

“Shots from the Pulpit:” An Ethnographic Content Analysis of United States Anti-Gambling Social Movement Documents

ABSTRACT

The history of anti-gambling impulses is perhaps as old as the gambling impulse itself, but academic research has thus far neglected the topic of anti-gambling social movements. Using social movement literature as a theoretical guide and ethnographic content analysis as a methodological tool, this paper examines anti-gambling documents produced in the United States over nearly two hundred years. During this period, three distinct periods emerge: first, an early (1816-1915) period framed the gambling act on strict religious grounds as an individual sin. This religious framing was then challenged by the rise of more rational and scientifically-based medical discourses on problem gambling (1915-1980). From 1980 through the present, gambling opponents have modified (and in some cases *reversed*) their arguments – and now incorporate both moral and scientific rhetoric into their claims. Drawing from sociological research and theory, we identify a process of “frame inversion” in which problem gamblers were once cast as villains to be scorned, but now are characterized as sympathetic victims of the gaming industry. In this first academic study of anti-gambling social movement rhetoric, we develop an illustrative example of how social movements’ rhetorical tactics can change over time, and of the kinds of opponents the global gaming industry has faced – and might still face in the future.

Keywords: Anti-gambling social movements, problem gambling, gambling history, ethnographic content analysis

Introduction

Controversies over gambling in the United States predate the formation of the nation itself. From at least the time that lotteries were legalized in the colonies in 1750, gambling has provided both an enticing pastime and an enduring source of debate (Rosecrance, 1988). Today, the scope of legalized gambling in the country is undeniably massive; it is probably safe to say that never before in American history have more people had more and diverse access to ways to wager their money.

Despite (and occasionally because of) this size, the American gaming industry is often opposed by any number of different social movement organizations. Throughout the history of these debates on gambling in America, anti-gambling groups have emerged to argue against gambling behaviors and/or gaming industries. These groups usually emerge from religious institutions, and they have played a major role in shaping public perceptions of the nation’s gaming industry (as well as those consumers who patronize it).

Throughout this history, a strikingly consistent character in anti-gambling narratives is the individual who gambles “too much.” Yet, *how* this individual (and the larger group of problematic gamblers) is invoked and characterized changes dramatically. Early anti-gambling moralists focused on the individual failings of gamblers, frequently casting them as villainous, and their actions as proof of their individual sin or moral weakness. This framing of the “gambling problem” as an individual problem led to ameliorative religious solutions at the individual level to repair the sinner’s moral deficiency. Today,

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the casting of heroes and villains has inverted. Instead of casting those who gamble too much as sinful villains, anti-gambling rhetoricians now offer a more sympathetic view that defines individual gamblers as ailing victims of a predatory gaming industry – an industry that exploits their medically-defined gambling addiction. Rather than individual spiritual reformation as the prime remedy, the change that anti-gambling advocates now emphasize is *social engineering* to reduce gambling opportunities by abolishing (or at least containing) the gaming industry.

To explain these historical shifts, we draw upon conceptual tools from social movement framing theory to explain the historical shifts in anti-gambling claims (Benford and Snow 2000; Whooley 2004; Loseke 1999; Benford 1997). Specifically, we explain how anti-gambling claims-makers have responded to broad shifts in science, culture, and politics surrounding gambling. Our sociological focus on the role of anti-gambling claims-making in the historical expansion of gambling is a perspective that has long been neglected in the research literature (Bernhard, 2007).

Literature Review: Framing, Claims-making, and Temporal Change

The sociological literature on social movements often invokes “social constructionist” perspectives to help illuminate historical developments. Social constructionists have an interest in the *rhetoric* claimants use to diagnose conditions as problems, to define correctives, and to motivate people to act for change (Benford and Snow 2000; Holstein and Miller 1993; Miller and Holstein 1991). From this perspective, the definition of a societal problem is explainable as a social accomplishment, and requires explanations that focus on social dynamics (Benford and Snow 2000; Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 1987; Blumer 1971). Social constructionists provide these explanations by focusing on claims-making discourses that highlight the way that groups tell stories about a social problem to convince others that it merits their concern and action (Benford and Snow 2000; Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993). Understanding how an issue is “framed” -- the manner in which stories are told, the characters are portrayed, and the plot lines are developed -- is crucial for understanding how people understand and act on that issue (Goffman 1974; Benford and Snow 2000).

Social movement leaders frame issues strategically to define problems and to mobilize people to action. Research in this area highlights how claimants use diagnostic (defining), prognostic (predicting), and motivational (inspiring) arguments in their efforts to mobilize audiences (Snow and Benford 1988; Benford 1993a, 1993b; Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994). To achieve success, these arguments must carry some empirical credibility and cultural resonance with the audiences that claims-makers are hoping to inspire (Benford and Snow 2000). Crucially, however, since culture is never static, what confers credibility and resonance can change over time, and hence, so too must narratives change right alongside them. This makes framing the causes, consequences, and cures of social problems a complicated and ever-changing process as claims-makers attend to cultural shifts that erode the salience of old framings and prompt new interpretations.

Perhaps due to these complications, few academic studies deal with changes in framing over time (Benford 1997; Loseke 2000). In this literature, research frequently suffers from the “static tendencies” of studies that are “either synchronic or encompass a relatively brief slice of time” (Benford 1997: 415, 417; for examples see Whooley 2003; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; for exceptions see, Cormier and Tindall 2005; White 1999; Marullo et al., 1996; Mooney and Hunt 1996; Ellingson 1995).

In this paper, we address this literature gap (in both the social movements and the gambling literature) by using a comparative ethnographic content analysis methodology to analyze the effects of changing rhetoric of anti-gambling forces in the United States from the early 1800s to the present. We explain how gambling opponents have amplified, transformed and inverted aspects of their diagnoses and prognoses of the “gambling problem” in their effort to encourage broad societal resistance to gambling and the gaming industries.

