

The University of Chicago

**Just One More: Wind Creek Chicago Southland and the Expansion of Legal Gaming in
Illinois**



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**A project essay submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Policy**

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Undergraduate Program in Public Policy

February 21, 2025

Abstract

The seductive pull of gambling lingers in the mind, a promise of fortune wrapped in the thrill of risk. Casinos have long served as carefully regulated arenas for this pursuit, yet Illinois' Rebuild Illinois initiative, passed in 2019, ushered in a new era of unrestricted casino expansion, including Wind Creek Chicago Southland. Through a combination of ethnographic research and interviews, this paper examines the intersection of policy, addiction, and personal experience at Wind Creek. I found that the casino's reward structures and incentive systems encourage repeated play, drawing both casual visitors and seasoned gamblers into cycles of loss and pursuit. While some patrons praised the casino as a social hub, the shadow of addiction loomed larger, reinforced by the psychological mechanisms of slot machines and tiered reward programs. These findings suggest that Illinois's new gambling infrastructure may inadvertently serve as a structure for addiction. If left unchecked, this structure may continue, if not expand, how people can engage in casinos that fuel addictive behaviors.

Introduction

“Damn it!”, the gentleman across from me shouted, slamming his cards onto the table. He had just lost an all-in gamble against a beaming, grizzled, 60-year-old trucker seated to my left. As his full stack of \$200 worth of black, green, red, and white poker chips was pushed to the victor, he quietly muttered, “Hold my seat; I’ll be back.” Come back, he did, buying in for another \$200 after he had cooled off in a 10-minute break, ready for one more run to make his money back. This brief interaction conveys the spirit of gambling, the art of saying “just one more.” In blackjack, you are just one hand away from either a blackjack; or busting and losing your bet. On the slot machine, you are just one spin before that sweet jackpot; or going further into the hole. In poker, you are just one more hand between recovering your losses and then some; or going on a 10-minute break to regain your cool after losing your money like the man who sat next to me. So what happens when the state of Illinois says that it is time for one more casino? Or, in the case of JB Pritzker’s 2019 Infrastructure Act, the possibility for six new casinos in Illinois (Office of the Lieutenant Governor n.d).

This is precisely what Rebuild Illinois did in 2019, opening up six casino licenses that can be purchased by outside investors who could then open up “Las Vegas-style” casinos within the state of Illinois. Local officials describe one specific casino, Wind Creek Chicago Southland, as “Las Vegas-like”. This title suggests that Wind Creek’s high-end finishings are as close as you can get to Las Vegas while being in Southland (Fox 32 Chicago, 2024). Within this context, this project would suggest that Chicagoans and Illinois as a whole are gaining some benefit. The chief benefit for the state in allowing the opening of casinos such as Wind Creek Chicago Southland was that these casinos would provide taxes to the state. At the same time, these casinos promised to offer up thousands of jobs for not just the construction of these casinos, but

also permanent positions for people of the state (Office of the Lieutenant Governor n.d). At the same time, it cannot be ignored that gambling is a vice with associated risks. For instance, it is suggested that about 1% of Americans are compulsive gamblers, any one of whom may not have lived near a casino beforehand but could now more easily engage in this behavior (Yale Medicine n.d.). Overall, the benefits associated with casinos could be a good thing for Illinois; after all, job growth will happen, and some lucky winners will hit big. At the same time, there remains an inescapable darkness. The funds going back into the state of Illinois are built from the damage to the wallets of Chicagoans as they face some of the horrors of gambling. Some may become gambling addicts, insisting that they are just one more spin from success. In reality, these hopeful gamblers may instead be a spin away from throwing away their food money. As a result, the question of addiction and suffering must be explored in the gambling landscape as it presents itself in Chicagoland. Specifically, how do the positive and negative aspects of gambling manifest on the casino floor? Furthermore, what are the reasons that people find themselves at casinos, and do the other potential benefits outweigh the dark downsides of engaging in casino gambling? To explore these questions, I will be engaging in a broad analysis of the history of gambling and how it relates to Wind Creek Chicago Southland. At the same time, I will take an ethnographic view of Wind Creek, documenting my experiences with the casino through my eyes.

