CASINO AS CASH COW
A Cautionary Tale?

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Introduction

Economic development initiatives frequently involve a large measure of compromise and trade-off. For First Nations experimenting with high stakes gambling as an engine for economic progress, the trade-offs are sometimes not acceptable or even visible to community members. Raising revenue through casinos may forever alter the social and economic balance of a community. Many observers are wondering if the profits from casinos can ever adequately compensate residents for the social costs associated with gaming enterprises.

In an era where debt load may interfere with progress on reserves, gaming becomes a tempting alternative. Indian Affairs officials claim that up to 25 per cent of bands are broke or in need of financial management assistance (Tibbetts, 1998: A8). As Aboriginal nations step up the pressure for full self-governance, indebtedness has prompted many to embrace gambling as a catalyst for economic rejuvenation.

Frustration has been mounting as the federal government continues to ignore the 4000 page Royal Commission Report with its 440 recommendations for improvement. Increasingly bands are convinced that financial dependence on Ottawa can only be severed through calculated risk-taking. As always the question remains: How can developers maintain a balance between economic and social progress?

The American Model

Canadian bands have been eager to follow the lead of some tribes south of the border who appear to have struck gold. A closer look, however, reveals that all is not as prosperous as it would appear in the American flirtation with casino development. It is true, as Kim Crompton reports in "Tribal Gambling Pitch Escalates," that "tribal gaming has replaced yesteryear's buffalo as American Indians' means of survival in the modern day." In a March 2001 edition of Journal of Business, she notes that nationwide there are about 200 tribes operating more than 300 gaming facilities ranging from one-room bingo games to large casinos. The National Indian Gaming Commission in the United States

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confirmed that the industry now generates more than $9.6 billion in gross gaming revenue, up from $500 million in 1988 (Cromption, 2001: A1).

With so much at stake it is not surprising that First Nations in Canada feel a sense of urgency and have ceased to wait for the government to act upon the Royal Commission directives. But, as a team of reporters from the Associated Press discovered last spring, a casino does not signify instant freedom from federal purse strings. Investigators from *The IRE Journal* set out to see if the billions of dollars in gambling revenues had changed the lives of Indians on reservations. Was gambling solving the unemployment, poverty and welfare problems that had plagued U.S. reservations since their creation in the 19th century?

In summarizing the findings, reporter David Pace reveals that there was "a tremendous concentration of gambling revenues among tribes with few members." The 23 tribes with casinos making more than $100 million a year got 56 percent of the total Indian gaming revenues in 1998 even though they accounted for just 5.1 percent of the American Indian population. Interestingly, tribes that owned casinos making less than $10 million a year comprised more than half of the Indian population but received only five percent of the total gambling revenues.

Pace goes on to say that "welfare participation on Indian reservations with casinos grew far less during the 1990s than on other reservations. But the historically high unemployment and poverty levels on reservations changed very little during the 1990s despite the influx of gambling money" (Pace, 2001: 8).

The report cites further evidence that gambling revenues were having minimal impact on the quality of life. The analysis found that the U.S. unemployment rate dropped from 6.9 percent to 4.9 percent between 1991 and 1997; however, the unemployment rate for 146 tribes with casinos declined from 55.9 percent to 52.2 percent. Among the 144 tribes without casinos, the unemployment rate increased from 43.6 percent in 1991 to 48.3 percent six years later.

The investigators examined data on education levels, poverty rates and housing conditions. The average poverty rate in counties hosting gaming tribes declined only slightly between 1989 and 1995, from 17.7 percent to 15.5 percent. In counties of non-gaming tribes, the poverty rate increased slightly, from 18.2 percent to 18.4 percent. In the U.S. as a whole, the poverty rate increased from 12.8 percent to 13.8 percent during that period.

The authors of the report concede that about two dozen tribes with casinos are beginning to intervene in the poverty cycle. The vast majority of tribes have not experienced relief. For example, the San Carlos Apaches of eastern Arizona run a $40 million casino that provides jobs for several hundred of the tribe's 10,500 members yet the $65,000 monthly dividend to the tribe has not solved local problems. "The reservation's unemployment rate increased from 42 percent in 1991 to 58 percent in 1997," according to Pace, "and the number of tribal members receiving welfare jumped 20 percent during that period (Pace, 2001).

