The Experience of Lotto 6/49 and the Capacity to Trust

Elements for an Anthropology of Gambling

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The Lottery-Ticket Paradox

Quebeckers play the Lotto 6/49, even if they know they will lose.

Probability of winning a prize: 1 in 32,3
Probability of hitting the jackpot: 1 in (about) 14 million

Are gamblers complete fools?
Does somebody had asked directly gamblers why they gamble?

Anthropologists study Lotto 6/49 as an experience.

Lévy-Bruhl tries to compare the magical beliefs of serious gamblers with the magical beliefs of individuals he refers to as the “primitives” (1924).

After that, Henslin studied the superstitions of St.Louis taxi drivers who play craps during their work breaks and compared them to Skinner’s pigeon (1967).

I wanted in my thesis to help anthropology to reconstruct lost knowledge regarding gambling and beliefs about magic in capitalist society.
In the first round of interviews, my informants responded by saying that they were not genuine gamblers. If I insisted, they confessed that their gambling was *completely irrational* and some started to insult themselves.

I had the choice between concluding the lottery players are fools or interviewing genuine gamblers.

It was puzzling to have to separate two types of player. Both participate in the same lottery.
Problems with the first round:
1. The myth of recreational players
2. Selection
3. Interview format

My informants endeavored in their interviews to avoid being categorized as pathological gamblers.

I had to perform point-blank interviews inside the "magic circle" of the game as Huizinga would say. Outside the magic circle, the players became citizens again.

Fieldwork (4 months)
- 200 interviews
- Direct observation
- Participation
- Observational drawings
Capacity to trust

Trust is a feeling that appears to coordinate the various passages between gamblers and their world. It transforms *homo oeconomicus*, the rational thinker, into *homo ludens*, the person who knows how to play. The capacity to trust enables gamblers to lift the cloud of doubt, particularly with respect to the significance of their lives. It has the magic power to create links where previously there were none. It helps gamblers think that they could defy the expected utility despite statistics. It’s a magical weapon to fight determinism. It’s an expression of magical thinking.
Map of Lotto 6/49 playground

Level of satisfaction

Investment of trust