



research reveals...

an update on gambling research in ALBERTA

About The Alberta Gaming Research Institute

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute is a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge. Its primary purpose is to support and promote research into gaming and gambling in the province. The Institute's identified research domains include bio-psychological and health care, socio-cultural, economic, and government and industry policy and practice. The Institute aims to achieve international recognition in gaming-related research. It is coordinated by a Board of Directors working in collaboration with the Alberta Gaming Research Council. The Institute is funded by the Alberta government through the Alberta Lottery Fund.

OUR MISSION:

To significantly improve Albertans' knowledge of how gambling affects society

Your comments and queries are welcome either by e-mail abgaming@ualberta.ca or phone 780.492.2856.

Alberta Gaming Research Institute Board of Directors, 2003

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Fantasy games, real dollars: Sport gambling in cyberspace

WAGERING ON SPORTS over the Internet is a thriving activity and generates several billion dollars per year worldwide. At the same time, however, it remains one of the most understudied forms of gambling. Dr. Catherine (Cathy) van Ingen, a post-doctoral researcher in the Physical Education and Recreation Faculty at the University of Alberta, researches and teaches about sport culture in Canadian society. She is interested in researching sports fans and online gaming, more specifically, the "fantasy sport" industry, which is one of the fastest growing segments of Internet gaming, with an estimated 30 million players.

What lies at the centre of Dr. van Ingen's research are questions of "culture," specifically, how does culture become adapted to particular spaces and places? In this context, "spaces and places" can be as diverse as casino-hotels or the "space" created by interactive, online gambling. Cathy examines forms of cultural change in different geographical settings, from developing a curriculum that reflects the diversity that exists in the school classroom setting to the production and consumption of new forms of gaming. Cathy explains that cultural geographic analysis, as this is known, can be an important tool for understanding, and progressively intervening in, contemporary social change.

To understand the social meanings of gambling, Cathy believes it is necessary to have insight into how gambling is influenced by political culture, city life, the home, as well as national and global factors. For example, while sportsbooks (defined as a person, shop or website that accepts bets) are not legal in Canada (though there are several located on First Nations reserves), the difficulties of regulating Internet commerce make it possible to access offshore sportsbooks online, opening up virtually infinite opportunities for gaming. Recently, notes Cathy, the U.S. government attempted to block American residents from using online casinos, which in turn resulted in a complaint against the U.S. at the World Trade Organization by Antigua, a Caribbean nation.

To understand contemporary gaming practices such as online sports betting, it is also necessary to understand such important social issues as globalization, changing consumption dynamics, and new spaces created through the online gaming culture. Cathy's research examines the changing geography — or landscape — of gambling as a significant means of cultural production. Why fly to a Las Vegas casino-hotel, drive to the race track or try to organize a play-off hockey pool when you can easily belong to a fantasy sports league over the Internet?

Fantasy sport leagues are a serious, growing business, says Cathy; they are widespread and easily accessible - high consumer demand has merged with a rapidly growing e-gaming marketplace. Fantasy sport leagues generally cover professional sports such as football, basketball, baseball, boxing, golf, hockey, auto racing and tennis, as well as college sports. Within fantasy sport leagues, participants become owners/general managers who draft their own virtual "dream team," which then competes against other team "owners" in virtual fantasy leagues. They earn points based on their selected players' performances in actual games; the total number of points obtained by a participant's "team" determines the overall standings and prize winnings. Although some leagues are free, most are pay-to-play and include cash prizes ranging from as little as \$50 up to \$10,000. At the most competitive level, fantasy leagues offer high stake tournament-style fantasy sports events with \$5,000 entry fees and a \$250,000 grand prize. Players can choose to wager on fantasy leagues through a host of sport handicapping websites and Internet casinos as well as through major mainstream network websites. Some websites also provide additional services, such as how to extend fantasy playing into standard sports betting by teaching the basic elements of online gaming.

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Given the trend to Internet sports gambling, Cathy believes that it is important to examine how fantasy sport leagues have generated a new means of consumption; how new fans or "customers" are recruited and retained; and the ways in which fantasy sports provide interactive and compelling social environments for youths and adults. While the typical fantasy sport player is assumed to be male, between the ages of 18 and 49, and college educated, Cathy notes that fantasy sport providers are also aggressively marketing their products to new players. She points out that other sites operate play-for-free fantasy sport leagues for children between eight and 17 years old.

Today's youth, or the "instant message generation," is increasingly spending self-directed leisure time on the Internet. Yet there is little empirical research on adolescent and youth gamers and online sports gambling. Cathy's current research will address the social impact of cyber gaming and address such other questions as what makes fantasy sports leagues so fascinating for players; how do players use and value different games; and to what extent are the changing media environments of children impacting involvement in gaming?

