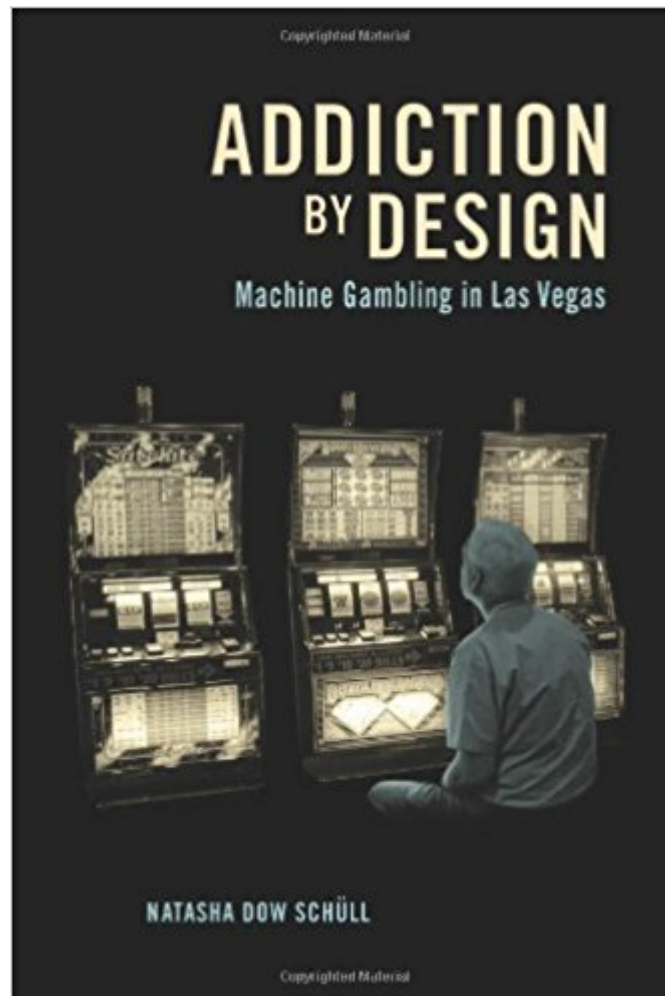




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# Addiction By Design: Machine Gambling In Las Vegas



## 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 "ambiance 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Winner of the 2013 Sharon Stephens First Book Prize, American Ethnological Society  
Honorable Mention for the 2013 Gregory Bateson Prize, The Society for Cultural Anthropology  
The Atlantic Editors'™ "The Best Book I Read This Year" for 2013, chosen by senior editor Alexis C.

Madrigal"Natasha Dow Schill, an anthropologist at MIT, has written a timely book. Ms Schill has spent two decades studying the boom in casino gambling: the layout of its properties, the addicts and problem gamblers who account for roughly half its revenue in some places, and the engineering that goes into its most sophisticated products. *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas* reads like a combination of *Scientific American's* number puzzles and the 'blue Book' of Alcoholics Anonymous."--Christopher Caldwell, *Financial Times*"*Addiction by Design* is a nonfiction page-turner. A richly detailed account of the particulars of video gaming addiction, worth reading for the excellence of the ethnographic narrative alone, it is also an empirically rigorous examination of users, designers, and objects that deepens practical and philosophical questions about the capacities of players interacting with machines designed to entrance them."--Laura Norén, *PublicBooks*"Schill adds greatly to the scholarly literature on problem gambling with this well-written book. . . . Applying an anthropological perspective, the author focuses especially on the Las Vegas gambling industry, seeing many of today's avid machine gamblers as less preoccupied with winning than with maintaining themselves in the game, playing for as long as possible, and entering into a trance-like state of being, totally enmeshed psychologically into gaming and totally removed from the ordinary obligations of everyday life. . . . The book offers a most compelling and vivid picture of this world."--Choice"If books can be tools, *Addiction by Design* is one of the foundational artifacts for understanding the digital age--a lever, perhaps, to pry ourselves from the grasp of the coercive loops that now surround us."--Alexis Madrigal, *The Atlantic*"Natasha Schull's *Addiction By Design* is fascinating, absorbing, and at times, a bit frightening. . . . Schull's work will have wide relevance to many audiences, including those interested in technology studies, media studies, software studies, game studies, values-in-design, and the psychology and sociology of addiction and other technologically mediated behavioral disorders."--Hansen Hsu, *Social Studies of Science*"Original, ambitious, and written with elegant lucidity, *Addiction by Design* presents us with a

