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Revisiting gambling research contributors' use and views of open science principles and practices: a brief report

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ABSTRACT

Open science practices, such as research pre-registration and open data access, are designed to protect against threats to research integrity and promote the acceleration of science. Yet, for many academic disciplines, including gambling studies, the use of these practices remains limited and often in need of improvement. This brief report provides new information about how the use of such practices has changed during the past 5 years. In a survey of 65 gambling studies research stakeholders who had attended a major international gambling studies conference in May 2023, we observed that a majority reported engaging in these practices, but minorities reported doing so for any particular practice. Holding more perceived benefits of open science was associated with a greater likelihood of using those practices in research. Comparisons with a sample of stakeholders from 2019 indicated some increases in open science practices, and areas in need of improvement. These and other findings provide guidance for boosting support for the use of open science principles and practices in gambling studies research.

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gambling; gambling studies;
pre-registration

Five years ago, gambling studies researchers began calling for increased attention to and engagement with open science principles and practices (LaPlante, 2019; Wohl et al., 2019). Recommendations included activities such as research pre-registration, public documentation of research protocols and materials, and open access to data and publications, as well as determining the replicability of the published gambling literature. These and other efforts have been found to have beneficial impacts on the quality and replicability of the published scientific literature (Lakens et al., 2024; Soderberg et al., 2021). Recent conceptual advances address tactics for growing open science practices in a variety of disciplines, such

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as behavioral addiction research (Eben et al., 2023). The current brief report provides new insights into the state of open science engagement in gambling studies.

Although there are some early examples of a commitment to open science in gambling studies (eg Shaffer et al., 2009), recent empirical examinations suggest that open science practices in gambling studies remain quite limited and often in need of improvement (Cho et al., 2024; Heirene et al., 2024). For example, a scoping review of 500 studies focused on gambling and problem gambling (published 1/1/2016–12/1/2019) reported that small minorities of published papers used open science practices (eg only 1.6% reported a research pre-registration; Louderback et al., 2023). Likewise, a study describing gambling stakeholders' own use and views about open science reported similar conclusions. Specifically, a 2020 survey of gambling researchers who attended the 17th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking in 2019 indicated that gambling research stakeholders' understanding of and use of open science practices was limited (LaPlante et al., 2021). For example, the authors found that minorities of respondents reported either some or extensive use of open science, generally, and for specific open science practices.

The current study revisits the question of open science practices in gambling studies among attendees from the 18th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking in 2023. More specifically, in a 2024 survey we examined changes in the use of such practices in two repeated cross-sections of participants (ie from 2019 and 2023 attendees). In addition, we expand our inquiries by asking new questions about the perceived benefits of open science, including, but not limited to, stakeholders' perspectives about the ability for open science practices to protect against potential external threats to scientific integrity, such as industry funding, and views on the prospective need for cultural change with respect to open science beliefs. For our primary research questions, we expected the following:

- (1) What is the current state of knowledge about open science principles and practices among gambling research stakeholders generally, and how has it changed between 2019 and 2023?
 - (a) A minority of respondents will endorse that they have some or extensive experience with open science practices, generally;
 - (b) The percentage of participants who report some or extensive experience with open science practices generally will be higher in 2023 than in 2019.
- (2) What proportions of gambling research stakeholders use specific kinds of open science principles and practices, and has participation improved from 2019 to 2023?
 - (a) A minority of respondents will endorse that they have some or regular experience with specific types of open science practices;
 - (b) The percentage of participants who report some or regular experience with specific types of open science practices will be higher in 2023 than in 2019.
- (3) What do gambling research stakeholders indicate are the barriers or concerns they have for specific kinds of open science principles and practices, and do they remain the same or have they changed from 2019 to 2023?
 - (a) The top three reported barriers or concerns about specific kinds of open science practices will remain the same in 2023 as they were in 2019.

