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Research and Measurement Issues in Gambling Studies

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Edited by Garry Smith, David Hodgins & Robert J. Williams. (2007). Elsevier: Academic Press. 664 pp., ISBN 978-0-123-70856-4. Price: \$89.95 USD (hardcover).

Research and Measurement Issues in Gambling Studies is a collection of chapters edited by Smith, Hodgins, & Williams (2007). This book is an ideal textbook for anyone who wishes to teach a course in research methods in the field of gambling studies. I'm not sure if such a course actually exists, but if it does, here's the textbook.

The authors of the various chapters are a virtual "who's who" of prominent researchers in the field of gambling studies. The chapters cover nearly every approach to the study of gambling problems that I can think of, including surveys (chapters 2 & 3), experimental studies (chapter 4), longitudinal studies (chapter 6), pharmacological studies (chapter 14), economic studies (chapter 20), qualitative studies (chapters 5 & 22), prevention (chapter 16), treatment, (chapter 15), psychometric studies (chapter 8), cross cultural studies (chapter 18), and policy (chapters 23 and 24). In addition, there are several chapters that summarize the current research findings within specific areas, including internet gambling (chapter 19), game features (chapter 9), adolescent gambling (chapter 17), co-morbidity (chapter 12), gambling and crime (chapter 21), and risk factors (chapters 11 & 13).

The only topic that I can think of that was not covered is the use of simulations of the games played by gamblers in order to understand the experience of the player (e.g., the outcomes of betting systems, the volatility and hit rate of different game designs, reinforcement schedules, distorted apparent payout due to virtual reels). In addition, economics methods are only covered in a single chapter that may not be representative of the general approach. However, on the whole this is an extraordinarily comprehensive survey of research methods in the field of gambling studies.

As an added value, each chapter is laid out with numerous subtitles that allow the reader to turn directly to the sections that interest them the most. In addition, the table of contents lists every subtitle of every chapter making it one of the most useful and longest table of contents I have ever seen. In addition to this, the book also includes a comprehensive index.

The approach of the chapters is somewhat mixed. In some chapters, the authors clearly take the position that they are teaching the reader how to conduct research in a particular area of interest. Other chapters are literature reviews that discuss a body of literature from a particular methodological point of view, rather than didactically explaining how to conduct the studies. I have not read every chapter in the book, but those that I have read are uniformly of high quality regardless of the approach taken.

One chapter I have found particularly useful is the one discussing gambling and crime, written by Campbell & Marshal (chapter 17). Their approach is both a literature review and a didactic discussion on the difficulties that one can face in conducting research on gambling and crime.

If you are setting up a course on methods of research in the field of problem gambling, this is the textbook for you. If you are a graduate student and want to know how to conduct research in this field, this is the resource for you. If you are a researcher looking for good summaries of the literature on a variety of topics, this is good reference book for you.

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