Methodology

This project relies upon ethnographic content analysis methodologies (Ahuvia 2001; Altheide 1996; 2002). Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) is a qualitative content analysis technique used to locate, identify, and thematically analyze documents (Altheide 1987; Altheide 1996). In recent literature, ECA has been used to examine documents as diverse as media portrayals of Hurricane Katrina (Stock, 2007) and the depiction of Islam on religious television programs in the U.S. (Gormly, 2004). It even has been deployed in hospitality-oriented research on wedding planning books (Besel, Zimmerman, Fruhauf, Pepin, and Banning, 2009).

In essence, ECA takes the research tools of ethnographers and applies them to texts (rather than conventional "spaces"), and attempts to provide deep contextual understanding of textual meanings to develop and verify theoretical relationships. In

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contrast to traditional approaches to content analysis, ECA conceptualizes document analysis as fieldwork, allows concepts to emerge inductively during analysis (rather than relying upon previously established categories to guide the research process in a deductive fashion), and insists upon a reflexive approach whereby each textual interpretation is constantly compared against other textual interpretations, resulting in an iterative process inspired by the tenets of Grounded Theory (Altheide 1987).

Our research project is particularly well suited for ECA, as our primary sources are deeply embedded in oral and written traditions, and also embedded in important social institutions and time periods. Our primary sources for this analysis are sermons, speeches, books, pamphlets, and web sites produced by anti-gambling advocates. In each period, we coded for diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational themes that writers have used to frame gambling as a social problem. Materials were then enumerated, charted, and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The variety of documents that we reviewed reflects the common modes of communication during the historical periods we cover in our analysis. For the period from 1816 to 1915, we reviewed two major U.S. library collections on gambling and early America: one housed at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections Library's gambling collection, and one at the Harvard University Divinity School Library collection. In these collections, we analyzed all of the available primary documents published during this time frame. Some are in the form of small pamphlets containing one or two sermons, while others are longer book-like compilations presenting several chapters of sermons and other writing on the gambling problem.¹ Although these sermons were delivered to local parishioners, they were also intended to reach much broader regional and national audiences through widely distributed publications. This dual-audience approach is often expressed in the opening pages of the texts. For instance, Charles Savidge (1888), in his appropriately-titled work *Shots from the Pulpit*, opens with this preface:

During the past few months I have chosen living topics for my evening sermons. Large congregations have been patient enough to listen. Our city papers have published notes of these talks. I have proof that these printed reports have been the means of the conversion of some previous souls. Friends have advised me to bind these sketches together in this little book. I do so, believing in the marvelous power of truth. May these pages, written in the hurry of a busy life, be blessed to many hearts (preface, no page listed).

1. A more detailed analysis of the documents is available in Bernhard, Bo J. 2002. *From Sin to Sickness: A Sociological History of Problem Gamblers*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Nevada, Las Vegas. While the process of selection of excerpted texts for use in a condensed article is always necessarily subjective, we are confident that they are representative of the texts that are not excerpted here. We also recognize that the U.S. and England represented distinct cultures during this period, but we believe that the parallels and applicability are profound and direct. This assumption is perhaps best captured by the title of Posnett's (1863) work: *Shall Gambling Slay Us? An Appeal to the English and American People*.

While many of these early texts were locally oriented, they clearly expressed that gambling was a sizable problem that reached far beyond their neighborhoods into the rest of the United States. As the Methodist minister and social activist Hugh Price emphasized, gambling was considered "...one of the greatest and most ominous of our national curses" (1889:257), and he articulated a desire to reach a national audience in explaining the scope of this curse. It is difficult for us to imagine the power of these messages and messengers today, but in an era that long pre-dated mass communication, and in which religious leaders were enormously influential, these texts became widely read as scathing exposes of the gambling sin.

Contemporary anti-gambling documents are also self-published by prominent faith-based anti-gambling groups in the U.S. However, unlike the early period texts, which consist primarily of tattered sermons and books, these current narratives can be found on internet sites and in pamphlets of the most prominent U.S. anti-gambling organizations: Focus on the Family (FF), the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling/Stop Predatory Gambling (NCALG/SPG), and other religiously-inspired organizations. These groups are the modern day descendants of the early Christian moralists.

The narratives presented on FF, NCALG/SPG, and other religious websites (as well as the pamphlets produced by these organizations) range from mission statements to opinion pieces authored by members of the organization to purchasable books, articles, and how-to texts designed to combat gambling. For this paper, we gathered and reviewed these self-published, hard-copy texts from FF, NCALG, United Methodist Church, and the Lutheran Church, and then coded for common themes expressed across the sources.

Our focus on self-produced literature from moral authorities in both eras provides consistency in our historical comparison. Both the early and the current texts immediately target local "believers" (congregations), but aspire to broader acceptance (through the printing press and then later, the world wide web). Of course, the texts from these two eras are not perfectly parallel. The early narratives are mostly verbatim transcripts or reworked versions of sermons, hence capturing elements of both oral and written traditions. The contemporary texts are typically produced first in written form and are styled for a size and diversity of audiences unimaginable to early period writers.

