

## Book Review: Gambling: Who Wins? Who Loses?

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*Gambling: Who Wins? Who Loses?* is a thought-provoking collection of essays, written largely by international experts in the gambling field, that analyze the complex cultural, economic and social issues that have emerged as a result of the legalization and expansion of commercial gambling globally. Editor Gerda Reith, author of *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture* (2002), succeeds in her objective of stimulating informed debate. Reith presents a diverse range of topics and opinion that highlight historical and current trends in gambling activity from legal, political, economic, social, psychological and ethical perspectives. The book, which includes an introduction by Reith, is divided into seven sections: (a) current trends in commercial gaming; (b) social and economic benefits and costs; (c) law, crime and commercial regulation; (d) the “addiction” debate; (e) social trends, problem gambling, and the challenge to public policy; (f) psychological and environmental factors; and (g) ethical and philosophical issues.

This accessible volume, like any good anthology, presents a multi-faceted picture of gambling activity without providing easy answers to the complex political and social issues that are raised. The articles found in *Gambling: Who Wins? Who Loses?* reflect contemporary thinking about the social and economic costs and benefits of gambling activity and will appeal to students, academics and professionals, as well as a more general readership, interested in the topics addressed by these authors.

**Keywords:** Problem gambling; Cultural and social issues; Economic costs; Gambling debate; Addiction debate; Public policy.

### Introduction

*Gambling: Who Wins? Who Loses?* (2003) is a thought-provoking collection of essays, written largely by international experts in the gambling field, that analyze the complex cultural, economic and social issues that have emerged as a result of the expansion of commercial gambling globally. Editor Gerda Reith, author of *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Cul-*

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cal and social issues that are raised. The articles found in *Gambling: Who Wins? Who Loses?* reflect contemporary thinking about the social and economic costs and benefits of gambling activity and will appeal to students, academics and professionals, as well as a more general readership, interested in the topics addressed by these authors.

In the Introduction (“Pathology and Profit: Controversies in the Expansion of Gambling”), Reith (2003) highlights many of the themes addressed in this anthology, with particular reference to how the intersecting forces of ideology, history and economics influence the current debate surrounding gambling activity globally.

Gambling activity, in its numerous forms, has existed throughout human history and across cultures (Gabriel, 1996). Reith (2003), like other authors in this book, situates gambling in its cultural context and identifies historical cycles of promotion (liberalization) followed by periods of prohibition (censor and criminalization).

Gambling is a complex phenomenon and cultural attitudes towards it remain ambivalent. Traditionally, as McMillen (2003) notes in Chapter Two, games played in local communities reflected social and cultural values and in some cases, such as sports, promoted national pride and sovereignty. However, over the last twenty-five years gaming and gambling activity have been transformed by the forces of commercialization and globalization, especially with the introduction of new gambling mediums, such as the Internet (McMillen, 2003).

The liberalization of gambling laws in many parts of the world, particularly during the 1980s and on, has led to massive growth in both the size of the gambling industry and gambling expenditures globally (Reith, 2003). According to Reith, the gambling industry generates huge profits and considerable tax revenues for regional, state, and federal governments, is a major player in global economies and is increasingly owned by a limited number of multinational conglomerates. In the United States, the gambling industry has expanded tenfold in the last twenty-five years and is a major economic force that generated revenues in 1996 of \$25 billion a year and paid about \$2.9 billion in taxes (Reith, 2003, p. 10).<sup>1</sup>

As McMillen (2003) notes in Chapter Two, gambling activity will continue to expand exponentially with innovations in gaming and gambling technology, particularly in continuous-play *electronic-gaming machines* (EGMs, video-lottery terminals, slots, “fruit” machines in Britain, or “pokies” in Australia) and the introduction of the Internet (and associated on-line casino, sports betting, stock-market gambling, as well as “internet” addiction itself; gaming PCs; hand-held games; WebTV; and web-phones). At present, gam-

bling activity on the Internet poses a challenge to federal regulators and is unregulated globally (Hammond, 2003; Rose, 2003). Little is known about its impact on society.

