focus of researchers. Lifetime participation rates are often estimated at more than 70% for all age groups—a majority of people, including adolescents, have gambled at some point in their lives. The gambling participation rate varies by demographic group, geographical location, legal restrictions, and other variables. For example, in Australia, gambling is a much more common and acceptable form of

## Gambling



**Slot machines.** Casino games are an “experience good” because they may be fun to play, often have a social aspect to them, and offer a chance to win money. FIELD MARK PUBLICATIONS.

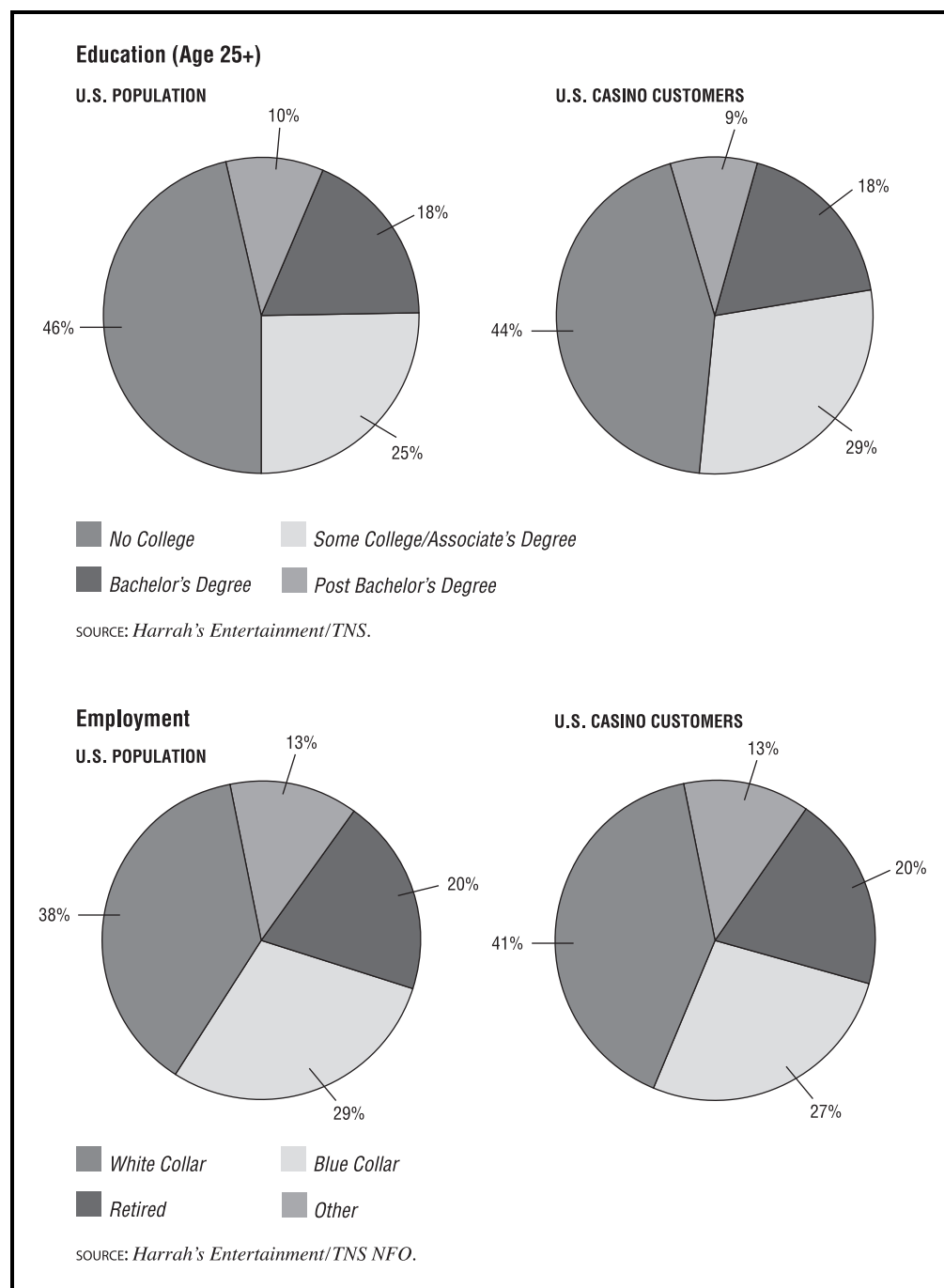
entertainment than in the United States. Therefore, the participation rate in Australia is expected to be higher than in the United States where casino gambling is a relatively new phenomenon except in New Jersey and Nevada.

Many adolescents gamble but not always in market-based gambling such as casinos and lotteries. Students may bet on sporting events, play poker, or other social forms of gambling. Such activities are counted in participation rates. Few adolescents develop gambling problems, but still, such gambling is viewed with concern, to the extent that it may lead to problem gambling as an adult. However, for most people, gambling represents a harmless form of entertainment.

