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Classification of Pathological Gambling as an Impulse Control Disorder

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the appropriateness of the current classification of pathological gambling as an Impulse Control Disorder. Controversy over the current categorization is as heated as it has ever been with more research suggesting that gambling is in fact not strictly an impulse-driven behaviour. Research also shows that pathological gambling is similar in presentation and treatment outcome to other addictive behaviours such as alcohol and substance abuse. Given such findings, it is arguable that pathological gambling needs to be re-examined in terms of where it fits into a psychiatric classification system.

Introduction

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (3rd ed., 1980) was the first to treat compulsive or pathological gambling as a separate condition labelling it a "mental disorder" (Levy & Feinberg, 1991). The DSM-III-R (1987) categorized pathological gambling as one of several Impulse Control Disorders, vaguely defined as mental disorders characterized by an irresistible impulse to perform harmful acts (McElroy, Hudson, Pope, Keck & Aizley, 1992). People with impulse control disorders have three central characteristics:

1. they fail to resist impulses to perform some act that is harmful to them or others;
2. they experience an increasing sense of tension before committing the act; and
3. they feel pleasure or release at the time the act is committed (Murray, 1993).

Pathological gambling specifically involves repeated failure to resist the urge to gamble, resulting in disruptive patterns that impair the ability to function in personal, family and occupational roles.

Personality Profiles of Pathological Gamblers

Descriptions of gamblers' personalities have been derived primarily from personality inventories. It is unclear whether the personality traits identified in the inventories preceded and contributed to pathological gambling or followed after and resulted from the gambling activities (Lesieur, 1979). In other words, if gamblers score high on scales of impulsivity, then presumably, they have difficulty controlling their impulses (hence an Impulse Control Disorder); it cannot be determined if this impulsivity trait was a cause of the gambling behaviour or caused by the gambling behaviour.

Langewisch and Frisch (1998) conducted a study in which they compared non-pathological gamblers [individuals with scores of less than five on the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) (Lesieur & Blume, 1987)] with pathological gamblers [individuals who scored five or greater on the SOGS] on measures of impulsivity. They found that the relationship between gambling and impulsivity scores were not significantly different for non-

pathological gamblers compared to pathological gamblers. Increased gambling severity (as measured by the SOGS) was not significantly related to increased impulsivity scores for pathological gamblers. They also found a strong relationship between gambling and other addictive behaviours.

Dickerson (1979) observed people betting on horses and dogs in a betting office in Scotland. He found that frequent bettors appeared to delay placing their bets until just before the start of the race. Additionally, people who follow horse racing carefully spend considerable amounts of time and energy attempting to increase their odds of winning. Studying horses, jockeys and tracks all figure into their calculations (Ladouceur, Giroux & Jacques, 1998). In the same manner, people who gamble on sporting events will often invest hours examining players, injuries, previous games and match-ups in hopes of increasing their knowledge and subsequently their odds. A reviewer for this journal pointed out that "even chasing is often a carefully calculated attempt to tap into the law of averages." Admittedly, not all gamblers (social or pathological) behave in this purposeful manner. These are just a few examples of how gambling can be a very deliberate and calculated act, rather than a rash, impulsive behaviour. These patterns of behaviour would seem to be more indicative of someone who has control over their actions rather than someone who is acting on impulse alone. In fact, when examined, this behaviour would be better labelled as compulsive rather than impulsive.

Little research has been conducted on self-control in gambling. Evidence for loss of control as an identifying or distinctive feature of gamblers (as expected in the DSM-III-R and DSM-IV, 1994) is not yet clear (Murray, 1993). Are there distinctive personality characteristics in pathological gamblers? While much has been learned about the personality traits of gamblers, both pathological and social, a personality profile distinguishing them has not yet been identified (Murray, 1993). As a result, it seems premature, even unfounded, to categorize individuals as pathological gamblers according to a behavioural pattern rooted in a personality trait. Whether or not gamblers can be split into two distinct groups, pathological or social, or those who lack control and those who do not, are issues that require further research and clarification (Dickerson, 1987; Greenberg, 1980; Murray, 1993).

The DSM category of Impulse Control Disorders is a diagnostic group that is not well understood. An "impulse" is not defined, and by placing "impulse, drive, or temptation" (DSM-IV) together any debate about what is meant by an impulse and what is meant by a drive is completely avoided. Several authors have questioned the DSM category's diagnostic validity, especially

with respect to gambling; many believe that pathological gamblers do not really experience irresistible impulses and that they retain control over their behaviour (Murray, 1993).

