

## ***A Review of Gambling: Who Wins? Who Loses?***

**By**

**Ryan K. May  
Marietta College**

Book: *Gambling, Who Wins? Who Loses?*

Author: Gerda Reith (Ed.)

Publisher: Prometheus Books

Date: 2003

*Gambling, Who Wins? Who loses?*, edited by Gerda Reith, Ph.D, examines several wide-ranging yet important topics related to gambling. This multidisciplinary compilation of essays, some written by prominent scholars in their fields, examines such questions as: How can the alluring economic benefits of gambling be balanced against the potential harm caused to a significant minority? Is problem or pathological gambling similar to drug dependency? To what extent, and by whom, should commercial gambling be regulated? To what extent should government be involved in the gambling business, and should it rely on gambling to generate revenue? Following an introduction by Dr. Reith, the collection of essays is divided into seven sections, each dealing with a different aspect of gambling and gambling behavior. The majority of the essays represent original work; however some are reprinted with permission from other sources.

In the introduction, Reith sets the stage for the forthcoming arguments, by highlighting the dichotomy between the perceived economic benefits from gambling and the potential social costs of these endeavors. In this section she highlights the recent proliferation of gambling availability and subsequent increases in financial expenditure over the last several decades, as well as how social and economic perspectives of gambling have changed throughout history.

The initial section of the book examines current trends in commercial gambling. William R. Eadington considers the political, social and economic factors that have lead to a brisk expansion of legalized/permitted gambling in the United States and other countries. He discusses both the quantitative and qualitative changes in the availability of legalized gambling as well as the increases in gambling expenditures and revenues. During this discussion he highlights the fact that the overall economic climate appears to be related to the level of increases in gambling availably, with the major expansions in gambling often coinciding with the slowing down of the economy. He also describes the interesting dilemma of how best to measure/compare the perceived economic benefit to the associated social costs, and how the nature and location of the gambling opportunity plays a role in how one should best conduct this comparison.

Jan McMillen continues the exploration of current gambling trends by arguing that gambling has been transformed from a diverse and localized activity to a transnational industry that is influenced by both global and local practices. In her discussion, she highlights the role that technology has played in this global shift by facilitating the introduction of new gambling products and the widespread availability of these products through the internet and global telecommunications. A significant portion of her essay is devoted to a discussion of sportsbetting, which she views as the most rapidly growing form of global gambling. She ends her essay by highlighting an important challenge for gambling studies, to understand the contradiction that although most gamblers inevitably lose in economic terms, there is this apparent worldwide fascination with commercial gambling that both fuels, and is fueled, by technology and the global shift of gambling.

The second section examines the economic and social costs and benefits of gambling. Earl L. Grinols begins this section by providing a cost-benefit analysis of casino gambling, that he intends to correct common misconceptions about the economic value of gambling. He asserts that the most common misconception about the social evaluation of gambling is the belief that looking at job creation by casinos is a way to measure the benefits of casino gambling. He provides examples to support his assertion that job-creation by casinos is neither necessary nor sufficient for economic development. He also discusses two ways in which to measure and estimate the social costs of gambling, making direct observations of the impact of casinos on such variables as crime rates and examining the costs estimated from problem and pathological gamblers. Grinols concludes that the common assumptions of the economic value of gambling are not valid.

Robert Goodman continues by discussing the change in the predominant attitude towards gambling as one of cautious tolerance to gambling becoming an activity that has been actively promoted by many state and city political leaders as a panacea for suffering local economies. He highlights how Las Vegas has been looked upon as an ideal of an economy that has been transformed and supported by gambling. He states that although many try to replicate the success of Las Vegas, that due to the expansion of legal gambling opportunities, the likelihood for successful replication is quite low, and the chances for the generation of problems caused by using gambling as an economic development strategy are quite high.

Grant Stitt, Mark Nichols, and David Giacomassi explore community satisfaction and perceptions of casino gambling. They review previous studies that have been conducted exploring citizens' attitudes and perceptions in new casino jurisdictions. They then report data from a survey that they conducted as a part of a larger study to explore the effects of casino gambling on crime and the quality of life in a new casino jurisdiction. Their results suggest that community satisfaction with casino gambling is mixed, and the perceptions of, and satisfaction with, gambling are dependent on the multiple unique dynamics at work within each community.

