A group of more than 80 researchers, treatment providers, policy makers, and government officials gathered together at The Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta from March 30th to April 1st for the Institute’s annual conference on gambling research. The theme of this year’s two-day event was “Contemporary Issues in Gambling Research.” It featured a roster of esteemed presenters who provided interesting and relevant insights about topics related to online gambling and the issues surrounding this activity. Included were a myriad of talks about such topics as the regulation of sports betting, in-play sports betting, loot boxes and problem gambling, cryptocurrency ownership, reducing the speed of online gambling to prevent harm, and online-based self-exclusion. Special thanks to program planners Drs. Fiona Nicoll (Lead Co-Chair), David Hodgins, Rob Williams and conference organizer Glenda Wong (Institute Executive Director) for their efforts in making the event a success.

Continued on next page >
Highlights from the Conference:

An evening reception on March 31st provided opportunities to welcome attendees to the event, establish connections with new and old colleagues, and take in the stunning mountain scenery from the Kinnear Centre building.

Dr. Andrew Kim (Toronto Metropolitan University), who provided a fantastic introduction to in-play sports betting, which he described as allowing players to continuously make bets while a sporting event is ongoing. Kim discussed two investigations he has undertaken on this relatively new format whose characteristics (e.g., its “continuous” nature) make it an activity that is more potentially harmful than single-event and traditional forms of sports betting.

Brock University’s Dr. Michael Naraine, whose dynamic presentation about the regulatory landscape of sports betting in Canada was a natural complement to Dr. Kim’s talk. Naraine outlined the different ways that sports gambling is offered in Canada’s provinces and reviewed the consumer marketing tactics (e.g., loyalty programs, incentive programs, “free money”) being employed by online gambling companies to acquire the lucrative Canadian sports gambling customer.
A panel session about regulating sports betting and reducing harms which featured AGLC CEO Kandice Machado, Dr. Andrew Kim and Dr. Rachel Volberg. Machado mentioned that customers of the PlayAlberta online site have responded positively to the corporation’s message that “money played in Alberta stays in Alberta”; she is also particularly proud of the strong social responsibility measures that have been put in place on the site.

A research poster exhibition, which included presentations from twenty-three researchers and graduate student researchers, introduced conference delegates to the wide variety of investigations being undertaken in the field. The poster “Are there riskier forms of gambling? Evidence from the Canadian National Study” by U. of Lethbridge Master’s student Nolan Gooding was recognized as the best poster on display from amongst many excellent candidates.

The Indige-Spheres Youth Group, a group of young indigenous researchers from Northwestern Ontario, who provided a series of personal reflections about videogaming in their everyday lives.
A herd of thirty elk materialized on the Banff Centre’s mountain campus to greet attendees on the morning of Day 2 of the event just prior to the beginning of that day’s plenary sessions. It was a wonderful reminder of the Centre’s spectacular scenery and awe-inspiring location.

The final conference program, session presenters, poster exhibitors, and presentations (PDFs) from Institute Conference 2023: Contemporary Issues in Gambling Research are freely accessible from the Institute website (https://research.ucalgary.ca/alberta-gambling-research-institute/institute-conference/2023-conference-materials).

Next year’s conference event will also be held at The Banff Centre and is scheduled for April 11-13, 2024.
The Allure of Cryptocurrency Ownership: An Interview with Graduate Student Kyle Tuico

Can you tell us a little bit about your academic background?

I started my undergraduate degree at the University of Calgary as a major in Biological Sciences with the intent of taking human anatomy courses, but soon realized that anatomy wasn’t a major focus in that program. Wanting to take courses related to humans, I decided to take several Psychology classes in my first year, in which I took great interest as they focused on thoughts and behaviours. I eventually switched majors, and seven years later, I’m now halfway through a Master’s degree in Psychology.

How did you develop an interest in research related to gambling and cryptocurrency?

Prior to graduate school, I had the opportunity to work with Dr. Dan McGrath (Department of Psychology, U. of Calgary) as a gambling research assistant. Now, as his Master’s student, we’re working together to assess the psychological characteristics of those who engage in cryptocurrency trading and investing. Behavioural finance was initially a bit out of my comfort zone, but Dr. McGrath was very passionate about it and I’m always happy to challenge myself and work on interesting and novel topics!

Behavioural addictions have always interested me and I found it intriguing that people can get hooked on activities purely from the rush of dopamine they produce in the brain. For some, their engagement with these behaviours become so problematic that they experience negative consequences akin to those of substance abuse. However, despite the ease at which a person can develop a behavioural addiction, especially those related to new technologies like cryptocurrency, this topic is relatively understudied.
Your poster at the 2023 AGRI Conference presented research examining cryptocurrency owners and non-owners. Can you tell us about this study?