Cathy's interest in gambling research reflects

her academic training and her own research background, as well as her earlier post-doctoral work in Manitoba. Drawing on cultural studies and cultural geography methodologies and theory, Cathy explores, in a sense, the most traditional aspect of geography — landscape — by studying the "social spaces" of gambling, which now includes online gaming. Her methodology includes ethnography, textual and architectural discourse analysis (the best examples of this are the theme hotels of Las Vegas, designed to recreate the environments of such places as Paris, Venice or the Egyptian pyramids), as well as interviews or narrative-based research to investigate the online gaming landscape. Cathy predicts that in the future, Web TV will further expand both gaming and research into gaming. As such, she is interested in the evolving forms and structures of the online gambling experience, and the ways in which it increasingly is becoming a home-based entertainment medium.

In a way, Cathy's research is focusing on a moving target. But there is little doubt that her work will help shed new light on one of the most rapidly growing forms of gambling activity in the world today.



CATHERINE VAN INGEN completed her BA at Augustana University College in 1992, and then earned both her Master's and PhD degrees at the University of Alberta, completing her doctorate

in 2002. Her PhD dissertation examined the social geographies of a running club in Toronto. Cathy then worked as a research associate with the Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute at the University of Manitoba, where her research focused on the experiences of Aboriginal children and youth in physical education classes across Manitoba. The goal of this work was to develop culturally relevant teaching practices that take into consideration the coming together of age, gender, social class, race and geography on First Nations youths' experiences in culturally diverse classrooms.

Among her publications are the following:

Works in progress:

van Ingen, C & Bale, J. (editors). *Sport, Space and Identity*. (submitted for review)

van Ingen, C. (in press) Book review of Celia Brackenridge's *Spoilsports: Understanding and preventing sexual exploitation in sport* for the *Journal of Sport History*.

Sykes, H & van Ingen, C (editors). (forthcoming November 2003) Special Issue of *AVANTE* titled "Dis/Placing Bodies in Physical Education: Translations of Current Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences."

Publications:

Refereed Publications are indicated by*.

*van Ingen, C. (Vol .38, Issue 2 June 2003). "Geographies of Gender, Sexuality and Race: Reframing the Focus on Space in Sport Sociology." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

van Ingen, C. (2000). "Beyond Breaking The Silence." in Carl James ed. *Experiencing Difference*. Halifax, Fernwood Publishing.

*Mummery, W.K., J. Hudec, C. van Ingen (1997). "Psycho-Social Determinants Of Physical Activity In Children And Adolescents: The Theory Of Planned Behaviour." In *The Australian Journal of Psychology*, 49(Supplement).

Publications in professional journals:

van Ingen, C. (1997). "Play: The Priceless Ingredient in Exercise." *WellSpring*, vol. 8 no. 3.

van Ingen, C. (1996). "Girls' Inactivity Linked to Increased Smoking." *Network Voice – Action on Smoking and Health*, no. 2.

Dr. Cathy van Ingen will be offering the following course at the University of Alberta in the Fall 2003 Term:

Title: *Social and Economic Aspects of Gaming and Gambling*

Offered through the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

Prerequisites: PERLS 304 (Sport and Leisure in Canadian Society: Sociological Perspectives) or 300-level sociology course

The course will be offered to undergrad and graduate students and they can enroll in it in one of the three following ways:

- 1) as a *PEDS 497* (Selected Topics in Physical Education and Sport) course for Physical Education and Sport Students
- 2) as a *RLS 490* (Selected Topics) course for Recreation and Leisure Students
- 3) as a *PERLS 582* (Graduate Seminar: A Seminar in Current Factors, Problems and Issues) course

The course will expose students to an examination of the role of gambling in Canadian society with special emphasis on the social, economic, and political aspects of gambling behaviour. A wide variety of issues that surround gambling, commercial gaming industries, and public policy towards gambling will be examined. References outlining the kind of readings that the course will focus on:

- Kelley, R., P. Todorovich, et al. (2001). *Gambling@Home: Internet Gambling in Canada*. Calgary, Canada West Foundation.
- Korn, D. and H. Shaffer (1999). "Gambling and the Health of the Public: Adopting a Public Health Perspective." *Journal of Gambling Studies* 15(4): 289-328.
- Morton, S. (2003). *At Odds: Gambling and Canadians 1919-1969*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
- Ritzer, G. (2001). *Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.
- Smith, G. and H. Wynne (1999). *Gambling and Crime in Western Canada: Exploring Myth and Reality*. Calgary, Canada West Foundation.
- Williams, M., Ed. (1999). *Legalized Gambling: Contemporary Issues*. San Diego, CA, Greenhaven Press, Inc.

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