"Casino profits have just scratched the surface of the economic and social problems confronting reservations," tribal chiefs told *The New York Times* last year. Many bands say they are so far behind in housing, plumbing and basic infrastructure that the casino money is a drop in the proverbial bucket. Tribes are beginning to see a reduction in participation in food stamp programs but it is apparent that progress is slow and sometimes imperceptible (Belluck, 2000).

Stephen Cornell, director of the Udall Centre for Studies in Public Policy, supported the chiefs' observations in an address to an economic development conference in Tucson, Arizona. Gambling is not a cure-all, he agreed; "There are huge, continuing problems of poverty in Indian America. We are dealing with problems that are comparable with poverty issues in developing countries" (The *New York Times*, 12 November 1999).

Although the National Indian Gaming Association claims that "Indian gaming is the first and only economic development tool that has ever worked on reservations," many would disagree. As Jerry Unseem reports in his article "The Big Gamble," most of America's 1.7 million Indians, and especially those living on reservations, are poor. Native Americans have a poverty rate 2.5 times the national average, a suicide rate nearly twice as high, and an alcoholism rate six times greater" (Unseem, 2000: 222). Mega resorts, like the famous and lucrative Foxwoods run by the tiny Pequot band, are relatively rare. In fact, 361 tribes have no gambling at all. Only very small tribes in close proximity to substantial population centres are able to enjoy runaway success. For the others "the

Indian new economy" has evolved into an elusive dream (Unseem, 2000).

For Canadian bands grappling with similar realities, gaming still seems attractive. It is natural for Aboriginal economic development committees to envy the growing gaming industry in American states and to rush to jump on the bandwagon. It is also understandable for First Nations on both sides of the border to gravitate to gambling as a way to address community needs. In fact, adopting commercial gaming as a strategy is a clear example of Native inventiveness and adaptability.

History of Gaming Practices

Much of the impetus to focus on gambling operations has been inspired by the Canadian government's rigid stance on self-government. Court decisions in the 1990s argued that bands could not claim an activity as a right unless they could prove that activity is part of their culture or heritage (Morris, 1996: A18). First Nations negotiators quickly reacted to this short-sighted view since gaming is one area where it is easy to demonstrate a long-standing traditional practice. Establishing casinos became a potent symbol of the inherent right to manage First Nations affairs.

The historic record shows that games of chance have been an integral part of tribal societies throughout North America. As Reven and Gabrielle Brenner point out in *Gambling and Speculation*, "Early American Indians believed that their gods were the originators of their gambling games with coloured stones and that the gods determined the outcome" (Brenner, 1990: 3). In those days, bones, sticks, arrows and lots were shuffled and thrown by the tribal seer, who then disclosed the message for the future, a message revealed by the supernatural spirit who controlled the throw. Today's players are simply repeating a ritual sanctioned by their ancestors.

Historians claim that Woodland tribes, for example, enjoyed a wide variety of games based on dexterity or on chance. Summaries published by the National Geographic Society describe activities involving shooting arrows, playing a kind of soccer, tossing lances at a rolling disk and guessing which moccasin held a stone or marker. Both men and women engaged in "gambling by tossing split lengths of cane for scores determined by the number of convex or concave surfaces turned up" (Grovenor, 1974: 142).

Methods of play, forerunners of modern casino techniques, illustrate far ranging complexity, creativity and resourcefulness. In Quebec, for instance, the Algonquian people were passionate about a game called paquessen. The Amalecite people of New Brunswick invented altestagen for entertainment. Pahkasahkimac was a popular diversion among Saskatchewan Cree. The Micmac of Nova Scotia were equally inventive with their regional dice games. Players in Manitoba were fans of buggasank or boggasah which involved a complicated circle game of gain and loss. The Nisga'a of British Columbia contributed a totemic trump game to the repertoire of Aboriginal gambling activities. Throughout the Americas colourful and intricate games enlivened festivals and celebrations. This affinity to games of chance in the past makes today's economic development officers comfortable with the casino concept.