narrative that is as compulsive as the behavior it describes. The book repositions debates in the field of gambling and will surely become a classic text in studies of society and technology."--Gerda Reith, *American Journal of Sociology*"Based on fifteen years of ethnographic work, *Addiction by Design* is an ambitious and thought-provoking book that challenges the neoliberal ethos currently governing the way in which governments and professionals think about gambling addiction."--Kah-Wee Lee, *Technology and Culture*"A handbook on regaining our proper orientation to the world. SchĂll's book offers a grim warning about the ways others can deliberately cut us off from natural and supernatural joys."--Leah Libresco, *Commonweal*

"A stunning portrayal of technology and the inner life. Searing, sobering, compelling: this is important, first-rate, accessible scholarship that should galvanize public conversation."--Sherry Turkle, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*, author of *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*"A fascinating, frightening window into the world of gambling in Las Vegas and the technological innovations that deliberately enhance and sustain the 'zone'--the odd, absorbed state for which extreme machine gamblers yearn. An astute and provocative look at addiction and its complex moral, social, and emotional entanglements."--T. M. Luhmann, *Stanford University*"At the heart of SchĂll's book is the interplay between the players and the machine; between the players and the machine manufacturers; between the players and the math program; and between the players and the 'zone' that the machines help produce. A tour de force that changes the dialogue on gambling addiction."--Henry Lesieur, author of *The Chase: Career of the Compulsive Gambler*"SchĂll's clear and dramatic writing style is itself addictive. One is drawn into the ways in which the interactions among the different stakeholders lead to players' experience of being drawn into a 'zone' where they remain until all resources are gone. This is a must-read narrative that points to the many variants of screen addiction possible today."--Don Ihde, author of *Bodies in Technology*"This gripping, insightful, and poignant analysis of machine gambling offers a kind of object lesson in the intensified forms of consumption that computer-based technologies enable. An exemplary case of the way in which close, critical investigation of specific sites of capitalism can provide a deeper understanding of both intimate experience and widespread socioeconomic arrangements."--Lucy A. Suchman, author of *Human-Machine Reconfigurations*"SchĂll offers a provocative and important study of the imperative some people feel to lose themselves in a machine. The ethnography is rich and deep, shedding original light on the significance of addiction and gambling in American culture. The story told in the book is absolutely riveting."--Emily Martin, author of *Bipolar Expeditions*

I found this book profoundly interesting. It is not an easy read, but that is more, I believe, due to the complexity of the concepts with which the author is dealing, rather than his prose style, which I find very clear and fluid. The book's emphasis is on the rise of the digital gambling machine, particularly "slots", which account for such a huge portion of modern casino revenues (and profits). The author examines the design and construction of the machines, their interaction with their users, and how this interaction leads to the formation or enhancement of gambling addictions. This is no hackneyed piece of academic research. The author spent many months with "boots on the ground" in Las Vegas casinos and machine manufacturing centers, trying to develop a comprehensive understanding of the forces at play in the modern human-machine interaction. I believe he has succeeded admirably. His explanations of what is really happening in the gambler's mind- and how the machine plays to those cerebral patterns- is profound and much different from conventional thought. If you want to understand what makes casino gamblers tick, and how the gambling industry takes advantage of every nuance of the gambler's psyche, this is a wonderful read. It should not be rushed through, but savored. Highly recommended, and ground-breaking research, compellingly presented. A few reviewers have complained that this book is difficult to read. They criticize the author's writing style, declaim his density of style. Sorry, I don't buy any of that. This is wonderfully written

This book is a thorough discussion of electronic gambling. It explains the development of electronic gambling as a business seeking to maximize customers and revenues. The author attempts to explain the nature of addiction to these electronic games from both the theoretical and from the perception of the people who find themselves unable to separate from these games. She does as good a job of this as I have encountered. In central New Mexico we are surrounded by Indian Casinos which are the primary sources of entertainment for many people. As a result, we have much gambling addiction. I had thought poor teaching of math skills in our schools was a primary cause of the attraction of the casinos. But, the author has convinced me that the gambling addicts know they are going to lose their money; they are trying to maximize the time they are "in the game".