- (4) What general benefits do gambling research stakeholders perceive for open science principles and practices to protect against external threats to scientific integrity?
 - (a) Exploratory analysis – no specific hypothesis.
- (5) Is the number of one's beliefs about the general benefits of open science practices associated with the likelihood of engaging in such practices, generally, and specifically for different types of open science practices?
 - (a) Holding more beliefs about the general benefits of open science practices will be associated with a greater likelihood of having some or extensive experience with open science practices, generally;
 - (b) Holding more beliefs about the general benefits of open science practices will be associated with a greater likelihood of having some or regular experience with specific types of open science practices.
- (6) To what extent do gambling research stakeholders agree with the FAIR (Wilkinson et al., 2016) data suggestion for a need to view data in terms of stewardship, rather than ownership?
 - (a) A minority of respondents will endorse that they agree with the FAIR data suggestion for a need to view data in terms of stewardship, rather than ownership.

Methods

The Cambridge Health Alliance (IRB #: CHA-IRB-23-24-252) institutional review board approved this study as exempt on 13 March 2024. We posted our research pre-registration on 10 April 2024, which is available at <https://osf.io/kgh4p>.

Participants

2019 Sample. For some analyses, we conducted a secondary data analysis of previously available records from a survey completed during spring 2020. This sample included gambling conference registrants who presented or coauthored presentations at the 17th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking that took place in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, during May 2019, excluding the original authors ($N = 86$; response rate 27.3%).

2023 Sample. Our initial list of participants included all possible gambling conference registrants who presented or coauthored presentations at the 18th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking that took place in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, during May 2023 ($N = 323$), excluding the current authors. Of the 323 total individuals sampled during May 2024, 65 people responded to the survey, representing a response rate of 20.1%.

Instrument

We measured participants' experience and concerns with open science, generally, and for specific practices (ie pre-registration, Registered Reports, open materials, open data, pre-print archiving, and open peer review). We derived some of the study survey

questionnaire items from the Beaudry et al. (2019) Swinburne Open Science Survey. We also asked participants about their perceived benefits of open science (eg increased scientific productivity through data sharing or reduced publication bias) and views on FAIR data principles.

Procedure

We used the Qualtrics survey system to e-mail a 15-item electronic survey to all possible 2023 gambling conference registrants who presented or coauthored presentations, after removing the four e-mail addresses for the authors of this study ($N = 323$). In the process of distributing the survey we received eight non-deliverable notices (ie bounceback notices). We sent three e-mail reminders to all other participants if they failed to respond by accepting or declining, one per week after the initial invitation. Those potential respondents who accepted the invitation to participate immediately proceeded to an informed consent form. Once respondents indicated that they gave consent to participate, they proceeded to the electronic survey. We conducted the survey during May 2024. We did not reimburse respondents for their participation.

Power analyses

We conducted two power analyses in R using the *pwr* package before collecting data, including power analyses for the correlation analyses and equality of proportion tests. Using the *pwr.r.test* function with power = 0.80, $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed), and $r = 0.3$ (medium effect size; Cohen, 1988), the minimum sample size required to detect a statistically significant correlation coefficient was $n = 85$. Using the *pwr.2p2n.test* function with power = 0.80, $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed), $h = 0.5$ (medium effect size; Cohen, 1988), and the sample size of $n = 86$, as in the 2019 survey dataset reported in LaPlante et al. (2021) for comparisons with the new data collected for 2023, the minimum sample size required to detect a statistically significant difference in the proportions was $n = 50$.

Analytic plan

To help describe our sample, we examined basic descriptive statistics for each question in the survey. For items that address experience with open science practices, we recorded whether a minority or a majority reports some or extensive experience with open science practices, generally, or some or regular experience with specific types of open science practices.

To test whether there were potential changes in use of open science knowledge and practice use between 2019 and 2023, we conducted equality of proportion tests. To test whether there were potential changes in the patterns of barriers and concerns about open science between 2019 and 2023, we compared the top three reported barriers and concerns for each specific type of open science practice and observed whether they remained the same.

We calculated the counts and percentages for each of the potential benefits of open science practices, as well as identified the top three endorsed benefits. We did the same for concerns.