Metis communities also cherished their games of chance, according to Julia D. Harrison. In her publication entitled *Metis*, she reports that card-playing, horse racing and bingo have always been very popular. "In card games, players use traps, rifle shells, matches, fishing nets, or other personal equipment for bets when money is scarce" (Harrison, 1985: 129).

The Iroquois tradition also displayed some unique gaming practices. In *Teachings From the Longhouse* Chief Jacob Thomas relates that the Great Betting Game or the peach stone and bowl game was a well-respected activity. It was expected that participants would bet "the most valuable and precious things" they owned and, if a person lost a bet, it was believed they would "see their possessions in the spirit world" (Thomas & Boyle, 1994: 67).

Clearly gambling has existed and flourished in virtually every tribal group on the continent. Because of the strong link to the past, modern economic development agencies consider gaming a legitimate and traditional mode of fund-raising. The establishment of casinos serves as one strategy in the campaign to strengthen self-government.

Compulsive Gambling

Fortunately, there is abundant evidence to illustrate that gaming is an integral part of the distinctive cultures of Aboriginal people; however, further examination of past practices reveals early practitioners were not immune to the dark side of gaming excesses. Despite current misconceptions, compulsive gambling is not just a twenty-first century phenomenon. Many observers report witnessing out-of-control wagering behaviour throughout history.

Betting games sparked conflict then, just as they do now. An entry in the journal of Charlevoix described what he interpreted to be gambling mania among the Hurons of Michigan. So fond of the dish game were the Hurons that they sometimes lost their rest, "and in some measure their reason. They hazarded all they possessed and many did not leave off until they were almost stripped quite naked and till they had lost all they had in their cabins" (Culin, 1992: 106).

The tendency of gamblers to play until all is lost was also noted by Nicolas Perrot in his diary. "Entire villages have been seen gambling away their possessions, one against the other, and ruining themselves," he wrote (Culin, 1992: 107). Gabriel Sagard expressed similar amazement when he marvelled that the Native men were "addicted not only to the game of reeds but were also addicted to other kinds of games" (Culin, 192: 107). Other cultural outsiders, including Father Louis Hennepin recorded scenes of gaming euphoria. In his writings, he comments, "There were some so given to this game that they would gamble away even their great coat. Those who conducted the game cried at the top of their voice when they rattled the platter and they struck their shoulders so hard as to leave them all black with the blows" (Culin, 1992: 108).

Although early games of chance did not feature the huge cash prizes available to modern players, it is clear that compulsive behaviour spans generations. The face of pathological gambling today bears striking similarities to the gambling fever exhibited so long ago among tribal ancestors.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, there are several key indicators of pathological gambling. The gambler is preoccupied with planning the next gambling venture or thinking of where to get money to bet. There is an necessity to gamble increasingly larger sums in order to get the desired excitement. There may be repeated unsuccessful attempts to control, cut back or stop the gambling. Chasing losses, lying to family members and committing illegal acts are all signals that the betting is out of control (Lesieur, 1995: 153).

Some Aboriginal social workers are reluctant to endorse gaming because some people are susceptible to cross-addiction, according to *The Edmonton Journal*. Butch Wolfleg, a councillor for the Siksika Nation east of Calgary, has expressed fears that he and others like him are prime candidates for gambling addiction. He shared his apprehension at a gaming conference featuring speakers from American casinos. He told conference delegates that "we are prime targets for people to exploit us, especially if they wave money and capital and jobs in our faces." Add a casino to a community with high unemployment and alcohol problems and the social impact can be devastating, he told reporter Marta Gold. In his address he characterized casinos as "a neat way of raising revenue, as long as it's balanced with some of that money being directed to social impact, especially on children" (Gold, 1996).

Similar concerns were voiced in "The Spirit of Bingoland," a study released by the Nechi Institute of Edmonton. The researchers noted that "the problem of alcoholism is being successfully addressed today through the efforts of countless Native people who are determined to reduce the devastation caused by alcohol in their own communities. Unfortunately, legalized gambling, seen by many as a new economic saviour, may supplement or possibly even replace drinking as the new addiction of choice in the Native community" (Hewitt, 1994: 1).