Pathological Gambling as an Addiction

There is no universal agreement about what exactly constitutes an addiction. The primary area of controversy surrounding the definition of an addiction is substance use versus behavioural activity (Griffiths & Duff, 1993). Most professionals in the field have little difficulty accepting the idea that the consumption of a substance (for example, alcohol and illicit drugs) is potentially addictive. In contrast, when referring to behaviours such as gambling, the definition of addiction becomes the primary focus of debate. Traditional views hold that in order for addiction to occur, a chemical substance and subsequent physiological effect must be present. However, more modern models of addiction attempt to identify components of excessive behaviour and the effects (i.e. social, occupational and personal problems) thereof. In doing so, the definition of addictions is expanding to include behaviours as well as substances.

The DSM-III-R's criteria for pathological gambling were modelled after the criteria for psychoactive substance abuse (from the DSM-III) and included notions such as "tolerance" and "withdrawal" (Lesieur & Rosenthal, 1991). Pathological gambling can also be viewed as an addiction whereby a pathological gambler appears to be completely enthralled in the gambling activity and will tend to increase bets in the same way that drug addicts increase their dosage and/or use (Jacobs, 1988; Lesieur, 1988). Similarly, pathological gambling is often treated in programs based on or modelled after other addictions, i.e. Alcoholics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous. Pathological gambling, clinically speaking, is generally considered analogous to alcoholism and substance abuse as they are often present in the same people, as well as in the same families (Blume, 1987; Lesieur & Rosenthal, 1991). Pathological gamblers have actually been successfully treated in treatment programs with alcoholics and substance abuse addicts (Murray, 1993). Admittedly, pathological gambling differs from substance abuse addictions because physical drugs are not consumed. However, what gamblers often describe as the sensation they experience while gambling is similar to the sensation substance abusers describe when using drugs or alcohol. Gambling, similar to drug and alcohol abuse, are all characterized by increases in tolerance, cravings and a consistent need to continue to take the drug or indulge in the behaviour.

Conclusion

Future Diagnostic and Statistical Manuals of Mental Disorder need to carefully evaluate where pathological gambling fits into a classification system. While there are arguments for and against both the current classification and the idea of gambling as an addiction, the latter seems to be gaining more and more support, from both researchers and clinicians. The implications of achieving the most applicable and "correct" classification spread into the realms of prevention, treatment and social policy.

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Ambient Frontiers

The El Rancho Vegas and Hotel

Last Frontier: Strip Pioneers

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Abstract

The first two casino resorts built on the roadway that became the Las Vegas Strip broke new ground in several ways. The El Rancho Vegas inaugurated the winning combination of gambling, dining, entertainment and vacation amenities that has become the basis of the casino gaming industry. The Hotel Last Frontier was the first truly "themed" casino that encouraged patrons to lose themselves in a fantasy world of Old West nostalgia while vacationing and gambling within the casino. These two casinos originated two concepts that would define American casino gaming into the next century: self-contained vacation pleasure within a suburban resort and the heady use of lavish theming to encourage patronage. Understanding their stories deepens appreciation of the history and current reality of casino gaming.

The casino gaming industry, particularly on the Las Vegas Strip, has historically intertwined two seemingly paradoxical ideas: the breaking of exciting new ground and an emphasis on comfort and convenience. Casinos transport patrons to a personal frontier not of hardship but of

wealth (or its lure); they vie with each other for the title of largest and most modern, but they also promise familiar vacation comforts and friendly customer service. Casinos thus offer a special kind of frontier where ambience and opportunity are subtly shuffled in a reality-blurring thematic prestidigitation. The first two casino resorts of the Las Vegas Strip pioneered in the pairing of these two conflicting concepts; though their important role in the successful selling of casino gaming as a legitimate form of public entertainment has been obscured over time.

