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## Guest editorial

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The same criticisms made 20 years ago about the literature on alcoholism are now being made about the problem gambling literature. Gender comparisons are rare, and most of the existing research is based on studies of men. As [Mark and Lesieur \(1992\)](#) pointed out 10 years ago, too few women are included in many samples to determine whether there are differences between men and women. In many cases as well, researchers assume that what holds true for males will also hold true for females. Given recent changes in women's gambling and rapid growth in the number of women seeking help, an entire issue (*EJGI*, Issue 8) devoted to the topic of women and gambling is timely and, we hope, will help create a “critical mass” of knowledge in this area.

As Bunkle points out in this issue, if women are going to drink, smoke and gamble as much and as often as men, we should expect to see the same “negative externalities” associated with these behaviors — alcohol abuse and dependence, tobacco-related morbidity and mortality, and gambling disorders — achieve parity between the genders. The research presented in this issue strongly suggests that, in fact, gender may be only one of several important dimensions that must be considered when seeking to understand differences and changes in gambling involvement over time. Borsoi and Toneatto suggest that gender may have less to do with gambling problems than deficits in self-confidence and problem-solving skills. While Thomas and Moore identify significant differences between male and female gamblers, their data point to an excessive reliance on particular coping styles by both male and female problem gamblers.

Much of the work presented here has implications for the treatment of women with gambling problems. Boughton, Martin and the anonymous author of the first person account clearly show that women in problem gambling treatment bring with them gender-specific issues that must be addressed, including experiences of abuse and caregiving demands. Women entering treatment are also more likely than male problem gamblers to have emotional issues with autonomy and rebellion

that will color the therapeutic relationship. However, it also seems clear that fostering self-confidence, teaching problem-solving skills and enhancing positive coping strategies are important elements of a problem gambling treatment program, regardless of the gender of the problem gambler seeking help.

It may be, as Griffiths speculates, that different factors lead men and women to gamble. Based on research presented in this issue, it appears that similar factors lead men and women to continue to gamble despite adverse consequences. Recent research clearly shows, however, that women seeking help for gambling problems start gambling later in life and that the progression of the disorder appears to be more rapid among women than among men ([Ladd & Petry, 2002](#); [Potenza, et al., 2001](#); [Tavares, Zilberman, Beites & Gentil, 2001](#)).

What stands out as this issue goes to bed is that women remain less involved in gambling than men. Women are still far less likely than men to begin gambling at a young age. And yet, the number of women accessing gambling helplines has grown substantially as has the number of women seeking help for a gambling problem of their own.

What are the factors that keep women away from gambling up to a certain point but then facilitate quicker, deeper involvement? How have the types of gambling as well as social attitudes toward gambling changed to normalize such behavior? What has happened to the stigma that was once attached to women gambling? Are deficits in problem-solving skills and coping strategies a symptom or a precursor to gambling problems? What are the factors that explain why women (and men) begin gambling, and how are these different from factors that explain why women and men continue to gamble in spite of adverse consequences?

These are questions that we do not have answers to yet. As with so many of our questions, they require more and better research to answer. But at least we have identified some of the key questions — and that is an important step forward.

*By Rachel A. Volberg*

*January 27, 2003, Gemini Research, Ltd., Northampton, Massachusetts, U.S.A.  
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**Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this journal do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.**

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## Statement of purpose

The *Electronic Journal of Gambling Issues: eGambling (EJGI)* offers an Internet-based forum for developments in gambling-related research, policy and treatment as well as personal accounts about gambling and gambling behaviour. Through publishing peer-reviewed articles about gambling as a social phenomenon and the prevention and treatment of gambling problems, it is our aim is to help make sense of how gambling affects us all.

The *EJGI* is published by the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#) and is fully funded by the Ontario Substance Abuse Bureau of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. We welcome manuscripts submitted by researchers and clinicians, people involved in gambling as players, and family and friends of gamblers.

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