In addition, the Nechi sponsored survey indicates that "gambling is a serious problem in Native communities which needs to be addressed. Unfortunately, recognition of the problem by Native communities is very low, probably at about the same level as recognition of alcohol and drug problems was 20–25 years ago" (Hewitt, 1994: 1). Overall the authors concluded that there is a very compelling link between gambling addiction and unresolved grief.

As professional social workers continue to gather data to alert political decision-makers to the hazards of rapid gaming expansion, anecdotal evidence is also emerging. The human side of the issue emerges in a letter written by Northwest Territories resident, Naomi Sampson (a pseudonym). She describes the loneliness and desperation she experienced as she tried to maintain a close relationship with the problem gambler in her household. "I first met the gambler in my life at the community hall," she writes. "I didn't think he was a gambler or a cheater when we first got together." At first she says she was unaware of the extent of her partner's gambling addiction. "In his winning phase he would just gamble more, but he did provide food. Then the losing phase brought many apologies but he would also blame us for what was happening. We learned to care for ourselves and to meet our own needs because we couldn't count on the gambler," she confides.

In the desperation phase of his illness, the gambler was seldom home, according to Sampson. "If he was home," she admits, " he was agitated and bored, anxious to get back to the gambling. As for myself and my two teenage boys, we don't gamble. Sometimes I felt the gambling was all my fault because we never did activities together and just drifted apart. I felt hurt and would try to tell him not to use the money for gambling and to buy something he needs for himself."

"There was a lot of shame and stress from living with the gambler," she confesses. "He would get into arguments with my sons and there would be a lot of abuse because we were dependent upon him."

"I try to be understanding," she says, "But it is disappointing. I feel helpless over his addiction. I stayed in the relationship because I love him and my boys wanted him but he couldn't get away from the habit."

During the gambling binges the young mother reports that she endured "loneliness and a lot of headaches." She agonized as the bills continued to pile up. "I was anxious and frightened whenever we would break up over the gambling," she says. "Emotionally it was very draining. Socially we didn't fit in because he didn't get along with my friends. After awhile I realized he had an addiction and that he didn't want help."

To other people trapped in such relationships, she advises, "Stop supporting them. You can start life all over again if you want to. After all, life is meant for love and joy. People who are hooked on gambling don't love you; it is the money they love. They are just throwing money away and the hungry people at home are forgotten. You want a true friend, not material things" (Little, 1999: 145).

Voices from First Nations Communities

Although proponents of casinos claim that gambling is an economic and entertainment choice, many First Nations people believe that gambling ultimately undermines family values. To determine whether casino development is favoured by a cross-section of Northern Ontario band members, a random sampling of students was surveyed at N'Swakamok Native Alternative School in Sudbury. In private interviews conducted at N'Swakamok Friendship Centre, many participants expressed the view that excessive gambling interferes with the teaching of patience, respect, human achievement and personal responsibility.

In his personal testimonial, Don, a thirty-six year old from Wikwemikong Unceded Reserve, remains opposed to a casino in his community. "I don't think it's right," he says. "I'd go out protesting door to door if they ever tried to bring one (casino) in there. I don't think it's right to take money out of the community. A lot of people already have problems with gambling at bingo and such. Kids are left to run around and fend for themselves; they're not raised properly."

For Don a casino would spur an upswing in addiction. He believes that increasing the opportunities to gamble leads to an increase in the population of problem gamblers. "People that don't normally gamble would end up gambling if the casino came in," he predicts. All in all Don views gambling in a negative light and disapproves of it as a drain on the people. He applauds other resources for economic development including a dolomite quarry, a marina, and mini-mall and logging operations (Little, 1997:, 83).

Eighteen year old Paula echoes some of Don's concerns with casino operations on reserve. As a Wikwemikong band member, she believes that a casino would cause too many problems among the residents. "People get hooked on the games and they get addicted to gambling and start to neglect their families by sitting at a slot machine all night," she says. I've seen children neglected; I have been one of those left babysitting while others were out at bingo."