Debate exists in society about the economic and social costs and benefits of increased commercial gambling. Reith examines the research regarding the economic benefits of different forms of gambling; for example, “convenience” gambling (video lottery terminals and games over the Internet) creates few jobs, has very little impact on the economy, is unregulated, and appears to be associated with a high risk of problem gambling in gambling consumers (Volberg, 2003). Casino and pari-mutuel industries, on the other hand, are highly concentrated, provide infrastructure and employment and are strictly regulated. Casinos offer slot machines, a continuous play machine similar to video lottery terminals, as well as keno and table games; EGMs, such as slots and video-lottery terminals, have been associated with an increased risk of problem gambling (Volberg, 2003). Many racetracks now offer slot machines and are called “racinos.”

Proponents of casino development, especially in depressed communities, focus on the economic benefits such as job creation and economic development (Reith, 2003). Critics of casino development argue that commercial gambling is a regressive tax on the poor and results in a “transfer,” not creation, of wealth (Reith, 2003). The overall economic benefits and social costs of gambling activity are impossible to estimate (National Gambling Impact Study Commission [NGISC], 1999), as the social and economic costs (losses) of gambling on individuals, communities and societies are difficult to quantify and cannot be compared to the benefits reflected in revenue generation by the gambling industry.

The growth of legalized gambling according to Reith and others authors in this volume, has led to an increase in problem gambling, as well as other problems associated with problem gambling such as: negative environmental effects, increased indebtedness and bankruptcy, crime, domestic abuse and violence, familial breakdown and suicide. The personal and family impacts of gambling are addressed in the realm of treatment and counselling (addictions and mental health fields), while the social impacts of gambling are addressed by policy and legislation (Reith, 2003).

Throughout history, gambling activity has been defined and characterized in various ways. Reith and others in this volume, note that in the past gambling was viewed as a sin, a vice, and today, is increasingly por-

<sup>1</sup> Eadington (2003), in Chapter 1, states that gambling revenues in the U.S. alone increased from \$10 billion to \$61.5 billion between 1982 and 2000.

trayed as a mainstream leisure activity, advertised and promoted by the gambling industry and governments increasingly dependent on the tax revenues generated. Criticism of gambling tends to be expressed in language specific to its socio-cultural climate in history (Reith, 2003). The liberalization of gambling laws, combined with the force of commercialization, has created a shift in problem gambling discourse in the last century from vice to disease.

Although excessive gambling has occurred throughout history, it was only included in the American Psychiatric Association's (APA, 1980) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (*DSM-III*; the main diagnostic reference of mental health professionals in the US) in 1980, compared with the diagnostic criteria for "alcoholism" which were included in both the *DSM-I* (APA, 1952) and *DSM-II* (APA, 1968) as a subset of personality disorders, homosexuality, and neuroses (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 1995). First conceptualized as an impulse disorder, problem gamblers were labelled "pathological." In 1987, the criteria for pathological gambling were changed to reflect similarity with psychoactive substance dependence criteria, including tolerance, withdrawal, loss of control, and adverse consequences. Considerable disagreement exists over the application of the medical model to gambling. One of the criticisms of the "disease model" is that it tends to individualize and pathologize social problems (Lesieur, 1984; McKay, 1995). Much debate exists within the mental health and addictions field about what problem gambling is: a genetic condition, a discrete "disorder" or "syndrome," an "addiction"? These issues are discussed in further depth by authors in Section Four.

Reith (2003), and others in this volume, note that creating policy and legislation that addresses the social impacts of gambling is a difficult task, given the conflicting interests at play and the significance of the financial outcomes. The role of the state in the regulation of gambling and the creation of relevant policy is a debated social policy issue, as the state is perceived to be in a conflict of interest in its roles of regulator, beneficiary, or operator of gambling establishments (Derevensky, Gupta, Hardoon, Dickson, & Deguire, 2003). The role of the state is to consider the social policy implications of gambling activity in terms of revenue generation and legislation, and to control gambling activity through regulation of the gambling industry (Eadington, 2003).

Much debate centers on the pros and cons of gambling activity with reference to its social impacts. Proponents of gambling contend that gambling is a voluntary activity and provides much needed tax revenues without the politically unpopular move of raising taxes (Reith, 2003). Gambling operators argue that government intervention in gambling activity is a hindrance

on the operation of the free market. Critics of gambling maintain that the negative personal and social impacts of gambling are less quantifiable than the benefits as evidenced by revenue gains and demand government accountability, and consumer protection.

