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Why Gambling and Creativity Go Hand in Hand

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When Fyodor Dostoevsky first published his novel *The Gambler* in 1866 he was simply confirming what many had suspected for some time: that artists of all kinds, not simply writers, were fascinated by gambling in all of its forms.

In the story, the central character, Alexei Ivanovich, frequents the casino in the town in which he is employed as the tutor for a wealthy family. Roulette was his game and his success at it elevates him in the eyes of Polina, a niece of the family. While this was one of the very first works of literature specifically about gambling, the arts had already embraced it as a subject several centuries before. One of the Baroque period's greatest painters, Caravaggio, captured the excitement of a game of cards in his picture created towards the end of the 16th century called [The Cardsharps](#).

But it's not just a coincidence that all these different artifacts and art forms feature gambling. There is an undoubted psychological link between the randomness of the creative mind and the creative person's desire to take risks.

There's a direct parallel with the randomness that one will experience whether playing cards with friends or visiting a [live casino on Paddy Power Games](#). As the roulette ball spins or the live dealer turns over the cards for a game of blackjack, you as a player enjoy the frisson of not quite knowing what the outcome will be. In its own way, this is a creative act that simply adds to its appeal, and you can only experience the atmosphere detailed in this art by experiencing it in an environment such as a live casino.

To flip this analogy on its head and to see how gambling could relate to creativity, what could represent a greater personal risk than exposing a picture, a novel, or a movie that you have created to the general public, oblivious to what their reaction might be?

Two modern British artists who exemplified this link between creativity and gambling, in two very different ways, were Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud.

As art lovers will know, Bacon was known for his sometimes grotesque and often controversial portraits which have ultimately been recognized as masterpieces. In fact, it was Bacon's triptych portrait of Freud which achieved [the highest ever price paid at Christie's](#) for a series of paintings. Bacon felt that his love of gambling was inextricably linked with his ability to produce art and which gave him the life-force to carry on creating well into his seventies.

Freud, on the other hand, made no such links between his art and his hobby. He simply enjoyed betting, primarily on horse racing. But it was his art that supported the activity even, on occasions when he persuaded bookmakers to accept his paintings in place of payment.

So while there have never been any major psychological studies into the links between gambling and creativity there is more than enough empirical evidence to support it as a hypothesis. And it's one that promises to be proven again and again in the future.

Photo by Steve Johnson on Unsplash

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