Since the late 1940s pushing the frontiers of "the newest with the mostest" in casino design has encouraged operators on the Strip to build regenerative expansions, additions, and renovations, often sacrificing their existing physical plants. Progressive waves of "frontier-breaking" gaming operators, each of which sought to recreate the Strip in his own image, have thus inadvertently obliterated most physical signs of the Strip's history. Consequently, much of the Strip's history has been muddled. For example, the most notorious of the early casinos, the Flamingo, is often mistakenly identified as the first "real" casino on the Strip. This oversight is particularly unfortunate because the two casinos that preceded the Flamingo in breaking the frontier of the casino landscape of the Strip contributed important concepts to the evolution of the unified casino resort complex that has come to dominate American gaming.

The first, the El Rancho Vegas, represented the earliest genuine synthesis of a gaming casino, lodging and entertainment within a single, self-contained complex —the casino resort. The second, the Hotel Last Frontier, pioneered the use of Old West nostalgia in the selling of casino gaming, and its application of a themed environment as a marketing tool was a distant harbinger of the lavish theming that would be revived with the opening of Caesars Palace in 1966 and codified into the Las Vegas experience with the spate of themed casinos of the early 1990s. Together, the El Rancho and Last Frontier both foreshadowed and inspired trends that would dominate the gaming industry into the next century.

In the early 1940s, Las Vegas seemed to be a minor resort town in need of further commercial development. Though not completely insulated from the Depression, the city enjoyed the boon of a significant federal presence, first through the Hoover Dam and later through military bases. Consequently, the city did not suffer as badly as other regions of the state, particularly Reno, during the lean years of the 1930s. The town's proximity to Los Angeles more than anything else spurred its potential; as Southern California increased in population and wealth, Las Vegas's tourist base grew. The city's possibilities as a hospitality center seemed promising.

However, the primary development of resorts in Las Vegas spiraled in a suburban, rather than urban, direction. The casino resorts that would pace the region's economy were not centered on the town's downtown, but on its major southern artery, Highway 91. This roadway segued into Fifth Street to the north and meandered south about 300 miles (480 km) across the Mojave Desert to Southern California; thus its alternate designation as the Los Angeles Highway. There had been minimal development on Highway 91 before the early 1940s. The best-known club there, the Pair-o-Dice, pre-dated the 1931 decriminalization of gambling. Before that year, patrons had to knock on the front door and identify themselves before gaining admittance. After gaming decriminalization, the Pair-o-Dice ran "wide-open." Its operators, Italian immigrants Frank and Angelina Detra, were reputedly connected to Al Capone. Los Angeles's Guy McAfee bought the Pair-o-Dice in 1939 and aptly renamed it the 91 Club. Though the Pair-O-Dice/91 Club was, by all accounts, a pleasant gambling operation, it was not affiliated with a motel or hotel. The club's structure eventually became subsumed into the original Last Frontier (Wright, F., personal communication, December 28, 1999).

Las Vegas and American gaming entered a new era on April 3, 1941 when Thomas Hull opened the El Rancho Vegas just south of city limits (San Francisco Avenue, later re-christened Sahara Avenue) on Highway 91. Thomas Everett Hull had operated hotels in most of the major urban centers of California, including San Francisco, Fresno, Sacramento and Los Angeles before setting his sights on Las Vegas. As the owner of the El Rancho motel chain, Hull decided to open a franchise in Las Vegas after consulting a number of local business leaders (Castleman, 1997). It is inconceivable to believe that Hull had anything but the Los Angeles trade on his mind when he planned his casino on the highway to Los Angeles.

Later Strip boosters parlayed Tommy Hull's decision to build on the Los Angeles Highway into an almost Biblical parable of a stranded traveler suddenly receiving a lucid vision of profit. As a Las Vegas travel guide of the mid-1950s relates:

Other years saw other near ventures, but never did Las Vegas see a completed resort hotel until 1940 when hotel man Tom Hull and a friend were

Fig. 1. El Rancho Vegas in the 1940s. The unprepossessing main building doesn't seem to point towards the giantism and flash of today's Las Vegas Strip – but today's casino resorts are strikingly similar in philosophy to the El Rancho. [© University of Las Nevada-Las Vegas 2000]

(Detail - click the picture to view a larger image)

driving from Las Vegas down the now-paved Highway 91 towards Los Angeles. On the edge of city limits, Mr. Hull had a flat tire, and while his friend hitchhiked back into town for help, Mr. Hull stood on the highway and counted the cars. An hour of this and he became convinced that the mesquite and sage-stippled fright of a desert behind him was a mighty wholesome spot for a luxury hotel (Best & Hillyer, 1955).

