

Journal Information

Journal ID (publisher-id): jgi

ISSN: 1910-7595

Publisher: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Article Information

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Publication date: July 2010

First Page: 185 Last Page: 186

Publisher Id: jgi.2010.24.11

DOI: 10.4309/jgi.2010.24.11

Out of the Shadows: Exploring the Many Facets of Gambling and their Implications to Society

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Competing interests: None declared.

By Edward H. Sodergren, Ph.D. (2007). Mill City Press, Minneapolis, MN, USA. x, 74pp. ISBN 978-1-934248-10-2, \$12.95 USD (paperback).

Out of the Shadows is a brief book of only 74 pages. The intention of the author, as stated in the subtitle, is to explore the many facets of gambling and their implications to society. Indeed, in just these few pages, the author visits a great deal of research and quotes many authors, in an effort to paint a picture of the “history of gambling, its evolution, growth, prevalence, participants, and potential for problems, as well as recommended treatment responses” (p. vii).

The table of contents, introduction, and outline of the central chapters together take a full third of the actual book. I was confused about the author's decision to overview the book's material in Chapter 2 for about ten pages, and then begin with this same material in a bit more detail in Chapters 3 through 9. The overview seems to jump from topic to topic, and perhaps the pages could have been better spent in a more in-depth review of the topics listed. Rather than reading a description of what is coming in the following chapters, I would rather just get to it. Instead, in Chapter 2 we have eight sections — of several paragraphs each — telling us what will be discussed in the next seven chapters, which ultimately disturbs the flow.

Sodergren provides a short review of the landmark writings of several early researchers and treatment professionals in an effort to explain various aspects of problem gambling. This general but concise summary gives the reader an overview and a glimpse at the work of these selected authors. Some authors are discussed in more detail than others, but Sodergren seems to have a clear focus on what he wants to pull from these contributors in order to paint a picture of his selected facets of gambling.

I must say I enjoyed reading about some of the lesser-quoted authors that did indeed make significant contributions to our understanding of problem gambling. The author's overview of historical contributions is a focused collection with clear intention. However, I was disappointed with the dated references. Roughly three-quarters of the references are from the 1990s, about one-quarter are from the 1980s, and only one research reference is from the last decade. Though any good work should indeed explore the historical works of early authors, one would expect a recent publication to include more recent findings.

This limitation is particularly of issue when trying to answer the author's question of whether pathological gambling is a treatable disorder, and if so, how best to treat it. The author states that he has used "available research and theory and provided an overview of the problem, both historical and current" (p. 71). But in limiting his review to research prior to 2001, the author fails to inform his readers of the several drug trials with problem gamblers, advances in neurobiology, biogenetics and brain scan contributions, as well as research on brief therapy, motivational interviewing, Stages of Change, Integrated Couples Behavioral Therapy, and other more current avenues to treatment for problem gamblers and their families.

Readers of this text will be left with the impression that there are inpatient programs treating gamblers in the United States, when in fact, what the US currently has is a small selection of residential programs, at least three of which are state funded. Outpatient gambling treatment services, today, have grown well beyond the 100 counselors nationally he cites. In fact, several states have more than 100 gambling counselors, and every year more states begin to provide training and treatment for problem gambling. This constitutes slow, but steady and significant, progress.

In fairness, Sodergren has not tried to make his book a literature review. In fact, he indicates clearly on the back cover that he is trying to offer the layperson and those in the helping professions who are inexperienced with gambling issues a view of the potential for problems and some considerations for treatment.

Sodergren has incorporated in several places selected lists, bullet points, and research findings in an easy-to-read and useful manner. Lists culled from articles by Rosenthal, Lesieur, Custer, Blume, Miller, and others speak quickly and clearly to topics such as the definition of a gambling problem, important elements of assessment, possible predisposing factors, enabling, when to consider residential or inpatient care, treatment planning elements, policy recommendations, and suggestions for future research. For so short a work, he has packed it with references and findings, and tried hard to paint an accurate picture of problem gambling. Though not a complete or comprehensive overview as such, and far from a spotlight on the problem, this flashlight does offer a great deal of information in a few short pages and will indeed make a contribution to diminishing the

shadows for those new to the problem gambling research and treatment field.

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