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Confronting the Windigo in Indigenous Casinos: Theory & Practice

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Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest

- Responsible Gambling Council of Ontario and Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (2019)
- Gambling and Problem Gambling in Canada: A National Study, AGRI (2018-2022)
- City of Greater Sudbury Gambling Harm Reduction Adhoc Committee (2018-2019)



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“For us... ..our people
were given one thing
and that was to be
kind and to have a
gentle heart.”

Peter O’Chiese

“You can only become
Anishinaabe when you
stop being Indian.”

James Dumont

Presentation Overview

- Objective:
 - **Theorizing Indigenous Casino Gambling: Indigenous-Centred**
- Background:
 - Windigo, Indigenous culture, wellbeing & casinos
- Modern-day Windigo: Casinos
 - Animate, transformation, consumption, individual-community
- Implications:
 - Public health, culturally-relevant harm reduction, policy framework



Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Windigo-Witiko

- Giant cannibal of northern forests (e.g. Brightman 1988, Carlson 2009)
 - Individual transformation
 - Spirit being (dream)
 - Community psyche (fear)
 - Psychosis? Mental illness?
 - Critique: limited evidence
 - Teaching: sharing
- Modern-day windigo? (Borrows 2008, Johnston 1995, Vizenor 1990, Methot 2019),
 - Colonialism (assimilative policies)
 - Corporations (natural resource extraction)
 - Colonial violence (lateral, physical, lethal)
 - Casinos (transformed gambling)



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Indigenous Gambling in Canada

-Social/cultural: community investments, e.g. education, language, heritage, recreation

-Economic: employment, provincial revenue agreements for First Nations, capital


-Politics: regulation, government (Provincial), self-determination, First Nations-FN-municipal, equity-inequity-continuum, internal variation

-Health: addiction, improved individual, family, community wellness

Source: Manitowabi (in press; cf. Belanger & Manitowabi in progress)

Discussion: Relevance?

- Role of culture in gambling (Raylu & Oei 2004)
- Social (-cultural) practice of gambling: beyond biomedical framework (Gordon & Reith 2019)
- Indigenous casinos occur within colonial setting
- Casino transformation: consume (person, community, land), avoid or seek equilibrium
- Indigenous-centred framework: casinos transformative gambling (ritualized play to Indigenous-state relationship)



In Conclusion: Implications

- Indigenous theoretical gambling framework
- Public health: culturally-relevant harm reduction & treatment (cf. Duran 2016)
- First Nations/Indigenous policy development
- Decolonizing gambling studies: recognize inherent Indigenous theory in gambling practice, & recognition of temporal-spatial holistic conceptions of harm & harm reduction

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