This anecdote plays on one of the key points of the Las Vegas mystique: stumbling into riches, but belies Hull's deliberation; he had not ended up in Las Vegas by pure luck. Finally, had Hull not decided to get a jump on the Southern California trade by leapfrogging Fremont Street and building his casino on Highway 91, another enterprising casino impresario certainly would have.

Hull built his casino complex in a frontier/Spanish mission style, and its conception and execution owed a debt to the "Hollywood back-lot" school of design; the casino's structures were built primarily for impressive show rather than efficient function. The casino, in which patrons could gamble at craps, blackjack, roulette or slot machines and could enjoy an Old West ambience replete with archaic firearms and cowboy hats. The physical structure of the El Rancho set a pattern for Strip casinos until the high rise era, with a central structure housing the casino, restaurants

and theater, surrounded by motel wings. The motel had 65 bungalow-style rooms in a number of independent structures. The El Rancho was built along the lines of a suburban subdivision rather than a typical urban gaming hall. Each "cottage" was directly accessible by car via paved and lighted streets. Although the complex had public restaurants and recreation facilities, the presence of private lawns, porches and kitchens in the El Rancho's vacation cottages suggests the private space of the suburbs.

Fig. 2. El Rancho builder Thomas Hull (right) and three cowboy entertainers. This photo was taken in the 1950s at the El Rancho's first rival, the Last Frontier. [© University of Las Nevada-Las Vegas 2000]

(Detail - click the picture to view a larger image)

Fig. 3. A bird's eye view of the El Rancho Vegas in its first decade. The insular nature of the first trip casino resort is clear from this photograph, and the motel bungalows surrounding the main building recall a suburban subdivision. The then low-rise city of Las Vegas is scattered to the north. [© University of Las Nevada-Las Vegas 2000]

(Detail - click the picture to view a larger image)

The casino's casual western decor seems more a product of an undertaxed imagination than a deliberate marketing approach. Because Nevada gaming halls had catered to the "boots and jeans" crowd since the 19th century, Hull's El Rancho Vegas did as well. In retrospect, it is clear that Hull, the first real builder on the Strip, was crossing into a new frontier of casino design armed with increasingly dated ideas of what a casino should be. Still, Hull sensed that traditional western gaming halls had to be at least tweaked to pull in Southern Californians. Not content with giving his patrons recycled cowboy relics, Hull also imported showgirls from San Francisco and Hollywood to liven up the casinos (Stamos, 1979, April 1).

Hull's casino also featured a prescient focus on creating a uniformly tranquil vacation experience for his guests. The El Rancho's managers touted customer service as a premium attraction.

According to Guy Landis, an El Rancho employee, the casino pioneered the idea that "all of a guest's needs could be found on the premises" (Stamos, 1979, April 1). Among the services that the El Rancho featured were a travel agency, retail shops and nightclub-

style entertainment, as well as a steakhouse, swimming pool and spacious lawns (Castleman, 1997). Employees were instructed to make guests "feel both welcome and excited about visiting the El Rancho." This, rather than keeping an eagle eye on the bottom line, was their "most important task" (Stamos, 1979, April 1). The El Rancho was successful at keeping its patrons happy. Former El Rancho cocktail waitress Goldie Spicer described in an oral history taken over thirty years later the large numbers of patrons drawn from the nearby Basic Magnesium Plant, and wartime federal projects in the area, such as the airfield north of Las Vegas, kept the motel reasonably filled (Spicer, 1977).

Although Hull had a winning idea, he was not successful in his proprietorship of the casino; and the El Rancho persisted through several ownership changes in the 1940s. By 1947, it had passed into the hands of Beldon Katleman, a UCLA mathematics major and something of a wunderkind. He was 29 when he assumed control of the El Rancho, holding a bachelor's degree, which was a point of pride for civic boosters in an era when most casino operators had not finished high school. Paul Ralli, Las Vegas attorney and booster of the early 1950s, synthesized his praise of Katleman with his adulation for the atomic bomb: "[Katleman] typifies the Atomic Age: relentless urge, overflowing imagination, bubbling ideas" (Ralli, 1953). Having inherited a share in the El Rancho Vegas from an uncle, Katleman bought out the other owners and became the casino's sole proprietor of record.

