

Beyond Pathology:  
The Cultural Meanings of Gambling

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Gambling can be a pathological addiction, but it can also be many other things. In associating it with alcoholism, drug abuse and similar disorders, we would not want to lose site of the myriad cultural meanings specific to gambling itself. This paper departs

economic climate, it is harder than ever to accept the familiar insistence that hard work is the key to success. But it is equally hard to see gambling in contemporary American society as anything more than a quietly desperate response to anomie. The question persists: are there certain historical and cultural circumstances that promote the isolated, obsessed kinds of gambling that lead to addiction, and other circumstances that encourage more benign—even communal--versions of this ancient, multivalent ritual practice?

#### Suggested Readings

Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (Boston, 1967), pp. 39-58.

Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture* [1944] (Boston, 1990), chapter 4, "Play and Law," pp. 76-88.

Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York, 2004), "Introduction," pp. 1-24.