Building the Infrastructure for Modern Casinos

Before we can look inside Wind Creek Chicago Southland, it is important to look at how we got to this point of casinos within Illinois. Legal gaming within Illinois began with horse racing in the 1920s (Encyclopedia of Chicago n.d.). With its regulation, horse racing stood out as

the only way to gamble in a way that was monitored by the state. However, due to a fall in popularity that coincided with the World War, horse racing fell in popularity (Encyclopedia of Chicago n.d.).

The next stage in the story of legal gaming in Illinois requires a fast-forward of 70 years to the Illinois Riverboat Gambling Act. This act saw Illinois become only the second state in the United States to legalize riverboat gambling (Sikes, 2024). In terms of specific regulation, there is debate among scholars that there was a specific clause that stipulated that a gambler could lose a maximum of \$500 per visit. However, even if this clause existed, other states that had this stipulation also counted each visit as any time that an individual paid the entrance fee to the casino. This means that any individual could just reset the amount they can lose by paying another entrance fee, rendering this regulation useless. Riverboat gambling was an immediate success for the state of Illinois, netting eight million dollars in taxes the first year and \$54 million the next. Riverboat casinos exist in Illinois to this day, with one of the most popular riverboat casinos in Illinois, “Rivers,” earning \$545.6 million alone from October 2022 to September 2023 (Civic Federation n.d.). This is an important chapter in the history of legal gaming in Illinois, as from 1990 to 2019, riverboat casinos were the only way to have robust casino experiences.

The modern stage of casino gambling began when the Rebuild Illinois Capital Plan was signed into law in 2019. The core mission of this plan was to expand infrastructure from education to roads and casinos, supporting the creation of an estimated 540,000 jobs over the plan’s lifetime (Office of the Lieutenant Governor n.d.). Within Rebuild Illinois, SB 690 is the bill that allows the expansion of casinos. Within this bill, there are stipulations that riverboat casinos can move to land and, importantly, that six new licenses may be granted for owners to build new casinos (Illinois General Assembly, 2025). These are not casinos bound to bodies of

water as riverboat casinos or casinos that must be built on reservation land as a Native American Casino. Instead, SB 690 welcomed the type of casino that one would find in Vegas, fully on land and fully private. Thus, it is a huge deal that these licenses became available, as it marked a yet unseen move into private casinos without restrictions. Furthermore, this was significant because of the reasoning behind the opening of these casino licenses. That is, through Rebuild Illinois, the state is acknowledging the value of casinos as tax-earning entities for the state. It logically follows that the state is then open to receiving money from casinos and is even encouraging it through the expansion of casinos. While this appears fine in theory, it becomes an issue when one considers the way that casinos generate revenue. There are, of course, the non-game money-making amenities that one would find at a casino, such as valet parking, hotel rooms, food, and beverages. However, when compared to these other segments, a report by the Henry Fund still finds that within the casino industry, all of these amenities combined make up only 35% of casino revenue compared to 65% made by casino games alone (Henry Fund n.d.). The tax revenue mostly comes from the money that the people of Illinois and those from other states lose on their visits to the casino. Thus, this modern age of casinos in Illinois represents a movement towards using the losses that the people of the state have at these casinos. Casinos also make it easy to lose money. There are no rules such as the one mentioned earlier about the maximum amount that one can lose. With this in mind, it is then helpful to look into addiction and its manifestations on the casino floor.