Early Anti-Gambling Rhetoric: "Individual Sin" (1816-1915)

"Let the gambler know that he is watched, and marked; and that, as a gambler, he is loathed... Let the voice of united, incensed remonstrance be *heard* – heard 'till the ears of the guilty tingle"

-- Samuel Hopkins, in a sermon entitled *The Evils of Gambling*, delivered the morning of April 19, 1835, at the First Congregational Church in Montpelier, Vermont (1835:17-18)

Early American morality was a distinctly Christian morality (Loseke 1999: 50), and most aspects of the secular world were understood in terms of spiritual ideals. Puritan values drove the definition of societal problems, using sermons and religious publications to decry the multitudinous sins of those who tempted God's wrath (Bercovitch 1978). The swirl of moralism following the evangelical fervor of the Second Great Awakening emphasized virtues of "iron self-control" over libidinous sinful desires (Watts 1986: 142). Against this backdrop, gambling was a natural target. The activity was often attacked with rhetoric of strict moral condemnation, but it also thrived as a relatively common (albeit underground) activity. Frequently prohibited by the likes of George Washington, William Penn, and many others, the gambling act was nevertheless practiced in every colony (Schwartz, 2006). Under the specter of Puritan morality, anti-gambling rhetoric often focused upon the activity's wastefulness, its inevitable association with greed, or its

"something for nothing" character, which put it directly at odds with Puritan values of the day (Lears, 2003).²

Preachers, pastors, and ministers dominated this era's anti-gambling claims-making. The standards for moral judgment were ostensibly outlined in the Bible, but the interpretations were left to these mediators of morality (Loseke 2000). Early American preachers frequently opened sermons on gambling with a focus on individual gamblers, using a diagnostic tone that established their authority on gambling as paramount. In opening his sermon in 1887, P.E. Holp asked (and answered) rhetorically: "Who are the men now given so fiercely to this mania in our city? Listen, I will tell you" (105). The interpretations that followed in these sermons focused on the sins of individual gamblers and the destruction that they wrought.

Loseke (2000) explains that defining social problems often involves the telling of "formula narratives"—stories that follow predictable plot lines and invoke characters familiar to people based on popular moral conceptions of the world (Loseke 2000). These narratives frame problems so that they are perceived as emotionally powerful moral issues consistent with widely shared understandings and values within a culture (Dunn 2004; Benford and Snow 2000).

In this context, the conventional storyline of early anti-gambling narratives relied on a religious frame that drew heavily upon familiar values of the day. Specifically, anti-gambling voices diagnosed individuals who gambled (and especially those who gambled intensively) as egregiously sinful. To these early preachers, these gambling actions constituted "a sin of the deepest dye – one that strikes at the root of every good and virtuous feeling known to our nature" (Green 1847:12). Hugh Price Hughes exclaimed to would-be moral citizens "it is impossible to exaggerate the evils of gambling" (1889:260) – a sentiment with which Major Churchill clearly agreed in his staunch anti-gambling pamphlet where he argued unequivocally that "the effects of gambling are all evil, unmitigated by any redeeming qualities" (1894:22).

These moralists supported their interpretations by portraying gambling as an infringement of sacred Christian principles – in some cases, an egregiously evil one. For instance, Johnathan Green (1847:11) memorably labeled gambling the "mighty evil, which is at once the parent of innumerable other vices of the most disgraceful character!" A decade later, Samuel Martin (1856:23) explained that "gambling is a transgression of divine law. It denies God utterly. It even sets up a false God." Likewise, W.J. Spriggs-Smith (1890:12, 14-15) characterized gambling as the root of all other vices as it "consumes time, and produces sin, immorality, and crime. [It is] unchivalrous and unChristian...the devil is the only father of it." At century's end, George Alexander argued that "the gambling spirit is the direct opposite of the Christian spirit... [it is] a manifestation of that Satanic taint" (1899:78).

Moralists combined these condemnations of gambling with more specific invectives on the Christian transgressions that it spurs. A familiar refrain is the notion that gambling violates the Protestant work ethic (Weber 1958 [1920]). George Frayn (1890:11, 12) captures the core of these arguments in this passage of his pamphlet *Gambling: A Discourse*:

The tendencies in the direction of abandoning honest work are serious enough if they are rightly viewed; but while keeping those before us, we must not forget that every single gambling transaction, by whomsoever made, has in it all the elements of ill for which we are contending. No matter how small the transaction may be, it is a diversion of capital from those channels of productiveness in which it should, in its measure, benefit not the individual merely, but the whole community. But the capital employed in gambling never adds a single grain to the aggregate of the world's wealth, and the individual who gains does so at

2. While other authors have assessed other targets of anti-gambling discourse (such as organized crime, cheating gamblers, and otherwise corrupt proprietors, see, e.g., Schwartz, 2006) we limit our focus to the individual who gambles excessively – the individual defined today as a "problem" gambler.

the injury of another...How different is [gambling] from the true and honest operations of industry!

In this early period, narratives are filled with individual life stories to strike fear in the minds of their audience by showing how gamblers are irrevocably “reduced from opulence, to poverty and wretchedness,” as noted and widely read moralist Jacob Rush (brother of the pioneering physician and signer of the Declaration of Independence Dr. Benjamin Rush) said in 1807 (71). Later, Mason L. Weems, in an 1816 treatise with the fear-inducing title *God’s Revenge against Gambling, Exemplified in the Miserable Lives and Untimely Deaths of a Number of Persons of Both Sexes, Who Had Sacrificed their Health, Wealth, and Honor, at Gaming Tables* (3rd edition) concludes that for the vast number of gamblers, “the Devil found them rich; he left them beggars.”³

The narratives also link gambling behaviors to criminal acts. Thomas Lewis Haines and L.W. Yaggy (1878:273) claimed that “every species of offense, on the black catalogues of crime, may be traced to the gambling table, as the entering wedge to its perpetration.” Or, as Martin put it, gambling “diverts men from lawful occupations, creates the strongest temptations to theft, forgery, and sometimes to murder” (1856: 24). Martin later connects this to a final theme typical in early American anti-gambling narratives, namely the effects on families. Specifically, gambling is scorned because the gambler’s tendency is to forsake the family in the pursuit of winnings. Wagering “renders children a sorrow and burden to their parents [and] converts loving husbands into heartless brutes. [It is] a practice to which many a broken-hearted relative can point, saying, that ruined my son, my brother, my husband” (1856: 24).