Another major worry for Paula is the loss of intergenerational communication when gambling takes hold in the community. She fears that casinos reinforce the materialism that threatens to seduce First Nations youth. Most of the Elders she knows are "very traditional and into healing and traditional medicines," she says. "They want to teach their grandchildren all of these things, but if others have their way, they'll be too busy getting a job at the casino!" She deplores the fact that many of the younger generation don't find the old ways very interesting. In her eyes, the promotion of casinos defeats the purpose of going to school and getting an education. “Why go to school to become a blackjack dealer?” she asks (Little, 1997: 85).

A twenty-six year old from Fort William expresses opinions akin to those of Don and Paula. Jack feels the morality of the people is adversely affected by the presence of blackjack tables and slot machines. For him casinos symbolize conflict. He sees his home community as a close-knit place where “people care for one another. Casinos bring in strangers, outsiders, and large crowds that have a negative effect on impressionable youth,” he says.

In his view, an influx of tourists coming to gamble has a detrimental effect on community life. And he feels traditional activities such as pow wows are “wrecked” since they can’t compete with the glitz of casinos. He recommends that more energy be put into economic development alternatives such as fishing, agriculture and nurseries. He encourages leaders to wait for small enterprises to pay off instead of concentrating on the instant profits and unhealthy dependence associated with reliance on casinos. “There’s always the danger that people will get comfortable with the casino,” Jack warns. “And gradually they get greedy and go for more expansion” (Little, 1997: 87).

Linda, a sixteen year old youth from Golden Lake, concedes that casinos bring money and jobs to communities, yet she fears the accompanying social problems. “There’s always the chance of getting addicted to gambling,” she says. “I definitely do not support it.” She believes gambling has a negative influence on personal responsibility. Too many people fall for the notion that they can “get rich fast” and end up falling behind in rent and other bills.

Linda acknowledges that many communities are in need of healing as well as an infusion of funds but she opposes materialistic solutions. She urges First Nations youth to treasure the old ways because “money is nothing but material objects;” whereas, “traditional values go back centuries and have been brought down to us; in no way is gambling compatible with traditional values. Gambling is something man-made; traditional values were sent to us from the Creator,”she believes. She is adamant that community goals of unity and prosperity can never be achieved by congregating at casinos (Little, 1997: 89).

Healing is also a priority expressed by Janice, a forty-seven year old member of the Whitefish Lake First Nation. She is cautious about expanded gaming opportunities since it might jeopardize the healing movement on reserve. “Most families do gamble now,” she observes. “And some families are hurting because of the gambling.” She is concerned that more emphasis on gambling might be a set back for the carefully nurtured recovery movement in the community.

Like many First Nations people, Janice experiences ambivalence when confronted with gaming questions. She admits casinos are divisive. “The community is in the midst of reviving traditional values of the elders and picking up the cultural heritage and teachings, “ she says. “Some members oppose gambling; others welcome it. It is a recent phenomenon that we are walking the sobriety road and gambling might interfere with the healing process” (Little, 1997: 90).

A thirty-nine year old Michipicoten member shares some of the same reservations as Janice outlines. Jackie longs for the economic boost casinos might ignite, yet she is apprehensive about the negative potential. “Wherever there’s more money, there’s more crime,” she points out. “One of the biggest negative things would be low-income families spending all their money gambling and leaving their children alone. This would lead to juvenile problems and drug and alcohol problems.”

Job creation aside, Jackie feels that large crowds of travellers destroy a community’s sense of safety and security. She also bemoans the fact that “a lot of teenagers and younger children are left alone without the support and guidance of parents between the hours of seven and ten at night. That’s when parents should be there, not at bingo” (Little, 1997: 100).

From the community interview excerpts it is apparent that band members have mixed feelings about gaming in their home communities. For most participants in the survey, balance in both economic and social issues is the key to community enhancement.

Cautionary Tales

Canadian communities are just beginning to assess the overall impact of large scale gaming operations on the quality of life. For those seeking models, a glance south of the border reveals an abundance of cautionary tales.

In her introduction to *Crapped Out*, editor Jennifer Vogel states that "in many cases gambling only makes a bad situation worse." She advises gambling promoters to be wary since gambling produces no new wealth and contributes nothing to economic development. In her view, gaming is a discredited economic philosophy.