Building the Infrastructure for Addiction

The first step to talking about how casinos relate to addiction is to talk about gambling addiction on its own. The American Gaming Association predicts that 90% of casino visitors

practice responsible gaming (Ledger n.d.). This means that these gamblers are taking steps such as setting a budget, tracking their spending, and knowing their responsible gaming resources. However, within this framework, it must be acknowledged that the difference between healthy and unhealthy is rather slim. A player could spend more than they budgeted to chase their losses, a very common thing within the sports-betting world that generalizes across games (Birches Health n.d.). A player could also disregard the resources available to them and forget to track their spending. All of these things exist within the realm of possibility for the “responsible” gambler, but there still exists those who do not gamble responsibly. Beyond the 1% of gamblers who are compulsive gamblers, defined by the uncontrollable urge to keep gambling despite losses (Mayo Clinic n.d.), it is also estimated that 2.6%, or 10 million people within the United States are at least addicted to gambling (Medical News Today, 2018). Combining these numbers with the fact that 10% of casino visitors are not responsible gamblers (Ledger n.d.), it is easy to see that having easier access to casinos could be very risky. That is, with these new places to go, those who are compulsive gamblers or just gambling addicts now get easier reach to their problematic vice. Furthermore, the 90% who are responsible gamblers are constantly facing the temptations of gambling addiction. One wrong move, one miscalculation, one loss when they were so close to a win could be all it takes for them to join the ranks of addicts. On top of this, depending on how easy it is for them to get to the casino, they could be facing the risk of becoming addicted each time they return. The next step to understanding this world is the individual way that casinos themselves act as landscapes for addiction. So, to look at the new face of addiction, it is time to go to the Wind Creek Chicago Southland and talk to the people there.

Wind Creek Chicago Southland

Wind Creek Chicago Southland was one of the six licensed casinos that came from Rebuild Illinois, with its spot being purchased by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, who opened the casino in East Hazel Crest, Illinois, on November 11, 2024 (Chicago Tribune, 2025). Wind Creek Chicago truly lives up to its name as a “Vegas-like” casino in many ways when it comes to what it offers. Boasting over 1,400 slot machines, some of the most popular table games, and a poker room, Wind Creek Chicago has had most of the games that one would expect when stepping into a Las Vegas casino since opening. Furthermore, there are plans to open up a sportsbook, as well as the opportunity for people to book spaces within the casino to host events. Not only that, but the casino also has a buffet, a Starbucks, and various restaurants (Wind Creek Chicago Southland n.d.). Although impressive, the casino is just at the beginning stage. Just like many of the casinos that one would find in Vegas, Wind Creek Chicago has plans to open up its hotel and spa within 2025, which would allow for 24/7 hours, which is currently impossible with the eight AM to four AM opening times that the casino has today (Wind Creek Chicago Southland n.d.). With all of these things that one can enjoy at the casino, it becomes clear that this is currently a casino, but it has plans of becoming more than that: an experience. A way to gamble when you want to gamble, drink and party when you want to drink and party, and rest and relax when you want to rest and relax. The casino, it would seem, is opening itself as a world for the consumer to become a part of when they enter and have no need to leave save for the moment that they run out of either time or money.



Figure 1. An image of Wind Creek Chicago Southland taken in the parking lot of the complex.

Arriving At the Casino

The feeling of entering a new world does not stop with what it offers but is something that one feels the moment when one arrives. When you get to Wind Creek Chicago, you can feel yourself being attracted by its gravity. All of your needs are immediately met. If you have a car, you can get a valet service; if you have a coat, you can have it hung up; if you are tired, you can stop by Starbucks for a drink. Overall, you are made to feel like you belong because they want you there. More than this, you feel as though you have the freedom to do what you want and all the resources you need to do so. Stepping into the casino, your first stop will be a small security section where you and your bags are checked. Moving swiftly through the security, and after a quick “Good luck!” from the security guard, you fully enter this new world. In front of you are slot machines as far as the eye can see. To your left is another restaurant where you can eat. To your right is a bar where you can grab a drink and catch the game, which is especially helpful if you have money riding on one of the games. This room will likely be your first stop. This is because if you stop by any of the slot machines, try to sit down to play a table game, or just ask a

staff member what the first thing to do is, you will be directed to “get a rewards card” which is located in this sports bar area.

