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Problem and pathological gambling

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By James P. Whelan, Timothy A. Steenbergh, & Andrew W. Meyers. (2007). From Hogrefe's *Advances in Psychotherapy Series*, Vol. 8. Cambridge, MA: Hogrefe Publishing Corp. x; 114 pp. ISBN 978–0-88937–312-9; U.S. \$29.80.

This very well-researched, quick-read manual is intended for therapists who are in search of statistics and methods for treating problem gambling. The volume summarizes the typical concomitant issues of problem gamblers, such as alcohol abuse, smoking, depression, and suicidality. Contextual variables—including relationship issues, as well as legal and financial issues—are also addressed. Since this book's publication, new research has become available on the etiology of problem gambling—particularly on the involvement of neurotransmitters. However, the manual offers the advantage of brevity and practicality in comparison with similar volumes (see, e.g., Nancy Petry's thorough 2005 work on the subject).

This book is helpfully organized and outlined, and it includes numerous graphs and a full clinical vignette. Throughout, the authors promote a Motivational Interviewing style and its adaptation using Sobell's Guided Self-Change Program for Gamblers (see, e.g., [Klingemann & Carter-Sobell, eds., 2007](#)). The five phases involve (1) information-gathering; (2) engaging the client; (3) adopting a motivational, empathic style; (4) reviewing triggers; and (5) setting goals. Appendices have practical self-help worksheets that may be reproduced for use by problem gamblers in treatment; note that based on my personal experience, most gambling clients would likely need assistance with these (especially the initial Gambling Timeline Follow-Back activity).

As is typical for Motivational Interviewing, total abstinence and Gamblers Anonymous are not required components. Those new to treatment may find this book's lack of emphasis on abstinence appealing. However, in my clinical experience, while many pathological gamblers may start with a harm-reduction attitude, more long-term success ultimately comes from total abstinence.

In sum, this concise and practical volume offers problem gambling therapists a number of useful treatment strategies and provides them with worksheets intended to both facilitate introspection and enhance the dialogue between client and therapist.

References

Klingemann, H., Carter-Sobell, L., (Eds.). (2007). *Promoting self-change from addictive behaviors: Practical implications for policy, prevention, and treatment*. New York: Springer.

Petry, N.M.. (2005). *Pathological gambling: Etiology, comorbidity, and treatment*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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