

Critical Gambling Studies



Editors' Introduction to the Issue

Fiona Nicoll, Emma Casey and Kate Bedford

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CRITICAL gambling studies



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EDITORIAL

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This is the second issue of the fifth volume of *Critical Gambling Studies*. Having recently produced the report [Opening Spaces: Critical Gambling Studies 2019](#), we thought it timely to introduce the current issue with some reflections about the broader project of the journal; to generate critical interdisciplinary research on gambling. Our special issue published in 2023 sought to define 'critical gambling studies' as a paradigm shifting endeavour (Nicoll et al., 2022). We connected the journal's emergence to longstanding concerns about a field dominated by psychologists and neuroscientists which focussed almost exclusively on gambling and (most recently) videogaming 'addiction.' We were concerned that researchers taking different approaches, or offering uncomfortable findings about gambling harms were excluded, silenced, intimidated or dismissed as ideologues and activists. The special issue identified three broad and related concerns shared by many scholars aligned with the project of critical gambling studies.

Firstly, critical gambling scholars are concerned with the conflicts of interest that often arise when "responsible gambling" becomes the shared goal of governments, gambling operators, and academic researchers. The field's focus on the responsabilization of individual gamblers is not only stigmatizing to those experiencing harm; it draws attention and funding away from other sites of responsibility, including that of gambling product designers and operators to provide less harmful products, and governments to effectively regulate how gambling is provided.

Secondly, many critical gambling scholars are sceptical of claims to interdisciplinarity made by journals and scholarly networks dominated by psy-sciences and the STEM disciplines, from which technocratic solutions to gambling harms are increasingly sought. We are aware of and committed to active intervention within the politics of disciplinarity in the universities from which academic understandings of gambling are generated. Decades of 'culture wars' have seen researchers in the humanities and social sciences be routinely interrogated about their political biases and methodological rigour. This is in stark contrast to the lack of critical scrutiny of methodologically weak or theoretically incoherent psy-scientific gambling research. To level the playing field, more funding is needed to produce and promote curiosity-driven research on gambling by scholars from different disciplines and different parts of the world.

Thirdly, and arguably most importantly, critical gambling scholars are concerned that the rapid technological development of gambling products and their integration within everyday digital practices and platforms, and the expansion of marketing to new consumers, has significant harmful consequences. The diffusion of gambling and gambling-like phenomena into everyday spaces of entertainment, finance and play presents significant challenges for regulatory regimes that were developed in some cases before the widespread use of the Internet. The recent expansion of markets for online sports betting in low- and middle-income nations is of particular concern to critical gambling scholars; we actively seek work by scholars in sub-Saharan



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Africa and other regions affected by this expansion. A related focus is the specific historical contexts and political climates within which gambling policies are developed in different jurisdictions. In particular, we attend to the different ways that gambling policy interfaces with Indigenous human rights movements in various parts of the world.

The *Opening Spaces* report documents our success in achieving and exceeding the goals of our editorial board. The interdisciplinary profile achieved by CGS is clear, measured both by the diversity of disciplines of those who contribute peer-reviewed articles and by the diverse disciplinary homes of those who are citing research from the journal. The international profile of CGS is equally impressive. To date we have published 46 research articles, seven editorials, seven commentaries, eight book reviews, and one original translation. The authors are from 14 different countries, 40 different universities, and 40 different academic disciplines. CGS also published 27 individual blog posts during this period.

In its first five years, CGS established a distinctive presence within a research field dominated by academic journals owned by large commercial publishers with paywalls that restrict public access to timely knowledge. Publishing with a university journal press has enabled us to provide open access knowledge to authors and readers. An active, international editorial board featuring some of the most influential critical scholars of gambling provides us with a rigorous peer review process. We have developed a governance system designed to avoid and navigate financial and other conflicts of interest that often affect gambling research. In recognition of the important role of PhD dissertations and monographs within Humanities and Social Sciences, we have dedicated a section of the journal to review essays. Recognizing the pressures on early and mid-career researchers in particular, we publish shorter commentary essays to disseminate time-sensitive and preliminary

academic research findings. These essays also make accessible the expertise of different non-academic professionals, from gaming designers and youth workers to lawyers for Indigenous nations. Additionally, CGS publishes an online blog so that graduate students and scholars can quickly share work-in-progress or develop arguments on specific developments within the gambling sector. We have also organized online workshops or symposia on important topics, from gambling and philosophy to gambling research methodologies.

An important way that CGS has distinguished itself from other academic gambling research journals is through a focus on early career researchers and new technologies and platforms of gambling. Lead editors have mentored ECRs to produce two special issues through a collaboration with the SSHRC funded [RANGES](#) network. This ensures that the questions that are most important for the emerging generation of scholars are foregrounded and that those scholars are supported to critically engage with cutting edge research paradigms and methods. Beyond recognizing the importance of the emerging generation of researchers, we curate conversations between different generations of critical gambling research scholars to build a genealogy of our field. One way of doing this is through interviews and invited essays featuring established scholars who have shaped the field in important ways. In response to the rapid innovation of technologies in gambling products and treatment provision – including AI and new surveillance tools – we recently introduced a new section of the journal titled **Gambling 3.0**.