With the seemingly relentless expansion of gambling into the global marketplace, the debate between critics and proponents of gambling becomes increasingly polarized. Gambling remains a contentious policy issue with a long history of being viewed as a "sin" or "vice," and public opinion is divided about its benefits and costs (Reith, 2003). If history serves as a guide, it seems likely that a period of prohibition, due to a public backlash against gambling, may follow this period of rapid expansion (Eadington, 2003). As Reith (2003) notes, all of the essays found in this anthology, in their various ways, identify and grapple with the complex social, individual, legal, political, and economic issues that have emerged as a result of the expansion of commercial gambling globally.

## Section One: Current Trends in Commercial Gaming

Section One examines current trends in commercial gambling (United States, Canada, Europe, South Africa, Australia and Asia) and in legalized gambling, as well as the impact of new technologies such as the Internet, interactive and virtual gambling, web TV and hand-held devices on gambling globally.

Eadington (2003), in his discussion of "Values and Choices," introduces the reader to the economist's ideas of "economic rents" and "negative externalities." Both proponents and opponents of legalized gambling need to take heed of the terms. While economic rents come in different forms including franchise fees and monopoly costs, the most interesting from the reviewers' points of view is that extracted by the state. The state, by taking up the mantle of gambling to relieve tax burdens, essentially becomes a partner in the legalized enterprise. Negative externalities, according to Eadington (2003), are represented primarily by the cost of problem and pathological gambling to society. The term "externalities" describes, "the core value / practice of externalizing—this means making someone else pay for a given resource—costs in the name of profits" (Nietzsche, 2004).

His reading that convenience gambling appears to be associated with increased awareness of negative externalities and an eventual political backlash, is an interesting one and worth noting. One wonders, however, why scratch ticket outlets, though widely available in different countries, have not generated the backlash that occurs following widely available video slot machines. Researchers should investigate whether this is because of limited negative externalities, because of

essential differences in the psychology of the game, or because of lack of political awareness of vulnerabilities.

McMillen (2003) notes the homogenization of gambling as a result of globalization and examines regulatory challenges as gambling is transformed from a small-scale, community activity to a hi-tech, global one. It is not surprising that global companies are competing for the gambling market. Her essay is cautionary. She notes an unanswered moral question that will increase with further globalization (especially of Internet gambling): “who is responsible for addressing any social harm that might result” (p. 56). Given the penchant for governments to see gambling as a revenue raiser, requests for funds to prevent, educate, and treat problem gamblers may slip even further unless state representatives acknowledge the negative externalities.

## Section Two: Economic and Social Costs and Benefits

The focus of Section Two is the analysis of the economic and social costs and benefits of gambling. Grinols (2003) attempts to correct some of the common misconceptions about the economic value of gambling, while Goodman (2003) criticizes what he calls the “grand illusion” of gambling as a viable strategy for economic development. Stitt, Nichols, and Giacomassi (2003) examine community responses to the adoption of casinos in their communities.

Unfortunately, two authors (Grinols, 2003; and Goodman, 2003) are presented in Section Two of the book without rebuttal from those who have criticized their work in the past. In fact, one of the critics, Eadington (2003), cites Grinols’s (2003) work in his chapter. This gives a misleading impression that there is more agreement than is apparent from earlier writings. Grinols (2003) was one of the first economists to acknowledge that problem gambling raises important issues that should not be ignored. However, it appears that Grinols (2003), and Goodman (2003) as well, have taken data from studies of Gamblers Anonymous (GA) members and generalized them to the general population of problem gamblers. In actuality, GA members have more serious problems than most of the problem gamblers studied. The result is a possible exaggeration of the extent of the problem. However, given the paucity of available data, any estimates we could make would be flawed. The irony is that however flawed the data, both Grinols (2003) and Goodman (2003) have forced many to re-examine their views of the impact of problem gambling on society.