Diagnosing gambling as a sin against God, against family, and against society led to a prognosis of a future in hell (in this world and in the next) for those who gambled: “When I talk to you about card-playing in your home I am trying to pound through your head that every pack of cards is but another stepping-stone to hell” (Ellis, 1908:438). Meanwhile, Haines and Yaggy tell their audience that “(t)he gamester forfeits the happiness of this life and endures the penalties of sin in both worlds” (1878:275). E. H. concludes his “Discourse on the Evils of Gambling” with this tirade: “O, truly is the gaming-house denominated a ‘hell’ ... O, draw the veil, it *is indeed a hell!*” (1847:307-308). In his influential (and still in print) work *The Abominations of Modern Society*, Thomas DeWitt Talmage concluded a lengthy diatribe with a particularly damning final prognostication on the gambler’s fate:

To the gambler’s death-bed there comes no hope. He will probably die alone. His former associates come not nigh his dwelling. When the hour comes, his miserable soul will go out of a miserable life into a miserable eternity. As his poor remains pass the house where he was ruined, old companions may look out a moment and say – ‘There goes the old carcass – dead at last,’ but they will not get up from the table. Let him down now into his grave. Plant no tree to cast its shade there, for the long, deep, eternal gloom that settles there is shadow enough. Plant no ‘forget-me-nots’ or eglantines around the spot, for flowers were not made to grow on such a blasted heath. Visit it not in sunshine, for that would be mockery, but in the dismal night, when no stars are out, and the spirits of darkness come down horsed on the win, *then* visit the grave of the gambler! (1872:184-185).

3. Weems was no small-time author whose words never reached an audience. In fact, he was one of the most widely-read writers of his day, and became famous for penning the popular biography of George Washington that started the “cherry tree” myth.

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Early anti-gambling moralists combined these diagnoses and prognoses with the motivational "prescription" to scorn and stigmatize gamblers. In essence, they implored their audiences to not only resist the temptation of gambling but to *act against* those who pursued it. For instance, Weems (1816: 20) advocated "public scorn, pointing [the gambler] curses as he walks along the street while his former friends, ashamed, turn their backs; and, virtuous parents tremble to see him in the company of their sons." Desecrating the gambler's reputation created double leverage for steering the sinner straight—the personal guilt of sin amplified by social disgrace from his peers. In the sermon quoted at the opening of this section, Samuel Hopkins effectively prescribes a social reception by telling his audience how to "treat" this population:

When he is beset by popular indignation, he has a foe without and a foe within. Let the gambler suffer this persecution. Lay upon him the biting lash of public odium. Let him be conscious that—if he continue what he is – he must bear the superadded curse of unrestrained abhorrence; that whatever else may be tolerated, there can be no tolerance and no courtesy for a vice so foul as his (Hopkins 1835:15).

Frequently, anti-gambling moralists extended their objectives to the total elimination of this sin in their communities. Breeden's call is typical:

When once the American people realize the enormity of this sin, they will drive it from the land with the besom of destruction. In the mean time it is the imperative duty of the press, pulpit, and platform, to agitate. May the agitation go on and increase in volume and velocity until the reign of devils is summarily cut short – until this cloud, one of the darkest that ever dropped over the earth's fair face, is lifted and dispersed (1899:457).

In an interesting linkage to contemporary rhetoric, early anti-gambling speakers also used symbolic references to sickness (now prominent in today's anti-gambling messages). For instance, as early as 1803, Jacob Rush (72) called the gambler's "mind...deeply contaminated," while near the end of the century, Spriggs-Smith (1890:11-12) described it as "consum[ing] mind and thought...produc[ing] imbecility, idiocy, and insanity."

Henry Ward Beecher (1844:115) leveled the accusation that gambling "diseases the mind, unfitting it for duties of life." Other common characterizations of gambling was as a "passion," "madness," and "emotional pull." Barnett (1897:21) Beecher even invokes medicalized science imagery referring to his "research" on gambling with the goal "to draw attention to the nature and prevalence of the *disease*" (italics added). Others used social statistics to concretize their claims in what then passed for systematically gathered, empirical evidence.⁴ In 1899, George Alexander (1899:69) surmised that "(t)here must be something in *human nature* that inclines strongly toward this habit" (our italics).

Invocations of the imagery of disease and human nature evidenced some attempt to fuse otherworldly explanation of the "gambling problem" with arguments that suggested this-worldly cause and consequences. Moralists' anti-gambling tirades framed gamblers as primarily sinful and morally corrupt, but also referenced the discourse of mental illness, science, and the human condition. During this early period, these characterizations were negligible compared to the morally-based condemnations. However, the language of sickness and science slowly seeped into the rhetoric of moral condemnation producing radical changes in anti-gambling framing during the 20th

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4. For instance, in 1908 John Gulland (p. 44) cites several social statistics in support of his arguments on the relationship between gambling and crime, though we might certainly question the motives of the source of this "research." Likewise, from the records of the public press during the 12 years 1895-1907, the National Anti-Gambling League compiled the following record of crimes and wrecked careers they claimed were directly attributable to gambling:

Suicides and attempted suicides.....	234
Bankruptcies.....	530
Embezzlements and thefts.....	3236

century that challenged the notion that gamblers are immoral sinners in need of spiritual reformation.