Katleman oversaw a comprehensive renovation and expansion of the facility. He imported architect Tom Douglas from Los Angeles and expanded the complex from the 22-building/144-room complex he had inherited to 69 structures with 220 rooms (Stamos 1979, April 1). Katleman did more than add rooms; he substantively changed the flavor of the complex, starting the Strip tradition of constant, phoenix-like regeneration. The stylistic revision of the El Rancho transformed its look from cowboy kitsch to French provincial pastiche. The gourmet room, for example, had its name changed from the Round-up Room to the Opera House (Ralli, 1953).

If its theming and conception borrowed from the existing vocabulary of Nevada gaming, the El Rancho's self-contained, insular nature positioned it as the first suburban casino resort in the state. The casino was never promoted as having the best service in Las Vegas; it was merely assumed that guests would never even think about going to the city with their needs already met. The El Rancho marks the dawn of the suburban casino resort both because it was physically aloof from its surrounding cityscape and

because it catered to middle-class suburbanites on vacation rather than workaday city dwellers. In a quadrant of the nation where the automobile was the pre-eminent factor in residential and commercial development, and in an age when urban gambling would come under increasing fire, this was a logical and natural adaptation. Significantly, the renovations of the late 1940s hardened the boundary between the El Rancho and its surroundings by replacing the corral fence that had originally circumscribed the property with a solid wall. This, perhaps, was an unconscious reflection of the El Rancho's shift in identity from desert frontier outpost to suburban neighbor.

The integrated casino-resort complex that Hull pioneered was smart business. Ronald Coase in his seminal essay "The Nature of the Firm," hypothesized that the real reason behind the emergence of firms as business entities was their suppression of the price mechanism. A business that integrated many functions under a single directing hand and avoided paying the market price for them would gain a competitive advantage over those that did not (Coase, 1993). By combining several functions within his self-contained suburban resort, Hull lowered the costs for patrons, thus making the El Rancho and later Strip resorts a smarter buy for the tourist dollar.

Casino resorts, as they developed on the Strip, could afford to run their hotel, entertainment, and food and beverage departments at a loss. In a perfect world, everyone would be happy: casino operators would have a captive group of patrons, and casino patrons would get cheap meals, entertainment and accommodations, thus stretching their travel budget. Indeed, this is how the Strip has been promoted, officially and unofficially, throughout its history; although, the success of retail and other tourist adjuncts on the Strip has, since the early 1990s, challenged and ultimately weakened this former iron law of casino economics.

The Hotel Last Frontier, which opened on October 30, 1942, was like the El Rancho, a self-contained roadside gambling hall and motel. However, it refined and extended the use of Nevada's frontier past as a marketing tool. Its builder, R. E. Griffith, the proprietor of a chain of movie theaters in Texas and Oklahoma, was best described as a "good-natured and likeable Texan" (Scott, 1957). His nephew, architect Bill Moore, actually designed the complex and supervised its construction. After Griffith's death in 1943, Moore became the casino's chief operator, though he transferred ownership in 1951 to a group including Guy McAfee, Beldon Katleman and Jake Kozloff (Ralli, 1953; "Last Frontier," 1951).

The story of Griffith and Moore's initial involvement in Las Vegas is similar

Fig. 4. Friendly neighbors from the Old West styling on the ground of the Last Frontier in the early 1950s. [© University of Las Nevada-Las Vegas 2000]

(Detail - click the picture to view a larger image)

to Hull's in its reliance on happenstance. The two were planning a hotel/theater building in Deming, New Mexico. Having heard promising news about Las Vegas, they stopped off in the desert town and decided "the opportunities were fabulous." They immediately canceled the Deming project and began planning the Hotel Last Frontier to the south of the El Rancho on the opposite side of Highway 91 (Moore, 1981).

With no previous gaming experience, the hoteliers found themselves in dire need of seasoned casino employees and managers. Griffith and Moore hired away many of the El Rancho's employees, beginning a bidding war that increased the bargaining power of casino workers. A cocktail waitress who worked at both the El Rancho and Last Frontier described her employers and working conditions as unconditionally "wonderful" and asserted that competition between the two gaming halls drove up wages and created opportunities for employees at both casinos (Spicer, 1977).