I think this is a good read for those who are designing something addictive. You'll learn things about the mindset of addictive gamblers, and how to make people addicted. I just wish the author write the book in a shorter way. She tells good stories, but overuse the technique that make you tired of

reading.

This is an important book for anyone wanting to understand how the gambling industry systematically hooks gamblers. Unfortunately, it's a tedious read with much repetition.

An incisive investigation into the insidious workings in games of chance. Schull possesses impeccable credentials and ultimately points to the anxiety and precarious essence of contemporary life as one of the troubling components involved which draw individuals to betting. It turns out that much of what goes at the root of economics, politics, and in society is dominated by extraordinary technological manipulation.

This is a very interesting book. The author does a remarkable and in-depth research of Las Vegas gaming environment. However, the importance, at least for me, lies beyond that. *Addiction By Design* gives a lot of input for debates related to technology incorporation and the digital age. Highly recommended. Take into account it's shorter than it seems. There are 100 plus pages of references.

As machine gaming expands across the US more people need to understand the design process of these machines and the impact they have on people. The author does an excellent job explaining the development process and how that process has driven the design of these games to encourage gameplay in a way that seems to disconnect players from the outside world. Some of the psychology was a little deeper than I thought necessary, but it was still interesting. I gained a lot of insight into why people play some of these games and it wasn't what I expected.

Fascinating book. Although it's a little sad how people are manipulated by casinos. Read this - and buy this - if you play slots - ever - and especially if you have a family member who is hooked on slots.

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Workbook: Written by a Former Gambler (Gambling Addiction Cure, Compulsive Gambling, Problem Gambling, Gambling Stories) Gambling Addiction Cure: Gambling Addiction Cure and Recovery of Your Life (Addiction Recovery, Addiction Gambling, Quit Smoking, Addictions) Master Book On Addiction: How To Overcome Drug Addiction-Alcohol Addiction-Smoking Addiction-Gambling Addiction-Internet Addiction-Overeating LAS VEGAS: THE COMPLETE INSIDERS GUIDE FOR WOMEN TRAVELING TO LAS VEGAS: A Travel Nevada Gambling America Guidebook (America Las Vegas General Short Reads Travel) 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) Breaking Bad Habits: 11 Steps to Freedom (addiction, food addiction, sugar addiction, gambling addiction, addiction recovery, habits, breaking bad habits) The Ultimate Gambling Addiction Help Guide: How to Overcome a Gambling Addiction and Problem Gambling Once and for All Gambling Addiction Cure: How to Overcome Gambling Addiction and Stop Compulsive Gambling for Life Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas Addiction and Recovery: How to Overcome Alcohol, Gambling, Drug, Sex, Food, and Technology Addictions (Addiction, Substance Abuse, Addiction and Recovery, Alcohol Addiction) Las Vegas, Reno, Tahoe '97: With Gambling Tips and Trips to Lake Mead and the Mountains (Fodor's Las Vegas) 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 Porn Addiction: How to Quit Porn, Porn Addiction, Step-by-Step Easy Guide to Control Your Porn Addiction, Stop Watching Porn in 7 Days! (Porn Addiction, Improve Your Relations, Live Happier Life) The Nicotine Addiction Cure - How to Avoid Triggers, Manage Withdrawal Symptoms, and Quit Nicotine & Smoking for Life (tobacco addiction, nicotine addiction, ... recovery, smoking addiction, stop smoking,) Insiders' Guide to Las Vegas, 6th: Including North Las Vegas, Henderson, and Boulder City (Insiders' Guide Series) Grandissimo: The First Emperor of Las Vegas: How Jay Sarno Won a Casino Empire, Lost It, and Inspired Modern Las Vegas Frugal Las Vegas - 2017 (Las Vegas Guides) Las Vegas Celebrity Mail Addresses: Over 150 Las Vegas & Nevada Celebrity Postal Addresses for Autographs, Fan Mail, Event Managers, Agents, and Journalists.

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