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Interview de **Matthew Rockloff**, M.S. Economics), Ph.D. Psychology. He is head of Experimental Gambling Research Laboratory School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences

- 1- You have recently co-authored with Dr Philip Newall a [letter to the editor](#) in « **Addiction** » journal, about the two concepts of nudge and sludge used by behavioral scientists. Could you explain these two concepts and tell us how they can apply to gambling?

The concept of a nudge comes from behavioral economics. Small reinforcements or indirect suggestions can allow policy makers to encourage people to make choices that are likely in their best interests but that they otherwise would not automatically choose for themselves. For instance, in the United States companies often offer jointly funded retirement plans where small monthly investments are matched by the company. Young employees, when given a choice, often fail to self-select into these plans because retirement is a long way off. As a nudge, the company can have induction paperwork that makes membership in these plans the automatic default option. A new employee must actively “opt out” of the plan, otherwise they and the company pay into the retirement benefits plan by default. Most young people will participate in a retirement plan when it is presented as the default option, whereas many will not when they must self-select into the plan.

A sludge, previously describe by Newall as a “dark nudge”, turns this logic on its head. Instead of creating a small incentive or suggestion that improves people’s choices, the sludge causes people to make choices that benefit the operator (the company) and disadvantage the consumer. Gambling industry operators often use sludge tactics to influence bettors to keep turnover high and increase their profits at the expense of the consumer.

- 2- Can you give some examples of sludge practices used by gambling operators to influence gamblers’ decisions?

Depositing money into a betting account is often much easier than making a withdrawal. Depositing money may involve only a few “clicks” and often deposited funds appear in the betting account quickly. In contrast, withdrawing funds is often slower and may involve more “clicks”, typed-in information and opportunities to reverse the transaction.

As another example, some gambling operators offer the setting of deposit limits as a consumer protection feature. However, when setting up the account the first options

for deposit limits may be very high amounts – often amounts exceeding what most gamblers could reasonably afford. Consequently, gamblers choose an option that is not helpful to them but does benefit the operator – a classic sludge.

- 3- **At the end of this letter, you proposed that « *prevention of current and potential sludge practices should be high on the agenda of those who want to promote safer gambling* ». Do you have some potential solutions that can be implemented, either by gambling operators or by public health authorities?**

Gambling operators and regulators should guarantee default options and incentives that conform to player interests rather than company interests. Arguably, this practice is in-line with a sustainable gambling industry despite not being in the short-term interests of profit. For example, withdrawing money from a gambling account should be as easy as depositing new money. One suggestion is that new bettors should be made to input all needed information for a withdrawal when opening a new account. In this way, a withdrawal could be made as the simpler of the two processes. Another positive nudge would be to have a default deposit limit that was low and affordable for most gamblers. If gamblers want a higher limit, they should make some effort to search and find where they can change the limit. In short, a sludge can be transformed into a positive nudge that aids in player protection.