



Lie is an elephant

Relationships and gambling

Friburgo, 28 giugno 2018

Alessandra Bassi

I am a professional counsellor

- I work for **a social cooperative, L'Arco**, in the district of Piacenza, Emilia Romagna, Italy.
- My activities around gambling and gamblers' families are carried out with a team of cooperative **L'Arco**, in collaboration with the **Ser.T.** (the national addiction service) and with **La Ricerca**, an Association of our town.
- My work with **gamblers' families** dates as far back as 2012.
- I have been working in **community projects** and **prevention** since the same year.

I am a systemic counsellor

- ▶ In the Milan Approach, we look at **families** as **systems**, social and sanitary workers as connected with people and families in **larger systems** in which they are incorporated.
- ▶ We try to **look at system in contexts**, to pay attention to **relationships** between people and **not to shout "guilty!"**.
- ▶ For us, **secrets are toxic**.

Working as counsellor with gamblers families

- ▶ **Lies** are always a present **theme** in the conversation
- ▶ **Lies** have the **leading role** in each of their stories: in counselling groups, families often speak about all the lies told by the gambler and believed by them.

Lies in the gamblers' families

- Gamblers' relatives **suffer a lot**: wives, husbands, sisters, brothers, children suffer from a mix of **humiliation, shame, anger** and **incredulity**.
- Gamblers' families have **huge economic or legal problems**: debts, loss of houses or properties, **physical or psychiatric illnesses** due to a difficult situation in years of stress.
- But **incredibly**, the gamblers' families seem to **suffer more for the lies** of their relatives than for the enormous economic problems caused by the addiction.

Wondering about lies...

- ▶ So we began to wonder about **lies** and their **impact on the gamblers' families.**
- ▶ In the groups of relatives lies seemed to be **wounds impossible to heal.**
- ▶ **Relationships were damaged as much as the finances:** also after a good therapy in the gamblers' families it is difficult to close with the past and go on.

People of gamblers' families don't like talking about their difficulties

- During the most **difficult periods**, when a gambler is still wasting money and lying, **speaking creates fighting and anger.**
- The whole family makes awful experiences about speaking: they are **afraid their gambler's relative will become angry.**
- The **little and young family members** are often afraid of everything: of someone's anger, someone else's sadness, of being seen in a bad mood, or perching on a roller coaster.
- The worried relatives learn that **speaking is dangerous.**
- The gambler learns that **it's better to interrupt arguments with manipulation, lies or by attacking.**

Lies and pacification paths

- So in gamblers' families people **don't like talking about their difficulties**
- We planned and realized pacification pathways, in order to **support the families in the reconstruction of the relational damages** that gambling had produced: in these experiences we **worked a lot on lies** told by gamblers and their families.
- It is not easy **because both gamblers and relatives are afraid to speak about... lies**

In gambling, lie is everywhere:

- ▶ in the **suffering families**,
- ▶ in the **financial losses**
- ▶ in the huge **economic problems**,
- ▶ in the **relationships** between **gamblers** and **therapeutic services**,
- ▶ **between gamblers** and the **rest of the world**,
- ▶ **between families** and the **rest of the world...**
- ▶ **everywhere.**

Lie is an elephant

- ▶ Working as counsellor with gamblers' families, lie seems to be **like an elephant in a living room**:
 - ▶ **enormous** so **obvious** and **ordinary**,
 - ▶ very **heavy** but still **unseen**.
 - ▶ **transparent**.
- ▶ People can pretend **not to see** it.

A silence conspiracy?

- ▶ Regarding lies, silence seems to be a conspiracy.
- ▶ **Everybody is aware** but **nobody wants to tackle it.**
- ▶ **Gamblers** know, **families** know, **sanitary** and **social workers** know.

Gamblers are happier if their lies remain **hidden** so they can **avoid unpleasant discussions**

Families are **sad, angry** and **not very confident of** being able to **keep calm during the discussions**

Sanitary and social workers have **no tools to work on lie:** how is it possible to **work** without **trust?**

Lies: working to change systems of lies

- ▶ Sanitary and social workers have many **difficulties about lies, gamblers' lies** and **family lies**.
- ▶ There is **lack of hints, directions and tools about lies in gambling**, despite their importance, confirmed by workers' **experience** as well as **assessment** instruments and **diagnosis** criteria.
- ▶ We have to consider **how lies work**, so we can make **hypothesis on how to work on them**.

Lie as a matter of fact

- Lies seem to make life **easier** in the **short term**, while having the **worst progression**.
- Lies seem to **affect much more who believes** them than who lies.
- Lies are part of the **normal life**: it's quite impossible to avoid them totally.
- Lies tend to connect to other lies: in Italy we speak of **"castles of lies"**.

Lie as a matter of fact in problem gambling

- ▶ **Every gambler becomes a liar.** Gamblers' lies are **part of problem gambling.** Lie bet docet...
- ▶ **Social and sanitary workers** seem to think that gamblers **would stop lying** since that is not necessary; some of them think that the gambler should **apologize** to the family.
- ▶ **None of these ideas seems to be reflected in reality.**

Lies, creativity and satisfaction

- Gamblers widely use **imagination and creativity to cheat** their relatives and colleagues.
- Moreover, they seem to be **proud** of themselves when they speak about their lies.
- They are quite close to the **habit of lying**; it is **hard for them to see the pain of their families** due to untruthfulness.
- How can we **take the good part (creativity and satisfaction)** and convert it into something positive?
- **Good ideas for good things**: can the gamblers **experiment their effectiveness in something real and positive?**

Stop gambling / stop lying?

- The biggest question is about the **connection between lies and the real possibility to stop gambling**
- Lies can become a **habit**, which becomes very hard to change.
- The more you lie, **the less you feel bad** when you lie.
- Sometimes there is a doubt: **are lies addictive?**
- **Can one stop gambling without stopping to lie?**
- **Can those who can't stop telling lies, stop gambling?**

Suggestions to create tools for teams

- The first thing is that teams have to work **together** about **impact of lies on gambling**.
- Workers' teams have to **consider the personal side of the lie**: what is a lie for them?
- What are their **expectations** by working on lies?
- what are their **prejudices**?
- How can they **support each other** by working on such a difficult and elusive subject?

Suggestions to create tools for gamblers

- ▶ The teams can work on lies **with gamblers asking**, for instance,
 - ▶ what **are** each gambler's lies
 - ▶ What was for them the **meaning** of their lies.
 - ▶ **Why** they told lies
 - ▶ **When**
 - ▶ To **whom**
 - ▶ What was the **effect** on the family
 - ▶ Who is the most **affected**

Suggestions to create tools for families

- ▶ The teams can work on lies **with the families asking**, for instance,
 - ▶ what was the **meaning** of gamblers' lies for the family
 - ▶ What was the **effect** of lies on the family
 - ▶ Who is the **most affected**
 - ▶ **Whether** or not the relatives have **spoken about** this (lies and their effect on relationships) **with the gambler**
 - ▶ In which circumstances **also** the **family lied** about gambling

After some experiences with these questions...

You can wonder if it's better to work to

stop gambling

or

stop lying

My conclusion is only...

**Have a good
job!**