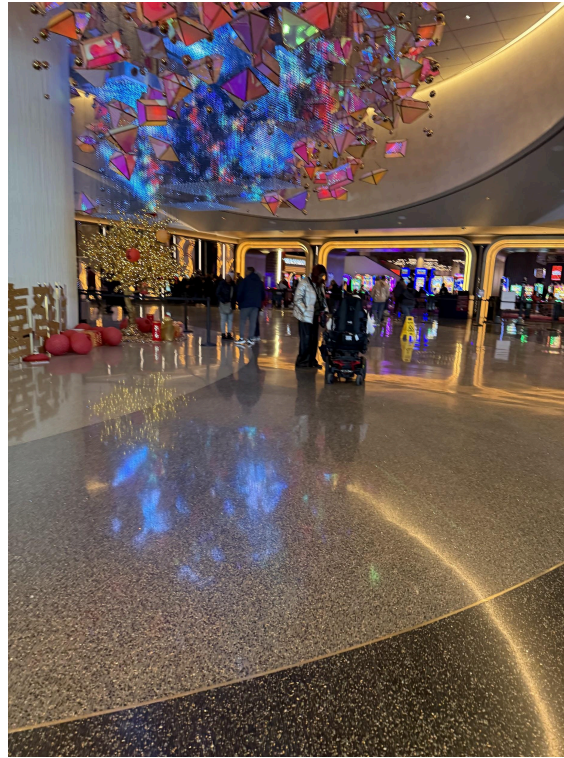


Figure 2. The first view of the casino when you step into the building. Pictured is the lobby area with the slot machines and security checkpoint in the background.

When you go to get your rewards card, it immediately becomes clear why so many people enjoy Wind Creek Chicago Southland. After queueing up for anywhere from five to 20 minutes, you will finally be able to get your rewards card. You don't have to spend any money to receive this magical card. You just need your ID, and then you are officially a part of the casino as a personalized card is given to you, as well as the red color indicating that you are a fresh “Play” member. “Play” here refers to your first tier of rewards card, with the tier system being based on points that you earn by playing any of the games at the casino. Play, the first tier ranges from 0-20,000, with benefits such as 25% discounted concert tickets and one discounted 3-night stay at a Wind Creek resort. Next is “Escape”, the green tier, from 20,000-74,999 points, with offerings such as a complimentary 3-night stay at a Wind Creek resort, ground transportation,

and \$150 value in birthday bonus points. Then, “Delight”, the purple tier, from 75,000-200,000 points, with offerings such as a free hotel night per month. Finally, is “Fantasy”, the black tier, for those who hit over 200,000 points, and offerings that treat anyone as royalty, offering a personal host and access to a spa lounge and fitness room to name some of the many rewards.

This tier system acts as an interesting way to immediately provide the gambler with a mission of sorts: to gamble as much as possible so that I can advance up the tiers, as playing any of the games within the casino grants points. This mission, however, would then objectively boil down to “gambling as much as I can so that I can gamble more”. Tier systems like this are not confined to Wind Creek Chicago Southland. A paper by Hollingshead et al. (2021) was published to study the way that tier-based structures within casinos encourage gambling. The study assigned participants into groups based on how high their tier was within the casino and their risk status as problem gamblers. For participants deemed non-problem gamblers, those in higher tiers gambled significantly more (Hollingshead et al., 2021). This entails that those with high-tier status on a given rewards system are encouraged to spend more on each casino visit, even if they are being promised rewards because of their status. The other finding within this study was that for problem gamblers, it did not matter the tier status when it came to loyalty. That is, these casinos are going to be gambling tier system or not. However, it was naturally also found that high-tier problem gamblers still were spending more money than low-tier problem gamblers (Hollingshead et al., 2021). This all suggests that these reward systems, such as the very robust one at Wind Creek Chicago Southland, are conducive to gambling more. These facts also tell a stronger story when one considers how close people can be to becoming problem gamblers, as mentioned earlier. The potential harm by reward systems amplifies as people

become even more at risk of harmful gambling, striving to reach higher tiers for rewards as they keep spending money