To examine the associations between beliefs in the benefits of open science and the likelihood of participating in open science practices, generally and specifically, we created a sum of the number of endorsed perceived benefits of open science. Then, we conducted point biserial correlations between the sum score for perceived benefits of open science and dichotomized responses for each type of open science practice participation.

We report the counts and percentages for participants' perspectives on FAIR data principles.

Results

1. What is the current state of knowledge about open science principles and practices among gambling research stakeholders generally, and how has it changed between 2019 and 2023?

In Hypothesis 1a, we anticipated that a minority of respondents would indicate that they had some or extensive experience with open science practices, generally; however, we observed that a majority of the 2023 conference attendee sample reported this level of engagement (see Table 1). We did not observe a statistically significant increase in the percentage of participants who report some or extensive experience with open science practices, generally (Hypothesis 1b).

2. What proportions of gambling research stakeholders use specific kinds of open science principles and practices, and has participation improved from 2019 to 2023?

As expected in Hypothesis 2a, minorities of the 2023 conference attendee respondents reported some or extensive/regular experience with specific open science practices (see Table 1). We expected higher rates of open science participation over time. We observed this increase for two specific outcomes: open materials/code, and pre-print archiving. Thus, Hypothesis 2b was partially supported.

3. What do gambling research stakeholders indicate are the barriers or concerns they have for specific kinds of open science principles and practices, and do they remain the same or have they changed from 2019 to 2023?

Table 2 shows that many of the concerns remained the same over time. New top three concerns included the possibility that study pre-registration prevents

Table 1. Percentage of respondents who reported some or extensive/regular experience with open science practices for 2019 and 2023 conference attendees.

Open Science Practice (n)	% in 2019	% in 2023	p-value of difference
Open science practices generally (2019 n = 86; 2023 n = 65)	44.18	60.00	0.054
Study pre-registration (2019 n = 86; 2023 n = 65)	31.40	43.08	0.140
Registered Reports (2023 n = 65)	–	12.31	–
Open materials/code (2019 n = 83; 2023 n = 65)	32.53	49.23	0.039*
Open data (2019 n = 83; 2023 n = 65)	48.19	46.15	0.805
Pre-print archiving (2019 n = 82; 2023 n = 65)	15.86	47.69	0.00003*
Open peer review (2023 n = 65)	–	40.00	–

Note. Registered Reports and Open peer review were only asked about in the survey of respondents from the 2023 conference. *p < 0.05.

Table 2. Top three concerns identified by practice for 2019 and 2023 conference attendees.

Open Science Practice (n)	Top three concerns and % in 2019	Top three concerns and % in 2023
Concerns with study pre-registration (2019 n = 86; 2023 n = 65)	Need to look at data before deciding how to best analyze it Stifles research creativity or flexibility	33.72 Others might take ideas 25.58 Need to look at data before deciding how to best analyze it
Concerns with Registered Reports (2023 n = 65)	Others might take ideas	23.26 Prevents exploratory research Greater burden on peer-review process Slows the publication process Exposure of study methodology to others
Concerns with open materials/code (2019 n = 83; 2023 n = 65)	Issues related to intellectual property Might lose control over materials/code Might not receive appropriate credit	37.35 Might lose control over materials/code 34.94 Issues related to intellectual property 24.10 Might not receive appropriate credit 44.58 Issues related to privacy
Concerns with open data (2019 n = 83; 2023 n = 65)	Others might use my data for another study Might lose control over how data are used	33.73 Issues related to ethics 32.53 Issues related to intellectual property
Concerns with pre-print archiving (2019 n = 82; 2023 n = 65)	Might add noise to the literature Journals might not publish findings if there is a pre-print Others might copy my ideas & Might reveal differences in pre-print and publication	37.80 Journals might not publish findings if there is a pre-print 36.59 Might add noise to the literature 32.31 Journals might not publish findings if there is a pre-print 21.54 Others might copy my ideas
Concerns with open peer review (2023 n = 65)	–	17.07 Others might copy my ideas Introduction of bias to publication process More difficult to find willing referees Withholding of critical feedback about fatal flaws in manuscripts

Note. Registered Reports and Open peer review were only asked about in the survey of respondents from the 2023 conference. Table shows the top three concerns in descending order for each of the two surveys. Bolded concerns were novel for the 2023 conference attendee cohort.

