

Observation of Casino Patrons

The objective of this study is to evaluate the behavior of gamblers in a casino.

Observation of subjects as they leave their bus, and participate in gaming will be conducted.

Due to the increasing number of casinos in the United States outside Las Vegas and Atlantic City more retirees are allocating their free time to gambling. Casino gambling is a new form of excitement and entertainment for a large number of senior citizens (McNeilly & Burke, 2002). For some retirees, however, casino gambling can become uncontrolled, challenging or an addiction. This is because older people are susceptible to despair due to aging and passing of friends (McNeilly & Burke, 2002). Disposable income and fewer parental responsibilities also contribute to the affliction (McNeilly & Burke, 2002).

The significance of this research is reflected in the work of Grant, Giacopassi, & Nichols. In their study entitled *Gambling among older adults; A comparative analysis* they state:

Though the results suggest that casino gambling is not a major threat to the elderly it is noted that more extensive research needs to be done to assess the individual and social costs and benefits, if any, associated with large numbers of the elderly regularly participating in gambling as a social activity (Grant, Giacopassi, & Nichols 2003).

Additional research by Zaranek and Chapleski suggests further examination of how casino activities relate to mental health and other leisure activities thereby justifying this study (Zaranek, & Chapleski, 2005).

Observations

The researcher initially placed himself in the lobby as senior citizens exited their bus. Different forms of behavior were detected. Thirty percent of subjects went directly to the restroom. This group of people did not interact with others, were focused on the direction in which they walked, had a quick pace, and they did not look around as they travelled. Twenty eight percent immediately went to the all-day buffet. As they travelled they interacted at a higher level than the others engaging in limited conversation that did not last more than thirty seconds. They were passed by the restroom group because they walked at a more causal pace and paused as they examined the Starbucks pastries. Fifteen percent of the seniors exiting the bus went directly to the gaming room. Their pace was moderate and deliberate and they did not engage in any conversation. The remaining senior citizens mingled in the lobby. This group looked around at the scenery, engaged in conversation that lasted over one minute, and wandered with no definite direction. Many were asking questions of each other and read signs.

The next observation location was the gaming room. At the slot machines gamblers were either alone or in groups. Only one group greater than two people was observed. This assemblage of four were all seated at the slot machines, not gambling and were all smoking. One couple was young while the other was of senior citizen age. The observer needed to move away in order to continue breathing. The partner clusters appeared to be separated into two sub-groups; one gambling with one observing, and the other with both gambling. Further observation showed that when only one member of the cluster was gambling the other was sitting close and watching the action closely. When the machine would begin to ring, buzz and flash the partners would establish eye contact and provide pleasant looks to each other. The two partner cluster gamblers, which will now be referred to as 'deuce's wild' by the researcher, did

not sit together. Also, they did not acknowledge each other or look in each other's direction when the machine started ringing, buzzing and flashing. Individual slot machine players had no contact or interaction with others. Here, two groups were observed. There were gamblers that stayed at the same machine and ones that moved frequently. The cluster that stayed at one machine tended to have assistive mobile devices such as canes, strollers, or carts. The other cluster group that the researcher will refer to as "high rollers", tended to move great distances when changing machine. On only one occasion was a high roller observed moving to the machine directly in contact with the one they had been putting money into.

The table games had younger participants. There was greater interaction between players at these games. The gamblers would only acknowledge other players at their own table and did not direct their attention to any other people. There was more kinetic activity at the tables. For example in one location one member of the group would pick up a pair of cubes with a variety of dots on the sides and throw them across the table. This would cause the others to become filled with excitement or experience grief. The excited individuals would cheer and raise their arms, while the grief stricken ones would lower their head, curse and consume alcohol. One person standing behind the table would provide additional tokens to the enthusiastic people while taking them away from the anguished ones. This activity would repeat itself throughout the research period. At another table an individual would spin a sphere around a circle of numbers which was also moving but in the opposite direction. Gamblers would place tokens on the table that had a matrix of numbers painted on the green felt. As the ball would lose its fight against gravity and fall into one of the number slots on the table players would become animated or dejected. The individual that first placed the ball in motion would provide tokens to the energetic ones and retrieve the tokens from the despondent ones. This activity would repeat itself throughout the

research period. Another location had people seated at a table. One individual stood behind the table and began dispensing cards face up to the seated folks that had placed tokens in circles painted on the green felt. He then provided cards to himself, the first face down, the second face up. The individual behind table would then attempt to make eye contact with each seated party. A hand motion would then be relayed to the card dispenser. At times additional cards would be provided other times not. The face down card would then be revealed to the group resulting with varying reactions. Additional tokens would be provided to individuals that smiled and clapped their hands while tokens would be taken away from those that frowned and dropped their head down.

Analysis

Analysis will begin with reflections on the observations of the senior citizens that exited the bus and traveled directly to the restroom without interacting with anyone. This could have been caused by full bladder stress they were experiencing. This is supported by a study of long distance coach drivers conducted by Coronel Institute for Occupational and Environmental Health at The University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands (Sluiter, J., van der Beek, A., & Frings-Dresen, M. 1998). They measured the urinary catecholamines and cortisol. The results indicated that drivers had higher levels of urinary excretion of adrenaline (Sluiter, J., van der Beek, A., & Frings-Dresen, M. 1998). The gamblers were also on a coach so they were experiencing the same bladder pressure as the drivers in the study causing their increased pace and lack of interaction. The brief conversations of the group traveling directly to the all-day buffet was caused by hunger. A study by Olson stated that hunger causes lack of focus (Olson, 1999). Absence of communication observed by those moving directly to the gaming room was caused by gambling addiction. McNeilly and Burke's study showed lack of communication in

people when afflicted with gambling dependence (McNeilly, & Burke 2002). The researcher can find no rationale for the last group. It is not understood why anyone would travel in a bus for hours just to wonder the lobby of a casino.

There was little group interaction at the slot machines. The group of four observed appeared to be there only to smoke cigarettes. They were not gambling and were constantly lighting up. This activity of visiting gaming houses for the sole purpose of consuming nicotine is supported by Pakko's study that correlated casino revenue and smoking (Pakko, 2008). The behavior of the single gambler couple is difficult to analyze because it is hard to understand why one person would watch another push buttons on a slot machine for hours. It is believed that the dual gamblers previously referred to as wild deuce's sat away from each other because they were losing money. A study in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* linked financial problems to unhappy marriages (Conger et al, 1990).

Analysis of the gaming tables indicates that there is value placed on the tokens by the people in front of the tables. Positive animated behavior is rewarded with these tokens. The individuals behind the tables seem to have some type of leadership position because they dispense the tokens and were all wearing the same orange and green shirts which did not have pleasing aesthetic qualities.

References

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