From Sin to Sickness: The Science of “Problem Gambling” (1915 to 1980)

“There is agreement on this... that it is a psychological illness with psychological causes, and that it is possible to treat ... pathological gambling has now been recognized as an illness by the professions authorized to make this sort of judgment”

-- Dr. Robert Custer, “founding father” of problem gambling treatment (from Custer and Milt 1985, p. 36).

Between 1915 and 1980, the sciences of psychology and medicine began to focus on the mental and psychological aspects of problematic gambling, an effort that culminated in the inclusion of the “disorder” in the third version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1980. The scientifically-based medicalization of gambling created an alternate interpretation to moralists’ spiritually-based claims of the causes and appropriate “treatments” for gamblers’ “sins.”⁵ We describe this period as a “prism period” that refracted gambling discourses in a way that rendered untenable a wholesale return to purely moral interpretations. In response to these changes, today’s anti-gambling interests have shifted how they framed the “gambling problem.”

Despite early American moral authorities’ alignment against gambling, the activity did not fade. During the early part of the twentieth century, and especially after gambling was legalized in Nevada in 1931, the gambling business rose to national prominence. In the 1950s, investment capital from organized crime accelerated the growth of Las Vegas, transforming it into the nation’s most opulent and popular gambling destination. The modern American lottery began in the 1960s, when New Hampshire became the first state to re-introduce lotteries in an effort to raise tax revenues for the state. (Today, state lotteries have spread to 42 states). The “resort-ization” of new destinations starting with Atlantic City in the 1970s solidified a burgeoning new era of gambling expansion to quench Americans’ thirst for the activity (Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz 2006).

Simultaneously, a sea change was taking place in the medical field, as psychological experts began to interpret and label some gamblers as “sick.” This new labeling reflected broad cultural shifts, as science and secularism found a place of primacy in public discourse. Rosecrance (1985: 276) finds in this period “the first successful ‘staking’ of a medical claim” about the causes of what was then called “compulsive” gambling. Reacting to the long history of moral scorn and stigma directed towards gamblers, Dr. Edmund Bergler famously contended that compulsive gamblers did not deserve the moral scorn they experienced, but instead suffered from an illness that required medical treatment (cited in Rosecrance 1986: 277). This interpretation was taken up by the founders of Gamblers Anonymous (GA) in 1957 (the same year that Bergler’s theories were published in his book *The Psychology of Gambling*). Modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous, GA created a 12-step therapy process to help problem gamblers recover from their addiction. The group has since grown at a remarkable rate, and now has meetings in all 50 states (as well as the District of Columbia) as well as in 47 additional nations (Gamblers Anonymous, 2007).

Bergler was one of many scientific experts who rose in prominence as problem-defining “entrepreneurs,” diagnosing a range of problems as rooted in physiological or psychosocial illness. During this period, numerous categories of “deviance” were medicalized as disorders (e.g., homosexuality, smoking, alcoholism, child abuse, etc.) and gambling was part of this trend (Conrad and Schneider, 1992; Burnham, 1993).

5. Several scholars have previously described the problem gambling field as tracing the medicalization trajectory (Rosecrance 1986, Castellani 2000, Bernhard 2007). Because this historical period and trajectory has already been established in the sociological literature, we spend less on the analysis here in favor of the two other periods that have been given little attention.

As a result of these processes, pathological gambling and other "disorders" now come with clearly defined diagnoses, prognoses, and treatments cataloged in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). First published in 1952, the DSM originally listed 106 disorders. Since then, the DSM has been expanded three times, and now includes more than 297 disorders in 886 pages. It is regarded among many clinicians and researchers, ironically enough, as a "bible" of mental disorder classification.

Problem gambling debuted in the third edition of the DSM in 1980. Its inclusion was championed by the pioneering efforts of the problem gambling field's "Johnny Appleseed," psychiatrist Robert Custer. While Bergler first staked the claim for the medicalization of problem gambling, it was Custer who led the fledgling topic out of scientific obscurity and into medical and psychological annals. He also opened the nation's first problem gambling-specific professional treatment facility in 1972, trained many of the field's second generation of researchers and practitioners, and hence spurred the rise of what has been called the "problem gambling treatment industry" (Castellani, 2000).⁶

Custer's perspective designated a certain type of gambling as "problematic" – i.e., uncontrollable gambling that led to wider problems in the gamblers' life.

It is a progressive behavior disorder in which an individual becomes dependent upon gambling to the exclusion of everything else in life. Eventually, the compulsive gambler loses all ability to control the gambling impulse and is literally unable to function without gambling (Custer 1980: 75, as quoted in Rosecrance 1985: 279).

Custer's work won recognition that problem gambling was an "illness" – because it was deemed so "by the professions authorized to make this sort of judgment" (Custer and Milt 1985, p. 36). According to Rosecrance (1985), the DSM entry on pathological gambling in 1980 marked a defining and seminal moment in the history of those who gambled too much.

Custer's scientific interpretation of pathological gambling directly challenged "sinfulness" as a legitimate diagnosis of those who gambled too much. As a result, blame shifted away from the morally corrupt sinner to a treatable patient with a medico-psychological deficiency. In fact, one of Custer's specific objectives was to confront the public stigmatization (and consequent *self*-stigmatization) of problem gamblers by insisting upon understanding them as "ill," rather than "evil" (Castellani 2000).

While this change proved powerful, Bernhard (2007) explains that the break from the moral to the medical was not total. In fact, the DSM criteria for a diagnosis of pathological gambling closely mirror many of the moral claims made against sinning gamblers from the earlier era. Hence, while the label (and interpretations) changed, much of the underlying rhetorical scaffolding for diagnosing gambling as a problem has remained the same. As a result, in both the early and late eras discussed in this paper, echoes of moral and medical overtones can be heard in descriptions of problematic gamblers.

