

# research snapshot

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## The influence of gambling on mood state and alcohol cravings among US college students

### What this research is about

There is a two-way relationship between gambling and alcohol. But while there has been research on how alcohol influences gambling behaviour, there is not much known about how the gambling experience influences the decision to drink alcohol. The purpose of this study was to examine how gambling context influenced mood state and alcohol cravings.

### What the researchers did

The researchers conducted an experimental study. A total of 82 college students over the age of 18 years were recruited. Participants were recruited from psychology classes and via flyers posted on the campus of a major urban university in Tennessee, USA. To be involved in the study, participants had to (1) gamble at least once in the past year, (2) consume at least three alcoholic drinks in the last month, and (3) be a college basketball fan.

Six participants were removed because of missing data. This left 76 participants. On average, participants were 21 years old. Most were female (59%). Over half were African American (54%). About 41% were Caucasian, and 5% self-identified as Asian American or belonging to other ethnic backgrounds. On average, participants gambled 12 times in the past year and consumed 2 alcoholic drinks while gambling.

Participants completed a questionnaire that included the following questions:

- (1) Demographic information (e.g., age, sex, education, and income).
- (2) Gambling history (e.g., type of gambling, frequency of gambling, duration of gambling episodes, betting habits, and alcohol use).

### What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to examine how gambling context influenced mood state and alcohol cravings. The researchers conducted an experimental study. Participants were 76 college students who gambled at least once in the past year, consumed at least three alcoholic drinks in the last month, and were college basketball fans. Participants were assigned to one of four groups. One group watched a movie that was unexciting (non-dysphoric). A second group watched a recording of a basketball game that did not have much action (non-dysphoric). A third group watched an emotionally charged sports event involving their university's basketball team. A fourth group engaged in slot machine gambling. Participants completed a survey that asked about their demographics, gambling history, alcohol use and urges, mood states, and state anxiety.

Participants who watched an exciting basketball game and those who gambled reported feeling more energized compared to those who watched a non-dysphoric basketball game or movie. Participants who gambled or watched an exciting sports event had greater urges to drink alcohol compared to those in the other conditions. Participants with greater urges to drink reported higher levels of state anxiety (i.e., feelings of anxiety at the current moment) and vigour compared to those with low urges.

- (3) The Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ), which measures the typical and heaviest weekly drinking quantity and frequency over the last 30 days.

- (4) The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT), which examines the extent that people experience negative consequences from drinking.
- (5) The Brief Assessment of Mood, which measures state-level mood status (i.e., how one feels right now) across six mood states (i.e., anxiety, depression, confusion, anger, vigour, and fatigue).
- (6) The Alcohol Urge Questionnaire (AUDIT), which measures current cravings to drink alcohol.
- (7) The Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory – State-Anxiety Portion, which measures the current level of subjective anxiety.
- (8) A Post-Test Alcohol Assessment, which was used to assess whether participants wanted to have an alcoholic drink and how many they would like.

After participants arrived at the lab, they completed the questions about demographics, gambling behaviour, the DDQ, and the AUDIT. Participants were then assigned randomly to one of four groups. One group watched a movie that was unexciting (non-dysphoric). A second group watched a recording of a basketball game that did not have much action (non-dysphoric). A third group watched an emotionally charged sports event involving their university's basketball team. A fourth group engaged in slot machine gambling. After 20 minutes, participants in all groups completed the rest of the survey items.

### What the researchers found

The researchers found that participants who watched an exciting basketball game or gambled reported feeling more energized compared to those who watched a non-dysphoric basketball game or movie. Participants who gambled or watched an exciting sports event reported greater urges to drink alcohol compared to those in the other conditions.

Participants with greater urges to drink alcohol reported higher levels of state anxiety (i.e., feelings associated with anxiety at the current moment) and vigour compared to those with lower urges.

### How you can use this research

Practitioners can use this research to inform how they treat people with problem gambling and/or substance use. The findings can also inform efforts to reduce

alcohol use in gambling venues and venues where sports gambling takes place.

### About the researchers

**Damon Lipinski** is affiliated with the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, North Carolina, USA. **James P. Whelan** and **Rory A. Pfund** are affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the University of Memphis and the Institute for Gambling Education & Research in Memphis and Johnson City, Tennessee, USA. **Blaine E. Stiglets** and **Meredith K. Ginley** are affiliated with the Institute for Gambling Education & Research in Memphis and Johnson City, and the Department of Psychology at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee, USA. For more information about this study, please contact James P. Whelan at [jwhelan@memphis.edu](mailto:jwhelan@memphis.edu).

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