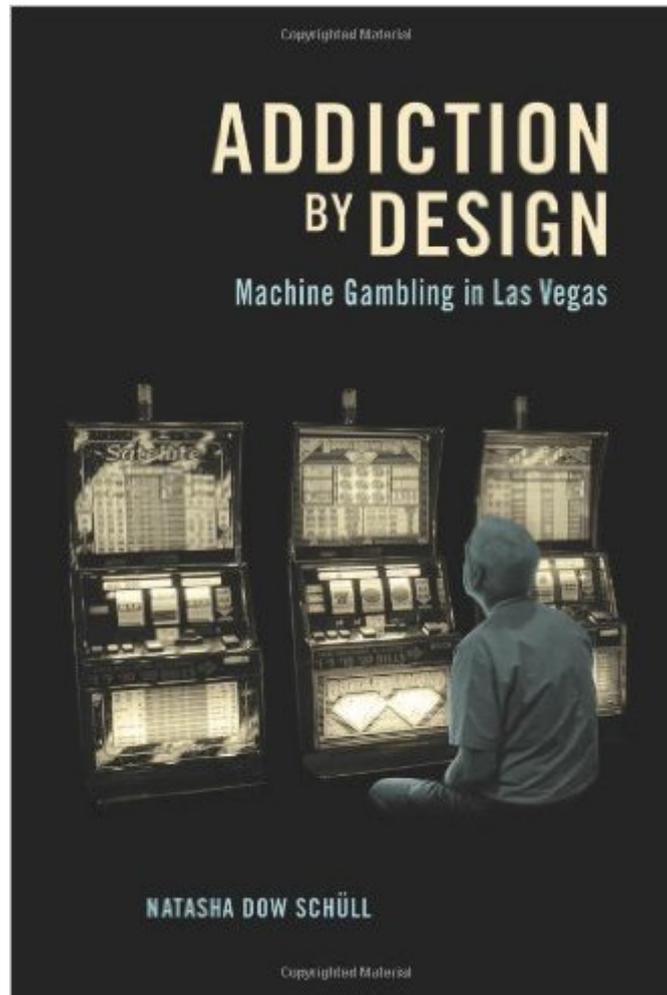# Addiction By Design: Machine Gambling In Las Vegas

Synopsis

Recent decades have seen a dramatic shift away from social forms of gambling played around roulette wheels and card tables to solitary gambling at electronic terminals. Slot machines, revamped by ever more compelling digital and video technology, have unseated traditional casino games as the gambling industry's revenue mainstay. Addiction by Design takes readers into the intriguing world of machine gambling, an increasingly popular and absorbing form of play that blurs the line between human and machine, compulsion and control, risk and reward.Drawing on fifteen years of field research in Las Vegas, anthropologist Natasha Dow Schüll shows how the mechanical rhythm of electronic gambling pulls players into a trancelike state they call the "machine zone," in which daily worries, social demands, and even bodily awareness fade away. Once in the zone, gambling addicts play not to win but simply to keep playing, for as long as possible--even at the cost of physical and economic exhaustion. In continuous machine play, gamblers seek to lose themselves while the gambling industry seeks profit. Schüll describes the strategic calculations behind game algorithms and machine ergonomics, casino architecture and "ambience management," player tracking and cash access systems--all designed to meet the market's desire for maximum "time on device." Her account moves from casino floors into gamblers' everyday lives, from gambling industry conventions and Gamblers Anonymous meetings to regulatory debates over whether addiction to gambling machines stems from the consumer, the product, or the interplay between the two.Addiction by Design is a compelling inquiry into the intensifying traffic between people and machines of chance, offering clues to some of the broader anxieties and predicaments of contemporary life. At stake in Schüll's account of the intensifying traffic between people and machines of chance is a blurring of the line between design and experience, profit and loss, control and compulsion.

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Customer Reviews

Natasha Dow Schüll's Addiction by Design is one of the most compelling books I've read in the past few years. Not because I was ever captivated by slot machines or video poker. In my entire life I lost a total of $5 to a slot machine and, quite frankly, even then I didn't consider the experience worth anywhere close to $5. But the experience has changed, thanks to technology and mathematical algorithms; it has a deeper hook.Schüll, an associate professor at MIT, argues that addiction to machine gambling stems from the interplay between the gambler and the machine. Drawing on fifteen years of field research in Las Vegas and extensive interviews with both designers and addicts, she shows how the "duty to extract as much money" as possible from customers and the desire to play for as long as possible combine to produce a recipe for potential addiction.Slot machines have come a long way from the coin-fed mechanical one-armed bandits. They now use video technology, which speeds up play significantly. On average, pulling a handle resulted in 300 games an hour. Video poker players can complete 900 to 1,200 hands an hour; the rate is similar on video slots. (p. 55) The financial flow in casinos has also sped up. Players no longer have to carry around heavy cups of coins or wait for payouts. Instead, casinos are "cashless." Moreover, players who run out of money can easily tap into their checking accounts, credit cards, or debit cards--in numerous jurisdictions right from their machines--to keep on going.Early on programmers devised techniques "not only to distort players' perception of games' odds but also to distort their perception of losses, by creating `near miss' effects.