As we explain in the next section, this proves important for interpreting current day discourses on problem gamblers, as it demonstrates some rhetorical consistency linking two periods of anti-gambling claims-making. What changes between these two periods is the type of claims that are emphasized: medically-based claims now provide the primary interpretive schemata for understanding this population, while moral arguments are now primarily directed at the gaming industry.

6. Today, the National Council on Problem Gambling's Clinical Lifetime Achievement Award is named for Custer, and that organization's most recent gathering attracted nearly 600 attendees, most of whom attended to learn how to better treat problem gamblers.

Contemporary Anti-Gambling Claims – 1980 to present

“In our world today, we are inundated with many messages—most of them rooted in false ‘truth claims,’ lies set in direct opposition to the truth of God’s Word. We call this the cosmic battle, a battle for the hearts and minds of people.”

-- Opening lines in Focus on the Family’s E-Newsletter on
“The Truth Project,” 2010b (www.thetruthproject.org)

Legalized gambling’s rapid expansion from 1980 to the present coincides with a similar expansion in interest in problem gambling. Furthermore, morality entrepreneurs at the helm of anti-gambling campaigns have regained some public prominence. Leading anti-gambling voices, such as Focus on the Family’s (FF) Dr. James Dobson and the Rev. Tom Grey of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling/Stop Predatory Gambling (NCALG/SPG) explicitly and implicitly align themselves with religious interests. At the same time, they deploy their activism through professionalized non-profit governmental lobbying and public information organizations, thereby lending their efforts a degree of political capital.

Focus on the Family (FF), founded in 1977 by Dr. James C. Dobson, is an evangelical Christian group that claims to be the “world’s largest nonprofit organization dedicated to nurturing and defending families worldwide,” (Retrieved 9-1-10 from: https://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/news_room/fact-sheet.aspx). FF claims to reach “more than 220 million people in 155 nations” through its radio broadcasts, Internet resources, publications, videos, and self-help CDs. FF opposes all forms of gambling on moral and social grounds, targeting the activity as morally problematic and exploitative. The organization financially supports anti-gambling lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C. and Dobson has actively participated in government proceedings by serving on the National Gambling Impact Study Commission in 1999.

The National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling/Stop Predatory Gambling was formed in 1994 as a non-profit education organization whose mission is to compile “information on the adverse personal, social, economic and public health impacts of gambling and disseminate it to citizens and policy-makers at the local, state and national levels” (Retrieved 9-1-10 from: http://spgfoundation.org/about_us.htm). In a development reflective of the ever-evolving strategies that we discuss in this paper, the organization no longer explicitly states that it is against legalized gambling (dropping the NCALG name), but rather specifies that it seeks only to stop the predatory kind (embracing the STP moniker). NCALG/SPG is joined in support by religious groups such as the United Methodist Church, the Protestant-based National Council of Churches, Lutheran Church, and other Christian organizations. NCALG/SPG’s spokesman, Rev. Tom Grey, is a former United Methodist pastor. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Grey notes he left this role in part because moral arguments against gambling are no longer as resonant, and even argues that churches might not be “relevant in an irreverent age” (Trotter, 2008). Dubbed the “warrior preacher” (http://www.villagelife.org/news/archives/11-4-97_warriorpreacher.html) by admirers, Grey travels widely to meet with anti-gambling groups and legislators.

Previous research suggests that social activists can respond to socio-cultural shifts in a number of ways – by amplifying particular elements of previous narratives or by transforming the entire frame to completely recast causes, effects, protagonists, and antagonists (Snow et al. 1986). Such changes occur when claimants perceive that extant interpretations do not “resonate with... [or] appear antithetical to, conventional lifestyles or ...” the moral universes of the audiences they address (Snow et al., 1986, p. 473) and that new values, meanings, and understandings are required in order to secure participants and support.

Today’s anti-gambling framing by FF and NCALG/SPG retains many of the framing elements used by early-American Christian moralists, but these newer groups frequently

invert the elements that they amplify and elaborate. For instance, they still frame the gambling problem through a lens of spiritual morality, but cede much of the thematic space to the scientific master frame (Roth, Dunsby, and Bero 2003) by emphasizing gambling as a medical pathology and a social ill. Frequently, they subordinate strict religious claims to a rhetoric of science and victimization, casting gamblers as sympathetic victims of medical addiction rather than scorn-worthy agents of sin. This interpretive scheme transfers blame from the individual gambler onto the gaming industry, which they portray as a predator preying on gamblers' sicknesses. Meanwhile, motivational claims now emphasize political action to block new gaming industry development in the United States.

Today, anti-gambling websites, pamphlets, and other media produced by FF, NCALG, and other religiously-inspired institutions situate medical research claims at the center of their diagnostic and prognostic interpretations:

Researchers now call gambling the fastest growing teenage addiction, with the rate of pathological gambling among high school and college-age youth about twice that of adults. According to Dr. Howard J. Shaffer, Director of the Harvard Medical School Center for Addiction Studies, 'Today there are more children experiencing adverse symptoms from gambling than from drugs...and the problem is growing.' (*Gambling: A Bad Bet* published for the United Methodist Church by The General Board of Church and Society. N.D. Pg. 2)

Similarly, NCALG/SPG also embraces the sickness model by using American Psychiatric Association statistics and medical experts to imply that gambling is more widespread than even cancer:

Gambling is an addictive behavior, make no mistake about it... Gambling has all the properties of a psychoactive substance, and again, the reason is that it changes the neurochemistry of the brain...'. When gambling appears in a community, it brings a wave of addiction. In a mature gambling market, compulsive gambling typically seizes the lives of 1.5% to 2.5% of the adult population. That amounts to three to five times the number suffering from cancer... The American Psychiatric Association says between 1% and 3% of the U.S. population is addicted to gambling (NCALG 2007)

Current-day anti-gambling claimants commonly (and selectively) pair medical claims with social statistics and analysis conducted by academics. FF's "Position Statement on Gambling" says:

Authorities in gambling jurisdictions report dramatic increases in divorce, suicide, bankruptcy, and child abuse and domestic violence related to gambling. Research shows that children of gambling addicts experience lower levels of mental health and physical well-being...John Kindt, Ph.D., professor of commerce and legal policy at the University of Illinois, asserts that for every dollar of revenue generated by gambling, taxpayers must dish out at least three dollars in increased criminal-justice costs, social-welfare expenses, high regulatory costs, and increased infrastructure expenditures. Gambling is a social cancer that ravages the communities in which it metastasizes (Focus on the Family 2010c).

