

A Reflection on the Past Four Years and the Future of Gambling Studies

Everything Is Different, Yet Some Things Never Change: Critical Directions in Early-Career Gambling Studies

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Volume 5, numéro 1, 2024

Critical Directions in Early-Career Gambling Studies

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1114236ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.29173/cgs200>

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Éditeur(s)

University of Alberta Library

ISSN

2563-190X (numérique)

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Citer ce document

Savard, A.-C., Palmer du Preez, K. & Monson, E. (2024). A Reflection on the Past Four Years and the Future of Gambling Studies: Everything Is Different, Yet Some Things Never Change: Critical Directions in Early-Career Gambling Studies. *Critical Gambling Studies*, 5(1), i–v. <https://doi.org/10.29173/cgs200>

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CRITICAL gambling studies



ISSN: 2563-190X. Available Open Access at <https://criticalgamblingstudies.com>

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APA Citation: Savard, A.-C., Palmer du Preez, K., & Monson, E. (2024). A reflection on the past four years and the future of gambling studies. Everything is different, yet some things never change: Critical directions in early-career gambling studies. *Critical Gambling Studies*, 5(1), i-v. <https://doi.org/10.29173/cgs200>

Article History:

Received August 16, 2024

Accepted August 26, 2024

Published October 5, 2024

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EDITORIAL

A Reflection on the Past Four Years and the Future of Gambling Studies

Everything Is Different, Yet Some Things Never Change: Critical Directions in Early-Career Gambling Studies

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Article History: Received August 16, 2024; Accepted August 26, 2024; Published October 5, 2024

Available Open Access from <https://doi.org/10.29173/cgs200>

Introduction

We are happy for the opportunity to present a second special issue dedicated to early-career researchers and related topics. As three early-career researchers (ECRs) in the field, we are grateful to *Critical Gambling Studies* for hosting us once again and for their continued support of ECRs, specifically of the RANGES (Research And Networking for Gambling Early-career Scholars) community, over the past four years.

It would be an understatement to say that the world has changed dramatically since the publication of the first early-career special issue with *Critical Gambling Studies* in 2021, entitled “Futures of Gambling Studies: Showcasing Early Career Research.” This second ECR special issue provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of gambling studies during the last 4 years, and to (re)consider the complex challenges faced by early-career academics in the field.

From the outset, we would like to emphasize that we feel that the field of gambling studies has changed in many meaningful ways in terms of perspective over the last decade. For instance, there is an ever-growing body of critical work,

especially within the ECR community, which we feel denotes an extremely interesting and promising turning point for knowledge production within the field. This special issue bears witness to this change.

While so much has changed, certain challenges remain, for us as guest editors and for many of our ECR colleagues. Indeed, just like four years ago, one of us is again on maternity leave, struggling to balance the challenges of being a parent with opportunities to advance their career. Since taking on the joint guest editorial role for this special issue, another of us has left the precarious employment offered by academia for a job with more stability. Indeed, many of the ECR struggles that we spoke about in editorial for the last special issue continue to exist. We want to note them again here to acknowledge that ECRs continue to encounter these foundational issues of precarity, lack of funding for critical work, work–life balance, etc.

For us, one of the most overwhelming challenges has been the uptick in data and information as the result of a drastic increase in online gambling offerings, advertisement, and participation—which have been further amplified

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by the COVID-19 pandemic—and a corresponding increased interest in gambling research. Simultaneously, the rapid advances in technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI), have not only changed research methods and accelerated the rate of outputs, but they have also emerged as hot topics within the gambling studies field. This, coupled with enduring “publish or perish” models within academia, where quantity prevails over quality and individual jostling takes precedence over collaboration, have left us wondering about space for ECRs who are interested in critical approaches that might take more time to develop. Thinking outside the box takes time.

Researchers in this field, individually and collectively, are at a crossroads with how to best engage with the opportunities and challenges being presented. How do we navigate this new world where there is less of an onus on the individual to be able to know everything, yet more information than ever to absorb in a deeply complex reality? How do we deal with the cumulative overload of information that has culminated in a tsunami of data and information and research outputs, and which is only continuing to grow? And as ECRs, how will we have the time, especially given the precarity of our situations, to pursue critical research and push the field forward?

These emerging questions are not ones we can answer here, but they do highlight a need to support ECRs. We need to allow time for ideas to be properly processed, and for critical research to occur. Given everything, it makes sense that our theme this time is “Critical Directions in Early-Career Gambling Studies.” We are so delighted to have an opportunity to spotlight ECRs who are doing incredible, diverse, *critical work* within the field. ECRs in gambling studies will continue to face the challenges we have outlined, but (luckily) they are also the best positioned to address these issues.

Article Summaries

The article “Gambling Industry Strategies to Influence the Reform of State Online Monopolies: The Case of the Gambling Industry in Sweden and Finland” by Sama and Hiilamo examines five political strategies used by the gambling industry to influence the reform of state online gambling monopolies in Sweden and Finland. The authors show that the involvement of the industry in policy-making can influence reforms and weaken state gambling monopolies. At a time when many countries are currently facing major challenges in regulating the commercialization practices deployed by the online gambling industry on the global scale, this study, of undeniable relevance, will undoubtedly contribute to reflections on the matter.

“Characteristics and Experiences of Employees who Gamble at Work: A Mixed-Methods Study” by Hudson Breen et al. takes an in-depth look at the little-explored topic of gambling in the workplace. The explosion of online gambling in recent years has effectively transformed the relationship of gambling practices in space and time, and this study provides original insights into the relationship of online gambling and the workplace. The article highlights how work spaces and gambling spaces sometimes overlap, and how workplaces can contribute to shaping gambling. It also examines workplace gambling as a social activity, and as a way to cope with adverse working conditions or a lack of job satisfaction.