The third section explores issues of crime, law, and commercial regulation. I. Nelson Rose asserts that gambling has followed a recurring pattern throughout the history of the U.S., in which legal gambling has spread only to “crash down in scandal and complete prohibition” (p. 113). He states that the U.S. is currently in the middle of the third such cycle, highlighting reasons why he feels legalized gambling has spread since the great depression.

Michael E. Hammond continues this section by examining the legal status of internet gambling. In his essay he examines various U.S. state and federal laws as to whether or not they apply to wagering on the internet. He also addresses the unique challenges to regulation that are posed by the international nature of many online gaming opportunities. Finally, he discusses pending legislation and the potential impact that it might have.

In the next essay, Jay Albanese examines the relationship between casino gambling and crime. He cites research findings showing that the introduction of casino gambling does not have a significant direct impact on crime rates. However, he highlights the need to continue to monitor and regulate gambling in an effort to keep the risk of crime low.

David Miers closes out the third section by exploring the role of regulation and industry competition as the methods that states can use to insert an element of fairness for the consumer of gambling products. He discusses how universally applied regulatory controls will inevitably result in consumer protection.

The fourth section of the book focuses on the idea of addictive or pathological gambling. Howard Shaffer identifies issues related to the attempts to classify pathological gambling as an addictive behavior. He reviews how an addiction is traditionally conceptualized and how well gambling, and other similar behaviors, live up to this conceptualization. He highlights the need for a “gold standard against which the presence or absence of the disorder can be judged” (p. 179). He asserts that pathological gambling, like many psychiatric disorders, currently does not have such a standard. He suggests that the symptoms associated with pathological gambling reflect not a single disorder, but a complex syndrome, and that the co-occurrence of pathological gambling with other entities may be an artifact of the diagnostic system. Therefore, he suggests that we redefine our conceptualization of addiction and pathological gambling.

Mark Dickerson then examines the extent to which the language we use to describe/conceptualize problem gambling and its consequences can either limit or facilitate progress. He asserts that the United States missed an extraordinary opportunity that was presented through the appointment of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission (NGISC). He suggests that as the NGISC focused on the medical model of problematic gambling, they clearly overlooked important factors. He provides an argument as to how prevailing political and social policy can have a significant impact on how things are conceptualized, which in turn has an impact on how things are treated.

Stanton Peele completes this section by providing an argument that although gambling is addictive, it is not a disease. He asserts that problematic gambling behavior is better understood in behavioral and experiential, as opposed to biological, terms. He also compares and contrasts the symptoms/behaviors exhibited by those experiencing problems related to gambling with those who abuse alcohol or other drugs stating that it is the experiential and not the biological similarities in these activities that link them together.

The fifth section examines recent trends in gambling and problem gambling and the implications of these trends on public policy. Rachel Volberg explores current trends in the rate and type of gambling participation in terms of various demographic and attitudinal variables. She goes on to review the concept of “problem gambling”, describing the various terminologies that are used to describe the phenomenon as well as reporting on the prevalence of such behavior. Finally, she discusses the rates of problem gambling as a function of different gambling activities, highlighting the apparent correlation between the availability of electronic gaming devices (i.e., stand alone slot machines, video poker, and video keno) and higher prevalence rates of problematic gambling.

Jeffery Derevnsky and colleagues discuss the troubling gambling trends amongst youth. They state that although gambling was once viewed as an activity primarily for adults, it has become a popular form of recreation for adolescents. They provide data suggesting that approximately 80% of adolescents engage in some form of gambling and that between 14% and 23% of these individuals are at risk for developing gambling related problems. They review various factors (i.e., familial, peer, physiological, personality, gender) that may be related to youth gambling. They discuss these trends and influences as well as their much needed potential impact on the development of public policy.

Dennis P. McNeilly and William J. Burke then examine the attitudes and gambling behavior of older adults. They state that many of today’s senior adults have embraced gambling as a form of mainstream entertainment, and that many promotional programs implemented by casinos and other gambling establishments target these older adults. They argue that despite this apparent increase in senior gambling, little research has been done examining the impacts of gambling in this age group. They then present findings from a study examining the gambling attitudes and behaviors of older adults. The findings suggested that seniors gambled in an attempt to relax, escape boredom, pass the time, and get away for the day. They suggest that the rate of problematic gambling among older adults is likely greater than that in the general population, signifying the need for greater awareness of the effects of increasing gambling availability on senior adults.