These framing shifts are indicative of the prominence and power of scientized medical interpretations to shape the rhetorical landscape of the, political, legal, and cultural spheres gambling abolitionists seek to influence. Anti-gambling claims-makers' attempt to amplify scientific arguments against gambling represents a response to the reality that "large segments of the American public (as well as the critical audience of social policy makers) tend to believe in [research and science] and claims made by people who are scientists (Loseke 1999: 35). Moreover, to challenge gambling in political and

legal realms opponents must mobilize scientific grounds for their claims so as to provide politicians with empirically-based arguments about cause and effect. On the other hand, legislators who already oppose gambling on moral grounds can draw upon the science advocacy of anti-gambling groups to justify and support their beliefs. As Bimber (1996) explains, legislators tend to use science as much to justify their already established moral stances on social issues as they do to create their policy positions.

Today's gambling opponents also face a much more secular, diverse, and amorphous public audience than did their counterparts in early America. Rather than creating messages to be delivered to a face-to-face religious congregation and then published for wider consumption, they now typically address the public through communication mediums such as cyberspace or books and pamphlets accessible through their websites. They also make their messages as palatable as possible to potentially diverse audiences, as contrasted with their predecessors' focus on waging war solely in spiritual arenas. Today, overly religious tones can even offend church members themselves, as Sargent (2000) has demonstrated in analyzing how evangelical megachurches draw on therapeutic culture to downplay traditional notions of sin and judgment.

Moralists' concessions to scientific rhetoric are not total, however. Present-day moralists' arguments against gambling are strategic combinations of the old and the new, past and present. As Sidney Tarrow (1998: 118) observes, claims-makers do not simply pull new framings "out of whole cloth. The costumes of [social problems claims-making] are woven from a blend of inherited and invented fibers..." into present-day interpretations. Gambling opponents use past and present ideas as cultural resources from which they graft together different strands to weave new interpretations of the problem. Specifically, they join the science of gambling addiction with the framework of moral-religious opposition. This "grafting" process, or what framing scholars Snow and Byrd (2007: 130) call "frame articulation," connects and aligns "events, experience, and strands of moral codes so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling way." What makes interpretations new is "not so much the originality or newness of its ideational elements, but the manner in which they are spliced together and articulated such that a new angle of vision or understanding is provided" (Snow and Byrd 2007:130). By "amplifying" certain aspects, issues, or beliefs, they elevate them in prominence over others as they search for resonance with cultural ideas that will draw support (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986; McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith 2004).

The move to emphasize scientific claims over religious has been paired with a discursive shift: from blaming the gambler to blaming the gambling industry. This rhetorical shift has transformed yesterday's anti-gambling moral entrepreneurs into today's "sympathy entrepreneurs" (Clark 1997). Constructing sympathy is not a simple task, however, as culturally derived codes define the circumstances and actors entitled to sympathy. For instance, blamelessness is a crucial determinant of sympathy (Clark 1997). The sympathy entrepreneur's job, then, becomes one of constructing the virtue of victims by making their victimization understandable (Clark 1997).

To do this, anti-gambling forces frequently combine these gambler-as-victim claims with "model-citizens-turned-gamblers" tales that describe how they fell from grace at the hands of pro-gambling interests. For instance, a 2006 NCALG Newsletter spotlighted "an outstanding 19-year-old student at Lehigh University...class president, the chaplain's assistant, and son of a minister" (p.3) who fell into bank robbery because of gambling debts. The article does not blame the student, but rebukes university administrators and government officials for failing to enforce laws against online gambling, which in turn created the opportunity for the student to succumb to gambling's lure.

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Similarly, Focus on the Family repeatedly tells sad tales about the lives destroyed by gambling with descriptions portraying problem gamblers as "model citizens," having "exemplary military careers," or as "innocent retirees" (Reno, 2007). They also attempt to evoke sympathy through rhetorical ploys to frame gambling interests as "preying on the desperation of the poor," who are painted as the most vulnerable population (Focus on the Family 2004). Further claims explain that "... gambling entices the financially disadvantaged classes with the unrealistic hope of escape from poverty through instant riches, thus ultimately worsening the plight of our poorest citizens" (ibid).

Framing problem gamblers as victims requires someone or something to blame for their plight. Anti-gambling forces direct their rage and condemnation at the growing gambling industry. The preponderance of today's anti-gambling claims identify the gaming industry as the destructive, "evil force" at the heart of the gambling problem. Focus on the Family has called the gaming business a "wolf" and "predator" (2007). Casino executives are indicted for having "taken captive entire communities" (United Methodist Church 2004) and eating away at gamblers and their families by using "every method...to take their money" (Focus on the Family 1999). NCALG casts the "battle" in clear populist terms of the underdog everyman versus big business, situating the "dramatic growth of gambling [as] driven by the gambling industry with its high priced lobbyists and pie-in-the-sky promises." Focus on the Family points to a selective "abundance of research" to legitimate this blame and detail the extent to which gambling problems have infiltrated wider society:

An abundance of research and expert testimony demonstrates that as gambling expands, so does the number of those with serious gambling problems. Millions more Americans have developed devastating gambling addictions over the last few years as a direct result of gambling's rapid proliferation. Further, these newly created addicts are the lifeblood of the industry. Preliminary research indicates that a third or more of gambling revenues come from problem and pathological gamblers (2004).