In “‘All You’ve Got to Do Is Stop’: A Qualitative Examination of Gambling Stigma and Discrimination from the Perspective of Lived Experience,” Killick et al. explore how interventions targeting gambling stigma often fail to interrupt individualized constructions of gambling harms. Lived-experience perspectives analyzed with a critical psychology lens highlight the structural dynamics and industry practices that drive gambling stigma and discrimination.

In “The Rise of Online and Sports Betting in Ghana: Observations, Driving Factors, and Societal Implications,” Toklo explores the societal shift towards widespread gambling participation in Ghana, especially for sports betting. It discusses how the political, economic, cultural, and social context in Ghana can help to understand the penetration of gambling into everyday life of the Ghanaian population, in which young people are particularly involved. Toklo also shares his thoughts about the issues related to the expansion of online gambling in Ghana, including a loss of interest in democracy. With this commentary, Toklo turns the spotlight on a reality that has been poorly documented in gambling studies.

In their commentary, “(Un)Lucky Designs? What Game Jams Can Contribute to Critical Gambling Studies”, Hoebanx and colleagues get off the beaten track and present how they use an innovative research method—game jams—to explore the role of luck in gambling games. This piece shows how this avant-garde interdisciplinary and participative research method can contribute to developing critical studies in the gambling field. Indeed, beyond the construction of the concept of luck, the piece highlights how this method can be used in a participative and collaborative way to generate ideas and reflections on contemporary gambling-related issues such as the gamblification of games.

In the next commentary, Emma Casey provides a reflection on her book *Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience*, published in 2008, as well as insights into her experiences as an early-career scholar at that point in time. Opening with a vivid depiction of its delivery (pun intended), Casey describes navigating the success of her book while balancing early motherhood and the challenges related to the dissemination of her work. She discusses progress within the field since the release of her book, with caveats for how certain challenges remain, and she concludes by

outlining future avenues of research that she hopes will be explored.

In the final commentary, “The Contextual Nature of Stigma and Gambling: What Difference Does it Make to Help-Seeking?,” Hitch and Hoon provide, from an intersectional perspective, an in-depth reflection on stigma in the gambling field and its impact on help-seeking. Using the case of veterans suffering from PTSD and struggling with gambling, they outline the necessity of taking into account the complexity of the context in which individuals evolve in order to better understand the differentiated impact of stigma on these individuals and on help-seeking.

Helen Keane is a well-known feminist sociologist and the author of *What’s Wrong with Addiction?*, a still-influential research text published more than 20 years ago. In “So, What Is Wrong with Addiction?: A Conversation with Helen Keane,” Professor Keane shares her reflections about her career and the challenges she encountered in her professional trajectory, ranging from gender discrimination to difficulties associated with ECR status. Reading this interview, we have to admit that some challenges stand the test of time. Professor Keane also shares her thoughts on the current state of critical research in the field of addiction.

Finally, this special issue includes a review of Tim Simpson’s new book, *Betting on Macau: Casino Capitalism and China’s Consumer Revolution* (2023), written by Kah-Wee Lee. This book review offers a very interesting conversation between two experts coming from different academic backgrounds about the gambling industry in Macau.

Acknowledgements

First of all, we would like to extend our warmest thanks to all the authors of this special issue for their valuable contributions. We are also extremely grateful to the editorial team of *Critical Gambling Studies*—Professor Fiona Nicoll, Professor Kate Bedford, and Professor Emma Casey—for once again providing a dedicated

space to showcase the work of ECRs, and for their support and confidence throughout this editorial project. A special thanks to Kate for her judicious advice and her always kind and constructive guidance throughout this process. We would also like to thank all the reviewers who contributed to this issue for their rigorous work and productive feedback.

We would also like to thank Jonathan Leggo for his copyediting work.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the Research Chair on Gambling at Concordia University, headed by Professor Sylvia Kairouz, for financially supporting the production of this special issue.

Funding and Conflict of Interest Statements

This special issue was financially supported by Professor Eva Monson's research funding from Université de Sherbrooke (FRQ-SC); Jeu, Responsabilités et Société, the research team headed by Professor Annie-Claude Savard at Université Laval (FRQ-SC); and the Research Chair on Gambling headed by Professor Sylvia Kairouz at Concordia University (FRQ-SC).

Annie-Claude Savard (ACS) declares having no known conflicts of interest. While working on this special issue, she held a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant (611-2022-0294) that funded the RANGES outreach activities. She received no direct funding for this editorial. ACS receives salary support from the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQ-SC). In the past five years, ACS has received funding as a principal investigator from FRQ-SC, SSHRC, the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR), the Institut universitaire sur les dépendances (IUD), and the Faculté des sciences sociales de l'Université Laval.

Katie Palmer du Preez (KPP) has no conflicts of interest to declare. In the past five years, including while working on this special issue, she has received no research funding. KPP is employed outside academia by a health workforce development NGO that is funded by the New

Zealand national health commissioning body, Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora).

Eva Monson (EM) declares having no known conflicts of interest. EM received no direct funding for this editorial. While working on this special issue, she held a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant (611-2022-0294) that funded the RANGES outreach activities. EM receives salary support from the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQ-SC). In the past three years, EM has also received funding as a principal investigator from FRQ-SC, the Government of Canada's New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF), Réseau de recherche en santé des populations du Québec (RRSPQ), and the Institut universitaire sur les dépendances (IUD).

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