The best book on the techno-human intersection I've read in a long time, and also highly depressing. If you've read Temple Grandin on humanely getting cattle through the slaughtering chutes, you might recognize the same spirit in this depiction of best practices for casino design: "`passageways should keep twisting and turning through gradual, gentle curves and angles that smooth out the shifts in direction.' Aisles leading into gambling areas `should narrow gradually, so walkers do not notice the approaching transition until they suddenly find themselves immersed in the intimate worlds of gambling action.'" The games themselves are designed to create a false sense of efficacy in the gambler--players who feel they can have an effect on outcomes will keep

playing longer. And they are designed to create a false sense of the odds of winning and the magnitude of wins: reels are programmed so that there are fewer opportunities to win than it looks like there should be based on the number of symbols on the reel; reels are programmed to stop so that it often looks like there was a near miss (and regulators ignored the deceptive potential, because it was good for the industry); "teaser" reels display before you play with more winning combnations than actually available; and then payoffs less than the original bet are rewarded with "winner!" notifications, creating "a sense of winning" and allowing people to play longer and more smoothly as their money drops to zero. It was pretty chilling to read that the most recent "subtle yet radical innovation is precisely [new machines'] capacity to make losses appear to gamblers as wins, such that players experience the reinforcement of winning even as they steadily lose.

I have no idea what to rate this book because one, I can't finish it, and two, my beef isn't with the contents per se.I'm shocked that this book received nothing but 4 and 5 star reviews. Must've all been by academics. I'm trying, for probably the 5th time, to read some of this book and I just can't focus. It's written like a thesis paper. It reads like a thesaurus exploded all over a psych degree to impress an english professor. I was excited to get this book after hearing an interview on a radio program about it. I am researching design manipulation (for practical reasons, not academic) and this was absolutely perfectly the type of thing I was looking for.The concepts are simple enough, and quite fascinating, but the writing is just awful. I'm not normally one to be so blunt (nor mean), but I can't help it, mostly because I'm shocked that I seem to be the lone voice. Here is a very typical example of the writing:"To ignore the continuum of problematic experience among gamblers is to minimize the extent of the phenomenon, they suggest. Departing from the dominant medical emphasis on the psychological, genetic, and neurophysiological factors that might predispose an isolated subset of individuals to "maladaptive gambling behaviour," they seek to understand how commercial gambling activities and environments might create the conditions for - and even encourage - such behaviour in consumers."I literally just turned to a random page and wrote down the first thing I saw. Do I understand every word in those two sentences? Sure do. Do I understand what the author is trying to say here? Sure do. Is it enjoyable to read in the slightest? Sure isn't. It reads like a dry textbook as opposed to a book you read out of want.

Gambling Addiction: The Ultimate Guide To Gambling Addiction Recovery: How To Finally Overcome Gambling Addiction And Problem Gambling Forever (Overcome ... Sports Gambling, Fantasy Sports, Poker) The Ultimate Gambling Addiction Help Guide: How To Overcome A

Gambling Addiction And Problem Gambling Once And For All (gambling addiction cure, problems, ... craps, baccarat, poker, blackjack) Gambling Addiction Cure: Gambling Addiction Cure and Recovery of Your Life (Addiction Recovery, Addiction Gambling, Quit Smoking, Addictions) Gambling Addiction Recovery: Gambling Addiction Recovery and Cure of Your Life (Addiction Recovery, Addictions Gambling, Quit Smoking, Addiction) Master Book On Addiction: How To Overcome Drug Addiction-Alcohol Addiction-Smoking Addiction-Gambling Addiction-Internet Addiction-Overeating Addiction: The Last ADDICTION RECOVERY Guide - The Infallible Method To Overcome Any Addiction: (addiction, addiction recovery, breaking addiction, overcoming ... addiction recovery, recovery, clean Book 4) The Gambling Addiction Cure - How To Overcome Gambling Addiction And Problem Gambling For Life (Compulsive Gambling, Gamblers, Casino Games, Sports Betting, Poker, Black Jack, Craps, Slots, Roulette) Gambling Addiction Cure: How to Overcome Gambling Addiction and Stop Compulsive Gambling for Life Gambling Addiction Cure: How To Overcome Gambling Addiction And Stop Compulsive Gambling For Life (slots,roulette,craps,baccarat,poker,blackjack) Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas Smoking Addiction: Desire To Stop Smoking Addiction Just Three Steps (Addiction Recovery, Addiction Gambling, Quit Smoking, Addictions) Caffeine Addiction Gone - A Beginners Guide to Overcoming Caffeine Addiction (Caffeine Addiction Guide, Caffeine Addiction, Overcoming Caffeine Addiction) Gambling:Just Stop Pressing The Button: The Truth Behind our Gambling Addiction - What Most People Do Not Understand And How You Stop Gambling Away Your Life Gambling: Sports Betting: Betting Systems (Blackjack Poker Slots) (Las Vegas Gambling Craps) Gambling Addiction Cure: Discover Easy Steps on How to Stop Gambling Addiction Problems [Newly Revised Book] Las Vegas: Glitter to Gourmet - Savory and Sensational Recipes from the Junior League of Las Vegas Bread Machine Cookbook: 101 Delicious, Nutritious, Low Budget, Mouthwatering Bread Machine Cookbook: Best Bread Machine Bread Recipe Recipes for Perfect-Every-Time Bread-From Every Kind of Machine Craps: Strategy! Casino Craps Strategy For Shooting Dice To Win At Craps! (How To Play Craps, Gambling, Las Vegas, Black Jack, Thinking Fast, Brain Power, Brain Training) Bread Machine Cooking - The Ultimate Guide to Bread Machine Bread Baking: Over 24 Bread Machine Recipes You Will Love! Change Your Gambling, Change Your Life: Strategies for Managing Your Gambling and Improving Your Finances, Relationships, and Health