The frontier of the hotel's name and essence was, of course, the Old West. The complex was "conceived to be as near western as we [Griffith and Moore] could make it," Moore related in his oral history:

> The lobby had extremely high ceilings with the fireplace running right up through the middle of it–actually two fireplaces in the lobby, in the form of an octagon. The ceilings were of hewn timbers–logs–rough-sawed boards antiqued in such a way as to look many years old. And the whole structure was laid out on that basis (Moore, 1981).

The casino's western decor also featured buffalo heads, saddles and other "genuine" pioneer fixtures throughout the complex. The sandstone patios and fireplaces were hewn by Ute Indians imported from New Mexico for both their skill and the "authentic" western flavor their work would have (Best & Hillyer, 1955). In an apparent nod to the Southwest's mission tradition, the main showroom was christened the Ramona Room. Other noted attractions included the Horn Room, whose walls showcased a

Fig. 5. Last Frontier architect and operator William J. Moore. Moore, together with his uncle Robert Griffith, founded the Hotel Last Frontier and brought the Last Frontier Village to Las Vegas. [© University of Las Nevada-Las Vegas 2000]

number of animal horns, and the Gay Nineties Bar, a fin-de-siècle saloon (Stamos, 1979, April 8).

The Gay Nineties Bar was in fact much of the Arizona Club of Block 16, Las Vegas's pre-war red-light district. Moore simply bought up the bar and its leaded-glass front entrance and put it into the hotel as the Gay Nineties Bar. Though largely faithful to the original design, Moore added a "western" flourish:

…we did add some saddle bar stools made out of leather in the form of a western saddle. Naturally, we had to make it comfortable. We didn't use the complete saddle design, but looking at the rear of the bar stool was like looking at the rear of a saddle. So in some cases there were stools big enough for two people because you would actually be—what looked like—seated on the side of the saddle (Moore, 1981).

No comment could reveal more about the theming of the Last Frontier. As "the Old West in Modern Splendor," it gave patrons the trappings of the frontier west but the comfort expected of a resort hotel. Where the real western town of Las Vegas was not "west" enough, Moore embellished without sacrificing his guests' comfort. This elevation of ambience over reality was to become a touchstone of casino resorts along the Strip.

The most outstanding feature of the casino, however, was the Last Frontier Village. Brought to life by 1950, it presaged both Disneyland and later elaborately themed casino resorts in its unabashed exploitation of a themed environment. This complete re-creation of a "genuine" western village boasted a variety of "Old West" and Chinese artifacts. Nevada gambler and casino owner Robert F. Cauldhill, better known by his colorful nickname Doby Doc, originated the village with his collection of memorabilia. In the early part of the 20th century, Cauldhill began his career cooking on a chuck wagon in Nevada cattle territory. After purchasing a joss house from the "Chinese Syndicate" of Elko, Nevada, Cauldhill discovered his passion: assembling a massive collection of relics from Nevada's frontier past (Ralli, 1953).

Fig. 6. The entrance to the Last Frontier Village. This village pre-dated Disneyland as a consumer-based themed fantasy town. [© University of Las Nevada-Las Vegas 2000]

In 1947, Griffith and Moore convinced Cauldhill to open his heretofore private collection to public view and designed the Last Frontier Village around it. The village was designed to display artifacts so that "the public would be allowed to see it and use it and actually were not charged for viewing it." But Moore did not only want to preserve the past; he admitted that he wanted to use it as "an advertising method in order to induce people to come to the hotel and stay there—patronize the hotel, patronize the village" (Moore, 1981).

The Last Frontier Village included a mix of museum pieces with working "authentic" western attractions and retail establishments. Included within in were three "complete railroad outfits with engine, tracks and the usual accessories." The village featured a drug store, general store, post office, schoolhouse and jail, as well as the "original printing plant of the venerable Reese River Reveille, Nevada's oldest newspaper" (Ralli, 1953).

Moore and his compatriots in the Last Frontier transcended dry historic preservation. The Golden Slipper Saloon and Gambling Hall, which opened in 1951 within the Village, allowed guests to wager at various games including an antique Wheel of Fortune, reportedly used in 19th century mining camps. It was considered a "genuine" reconstruction of an Old West watering hole. A group of dancers called the Flora-Dora girls, outfitted in period costumes, performed nightly in the Old Bar ("Old West," 1951). The Last Frontier Village was to provide guests with a total entertainment experience centered upon, of course, gambling. In addition, patrons could relive the Old West through purchases at retail establishments like a rock shop and an art gallery that featured paintings of western subjects: landscapes, mining towns, horses and cowboys.