### PROBLEMATIC GAMBLING

A small portion of gamblers develop what has been termed *pathological gambling*, in which an individual

damages his or her personal and professional life because of an unhealthy amount of or a preoccupation with gambling. In 1994, the American Psychiatric Association (*DSM-IV*) suggested that the prevalence of pathological gambling was around 1% of the population. Psychologists, psychiatrists, and medical researchers are interested in understanding the causes of problematic gambling behavior. Among the issues related to pathological gambling are the rate of the affliction (prevalence), how it affects different demographic groups differently, different rates of severity, and the types of behavior that result from or characterize it. Some researchers have focused on youth gambling behaviors and effects, whereas others have focused on gambling among members of minorities, gambling in various cultures, and society as a whole. Different samples of the population may be affected by pathological gambling in different ways.



**Figure 1.** The average U.S. casino customer is more likely to have attended college and hold a white collar job than the average American. CENGAGE LEARNING, GALE.

The results of such studies depend on the sample being studied, cultural idiosyncrasies, legal restrictions, research methodology, and other factors. The newest and most promising area of research related to pathological gambling deals with the neuroscience of addiction (Ross, Sharp, Vuchinich, & Spurrett, 2008). This research

examines the role of processes inside the brain in initiating and sustaining addiction and promises to improve prevention and treatment strategies. This area of research overlaps with research on other addictions, such as alcoholism and drug abuse. Some researchers have suggested that all forms of addiction, and related behaviors, are not

### *Gays and Lesbians, Adulthood*

medical issues, but are instead nothing other than very strong preferences (Becker 1996; Schaler 2000).

#### CONSEQUENCES OF THE GAMBLING INDUSTRY

The other major research interest with respect to gambling is involved with the social and economic effects of the gambling industry. Many governments (local, regional, and national) have either adopted or are considering the adoption of gambling as a public policy tool, primarily to raise tax revenues. Economic studies of the effects of gambling have become more common in recent years, focusing on cost-benefit considerations.

On the *cost* side of gambling adoption are issues of pathological gambling and related behaviors. As psychologists, sociologists, and others attempt to measure the prevalence and severity of such behaviors, economists attempt to quantify these costs. This area of research has been fraught with methodological problems, particularly related to how to define *social costs* and how to measure them in monetary terms (Walker, 2007). No reliable estimates of the social costs of pathological gambling yet exist.

On the benefit side of the equation, most advocates of legalized gambling argue that there are significant consumer benefits, tax benefits, and economic development effects, particularly owing to large casinos. Perhaps the most important and sizable of these benefits is the consumer benefits received from the availability of gambling. If consumers did not enjoy gambling, they would not do it. The facts that casinos earn profits and lotteries continue to raise revenues indicate that people do enjoy gambling. Aside from these consumer benefits, the most common benefits derived from legalized gambling appear to be tax revenues from lotteries and casinos, and economic development, in the case of casinos.

Overall, results of existing research suggest that the economic benefits of legalized gambling (including consumer benefits, development and tax effects) probably outweigh the costs of pathological gambling. However, such economic and medical research is still in its infancy. Before researchers can develop reliable monetary estimates of costs and benefits, many conceptual and methodological issues need to be sorted out. As gambling expands, the gambling industry and government are beginning to offer more help for problem and pathological gamblers. Such programs will become more effective as researchers develop a better understanding of problem gambling behaviors.

**SEE ALSO** Volume 2: *Debt; Mental Health, Adulthood; Risk.*

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### GAYS AND LESBIANS, ADULTHOOD

The adult life course of men and women who report same-sex attraction must be considered in the context of social and historical change. Following social theorist Karl Mannheim (1993 [1928]) and sociologist Glen Elder (2002), persons born within adjacent birth years comprise a generational cohort and are subject to many of the same social influences at about the same ages. At the same time, there is considerable intra-cohort variation based on such factors as geography, social status, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This entry focuses on the interplay of social change and the life course among men and women in contemporary American society who seek others of the same sex for social and sexual ties. Social and historical change interplay with life history in determining the meanings that men and women construct about their sexuality and this is reflected in the distinct identity cohorts that have emerged from the context of social change.

Discussion of the life course of men and women expressing same-sex desire must be understood in terms of three aspects of their sexuality: sexual orientation, sexual behavior, and sexual identity (Savin-Williams, 2005). Sexual orientation refers to awareness of a preponderance of desire for social and sexual encounters with others of the same sex. Desire must be distinguished from sexual behavior, which is the realization of desire in action. Sexual orientation and behavior must in turn be differentiated from sexual identity, that is, the label that men and women use in portraying their sexuality. Biologist Alfred Kinsey et al. (1948), psychologist Ritch Savin-Williams (2005), and philosopher of science Edward Stein (1999) maintain that sexual attraction cannot be viewed as either straight or gay but that sexual attraction instead ranges from complete affinity for the opposite sex to that for one's own sex. This perspective has been supported in Lisa Diamond's (2006) study of young adult women and in Stein's (1999) careful review of quantitative findings regarding homosexuality.