Table 3. Bivariate correlations between beliefs about benefits of open science practices, and engagement in open science practices.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Beliefs about benefits of open science	-						
2. Open science practices generally	0.38*	-					
3. Study pre-registration	0.43*	0.65*	-				
4. Registered Reports	0.13	0.11	0.24	-			
5. Open materials/code	0.42*	0.55*	0.57*	0.29*	-		
6. Open data	0.43*	0.57*	0.69*	0.31*	0.88*	-	
7. Pre-print archiving	0.37*	0.40*	0.54*	0.11	0.48*	0.41*	-
8. Open peer review	-0.04	0.28*	0.30*	0.08	0.14	0.19	0.23

Note. Table shows Pearson correlation coefficients with pairwise deletion, including point-biserial correlation coefficients in column 1. * $p < 0.05$

exploratory research and that open data might lead to ethics-related issues and intellectual property issues. Hence, Hypothesis 3a is partially supported.

4. What general benefits do gambling research stakeholders perceive for open science principles and practices to protect against external threats to scientific integrity?

We asked respondents about some perceived benefits of open science. In descending order, these were: (1) Research process transparency (70.77%; $n = 46$); (2) Improved public access to scientific information (64.62%; $n = 42$); (3) Increased scientific productivity through data sharing (52.31%; $n = 34$); (4) Improved opportunities for collaboration (49.23%; $n = 32$); (5) Greater likelihood of research replicability (44.62%; $n = 29$); (6) Enhanced rigor and quality of research literature to inform evidence-based approaches (44.62%; $n = 29$); (7) Improved scrutiny of research plans, materials, and products (41.54%; $n = 27$); (8) Reduced publication bias (33.85%; $n = 22$); (9) Reduced potential funder biases (32.31%; $n = 21$); (10) Increased inclusion and representation of minoritized researchers due to greater access to scientific information and materials (26.15%; $n = 17$); and (11) Increased opportunities for innovation (23.08%; $n = 15$). One respondent selected Other (1.54%; $n = 1$) as their response, however, their open response for this option was 'Not familiar with the topic' and this participant did not endorse any other benefits, so this participant was assigned a 0 for their open science benefits score. Five respondents (7.69%) reported that they did not perceive any of these benefits of using open science practices. Overall, the total number of benefits endorsed ranged from 0 to 11 (Median = 5; $M = 4.83$; $SD = 3.10$).

5. Is the number of one's beliefs about the general benefits of open science practices associated with the likelihood of engaging in such practices, generally, and specifically for different types of open science practices?

Table 3 shows the bivariate point-biserial correlations between the number of beliefs about benefits of open science, and the recoded binary measures of open science practices generally, and for each specific type of open science practice. As expected in Hypothesis 5a, there was a significant positive correlation between total beliefs in the benefits of open science and reporting some or extensive experience with open science practices, generally. Likewise, with the exception of engaging in Registered Reports and open peer review, there were significant positive

correlations between total beliefs and each specific open science practice. Thus, Hypothesis 5b was largely supported.

6. To what extent do gambling research stakeholders agree with the FAIR data suggestion for a need to view data in terms of stewardship, rather than ownership?

Regarding the FAIR data question (valid $n = 64$) and the extent to which respondents agreed that embracing the FAIR data suggestion is a necessary perspective shift for gambling studies research, we observed the following endorsement rates, in ascending order: (1) 'Not at all' (7.81%; $n = 5$); (2) 'To a small extent' (10.94%; $n = 7$); (3) 'Completely' (17.19%; $n = 11$); (4) 'To a meaningful extent' (28.12%; $n = 18$); and (5) 'Somewhat' (35.94%; $n = 23$). In total, 45.31% ($n = 29$) of respondents responded 'To a meaningful extent' or 'Completely'. Therefore, Hypothesis 6a was supported.

