RESEARCH QUESTIONS
What are the effects of the ‘near miss’ and the ‘big win’ on persistence in slot machine play?

PURPOSE
The purpose examined the influence of a ‘near miss’ (i.e., a gambling event that comes close to winning) and a ‘big win’ (i.e., a large, early monetary gain) on persistence at slot machine gambling.

HYPOTHESIS
Thirty percent ‘near miss’ (compared to a 15% or a 45%) and an early ‘big win’ would increase persistence.

PARTICIPANTS
Participants were 180 undergraduate (average age = 20 years) students.

PROCEDURE
Participants were randomly assigned to a ‘near miss’ or ‘big win’ condition prior to playing a four-reel slot machine. Participants had to spin at least 50 times but could play as long as they wanted. The slot machine was programmed for the first 50 spins such that players received either ‘near misses’ on 15%, 30%, or 45% of the trials or a ‘big win’ ($10) on Trial 8 (i.e., acquisition phase). After the 50 trials, no ‘near miss’ or win occurred (i.e., extinction phase). The ‘near miss’ was defined as the occurrence of three out of four of same number, with the last number being different (e.g., 3, 3, 3, 7). A ‘big win’ occurred when 4 leprechauns were displayed instead of numbers. When players elected to terminate, they were asked whether they would be willing to return to play.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES
The South Oaks Gambling Screen assessed gambling pathology. Persistence was measured by the number of spins during extinction. A self-report measure of intention to play again was also obtained. Willingness to return to play was differentiated as: with their own money, if money was provided to them, or not at all.

KEY RESULTS
No gender difference for number of trials in extinction was found. The number of trials in extinction for the 30% ‘near miss’ condition was higher than the 15% ‘near miss’ condition and the 45% ‘near miss’ condition. Thus, as hypothesized, the 30% ‘near miss’ condition led to the greatest persistence. Contrary to hypothesis, the number of trials in extinction for the ‘big win’ present condition was not significantly different than for the ‘big win’ absent conditions. No differences were found on the self-report measure of willingness to return to play again. Neither ‘near miss’ percentage nor the ‘big win’ affected participant responses.

LIMITATIONS
The amount of the ‘big win’ (e.g., $10) was probably not sufficient to increase persistence.

CONCLUSIONS
The results support the effect of the ‘near miss’ on gambling persistence, as measured by the number of trials in extinction.

KEYWORDS: gambling, gambling persistence, big win, near miss

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