In reality, casinos do not bring "the breath of life" to impoverished areas, according to *Newsday* writer, Stephanie Saul. In her investigation of economic development trends in Tunica County, Mississippi, she discovered that poverty persists even though casinos thrive. The drawbacks catalogued in areas where casinos were located included an 800 per cent increase in crime. Traffic accidents increased because of free alcohol at gaming establishments. The district attorney reported higher levels of violent crime and armed robberies. The county averaged twenty indictments a year before the advent of casinos and 160 a year after casinos arrived. Economists estimated that for every dollar generated by gambling, it cost the state triple that sum to cover the costs of incarceration (Saul, 1995: 49).

Iowa residents have announced disillusionment with gambling as well. In *America's House of Cards*, Marc Cooper observes that casinos are built in "vulnerable communities" where high unemployment makes the citizens desperate for funds for "social improvement projects" (Cooper, 1996: 32). Casino developments are like vultures descending upon "impoverished ports and Indian reservations throughout the heartland," he notes. Iowa's compulsive gambling population tripled after riverboat casinos arrived. State officials estimate that each problem gambler costs the taxpayer between $13,000 and $35,000 per year in treatment, law enforcement, divorce, spousal battering and absenteeism (Cooper, 1996: 34).

The unsavoury reputation attached to some American casinos also raises red flags for Canadian bands contemplating similar enterprises. In some areas anti-gambling groups have charged that Native casinos are fronts for non-Indian developers who skim off a large percentage of the profits. Donald Trump, a wealthy casino booster, tried to convince a congressional panel that Indian gaming was awash in crookedness and that "organized crime is rampant on Indian reservations" (Unseem, 2000).

Tales of fraud and misappropriation of funds may be a powerful deterrent to bands with casino visions. One of the most highly publicized casino scandals has been played out on the South Dakota Pine Ridge Reservation. According to Fortune magazine, the community has been torn apart over casino profits of $3 million. A grass roots organization occupied tribal council headquarters amid accusations of "corruption" and claims that the tribal treasurer was pocketing money himself. All of this conflict has erupted in an area reporter Jerry Unseem describes as "an economic dead zone" where unemployment hovers around 80 percent and alcoholism around 50 percent (Unseem. 2000: 223). Instead of creating harmony and comfort, the casino is the focal point of community division.

An equally fragmenting scenario has unfolded in Mohawk territory as well. As the twentieth century was winding down, gaming issues fomented a bullet-punctuated feud in Akwesasne. According to Toronto Star reporter Darcy Henton, a dozen aluminum-sided gaming houses jammed with slot machines and blackjack tables had sprung up along highway 37 near Hogansburg, New York. The illegal casinos continued to operate because of jurisdictional disputes among New York, Ontario and Quebec authorities. Traditional Mohawks opposing the unwanted casinos were pitted against a heavily armed "security force" of warriors who used force to keep the unlawful houses operating. Again gambling destroyed community peace and brought the reserve "to the brink of war" (Henton, 1990).

Another damaging blow to Aboriginal blueprints is "the rich Indian stereotype" currently in vogue as non-Native citizens universally assume that bands are getting rich from betting operations. As modest gains with gambling are documented, a backlash emerges among surrounding communities. Even though bands are just beginning to acquire some of the things that they have needed for decades, the myth persists that Indians have access to great gaming wealth. The Menominee casino in Keshena, Wisconsin, for example, was not profitable enough to keep unemployment among the 6,500 residents from reaching 47 percent. Menominee chairman, Apesanahkwat, explains: "We're just trying to bring our people up to a quality of life that everyday Americans enjoy" (Belluck, 2000).

The Chippewas of Mnjikaning, operators of Casino Rama near Orillia, Ontario, have learned that hosting a casino can foster unrealistic expectations. In December 2000 a community referendum was held to decide the fate of casino profits. The voters endorsed a decision to divide up the $12.6 million that had accumulated. Chief Sharon Henry told reporters that band members "obviously felt they deserved something in recognition for the drastic changes in the community over the past five years." Individuals were to receive payouts of about $12 per day. "It's not a huge amount of money," she added. "Nobody's getting rich here."