Discussion

This study builds upon previous studies (LaPlante et al., 2021; Louderback et al., 2023) to provide an updated view about gambling studies research stakeholders' use and views of open science principles and practices. This focus on open science practice use remains an important methodological topic of inquiry to advance the quality and replicability of this academic discipline. In brief, we observed that most respondents indicated they engaged in open science practices, generally, even though minorities endorsed using each specific type of practice. This finding suggests that gambling studies research stakeholders are open to adopting these practices as a regular part of their work, but are selective about which practices they use. This study's contributions include its comparisons of open science practices over time, which provides insight into the growth of this approach in this field. We observed several statistically significant improvements and an overall 16 percentage point increase in the use of open science, generally, albeit this change was not statistically significant. Additionally, this work provided novel findings about perceived benefits of open science, which might be used to promote this approach more widely.

It is notable that we found statistically significant increases in some reports of open science practices, even if minorities continue to use specific practices. The implications of these results are that gambling studies research stakeholders are beginning to shift their approach to incorporate open science, but this shift is only emerging and not yet widespread. Integrating open science principles and practices should yield improvements to scientific rigor and replicability. Although we did not observe an improvement in use of open data, this practice already was reportedly used by nearly half of respondents. Continued support and interest should further increase the likelihood of open science approaches being used in gambling studies research.

New information about the kinds of benefits people associate with open science featured majorities endorsing research process transparency, improved public access to scientific information, and increased scientific productivity through data sharing. Further, nearly half indicated improved opportunities for collaboration. These benefits seem aligned with bolstering the legitimacy of scientific products and the notion that science is meant to be shared rather than locked away (eg within labs or behind paywalls).

It is unclear whether growing more support for open science is best achieved by requirement (eg funding body or journal mandates) or through promoting awareness of their advantages. Promisingly, participants' responses indicated that there was a link between how favorable they were toward open science (ie the number of perceived benefits) and the use of open science practices. This finding suggests a pathway to stimulate uncoerced open science engagement. Future work in this area might consider examining whether providing professional education about the value of open science practices stimulates greater beliefs in those benefits, and accordingly, if behavior follows belief. Such work could establish whether fostering affinity for this research approach incidentally fosters greater engagement on a regular basis.

Finally, we observed minimal support for the FAIR suggestion related to data stewardship that indicates investigators should adopt the viewpoint that they are caretakers of data rather than keepers of data. Consistently, one of the 2023 conference attendee sample's top three concerns for open data related to concerns about intellectual property. (Notably, many of the 2019 attendee top concerns also included loss of control over research projects and ideas.) Together, these findings indicate an ongoing adherence to the idea that openness can create threats to one's academic contributions by enabling 'scooping,' or the use of data by someone else for an analysis that the data collector already planned, and minimizing credit. Shifting norms for data source citation would potentially alleviate such credit-concerns. Some research suggests that scooping concerns might be mitigated by shifting focus toward goals such as new knowledge and ethics reform, and away from goals such as personal publication counts (Laine, 2017).

Limitations

This study had limitations, including its reliance on a convenience sample with a low response rate. The former issue could have potentially created sampling bias, particularly a positivity bias for open science practices. The latter resulted in low power for some analyses. Although the Gambling and Risk Taking conference is a well-attended international event, samples that are more representative of gambling studies researchers might yield different findings. Future research studies that are generalizable are warranted; however, observations from this brief report could form the basis for evidence-based hypotheses about the growth of open science in gambling studies. Another limitation relates to our inquiries about respondents' perceived benefits and concerns related to open science. Asking about a different matrix of these benefits and concerns might yield different results.

Concluding thoughts

Open science holds considerable promise for buttressing gambling studies research. Although gambling studies research can make better use of these practices, there is considerable room for optimism about the future for this methodological standard. We continue to advocate for the widespread use of open science in gambling studies research.

Disclosures statement

During the past 5 years, **Debi A. LaPlante** has served as a paid grant reviewer for the International Center for Responsible Gaming (ICRG), received travel funds, speaker honoraria, and a scientific achievement award from the ICRG, received honoraria from Harvard Health Publications, and received publication royalty fees from the American Psychological Association. Dr. LaPlante is a non-paid member of the New Hampshire Council for Responsible Gambling.