Keith Whyte concludes this section describing the impact of problem gambling as a serious public health issue. He states that many governmental bodies at all levels of government have taken the lead in legalizing, regulating, and promoting gambling, but that they have failed to develop public policy on problem gambling. He states that this

problem demands a comprehensive solution involving many aspects of society, both public and private, guided by consistent policy designed to moderate the wide ranging negative impacts of gambling. He states that there are five essential components to a comprehensive responsible gambling policy: prevention, education, treatment, enforcement and research.

The sixth section of the book is dedicated to psychological and environmental influences on gambling behavior. Mark Griffiths and Jonathan Parke discuss the situational characteristics of gambling environments and examine the impact that they may have on the acquisition, development, and maintenance of gambling behavior. They discuss such factors as sound effects and noise, music, light and color effects, aroma, money access, seating, heating, refreshment, floor layout, and social facilitation/inhibition. They acknowledge that many of the ideas that they present have limited empirical support, but that these ideas highlight the need to investigate these variables further in order to have a complete understanding of the psychology of gambling.

Neil A. Manson then explores the probabilistic features of various common gambling games. He states that many gamblers are uninformed regarding the probability of the games that they are playing, and even if they are better informed, these gamblers are not disciplined enough to play in such a way to maximize their length of play while minimizing their losses. He states that not only do gamblers not fully understand the probability of the games that they are playing, but that gamblers frequently operate not on probability, but on hunches, taking an irrational approach to the game.

The seventh and final section of the book is devoted to moral and ethical aspects of gambling. Jerome H. Skolnick examines the differing and shifting views on vice throughout history. He looks at gambling, and relates it to other activities that he describes as “wicked pleasures” (p. 311). He contends that public policy must find a regulatory mean that is somewhere between criminalization and exploitation in order to regulate it.

Peter Collins then examines the morality of prohibiting gambling, and argues that there are significant moral reasons for thinking that gambling should be legal. He contends that using the law to stop people from gambling is a “morally illegitimate” use of governmental power. He asserts his belief that “the most admirable kind of society from a moral point of view is one in which citizens are allowed to think for themselves and make up their own minds about how they wish to spend their time, money, talents and energy . . .” (p. 331). Drawing on the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke and Mill, he discusses and argues against what he views as the two major arguments that are most commonly used in support of prohibition of gambling (gambling is immoral or “bad” for people and it is the job of government to eradicate immorality and to prevent harm and gamblers cause unjustifiable harm to people other than those that gamble).

Katherine Gabriel explores the relationship between gambling and spirituality. She makes the brave assertion that from an anthropological perspective, gambling is as

spiritual as praying. She argues that sacred gaming “lies at the root of most cultures in the world, as if it were an evolutionary phase of human development, the origin myth of our existence” (p. 335).

John Scanlan closes out the section and the book with a literary and philosophical reflection on the wider role of chance in life and its implications for issues of rationality and knowledge.

The casual reader, as well as an academic reader, interested in gambling behavior would find this book to be a worthwhile read. The multidisciplinary approach that this text takes allows the reader to consider gambling and gambling behavior from several different perspectives. Furthermore, as the book contains stand alone essays, a reader interested in a particular topic would not have to read the entire text in order to gain an understanding of the topic of interest.

As a psychologist interested in problematic gambling behavior, I found many of the essays from other disciplinary perspectives to be informative and thought provoking. The breadth of topics allows one to consider issues not frequently discussed in their field or primary area of expertise. However, although the breadth of perspectives is vast, the depth of the discussion is often limited. Almost certainly an artifact of the demands of a broad collection, many of the essays merely scratch the surface of the important issues and may leave the targeted reader looking for an in depth discussion dissatisfied.

Although not a constant, there are frequent assertions made throughout the book with limited empirical support provided to back up these statements. In many cases this highlights a point made by contributors to this collection, the need for continued and increased levels of empirical research related to gambling and gambling behavior. Although the level of research into these areas has experienced a drastic increase in the past decade, there are many empirical questions that remain unanswered. The continued need for extensive research into gambling and gambling behavior is apparent.

#### ENDNOTE

**Ryan K. May, Ph.D.** is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Marietta College in Marietta, OH. He received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from The University of Memphis. In addition to his teaching and research responsibilities, Dr. May maintains a small private practice.