Our latest quarterly report provides a snapshot of the distinctive contribution that CGS has made to the gambling research field more broadly. It is gratifying to see that the author of the most downloaded commentary this quarter is by a PhD student in Political Science investigating the transformations of social and political norms since the introduction of online sports gambling in Ghana. Early Career Researchers' (ECR) impact

is further evidenced by the fact that the author of one of the most downloaded articles of all time was a postdoctoral research fellow. Another frequently downloaded commentary and blog elaborates a new gambling research methodology developed by ECRs drawing on video game studies. Other frequently downloaded articles testify to readers' interest in intergenerational exchange, including an interview between early career researchers and Helen Keane, the author of the *What's Wrong with Addiction?* and a fascinating reflection by Emma Casey on the impact of her study *Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience*. Other downloaded pieces this quarter underscore the international scope of CGS, including a book review of Tim Simpson's recent monograph *Betting on Macau: Casino Capitalism and China's Consumer Revolution*.

This open issue continues to diversify the gambling research field with contributors from scholars from Turkey, Canada, Italy, Australia and Macao with disciplinary backgrounds that include sociology, anthropology, political science, psychotherapy, video game studies and economics. Peer-reviewed articles address the following questions, among others: how have cryptocurrencies become financialized and gamblified in different national and subcultural contexts? What are the different ways that gambling is understood by foundational theorists of play, Roger Caillois and Johannes Huizinga? How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact Indigenous gamblers in Australia and how do they understand calls for 'responsible gambling'?

Martin French and colleagues invite us to understand the imbrication of financialization and gamblification within cryptocurrency exchanges within the context of the deep structural inequalities that characterize contemporary capitalism. The case study of the BitMEX cryptocurrency exchange illustrates how risky speculation is gamified, and how gambling is normalized within the everyday lives of exchange users. Wesam Hassan brings a valuable

ethnographic approach to understanding the popularity and ambivalent status of cryptocurrency exchanges in Turkey. Through fieldwork with users of cryptocurrency kiosks in Istanbul's historical district, she untangles the connections between traditional games of chance, religious prohibitions, economic uncertainty and fantasies of modernity. James Cosgrave offers a careful theoretical exposition of key differences between two of the most influential theorists of games and play in twentieth century social sciences. While a significant historical gap separates Huizinga and Caillois from our current moment, this piece is actually very timely for the growing community of scholars investigating the gamblification of many forms of digital play – from mobile games to video games and esports. The fourth article by Sarah Maclean is a collaborative community study of how COVID-19 restrictions changed the gambling patterns of members of a regional First Nation in Australia. In addition to documenting changes in community members' experiences and expenditure, the article draws on their stories to flip the script on responsible gambling discourses. Rather than focussing on individual gamblers, participants highlighted protective effects of social gambling and called on governments and industry stakeholders to address underlying historical issues of which gambling harms are symptomatic.

Julie Pelletier's commentary offers important reflections on the politics of gambling research funding, writing from the perspective of a researcher based in the Canadian province of Manitoba. This insider's analysis from a cultural anthropologist highlights several academic and political obstacles to sustaining structures for ongoing interdisciplinary research in the jurisdictions where gambling is provided and regulated. Daria Ukhova and Fulvia Prever provide a valuable and overdue focus on the intersection of the literatures on gender and gambling – on one hand – and those on women and health – on the other. They explore how

combined insights from these fields might help to transform prevention and treatment approaches targeting women as well as open the concept of gender itself to critical examination. The third commentary by Eva Monson and colleagues continues a focus on the politics of gender with reference to their research findings that men are acutely over-represented as keynote speakers at gambling research conferences. To understand problems associated with this over-representation, they draw on workshops conducted as part of an international symposium with ECRs as well as related literatures on gender at work. They identify the following, among other issues: limiting women's professional opportunities from conference networking, silencing them in public discussions and sexual harassment. In addition to calling for the gambling studies field to recognize these problems, they offer several strategies for addressing them, including codes of conduct, guiding principles, training, and including women scholars in conference organizing committees. The fourth commentary continues our relationship with scholars of gambling in Asia, with a particular focus on Macau. Tim Simpson's essay is illustrated with photographs by Adam Lampton to visually convey the complex entanglement of history, culture, politics and consumption that materialise in the Special Administrative Region's casino resorts.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Critical Gambling Studies* and we thank you for your continuing support and promotion of this important and independent space for gambling research.

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Emma Casey is Reader in Sociology at University of York, United Kingdom. She is the author of *Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience* (2008) and *The Return of the Housewife: Why Women are Still Cleaning Up* (2025). Her research addresses everyday processes and practices of consumption and domestic life in late modern societies.

Kate Bedford is Professor of Law and Political Economy at the University of Birmingham. Her second book, *Bingo Capitalism: The Law and Political Economy of Everyday Gambling* (2019), was awarded the 2020 Hart-Socio-Legal Studies Association book prize and the 2020 International Political Economy book prize of the British International Studies Association. Her research explores how law and regulation distribute resources, and how they can impact inequalities.