Our study used the Connect crowdsourcing platform to recruit individuals who currently or formerly owned cryptocurrency as well as those who have never purchased cryptocurrency. We chose Connect because it had an in-built screener that allowed us to specifically recruit cryptocurrency owners. For the poster, we used multinomial logistic regression to estimate ownership type, with never having owned cryptocurrency as the reference category. Ownership type was defined based on their level of engagement with cryptocurrency. Active owners were defined as those who had purchased cryptocurrencies at least once a month or checked prices or the news related to cryptocurrencies 2-3 times a week or more. All other current owners were considered passive owners, and those who did not currently own cryptocurrency were considered former owners. Within our sample, we identified 144 active owners, 93 passive owners, and 57 former owners. We aimed to assess whether vulnerability to gambling fallacies (e.g., belief that a winning streak will continue) and conspiratorial thinking (e.g., belief that the government has secret and malevolent agendas) predicted cryptocurrency ownership of any type.

Our findings showed that cryptocurrency ownership, specifically active ownership, was predicted by a lack of resistance to gambling fallacies. Other factors associated with active cryptocurrency ownership included greater problem gambling severity and higher sensation-seeking – all things that suggest
an overlap between problematic gambling and active cryptocurrency purchasing. However, we did not find any association between any type of cryptocurrency ownership and conspiratorial thinking. Given that about 70% of the cryptocurrency owners (current or former) had lifetime expenditures of less than $5,000 on cryptocurrencies, and roughly 30% spent less than $10,000, we believe that we were not able to find this association in our sample as we suspect that greater conspiratorial thinking may be more prominent among those with higher spending.

**How does your research investigation connect with other cryptocurrency-related research that has been undertaken at the U. of Calgary’s Substance Use and Gambling Lab led by Dr. Daniel McGrath?**

My research builds off the previous research conducted in our lab. For example, the cryptocurrency questionnaire that was used in our recent study improved upon the survey created for a previous study, incorporating new findings such as the purchasing motives which Dr. McGrath briefly discussed at the 2023 AGRI Conference [Link].

The end goal of our research is to provide a deeper understanding of who invests in cryptocurrencies, why individuals invest in such a volatile market, and whether there are any overlaps between gambling and cryptocurrency purchasing. I believe that the research that was conducted in the past, and my research in the present, aligns with these goals.

**Do you have thoughts about the potential implications of cryptocurrency ownership as it relates to gambling and problem gambling?**

Our findings show that not all cryptocurrency owners are the same, and that there are psychological differences in associations between active owners, passive owners, and former owners. This is an important finding, as one of the main things that distinguishes between low-risk and high-risk problem gamblers is engagement, namely frequency, duration, and level of control. As such, it is important to assess cryptocurrency owners based on their activity to ascertain whether certain subtypes have greater susceptibility to developing adverse consequences from cryptocurrency purchasing, such as greater risk of financial consequences and emotional and psychological impacts.

**What do you see as the next steps for your cryptocurrency research?**

It’s important to determine how to best categorize cryptocurrency purchasing. Is it just an extremely volatile investment, market speculation, or gambling? Laying this groundwork and establishing a unified definition is important for informing public policies, which will ultimately contribute towards helping those who are most vulnerable to the allure of cryptocurrency and its negative consequences.

Kyle Tuico is a Master’s student in Psychology at the University of Calgary working under the supervision of Dr. Dan McGrath. He was a recipient of an AGRI Graduate Student Scholarship in 2022-23.
Catch Fortune When You Can (c.1812)

This image is an example of an early nineteenth century handbill that used hieroglyphics to promote and advertise lotteries in Britain. In the recently published book *Gambling in Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century*, Professor Bob Harris states that, “Lottery entrepreneurs were, in brief, masters of advertising, employing newspapers, placard men, sandwich men, wall posters, advertising vehicles (so-called errand carts), as well as handbills of ever-greater ingenuity, verbally and visually, in an effort to conjure into being and to sustain public interest in the lottery.” At this time, lottery businesses also used handbills to provide increasingly detailed information about the diverse social identities and often the places of residence of winners at their offices... not unlike the publicity that ensues after a modern-day lottery winner is announced.

Mark You Calendars

Next year’s AGRI Conference will be held at The Banff Centre and is scheduled for April 11-13, 2024.

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