Alberta Gambling Research Institute Conference 2019: Blurred Lines in Gambling Research

Browne, Matthew; Clark, Luke; Cunningham, John; Hilbrecht, Margo; Johnson, Mark R.; Quilty, Lena C.; Rodda, Simone; Sanders, James; Tavares, Hermano; Tremblay, Joël...

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Socio-historical perspectives on the blurring boundaries between games and gambling

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Disclosures

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- Funded by Wellcome 2017 to 2021
- Runs consultancy research business – do not provide services for industry; funding from public and third sector only
- Deputy chair of Responsible Gambling Strategy Board – renumerated by the Gambling Commission
- Have worked on projects for GambleAware, most recently on a project doing analysis of the relationship between problem gambling and suicide.
Main argument

1. Gaming and gambling are conceptually intertwined and there are reciprocal relationships and influences between them both.

2. Gaming and gambling both take cues from broader social norms, reflecting (or challenging) social processes.

3. It’s not necessarily that games and gambling are converging but that technology offers greater reach into people’s lives – it’s a move from private to public space, underpinned by motivations of commercial gain.
Gaming, gambling and play: conceptual ambiguity

The diagram illustrates the relationship between play, games, and gambling. It shows that play encompasses both games and gambling, indicating that these activities fall within the broader context of play.
Games, gambling and play: some theories

“It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it”
“gambling games are sterile, adding nothing to life or the mind”
Huizinga, 1949

“Play creates no wealth and ends as it begins”
But includes gambling games in four-fold taxonomy of play
Caillios 1949

“Play has negotiable consequences”
Juul, 2003
Gaming, gambling and play: what are the processes that give rise to concern?
“[betting within families leading to..] arguments and laughter and speculation whilst tea is being consumed. Possibly all this is wrong, but it is not very easy to detect the vice in it”
“Digital games cannot be understood without attention to the late capitalist economic systems from which they emerge and the changing political, social and cultural contexts in which they are produced and consumed” Kerr. 2006
Games as socially and culturally situated
Early digital games – contextually authentic
Technological change: gambling following where technology leads?
What do we mean by technology?

“Technology is the process by which organisations transforms labour, capital, materials and information into products. This includes engineering, manufacturing but also marketing, investments and managerial processes”

Source: Clayton Christensen
Changes in communication and immersive technology

Immersive technologies

So it’s not always about what’s happening now, it’s about how we want the player to feel. And based on their feeling, they will prepare and move to the next step.
“The coin noise in Mario - I don’t think it’s collecting the coin itself that’s satisfying, it’s the sound it makes that makes some little dopamine detonator go off in your head.”

- Charlie Brooker

Source: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/top_scores_video_game_music
What do we mean by technology? The importance of considering the techno-ecosystem

Integration

Connectivity

Products

Marketing and advertising

Affiliate networks

Brand development
Concluding remarks

There is a reciprocal relationship between gambling and gaming; need to pay attention to broader social processes.

Technological change underpins advances and changes in gaming and gambling.

Understanding broader socio-historical and cultural contexts helps us to anticipate concerns of the future.

“How you define something governs what you do about it”

(Korn & Shaffer, 1999)