Government also draws its share of blame as a gambling operator—in the case of lotteries or government-owned gambling outlets—or "enablers," that legislate for gambling interests. The United Methodist Church (2004) charges that

Government also draws its share of blame as a gambling operator—in the case of lotteries or government-owned gambling outlets—or "enablers," that legislate for gambling interests.

"dependence on gambling revenue has led many states to exploit the weakness of their own citizens." Similarly, Focus on the Family (2007b) has called the state's role in allowing and promoting gambling "unconscionable," claiming that legalized gambling is "ravaging the lives of untold thousands of individuals and families" (Focus on the Family 2010c).

In this context, anti-gambling opponents cast themselves, along with the problem gamblers they see themselves defending, as the underdogs in war against wagering. The NCALG/SPG even invokes classic Russian literature to extend

the motivational dimension of the anti-gambling frame.

Like Kutozov's army in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, citizens like you saw there would be no help from government to beat back this marauding band [of gambling interests]. You not only fought this fight, but found each other and formed a nation coalition against the spread of gambling...Our task is simple. We continue to organize and to network, forming coalitions of people – coalitions that strip away their (gambling expansionists) political cover – and when they are without political escort, we expose them in the public arena and take them out at the ballot box (Zabilka 1995: 5).

This most recent period of anti-gambling rhetoric contains elements of each of the historical periods that preceded it. In response to a) the cultural resonance of "science" as a master frame, b) the medicalization of problem gambling, and c) more diverse target audiences, contemporary anti-gambling moralists have amplified and inverted

their moral framings against gambling to stress scientific and medicalized interpretations of gambling as a problem. In doing so, they blend explicitly moral-religious ideas with medical and scientific language. Finally, they no longer assert that the individual is to blame, but rather portray the individual as an object of sympathy struggling in the face of a powerful and predatory industry.

Conclusion

Early American anti-gambling narratives cast gambling as an intolerable moral problem for society, and those who gambled excessively found themselves cast as an important target of the moralists' ire. The messages of moral condemnation sought to stigmatize gamblers as among the most offensive elements of society. The moral entrepreneurs of the time wove cautionary tales of gamblers as weak, morally-vacuous sinners who, if left unchecked, could bring down society. Anti-gambling moralists spoke primarily to spiritual inclinations of their audience, using religious fears and evidence of individual failings as the empirical grounds of their claims. Scorn and condemnation of individual gamblers served as the primary motivational drivers of the narratives. In sum, this was neither a kind nor a gentle discursive day for those who gambled too much.

Later, Bergler, Custer, and others developed a medicalized interpretation of "problem gambling," and the rhetoric of science and mental illness seeped more and more into the rhetoric of moral judgment on gambling. From this point forward, problem gamblers could no longer be depicted as villains, as our societal embrace of medicalization rendered this one-dimensional characterization problematic in itself.

Today, narrative strategies for framing the gambling problem emphasize the science of problem gambling, while de-emphasizing (and even erasing) earlier fire-and-brimstone religious interpretations. Anti-gambling rhetoric today concentrates on the gaming locations that lure people into the throes of an addictive activity (rather than the lure of Satan in his efforts to ensnare individual gamblers). These claims stress that we should express sympathy and concern for the problem gambler, while aiming invectives at the industry that profits on them. Of course, these kinds of statements are far removed from the scorn and stigma that early moralists advocated. Ironically, for several hundred years, the *last* place that gamblers would find sympathy was at a church; today, however, many within these same types or religious institution have decided that what was once a moral weakness is now an sickness created by the (morally bankrupt) gaming industry.

Framing scholars have theorized that framing efforts change in response to cultural shifts that render older interpretations unable to "resonate" with the moral universes of the audiences they address (Snow et al., 1986, p. 473). In response, we should expect that "new ideas have to be planted and nurtured, old meanings or understandings jettisoned, and erroneous beliefs or 'misframings' reframed" (Snow et.al 1986, p.473; Goffman 1974: 308). The process we identify here, however, is not quite so extreme or discrete. Anti-gambling claims-makers have not so much created "new ideas" and "jettisoned" old ones as they have *inverted* the themes they emphasize. Framing gambling as a social problem relies on "amplifying" (McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith 2004; Snow et.al. 1986) the science of problem gambling by bringing it to forefront of the stories told about gambling. At the same time, the moral overtones of the early period have not been abandoned. On the contrary, they are deeply etched into today's anti-gambling claims-making, but subsumed under and veiled by the rhetoric of science and medicine, and then re-directed at those who operate gambling facilities.

The dynamic of frame inversion we identify here challenges the perspective of some scholars (e.g., Rosecrance 1985; Conrad and Schneider 1980) who have characterized the medicalization of deviance as a sea change in claims making, in which science rises like a phoenix to overtake and tear down religious interpretations of the world. A subtler look suggests that because deviant behavior provides a "common ground" where these two interpretive discourses of science and religion overlap, we should expect that dimensions

of each will be retained in some form. Science and religion are not mutually exclusive discourses. Instead, they cross-fertilize each other over time, with both ultimately contributing to current framings – in this case, of gambling as a major social problem for Americans.

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Article submitted: 9/6/10
 Sent to peer review: 9/6/10
 Reviewer comments sent to author: 9/8/10
 Author's revised comments received: 10/12/10
 Article accepted for publication: 10/12/10