Moving past the tier system, the newly minted Wind Creek Chicago Southland member would then be exposed to the most glorious part of the rewards card: the freebies. As soon as you get your rewards card, you are given the fantastic information that the card contains \$70 of free play at the slot machines. This card is also loaded with a free \$30 voucher that can be used at the “Food Bazaar” or a single entrance to the Casino’s buffet, where you can eat a variety of delicious foods. After you receive the card, you are told that the only caveat is that the food voucher expires in two months, but then you are free. You have entered the casino fully, and there are no limitations. If this casino is a new world, you are now a citizen of it, and it is time to unleash yourself and have fun however you want to.

It was at this point when I was trying to understand the casino that I thought deeply about the rewards card. By speaking with people around the casino, I learned that this was a primary motivation for people to come here. Not specifically the tiers and their promise of rewards the more people play, but instead the monetary rewards that soften the losses and give more chances to play. The incentives begin with \$70 of free play at the slot machines. The \$70 of free play works in that any of the free play that you put in, you cannot lose in the form of real money. However, you must bet all of the money that you put into a slot machine in terms of free play. This means that if you put in \$10 and win \$10, you only get to cash out the winnings when you have spent the free play. However, even with this restriction, it still means that you have the chance of turning what are essentially casino credits into fake money. The \$70 free play is not the only incentive, but by just visiting, you are given more free play. In my three visits, I saw that another \$10 was added to my free play over the second and third visits just because of the hours I

put into playing poker. On top of this, in conversation with other people, the incentives that the casino gives are one of the driving factors for their repeated visits. One of the people I interviewed said that they had only just started coming to the casino, but now that they had started, they went once a week. This was all because on the casino's app, there was a promotion that gave people free money to play with for the slots. Others that I spoke with also agreed that one of the main things driving them to the casino was the free benefits that the casino offered. It would then follow that Wind Creek Chicago's biggest draw was the fact that it was giving away all of this money worth of free play, offering constant reasons to return. The woman who mentioned the app that attracted her was not alone in suggesting that she went weekly, as most of the people that I interviewed agreed that they went weekly. It would then follow that the free play is a great drive to bring people in. Once they are in, maybe they would then be in the responsible gambler stage that I mentioned above, only willing to play as much as they could for free. Once they lose all of their money, however, it becomes something different. It becomes a game of finally putting in real money to play. After all, for many if not most of these players, their drives to the casino aren't short, and it never feels good to end a session 30 minutes in because they ran out of free play. As such, when it comes to what is driving people to gamble at Wind Creek Chicago Southland, this seemingly innocent \$70 free play showcases the root of the addiction. Maybe it all starts with playing for free, but what comes after the free play leaves? The answer is the freedom of the casino, the draw of the lights and sounds, and the promise that even though they lost all of their fake free play, maybe they would win if they put in some real money. Although addiction stands out as a possibly dangerous effect of a casino, it is important to look at the casino as a social world that could have some real positive effects.

The Social and the Antisocial Worlds: The Poker Room

When it comes to the casino as a positive social space, the poker room seemed to be the best for gathering data on interactions. This is because of the nature of poker as a game where you are not playing against the house, but your fellow gambler and the house just takes a cut of each hand. Although we were playing against each other, there seemed to be a lot of positive social interaction. From my first visit, I noticed that the players had quite a lot of banter with each other. There were many humorous moments where a player would make a joke to another player, and some clear camaraderie had been built in the room. One specific instance involved a player seated to my left on my second visit. It seemed like his nickname was “Coach”, due to the fact that he was a retired coach of some sport. Every few hands a few people would come up to him and pay homage saying, “Hey Coach! How’s it going?” or something similar to that effect. In fact, he was so well known that when a player in the game was talking to her husband, Coach saw who she was talking with; and then said, “Oh you’re (guy’s name)’s husband! I’ve been playing with him for a few years, it’s so nice to meet you!” From moments like this, it felt like a definite kinship had been built up over each of these visits. This was a guy who had been going to the casinos of Illinois for so long that he made long-term friends. It seemed as if this tone was constant throughout my visits, and although we were playing against each other, competing for a chance to take the money off of one another, we were all in pleasant spirits. Part of this is likely because, for a lot of players, the poker room served as a third space. A third space refers to a place outside of the first place, the home, and the second place, work, where they can exist, connect, and have a good time with others (English Language Institute n.d.). The idea of the poker room, and the casino by extension, as a third place was best emphasized by a man that I observed during my time in the poker room. He was an older gentleman, likely in at least his late

