What this research is about

Gambling outcome expectancies are what people expect will happen if they gamble. People may expect positive outcomes like being relaxed or negative outcomes like losing money. Most research studies have relied on explicit methods that ask participants to self-report on what they expect to happen. However, these methods are prone to respondent biases. For example, participants may respond in a certain way to present themselves more positively. As a result, some studies have used implicit methods that are indirect and tap into what is outside of awareness.

Implicit methods expose participants to some cues (e.g., a video of people playing EGM) that indirectly activate their outcome expectancies. The cues usually require attention and focus. But people encounter multiple demands from their environment in real life, of which many are not related to gambling. This study used a gambling lab that was set up to resemble a bar with EGMs. Thus, the gambling cues were more like those in real life context. They were present in the periphery and not the focus of attention.

What the researchers did

Participants were 61 adults who had gambled at least 3 times in the last 2 months. They completed the study in a gambling lab or a white sterile lab. The gambling lab looked like a bar with EGMs. A research assistant played on one of the EGMs to create sounds and visuals like those of a casino or EGM venue. The sterile lab looked like a typical research lab, with an assistant playing on a computer game.

Participants in both labs completed the Affective Priming Task. The task had 2 blocks of 20 trials each. In each trial, they saw a gambling picture or a non-

What you need to know

This study examined the effects on outcome expectancies after gamblers were exposed to gambling cues implicitly. It used a gambling lab that was set up to resemble a bar with electronic gambling machines. Thus, gamblers were exposed to gambling cues that they might encounter in real life. These cues were present in the periphery rather than being the focus of attention as there were other cues in the environment. Results showed that gambling cues that were not the focus of attention did not implicitly activate positive outcome expectancies (e.g. winning, relaxation). But there was some evidence that they activated negative outcome expectancies (e.g. shame, anxiety).
What the researchers found

On average, participants had low to moderate risk of problem gambling. Participants in the gambling lab and sterile lab responded similarly on the GEQ. Thus, explicit gambling outcome expectancies were similar.

Participants in the sterile lab did not differ in their reaction time to positive target words that followed gambling pictures as compared to non-gambling pictures. This was not surprising as the sterile lab was a neutral environment. However, participants in the gambling lab also did not differ in their reaction time. This suggested that the gambling lab did not implicitly activate positive outcome expectancies.

There were differences in reaction time to negative target words in the sterile lab. Participants reacted faster to negative words that followed non-gambling pictures than gambling pictures. This suggested that they expected more negative outcomes from non-gambling activity than from gambling when in a neutral environment. In contrast, there were no differences in reaction time in the gambling lab. This suggested that the gambling lab did implicitly activate negative outcome expectancies. Participants expected negative outcomes as much from gambling as from non-gambling activity.

How you can use this research

Researchers should replicate this study to see if they obtain similar findings. They should also examine if high-risk and problem gamblers react differently than low-risk gamblers. If follow-up research confirms that gambling environment could trigger negative outcome expectancies, this could be important in the treatment of problem gambling. Clinicians could use peripheral cues to facilitate the association of negative outcomes with gambling.

About the researchers

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Citation


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