A Texaco gas station on the grounds of the Village crystallized Moore's use of history to market the gaming experience. The obvious anachronism of a gas station in the Old West was assuaged by the use of "period replica" design. In other words, the gas station was a reproduction of what an Old West gas station would have looked like had the internal combustion engine been in use a generation earlier —an interesting commentary on the bottom-line oriented historicism of the Last Frontier Village. Within this gas

station, faux western design was neatly merged with customer service and astute marketing. William Moore describes the gas station's genesis:

> It was designed by [Walter] Zick and [Harris] Sharp, Las Vegas architects. Originally, because Texaco [had] been using a fire chief—old, you might say, western-type advertising on their stations and promotion—we felt that it was a good tie-in with the old fire engine and tied in with Texaco's advertising… Part of the idea was to put showers, restrooms, and so forth that would be inducive [sic] to the people cleaning up after a drive across the desert. The restrooms were rather elaborate—quite a number of stools and lavatories—various types of equipment that we could use in promotion, where the people would have the service that could be advertised on the road (Moore, 1981).

By Moore's admission, the gas station was a tourist trap, as was the village that surrounded it.

The pithy phrase "The Old West in Modern Splendor" neatly sums up the marketing strategies of the earliest western-themed casino resorts. They wanted their patrons to see the Old West, but not necessarily smell it, so to speak. The operators of these casinos envisioned visitors "roughing it" in the ambience of the Old West while enjoying all of the "modern" amenities of the Atomic Age. There is deep historical irony in casinos like the Last Frontier simultaneously evoking the Old West frontier and offering their patrons a complete travel experience in air-conditioned comfort. A travel guide of the period captures the irony implicit in the dualistic promotion of Strip casinos:

> Tourists enjoy the Chuck Wagon suppers, served from ten in the evening till seven the next morning – price, $1.50 – and breakfast is served twenty-four hours a day. Nowhere in the world is there anything quite like it – this informal magnificence at multi-million dollar hotels at little more than motel rates; and you can take your choice of nearly a dozen of the nation's top-flight shows for the price of a drink. Of course, the casinos carry the load (Scott, 1957).

This is a unique construction of the Wild West: promiscuously free-flowing food, lodging, and quality entertainment, with nary a frontier hardship in sight. It captures, though, the freewheeling but comfortable ambience that casino operators successfully engineered on the Strip.

The constant re-creation of the Strip has left few traces of the first two casinos. The El Rancho's central structure burned to the ground in a suspicious conflagration in 1960; after languishing as a non-casino motel and eventually a storage facility —it was razed entirely and is currently a vacant lot across the Strip from the Sahara. In 1955, the Last Frontier was replaced by the space-age New Frontier, which in turn was demolished and replaced by the adjective-less Frontier in 1967.

This Frontier, too, may soon pass; its current ownership has floated the possibility of shuttering and imploding the Frontier and replacing it with a San Francisco themed resort. Given the current trend towards redevelopment of Strip casino hotels into hyper-themed megaresorts (and Steve Wynn's plans for the extravagant rebuilding of another fellow north-Strip landmark the Desert Inn), the closing of the "new" Frontier's is likely to happen sooner rather than later.

Even though these first casinos' physical presence proved ephemeral, they cast long shadows in the areas of casino design and promotion. Almost all casino gaming in North America takes place in self-contained casino resorts, and many of these resorts, particularly in crowded, competitive markets like Las Vegas and Atlantic City, use theming to attract customers and stimulate play. Although the El Rancho and Hotel Last Frontier have faded into obscurity, the basic paradigms they advanced have never been questioned. Patrons continue to negotiate the ambient frontiers of the casino as they choose from a buffet of themed, self-contained gaming destinations. The notion of casino operators as frontiersmen (and women) breaking revolutionary ground has been retold in each generation of the Strip. But, the contributions of the earliest frontier breakers cannot be underestimated. The El Rancho began the evolution of the casino as a self-contained suburban resort, while the Last Frontier's use of theming to promote gaming tourism would eventually become a Strip staple. Even as new resorts on the Strip outdo each other in opulence and casinos proliferate across the United States, the lessons to be learned from the "first frontiers" of the early Strip, like the idea of the "new frontier" itself, can be applied anew.

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