Missing in Action? Electronic Gaming Machines in Gambling Studies Research

In the past thirty years casinos across the world have become dominated by the rise of “electronic gaming machines” (EGMs). Expanding with tremendous speed, this technology has arguably become the dominant form of non-online gambling around the world at time of writing (DeMichele, 2017; Schwartz, 2018). EGMs are also noted as being one of the most harmful forms of gambling, with significant numbers of players betting beyond their financial limits (MacLaren et al, 2012; Stewart & Wohl, 2013), spending a disproportionate amount of time playing (Cummins, 1999; Ballon, 2005; Schüll, 2012; cf. Dickerson, 1996), becoming disconnected from the world outside of the “zone” (Schüll, 2012) of gambling play, and even becoming bankrupt or otherwise financially crippled as a result of their use (Petry, 2003; Scarf et al, 2011). Using metadata from Web of Science and Scopus databases, we analysed peer-reviewed gambling research produced in Australia, New Zealand, North America and the UK published between 1996 and 2016. Surprisingly, we found that the overwhelming of majority of articles do not specifically address EGMs as the most popular and pervasive gambling technology available. Our paper teases out some concerning implications of this finding for the interdisciplinary field of gambling studies.

Keywords

Electronic Gaming Machines; Meta-Analysis; Gambling Research; Responsible Gambling

Statement of implications

Our findings provide new and compelling grounds for an evidence-based contribution to debates about the efficacy of responsible gambling policies in these jurisdictions, as well as addressing questions of ethical and academic standards within the field of gambling studies (See Cassidy, 2013; Livingstone and Adams, 2016; Hancock and Smith, 2018).

Co-authors

Associate Professor Dr Fiona Nicoll is an Alberta Gambling Research Institute Chair in gambling policy in the department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. She has published several peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on gambling since 2008. Her forthcoming monograph titled Gambling in Everyday Life: Spaces, Moments and Products of Enjoyment will be published with Routledge in 2019.

fnicoll@ualberta.ca

Dr Mark Johnson is a video-gaming scholar and a Killam postdoctoral research fellow in the department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. He is the author of The Unpredictability of Gameplay and several international peer-reviewed publications on intersections of gambling and videogaming. His current book project investigates the rise of Daily Fantasy Sports gambling.

markrjohnson@gmail.com

Mr Zachary Palmer is a graduate student completing a Masters’ thesis in the department of Digital Humanities at the University of Alberta.

zspalmer@ualberta.ca

Corresponding author: fnicoll@ualberta.ca