During the past 5 years, **Eric R. Louderback** has provided paid consulting services on player safety programs for Premier Lotteries Ireland, and has received travel reimbursement and speaker honoraria fees from the International Center for Responsible Gaming (ICRG). He has also received travel reimbursement and speaker honoraria fees from the Responsible Gaming Association of New Mexico.

During the past 5 years, **Kasra Ghaharian** has received funding for research and/or consulting services from the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, the Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, the Massachusetts Gaming Commission, AXES.ai, Playtech, IGT, Differential, and GP Consulting. From 2020 to 2022 Ghaharian worked as a Research Assistant for UNLV IGI and conducted research that was supported by funding from the IGI Payments Research Collaborative and Sports Betting Alliance. Ghaharian has received honoraria/travel reimbursement from the Responsible Gambling Council, the Illinois Council on Problem Gambling, and Kindred Group. None of these entities played roles in the design, analysis, or interpretation of this study, and imposed no constraints on publishing.

During the past 5 years, **Brett Abarbanel** has received funding for research and/or consulting services from the Connecticut Council on Problem Gambling, Sports Betting Alliance, GLG Consulting, MGM Resorts International, Eilers & Krejcik Gaming, ProPress Germany, Scientific Affairs, McGill University, University of North Carolina School of Social Work, Marina Bay Sands, Aristocrat Gaming, Pixel United, Life Works, Jones Ward, Navigation Media. Dr. Abarbanel has received reimbursement for travel from Association Cluster Sport International, Kansspelautoriteit, Gamification Group (Finland), Scientific Affairs, British Columbia Lottery Corporation, International Association of Gaming Advisors, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, Columbia University, and University of Salford. None of these entities played roles in the design, analysis, or interpretation of this study, and imposed no constraints on publishing.

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Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration via the Addiction Treatment Center of New England; and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration via the Gavin Foundation. During the past 5 years, the International Gaming Institute (IGI) at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, has received research and program funding from DraftKings, Inc., the American Gaming Association, ESPN, MGM Resorts International, Wynn Resorts Ltd, Las Vegas Sands Corporation, Entain Foundation, Aristocrat Gaming, San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, Axes.ai, Sports Betting Alliance, Playtech, Sightline Payments, Global Payments, the State of Nevada Knowledge Fund, and the State of Nevada Department of Health and Human Services. IGI runs the triennial research-focused International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking, whose sponsors include industry, academic, and legal/regulatory stakeholders in gambling. A full list of sponsors for the most recent conference can be found at <https://www.unlv.edu/igi/conference/18th/sponsors>. IGI maintains a strict research policy (<https://www.unlv.edu/igi/research-policy>), as well as partnership and transparency framework (<https://www.unlv.edu/igi/policies/partnership>) to ensure appropriate firewalls exist between funding entities—no matter the entity’s classification—and IGI’s research and programs.

Notes on contributors

Debi A. LaPlante is the Director of the Division on Addiction, Cambridge Health Alliance, a Harvard Medical School teaching hospital, as well as an Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School. Dr. LaPlante is interested in the epidemiology of gambling and gambling-related problems, and addiction studies.


Eric R. Louderback is a Research & Evaluation Scientist at the Division on Addiction, Cambridge Health Alliance, and an Instructor at Harvard Medical School. He is interested in quantitative risk assessment models for online gambling, responsible gambling program evaluation, data science approaches to analyzing human behavior, and public health-informed research frameworks.

Kasra Ghaharian is the Director of Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, International Gaming Institute. Ghaharian’s research interests center around data science applications and their implications for the gambling sector.

Brett Abarbanel is the Executive Director of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), International Gaming Institute and Associate Professor in the UNLV William F. Harrah College of Hospitality, and Research Affiliate at the University of Sydney. Her areas of expertise include video games, esports and gambling; sports betting; operations and technology; and responsible gambling and community relations.

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Data availability statement

Data and analytic code are available on the Open Science Framework: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/5MQ48>.

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