FLOW IN (PROBLEM) GAMBLING

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DISSOCIATIVE PROBLEM GAMBLER (DPG) FRAMEWORK

A framework within which much of gambling research takes place in mind sciences.

1. Focuses on problem gamblers.
   - Cassidy, Loussouarn & Pisac (Goldsmith report; 2014): "The debate [concerning gambling] is unified by a focus on 'problem gambling'."
   - Nature (2018). "Editorial: Science has a gambling problem" *Nature* 553, 379.

2. Emphasizes having dissociative experiences as the main motivation to gamble for problem gamblers.
   - I.e., experiences such as having lost track of time, losing control over one's behavior, having lost touch with reality, "not being themselves", and being driven by factors beyond their control.

DISSOCIATIVE PROBLEM GAMBLER (DPG) FRAMEWORK

- Can be traced back to Jacobs' General Theory of Addictions (1986, 1988).

- Dissociative experiences play a central motivating role also in Blaszczynski and Nower's (2002) Pathway Model of Gambling.

  - McCormick, Delfabbro & Denson (2012) "[Jacob's theory] provides a useful conceptual framework to explain the clustering of factors thought to underlie Blaszczynski and Nower's (2002) vulnerability pathway".

4 SHORTCOMINGS OF THE DPG FRAMEWORK

1. Other motivations for gambling remain insufficiently explored.
   - It does not explain why most people gamble (e.g., Blaszczynski and Nower's "behaviorally conditioned problem gamblers").
   - Dissociative experiences do not always separate problem gamblers from recreational gamblers.

2. It does not explain how dissociative experiences emerge.

3. The relationship to other research foci (e.g., reward processing and risk-taking) can remain unclear.

4. More generally: Gambling as a form of "normal" human activity remains inadequately conceptualized.

THE FLOW FRAMEWORK FOR GAMBLING

- Suggestion: *flow psychology* provides a fruitful perspective on (problem) gambling.

  - Explains why individuals select recreational activities: An individual aspires to experience flow because the state is very positive.

  - Support for the suggestion that *EGM* gamblers experience flow: Wanner & al. (2006); Dixon & al. (2018); Oakes & al. (2018)

- Two-dimensional conceptualization of flow:

  1. *Absorption* describes the flow state

  2. *Fluency* describes the antecedents of flow

EXPERIENCING FLOW IS NOT SURPRISING – ABSORPTION AND DISSOCIATION OVERLAP

- Transformation of time: "the way time passes seems to be different from normal"
  - Cf.: "I completely lost track of time"

- Action-awareness merging: "things seem to be happening automatically"
  - Cf. Dissociative Experience Scale items: "I felt that someone else was controlling my actions", "I felt like I was in a dream or film"

- Lack of self-consciousness: "I am not concerned with what others think of me"
  - Cf.: "I did not feel like my real self"

FLUENCY MAY APPEAR TO BE SURPRISING

Dimensions of Fluency

- Challenge-skill balance: "I feel suitably challenged"

- Clear goals: "I know clearly what I want to do"

- Unambiguous feedback: "I am aware of how well I am performing"

- Sense of control: "I feel in total control of what I am doing"

- Note: what matters for fluency is the sense/illusion of these dimensions, not their reality.

EXPLANATORY BENEFITS OF CONSIDERING GAMBLING IN THE FLOW FRAMEWORK?

Reminder: 4 shortcomings of the DPG framework

1. Other motivations for gambling remain insufficiently explored.

2. It does not explain how dissociative experiences emerge.

3. The relationship to other research foci (e.g., reward processing and risk-taking) can remain unclear.

4. More generally: Gambling as a form of "normal" human activity remains inadequately conceptualized.

EXPLANATORY BENEFITS OF CONSIDERING GAMBLING IN THE FLOW FRAMEWORK?

1. Provides an explanation of what motivates most gamblers: gambling is a form of positive activity.
   - The purpose does not need to be to win money or to avoid negative feelings (as DPG framework suggests for problem gamblers).

EXPLANATORY BENEFITS OF CONSIDERING GAMBLING IN THE FLOW FRAMEWORK?

1. Provides an explanation of what motivates most gamblers.

2. Explains how flow/dissociative experiences emerge.
   - Fluency-related experiences precede and give rise to the absorption-related experiences.
   - Flow experiences are intensely immersive and require full attention to the task at hand → decreases self-awareness, make us lose track of time, …

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1. Provides an explanation of what motivates most gamblers.

2. Explains how flow/dissociative experiences emerge.

3. Helps making connections between different research foci.
   - E.g., fluency related experiences require positive feedback → the research on the reward processing and the significance of "losses disguised as wins" informs the research of fluency when one plays EGMs.
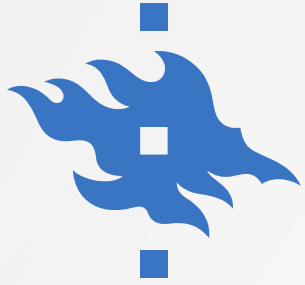
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4. Explains gambling on a well-established framework for human activities.

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5. Dark side of flow accounts for negative aspects of (problem) gambling.
   - Sense of control → Overestimation of one's abilities and unrealistic optimism, which in turn increases risk-taking
   - Lack of self-consciousness → Loss of self-reflection leads one to neglect other goals and values (of oneself and others)
   - Transformation of time → Neglecting relevant temporal information

Thank you!

Flow in (problem) gambling / Valtteri Arstila