Continuing with the social cost argument, Albanese (2003) notes, in Section Three, that the data do not support a connection between gambling and street

crime. However, he is investigating the impact of casinos on other crimes using arrest data. Sadly, arrest data are notoriously inadequate when it comes to embezzlement, forgery, and fraud (as well as associated problems such as domestic and family violence). These offences are seriously underreported and studying them will require an enormous undertaking. Such an undertaking will have to acknowledge that many problem-gambling related crimes are committed near home rather than near the casino.

Stitt et al. (2003) note the lack of fit in attitudes about gambling between studies of community leaders and those of the general public. One wonders whether these differences would have been quite different if even more specific questions were asked instead of the four global questions they used. For example, would spouses and significant others of problem gamblers have attitudes similar to those of others in their community?

## Section Three: Law, Crime, and Commercial Regulation

Section Three discusses the issues of law, crime, and commercial regulation. Rose (2003) outlines the historical “waves” of prohibition and legalization and identifies the forces that have contributed to the current “explosion” of legal gambling in the United States today. Rose, like some of the other authors in the book, is American in his approach. However, he raises interesting issues that should be examined in a more global context. It appears that the morality argument is not dead in Islamic countries; how much life does it still have in countries with a Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and other traditions? The domino effect has happened in Australia, Europe, and elsewhere as much as it has happened in the United States. Also, the Internet domino will probably change the picture in ways we have not yet conceived.

The article by Hammond (2003), also in Section Three, on whether Internet gambling is or is not illegal was so full of references to American legal decisions that it is doubtful that anyone outside of the US would be interested. On the other hand, Miers (2003)—also in Section Three—focuses on Great Britain, raising issues that have global implications. One such issue is how do we make games honest and transparent, and what guidelines should exist for an informed consumer. Manson’s (2003) article (in Section Six) on probability on the casino floor plus Miers’s (2003) article illustrate how difficult a task all this is. This is made even more difficult with irrational thinking errors on the part of gamblers that are reinforced by casino marketing strategies.



## Section Four: The “Addiction” Debate

Section Four examines the debate surrounding conceptual frameworks of problem gambling and whether it is an “addiction” or a disease. In “A Critical View of Pathological Gambling and Addiction,” [Shaffer \(2003\)](#) begins by outlining the difficulties in defining problem gambling—or, indeed, any behavioural pattern—an “addiction.” [Dickerson \(2003\)](#), an Australian problem gambling expert, takes a more critical view, suggesting the redundancy of the term pathological and highlights the differences between the political, research, and academic climates in the United States and Australia. Finally, [Peele \(2003\)](#) argues that, while gambling is addictive, it is not a disease and therefore should be understood in behavioural and experiential terms, rather than in biological ones.

[Shaffer \(2003\)](#), [Dickerson \(2003\)](#), and [Peele \(2003\)](#)—each in Section Four—do not seem to like the APA’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (*DSM-IV*), but for different reasons that would seem arcane for the casual reader, but underscore the link between theory and practice in the field of problem gambling. That is, if one views problem gambling as a consequence of individual, personality or biological “defects” or flaws, the social, cultural, and economic context in which gambling occurs in is neglected. A parallel example might be the tobacco industry: Most people who smoke frequently get hooked; individual personality or biological variables, while perhaps playing a role in nicotine addiction, are only a small piece of a much bigger puzzle.

[Shaffer \(2003\)](#), in Section Four, introduces confusion when he discusses the term “addiction” and the confusion is furthered by the inconsistency in which the term is used by different authors. Interestingly, [Shaffer](#) discusses the associations between disordered gambling and psychiatric comorbidity. Another possibility rears itself: *X* (the comorbid condition like depression or anxiety) exists prior to and is one of many contributing factors to problem gambling (PG), and PG increases the severity of *X*.

[Dickerson \(2003\)](#) uses the term *addiction* without questioning it, but questions *DSM-IV* because of the medical model implication of underlying pathology. He makes the assumption that an American approach that endorses the medical model hinders socio-political positions on harm minimization. In actuality, there are American practitioners (like the second author of this review) who endorse harm minimization while seeing some value (albeit with many of the same qualifications voiced by [Dickerson, 2003](#)) in the *DSM-IV* diagnostic criterion of problem gambling. At the very least, having pathological gambling in the criteria set alerts mental health professionals to the seriousness of problem gambling.

