

Book Reviews

Reviewed by Betty McNeal

Casino-ology: The Art of Managing Casino Games

Bill Zender

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Las Vegas, NV

ISBN: 0-929712-27-7

Paperback

313 pages. Indexed.

Bill Zender, the authority behind this book has worn many hats in gaming. He served variously as a casino worker, manager, owner, and regulator; he enjoyed a spell as an advantage player. Today he is mainly a consultant and expert. His book emphasizes table games operations, not slot machines, bingo, sportsbook or other casino action.

This is not a book of generalities, theories or business school lectures. Its main audience is the super-savvy casino manager or executive of the 21st century anxious to test things in the real world to determine their effectiveness and contribution to the bottom line. Attention to proven strategies is somewhat of a late addition to casinos. For in the process of inventing itself the gaming industry often operated hit and miss, guessing more than proving what should be done.

With Zender's book in hand, the manager is constantly reminded of a key concept—metrics. Examples of measurement, statistics and analysis are everywhere. You are shown how to calculate, sample and estimate. Mathematics plays a major role and illustrations in the form of more than 30 tables block out calculations and comparisons.

The book begins with an important discussion of time and motion, basics of table games the novice manager may overlook. Most educational are the insights into how much money is lost by slow games, for it turns out that one less round per hour at a single blackjack table can cost a casino more than \$100,000 per table in lost revenue each year.

Many cheats and scams are exposed along with tips to prevent or catch them. Past-posting, marked cards and false-shuffles are just three dangers the manager must curb. Not many books offer a peek into the inner sanctum of gambling establishments and even some insiders not accepting of practical research based on floor experience disagree with Zender's approach. However, *Casino-ology* earns a star for its candid coverage, chatty writing style and profit-oriented measurements.

Gambling, Freedom and Democracy

Peter J. Adams

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First published by Routledge, New York.

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon.

ISBN: 13: 978-0-415-95762-5

226 pages. Indexed.

Gambling, Freedom and Democracy is a challenging read with controversial arguments. The writing is concentrated and rigorous. The logic is slanted toward disastrous results if the current expansion in commercial gambling continues. Slowly and subtly, we are told, the gambling industry may overtake us till one day we wake up to find our values and freedoms extinguished or severely threatened. Slot machines, it seems, may place us in moral jeopardy.

The author Peter J. Adams is a New Zealander with extensive experience in the field of problem gambling. In chapters showing the roles of governments, communities and the media, he warns of the overbearing influence of this trio and their pressures to make gambling attractive or addictive. He analyzes gambling advertising for its manipulation and its attempts to normalize a questionable, though legal activity. He warns gambling researchers about the compromises that may occur when they rely on funds from gambling establishments as sponsors.

To demonstrate the possibility of his fatalistic future, Adams compares runaway gambling with the unplanned consequences of large-scale exploitation of the earth's primary resources that led to our current crises in the mining of precious metals, the logging of essential forests and the netting of ocean fish. In the rush to make money from mother nature, who knew what shortages lay ahead? Likewise, in our haste to gain gaming revenue from this often unhealthy pastime, who can say what regrets we may have?

Adams's remedies for gambling penetration include making problem gambling a matter of public health with appropriate and serious intentions. He also hopes for the adoption by various jurisdictions of a bill of rights, you might say, with guarantees of freedom from harm or minimization of harm.

Think of a modified version of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights but applied to gambling. The proposed gambling rights document would insist that people have the right to be protected from the negative effects of gambling including: the right to help decide the amount and type of gambling; special rights for indigenous populations; the right to develop one's own action regarding potentially dangerous consequences of gambling; the right to accessible professional treatment, care and support when gambling becomes a problem; and the right of non-gamblers to be supported in their choice of lifestyle.

Gambling, Freedom and Democracy should be read by politicians, gambling providers, researchers, regulators and others intimately involved with this love/hate gaming industry. The book would make an excellent roundtable discussion for a gaming conference. It may be viewed as an important awareness tool, a warning worth remembering even if the predicted tragedies never occur. If Adams is right, short term thinking that covets the rake-ins of fat gaming revenue and the creation of new jobs may eventually work to our detriment. We might begin now to imagine what the loss of our basic political entitlements might mean and take the bold steps laid out in *Gambling, Freedom and Democracy* to guard future generations from the debilitating effects of the gaming and wagering business.

