

The WAGER, Vol. 18(12) - Two roots and a hundred branches: Classes of misconceptions about gambling

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Gamblers can have a wide variety of superstitions and misconceptions that are associated with gambling-related problems. Either due to their variety or sheer number, dispelling those misconceptions can seem to be an impossible task. However, Ejova et al. (2013) recently proposed that it might be possible to group common misconceptions associated with gambling-related problems into two broad overlapping categories: (1) “primary control” - things players believe they can do to affect their results and (2) “secondary control” - the effects of external agents, forces or inanimate objects. If the two-category heuristic is valid, then dispelling gambling-related fallacies may require strategies against just two ideas, not three, ten or a hundred. Today’s WAGER reviews their study (Ejova et al., 2013).

Methods

- Through recruitment and convenience sampling in Australia, researchers surveyed 140 men and 189 women who were 18 or older, had gambled at a licensed establishment at least once, and were not at the time engaged in treatment for gambling-related problems.
- Each participant rated 100 common “beliefs” about slot machine gambling (e.g., the way to regain gambling losses is more gambling.) on a Likert-type scale from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree).
- The researchers used two types of factor analysis (confirmatory ([CFA](#)) and explanatory ([EFA](#)) on the participants’ responses to check their hypothesized model.

Results

- Both types of factor analyses suggested that the 100 belief items roughly grouped into two factors, or dimensions, that reflected primary control

(see left side of Venn diagram in Figure) and secondary control (see right side of Venn diagram in Figure).

- The Figure includes examples of fallacies regarding primary control, secondary control, and both

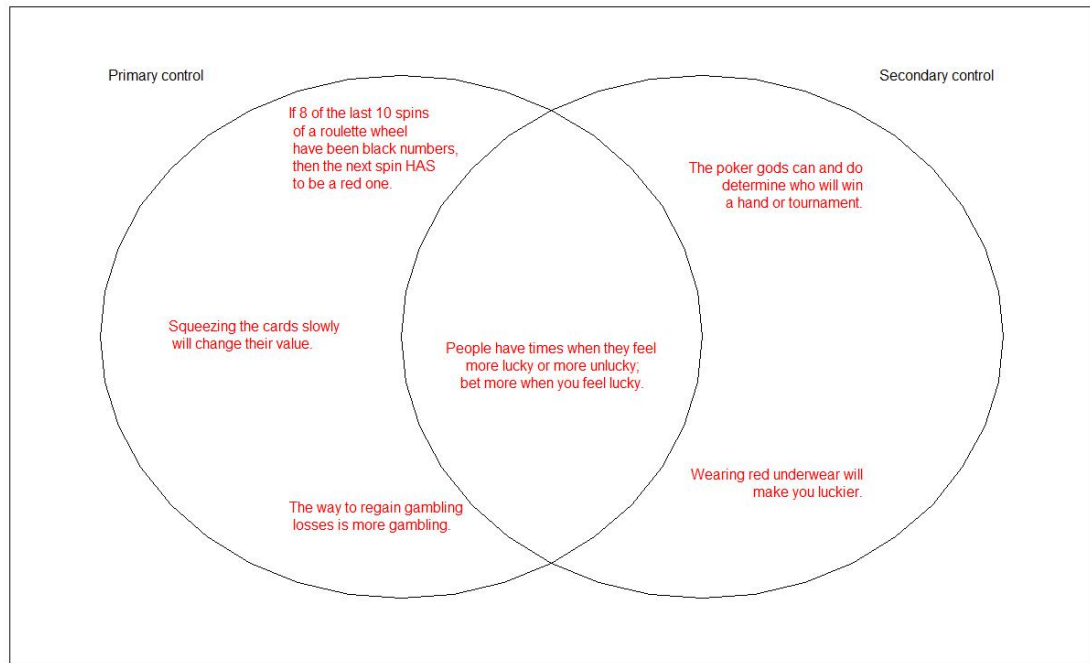


Figure. Venn diagram of the two categories of gambling fallacies. Adapted from Ejola et al., 2013. Click image to enlarge.

Limitations

- The researchers used [convenience sampling](#) to recruit participants. Their results may not be representative of the gambling population as a whole.
- Confirmatory factor analysis and exploratory factor analysis were designed for continuous measures, and there is disagreement about whether Likert scale items are continuous measures. Converting the Likert scale items from the questionnaire to numerical variables may distort the results.
- Researchers might not have explored the full range of fallacies, and other categories or classes may exist.

Conclusions

Researchers and clinicians believe that letting go of erroneous beliefs about

gambling should be part of the process of overcoming gambling-related problems. For example, in referring to his own struggle with overcoming problems with gambling, Charles Barkley said “I have to get the point where I don’t try to break the casino, ‘cause you never can (ESPN News Services, 2006).” To that end, this new study suggests that the various misconceptions and superstitions may be reflections of broader mistaken beliefs about who can control what. It may be possible for clinicians and patients to confront the broader systems (i.e., beliefs about primary and secondary control), and in doing so, attack multiple individual fallacies simultaneously.

-Matthew Tom

What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.

References

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Ejova, A., Delfabbro, P. H., & Navarro, D. J. (2013). Erroneous Gambling-Related Beliefs as Illusions of Primary and Secondary Control: A Confirmatory Factor Analysis. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. doi:10.1007/s10899-013-9402-9