## Section Five: Social Trends, Problem Gambling, and the Challenge to Public Policy

In Section Five, social trends, problem gambling and the challenge to public policy are discussed. [Volberg \(2003\)](#) outlines the contemporary situation, documenting an increase in problem gambling in the US, and further analyzes this in terms of problem gambling by group and by type of gambling activity. [Derevensky et al. \(2003\)](#) examine gambling trends amongst youth, the population most vulnerable to developing problems with gambling. [McNeilly and Burke \(2003\)](#) focus on the impact of gambling among the often forgotten older generation. [Whyte \(2003\)](#) highlights the impact of problem gambling as a serious public health issue and calls for a national policy response that incorporates prevention, education, treatment, enforcement, and research.

In the first article, “Paying the Piper: Gambling and Problem Gambling in America,” [Volberg \(2003\)](#) reviews the findings from the two national surveys of gambling activity that were conducted in the United States in 1975 (Kallick et al., 1979, as cited in [Volberg, 2003](#)) and 1998 (Gerstein et al., 1998, as cited in [Volberg, 2003](#)), respectively. The findings from the second study indicate that lifetime gambling participation rates increased from 68% to 86% during this time-frame, although last-year gambling participation rates remained relatively unchanged. Even though more adults were participating in gambling activities, attitudes towards gambling remained ambivalent. The 1998 survey also found that women participated in legal gambling to the same degree as men, that lifetime gambling had increased dramatically amongst older adults and that ethnic differences existed between frequency of gambling and types of gambling participation.

Estimates suggest that in the United States there are 2.5 million “pathological” and 3 million “problem gamblers,” while another 15 million are considered “at risk.” [Volberg \(2003\)](#) notes that problem gambling is found to be related to specific types of gambling, especially “convenience” gambling, such as EGMs, and that studies “support the conclusion that the greater numbers of machines are associated with higher problem gambling prevalence rates” (p. 234). She concludes that this link is a critical policy issue.

The next article, “Youth Gambling: Some Social Policy Issues” by [Derevensky et al. \(2003\)](#), focuses on adolescents as a high-risk group for developing gambling problems. Gambling has become a popular form of recreation for youth and rates of problem gambling are higher than in the adult population. Many youth who develop gambling problems begin gambling as young as 10, often with their families (pointing to a

possible link between parental and child problem gambling). Other factors make youth a vulnerable group: Peer influences, advertising and media, gender (gambling is more popular for males), physiological, personality, emotional and mental states, other risky behaviour, etc. According to these authors, problem gambling amongst adolescents is an emerging public health issue.<sup>2</sup>

McNeilly and Burke's (2003) article, "Late-life Gambling: The Attitudes and Behaviors of Older Adults," examines the impact of legalized gambling on older adults in the United States. Older adults are a market that commercial gambling operators try to attract through special promotions such as inexpensive food, transportation, and other discounts. Little research has addressed the impact of legalized gambling on the older adult population. McNeilly and Burke investigate older adults' level of participation in gambling and their problematic gambling behaviour. Levels of depression, life satisfaction, attitudes towards gambling, and motivations for gambling are also assessed. This study found that older women are particularly at risk for gambling problems. The study also suggests that there are potentially higher rates of problem gambling among older adults who were sampled at gambling venues than those previously reported amongst the general adult population. Another finding, contrary to previous research, was that there was no decline in the propensity to gamble as one ages. McNeilly and Burke conclude that gambling remains a largely unrecognized public health problem amongst the older adult population.

The last article in this section, "A Public Policy Response to Problem Gambling" by Whyte (2003), outlines the need for clear and concise social policy to mitigate the negative effects of legalized gambling. Until recently, problem gambling has not been viewed as a public policy issue but rather as a personal or individual problem. Whyte, like many problem gambling experts in Australia and elsewhere, maintains that problem gambling is a serious public health problem and affects 9-12 million individuals in the United States as well as their families and communities. Whyte promotes a comprehensive gambling policy that addresses Prevention, Education, Treatment, Enforcement and Research (PETER).