The payouts come from the casino's lease on the land and is compensation for tolerating an estimated 14,000 cars and 80 buses rolling through their neighbourhoods daily. A one-time $10,000 lump sum was to be given to each band member after a 60 day appeal period had elapsed. Chief Henry said, "It's enough to make them feel they're getting something in return. The small community atmosphere is gone forever" (*Sudbury Star*, 12 December 2000).

Unacknowledged Social Costs

One of the seldom acknowledged, but most disturbing, outcomes of casino development is the increase in suicide rates. Experts agree that increased gambling opportunities often push people with addictive personalities over the edge. The suicide rate for compulsive gamblers is five to ten times higher than it is among the general population, according to Robert Goodman, author of *The Luck Business* (p. 49).

In Minnesota where authorities estimate a population of 38,000 pathological gamblers, financial ruin has driven some gamblers to kill themselves in the desperation phase of the illness. Treatment workers in the state confirm that "gamblers are committing suicide" and that the average debt load is over $40,000 (Vogel, 1997: 204).

Canada has its own share of gambling-linked suicides. Since the opening of the Montreal Casino in Quebec, whispers of suicides have circulated around the site. Membership in the province's Gamblers Anonymous groups exploded by fifty per cent soon after Quebec opened three casinos. Suicides are categorized as gambling-related if a suicide note discusses gambling debts or if next of kin inform the police that the deceased was depressed over gaming activities. The Toronto Star reports that a sixty year old Montreal man killed himself over "serious" losses at the casino; a widow of 48 threw herself in front of a subway train because of financial difficulties attributed to betting; a depressed Laval resident shot himself in the abdomen after suffering very substantial losses at the casino; an Asian family man shot his brother-in-law and wounded his mother-in-law and uncle before killing himself (Moore, 1996: A12).

New Brunswick cities have also been reeling from video lottery terminal induced suicides. Gambling counsellors report that some New Brunswickers are taking their lives because of addiction to slot machines (*Times Transcript*, D16).

Henry Lesieur, editor of *The Journal on Gambling Studies*, contends that gambling costs society hundreds of millions of dollars in hidden social ills. It doesn't matter how precise the figures are, he feels. "To me, what's important is, once one person commits suicide or two people commit suicide, those numbers don't make any difference" (Vogel, 1997: 206).

First Nations communities already mourning the loss of so many youths to suicide may be repulsed by an activity long proven to exacerbate an already challenging social problem. Many families touched by the tragedy of youth suicide will reject casinos on the grounds that they deepen rifts in the community and open up painful wounds.

Conclusion

Many critics of high stakes gambling believe that gaming is inherently corrupt and likely to corrupt those who promote it and profit by it. Unless bands abide by a strong code of ethics and uphold community and family values, then there are many dangerous mine fields along this fabled route to self-reliance. First Nations leaders must firmly resist loss of control to outside interests and counteract the myth that gaming on reserve is merely a front for non-Indian entrepreneurs. The key to balance is to maintain traditional institutions such as collectivity, respect for family and the role of the Elders. Policies that separate political and economic development as separate from the rest of human experience cannot be tolerated. Ethical considerations must enter the picture whenever major projects are envisioned. The spiritual life of the people must be honoured in any economic development activity since communal values help to protect the community from self-serving individuals.

From scrutinizing gaming operations that succeed, it can be concluded that this model of economic development works when it is steered by traditional principles. It works when First Nations capitalism is guided by Native values and communication processes. It works when there is honest, open, fair and equitable distribution of resources to community needs decided by consensus. Communication and dialogue are always key ingredients. Above all, a community generated Code of Behaviour or Vision Policy is a must to hold it all together. The cultural values of peace, respect and friendship provide the underpinnings for all successful ventures.

It is possible to take marginalized communities and empower them through the gaming mechanism but well thought out safeguards must be built into the plan. The quandary posed by the use of gambling to woo prosperity is not easily resolved. It is vital that First Nations create institutions worthy of community support and respect. Precise financial management controls coupled with a concern for healthy families can be a winning formula for economic and spiritual salvation.

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