

Casinos banking on slot players

By Brad Plumer, Vox

The next time you find yourself in a casino, pause for a second to appreciate the architecture.

Casinos put an enormous amount of thought into their designs. The layout of the tables, the patterns on the carpet, the lighting – they’re all explicitly engineered to make gambling more seductive and get you to spend more money.

One surprising example are the curving hallways around the property. Many casinos try to avoid making you ever have to turn at a 90° angle. As Natasha Dow Schüll explains in her fascinating book, *Addiction By Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*, a right-angle turn forces people to call upon the decision-making parts of their brain – to stop and reflect on what they’re doing. “Casinos don’t want that,” Schüll told me. “They want to curve you gently to where they want you to go.”

But as Schüll discovered, almost nothing in a modern-day casino is more carefully engineered than its slot machines.

Slot machines and video gambling were once marginal to the success of casinos – but nowadays, they account for up to 85 percent of the gaming industry’s profits. And casinos have devised a dizzying array of strategies to make these machines as addictive as possible, from the elaborate algorithms beneath the hood to the position of the armrests.

Schüll, a cultural anthropologist at MIT, spent 15 years in Las Vegas tracking the evolution of slot machines, exploring how and why they’ve become so addictive. We spoke recently by phone about how gambling has changed dramatically over time and how the gaming industry has drawn on psychological

insights to make its games more addictive – often with tragic consequences.

Read the whole story