The authors in Section Five of the book all accept the *DSM-IV* definition of pathological gambling. Volberg (2003) summarizes the demographic studies of problem and pathological gambling in the US. Derevensky et al. (2003) acknowledge the common model for examining risk and preventive factors for studying youth problem gambling, drug abuse, delinquency, and other problems while using the harm minimization model that Dickerson (2003) seems to believe exists in opposition to the medical model.

McNeilly and Burke (2003) use a limited sample to examine gambling among older Americans. Their findings may be limited to the American context but further study is needed. Conspicuously absent from this section is a chapter on women and problem gambling, although gender is identified by Volberg (2003), and McNeilly and Burke (2003).

## Section Six: Psychological and Environmental Factors

Section Six looks at the influence of psychological and environmental factors on gambling behaviour. Griffiths and Parke (2003) analyze the way in which a range of environmental features, such as music, light and color, can induce gamblers to play for longer periods, or conversely, make them stop earlier. When it comes to the sights and sounds of gambling, Griffiths and Parke make some interesting observations including, "you can't hear the sound of losing" (p. 279), and "Non-gambling friends giving negative appraisals for unnecessary risk taking" (p. 288). Unfortunately, as the authors note, much of their essay is speculative and is given with little empirical support.

Keeping to the gambling setting, Manson (2003)—also in Section Six—examines how gambler's subjective (and often erroneous) beliefs concerning probability affect their playing strategy, and the amounts of money they stand to lose. Manson notes the variations in expected value of different games as well as the irrationality of many gamblers. He comments that most gamblers "are poorly informed and impulsive" (p. 306).

## Section Seven: Ethical and Philosophical Issues

In Section Seven, articles examine the widely debated moral and ethical aspects of gambling. Skolnick (2003) looks at relativistic and shifting definitions of "vice" throughout history and examines gambling in relation to other "wicked pleasures." Skolnick's article tells us that we need to be cautious when the state legalizes vice: the state needs to be mindful of the costs and should take whatever actions necessary to minimize them.

Peter Collin's essay draws on the political philosophy of Hobbes, Locke and Mill to argue that, in a liberal democracy, the outlawing of gambling is a morally illegitimate abuse of power. Ironically, even Collins (2003), the most ardent proponent of the legalization of gambling, notes that the state has a responsibility towards problem gamblers. His argument would have

<sup>2</sup> Readers are referred to an article by Korn and Shaffer (1999) on including gambling within a public health framework.

more force if different countries followed the suggestions of some of the other authors in this volume (e.g., Whyte, 2003, in Section Five); that is, provide sufficient funds to educate the public about problem gambling, engage in prevention efforts designed to reduce the harm that comes from excessive gambling, and treat those who develop problems.

Gabriel (2003) provides a wide-ranging study that examines the role of gambling, both as a metaphor and as a practice, throughout world mythology; and concludes that the dynamic behind all gambling behaviour is fundamentally spiritual, and as such, it should be understood in terms of religious belief, rather than as a sin or a vice.

Scanlan's (2003) essay provides a philosophical and literary reflection on the wider role of chance in life and its implications for issues of rationality and knowledge.

## Conclusion

All of these essays, in their various ways, bring a critical perspective to bear on the complex social, individual, legal, political, and economic issues that have emerged with the expansion of commercial gambling globally. The authors in this volume provide the impetus for informed and ongoing debate of this complex and rapidly growing phenomenon and begin to establish the parameters for further research and social policy development, especially regarding the potential "addictiveness" of EGMs (see, for example, Lesieur & Horbay, 2003) and the expansion of Internet gambling. At the time of this review, much of the work of these authors has been expanded upon and elaborated.

Only a few comments on how this anthology could be improved if it goes to a second edition: Gabriel's (2003) article on "Playing the Gods" should come in the front—it is interesting even if it is too condensed. The next edition should also allow for some direct debate among authors, while further internationalizing the readings a bit more (the majority of the articles are from the United States). Both reviewers would have also liked to see an article reflecting a gender analysis.

With an informed instructor (e.g., one who is familiar with the medical-model debate), this collection of essays will be a valuable addition to sociology, economics, political science, and psychology classes where gambling is a focus of attention.

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