

When new players learn slot-machine tricks, they avoid gambling addiction

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Novice gamblers who watched a short video about how slot machines disguise losses as wins have a better chance of avoiding gambling problems, according to new research.

Slot machines present losses disguised as wins (LDWs) with celebratory music and flashing lights, even though players actually won less money than they bet. People can mistakenly believe that they are winning and continue paying to play.

Researchers at the University of Waterloo found that showing inexperienced gamblers a brief [educational video](#) before they play helps make them more aware and curb false perceptions about the number of times they won.

"One of the keys to gambling harm prevention is to curtail misperceptions before they become ingrained in the minds of gamblers," said Michael Dixon, professor and research director in the Gambling Research Lab at Waterloo. "By exposing these outcomes for what they are, our study shows a way in which we can lead slots gamblers to have a more realistic view of their gambling experiences and possibly prevent problems down the road."

Earlier research from the University's Gambling Research Lab found that LDWs can also lead players to gamble for longer even when they are losing money—a symptom of [gambling](#) addiction.

As part of this study, one [group](#) of participants watched an educational [video](#) on [slot machines](#) and how they present LDWs, while a second group watched a different, unrelated video. All participants then played two games, one with few LDWs and one with many LDWs. They then had to estimate the number of times they won more than they wagered on each game.

"We found that the video was effective in correcting multiple misperceptions. Players not only remembered their actual number of wins more correctly, but they were also more capable of labelling losses disguised as wins during slot machine play," said Candice Graydon, lead

author and a PhD candidate in Waterloo's Department of Psychology at the time of this study. "We'd like to assess whether shining the light on LDWs will make gamblers stop playing sooner."

On the many LDW games, both groups got actual wins on approximately 10 per cent of spins. The group that did not watch the video drastically overestimated their wins - believing won on 23 per cent of spins. The group that watched the educational video, however, gave accurate win estimates. They recalled winning on only 12 per cent of spins. The study suggests that novice players who view the educational video will become more aware of LDWs, which could make them more attentive to other slot features such as the running total counter. Researchers would like to see the animation available to players both online and on casino floors.

The study, co-authored by Waterloo psychology professors Mike J. Dixon and Jonathan A. Fugelsang, in addition to Waterloo's Kevin A. Harrigan, and Grant MacEwan University's Michelle Jarick, was published in *International Gambling Studies*.

Provided by University of Waterloo

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