



Friday April 1st 2011

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[Can women become gambling addicts?](#)



March 30, 2011

By [Marilyn Lancelot](#)



Why do women gamble?

Women gambled to escape boredom, stress, and family issues but were neglecting their families, embezzling money and serving prison time, and some were committing suicide. But how far back does female gambling date in the U.S. And what is recovery like for women who want to stop gambling?

U.S. history and female gamblers of the Wild West

Today we think of women becoming compulsive gamblers only after the introduction of slot machines in 1887. In fact, the machines were initially added to the casino floor to give the women something to occupy their time while their husbands gambled at the tables. However, the history of gambling and risk taking women dates back to legends of the Wild West.

Past history tells us that ladies were present in the early gambling days but most of them were lovely trophies holding on to the arm of the big-time male gambler. Movies portray women in early western frontier days, sitting around a card table holding a handful of cards. History relates stories of dozens of infamous females who gambled in the late 1800s and *Women Gamblers of the Wild West*, describes the life of Poker Alice as a “female gambler with a British accent and a cigar protruding from her lips.” *Old West Legends* portrays Kitty Leroy as, “By the age of 20, she was said to have been one of the most popular entertainers in Dallas, but soon gave up dancing to become a faro (card game) dealer and was noted for never going to the faro tables without several knives and revolvers.” And these are just two of the [Old West female gamblers](#).

The National Indian Gaming Act of 1988

When Congress passed the [National Indian Gaming Act in 1988](#), native Americans began building casinos within less than an hour from home. Because of social changes and the proximity of casinos, women began gambling in increasing numbers. Women drove to the casinos after dropping their kids off at school, or visiting the casinos while their husbands were asleep. Some became addicted to on-line gambling without leaving the privacy of their home.

Women’s recovery from gambling is different than men’s

A few years ago, most phone calls to gambling helplines were men. Today the women comprise more than half of the calls. Men and women are different, they gamble differently and recover differently. Vive la difference! And here is how...

Society has accepted the picture of the macho male gambler but women have been perceived differently. Women have been portrayed as mature, nurturing mothers, loving daughters and responsible homemakers and the idea of a woman compulsive gambler simply did not exist.

The men did not know what to do with the women who came to the GA meetings. Some were literally chased away after being “hit on” or intimidated by the men and made to feel “less than.” Because of the stigma and guilt and the intimidation from the men, it was difficult for women to find recovery from their addiction because the men ridiculed the games women played such as Bingo, slot machines, and raffles.

When the women joined a 12-step program, they were invited to share their story in front of a group of all males. Some of the women came from abusive relationships and family issues could not be discussed in front of men. Here they were, looking for support and found themselves unable to discuss the reasons they drove to the casinos.

Female gamblers can help one another recover

So, nineteen years ago, a small group of women met in a tiny apartment, and — slowly—pain-filled, confused women came and stayed because they felt comfortable, and the members validated their feelings. The women became stronger, improved their self-images, learned to forgive themselves and became responsible through the program. They learned that they are mature, nurturing, and that they have choices in our lives.

If you are a woman with gambling problems, you can get help. Please leave your comments here, or write us an email. We will personally respond and help you as best we can. You are not alone!

Photo credit: Cock robin

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About [Marilyn Lancelot](#)

Marilyn Lancelot is a recovering alcoholic and compulsive gambler with twenty years of recovery. She has authored two books, [Gripped by Gambling](#) and [Switching Addictions](#). She also publishes a newsletter on-line, [Women Helping Women](#) for recovery from gambling. This newsletter has been published for more than 10 years and is read by women and men around the world.

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