The Gambling Debate

Richard A. McGowan

© 2008 Greenwood Press
ISBN: 978-0-313-34068-0

168 pages. Indexed.

The Gambling Debate is part of the series, Historical Guides to Controversial Issues in America, alongside its sister topics of gun control, three strikes law, genetic engineering and other public policy sore points. So if we think the gambling furor has subsided now that gambling has increased worldwide, we may need a closer look.

A short history of modern gambling starts things off. The ethical debate over the perennial right and wrong of gambling surfaces early. Here we are introduced to “the ethics of sacrifice” versus “the ethics of tolerance.” Government’s role in gambling comes to the fore. A stated goal is to present points of view from government officials, gaming executives and the gaming public.

Three emerging gaming controversies are addressed. Internet gambling gets its share of discussion with its constant regulatory problems, such as inability to control underage gamblers and international jurisdiction. Sports gambling gains our attention as it may catapult from a friendly wager to bribing players to influence outcomes. Native American gambling is agitated by the push for casinos on non-reservation lands.

Helpful features throughout include: revenue charts, revenue forecasts, license criteria, chapter notes, figures and illustrations, and a bibliography organized by books, periodicals and reports, and websites.

To fully engage the reader there are three chapters built around case studies and a final challenging chapter where you are invited to respond to two privatization issues. Case studies center on the issues faced by the Missouri State Gambling Commission (regarding St. Louis area casinos); by the governor of Massachusetts (facing a billion dollar budget deficit); and the dilemmas of the Chinese authorities (regulating and expanding gaming in Macau). As for the privatization debates the reader is encouraged to summarize his or her attitude regarding private companies operating lotteries (Illinois, Texas, Canada) and provincial casinos converted to private ownership (Canada).

The Gambling Debate is a thinker’s book. Questions are posed along with serious solutions; pros and cons are explored. Arguments are analyzed beyond tired rationalizations. Though intended for policymakers and public stakeholders, the academic researcher will find much to grapple with and many take-off points to investigate and clarify the ongoing drama of legalized gambling.

Research and Measurement Issues in Gambling Studies

Garry Smith, David C. Hodgins, & Robert J. Williams (Editors)

© 2007 Elsevier (under the imprint, Academic Press)

ISBN: 978-0-12-370856-4

657 pages. Indexed.

Research and Measurement Issues in Gambling Studies is a compilation of expert views boasting a list of 40+ contributors—a veritable Who’s Who among gambling investigators. In this volume editors Smith, Hodgins and Williams ask their worldwide cadre of scholars to “synthesize the generally accepted knowledge in their areas, comment on their methodologies and measurement strategies used (what does and does not work), and expound on research trends, information gaps, and future research prospects.”

A uniform presentation scheme makes each chapter approachable. First the authors are identified by professional affiliation. Following that there is a chapter outline, though no pagination for subheadings. Most chapters end with a glossary and conclusions. An extensive reading list adds the finishing touch.

This is basically a reference book, not a read-and-run, start with page one and proceed numerically experience. It would make an excellent permanent addition to any problem gambling library. It is packed with authoritative, groundbreaking, substantive findings no serious researcher will want to pass up.

Glancing through the contents we come across complexities such as: quantification and dimensionalization of gambling behavior, comorbidity and mental illness, etiological models, neurobiology, screening and assessment instruments, experimental and qualitative methodologies and other important terms necessary to gambling research.

The topics in this book are challenging. This is tough stuff but perfect for specialized consumption by the academic elite. We respect their niche and recommend this book highly. Niche is the keyword here, meaning that while excellent this book will probably attract a narrow readership, not the broader spectrum of gaming managers and executives.

To widen its appeal the compilers might have added more in the way of gaming business literature, which is a growing field. The too heavy concentration on social science literature could use a little balance.