60s or 70s, and was a veteran, as his cap indicated. He wasn't as chatty as the other players, and he didn't play as many hands, but you could tell he was happy to be there from the smile that occasionally crept up on his face. This man had been here all day when I visited, a Saturday, and apparently most of the day before. Because of this, another player asked him, "Man, I see you here all of the time, do you ever go home?" to which he replied, "I ain't got no home." This moment really spoke to me. Although he did chuckle afterward, signifying that he was exaggerating and that he did have a home, he clearly valued the place where he was. It didn't matter to him that he could win big or lose bigger; he just needed the space to get away from whatever unhappiness he had at his house. The poker room, in this instance, became his safe place.

However, there was another side. In poker, you can be soaring high, happy for the drinks and the company even as the cards go your way, yet there will still be moments of great loss that pull you back to reality. One such moment involved two players, a younger guy south of 40 and an older guy north of 50, squaring off in a one-on-one called "heads-up" in the poker world. Although the younger guy was representing a hand that was better than the older guy's for the whole round, he somehow managed to lose at the river, which just means that the very last card that came out was the one that sank him. After he saw this card, and likely because this was not the first time he lost in this last-minute manner in this way, he slammed his cards down and said, "Damn!". He lost every one of his chips, and he was out. He did come back, but he definitely had to take a long 10-minute break to cool himself down. This brought me back to reality. No matter how sweet these relationships were, no matter the healing fact that the casino can be a third place for people, gambling is gambling. An interview that I had with one of the regulars best showed me that the social aspect of the poker room specifically was very surface-level.

While interviewing this guy, someone who was a professional poker player in the poker room for his job that he drives in from Michigan to do, a lot of things made a lot of sense. For him, the poker room was pure and simple business, though ironically, I did speak to him as he was ordering a beer, so it is at least business with some pleasure. This speaks to the fact that these two competing sides, business and pleasure, are always present in the casino. When asked about how he saw the poker room as a social space, he said that a lot of guys do come for camaraderie and fun and that even he enjoys the time that he has. As such, the poker room stands out as a unique and complex look into the social world of the casino, so it is necessary to look elsewhere.

We can find the next area to look at right outside of the poker room in the big room full of slots. These 1,400 slot machines overwhelm, but behind every active one is a person engaging in the slot machine.

The Social and the Antisocial Worlds: The Slot Machines

In my investigation of the sociality of the casino and its intersection with addiction, I was often overwhelmed when interacting with the slots and those playing with them. Looking around me, I saw people captured by these machines. I saw a lot of older people pulling the levers of these machines as fast as they could. I saw a few couples sharing a seat and leisurely taking turns tapping the screen to spin. I even saw people speaking happily to the person next to them as their eyes remained transfixed on the screen in front of them. “What are these slot machines doing to these people? Where is it taking them?” are the questions that I was struggling to answer, so the only way that I could was to see if I could find the realm that these people entered, and I began my game. For the next 40 minutes, I believe I found this realm. Tap the screen, spin the slots, and win. Tap the screen, spin the slots, and lose. Tap the screen, spin the slots, and hit a jackpot,

which is paired with a great internal celebration. The sounds of the machine celebrate with me, and the happy ringing of the gods of luck shines on me. However, during these 40 minutes, I was not connected with the people around me. The world around me might as well not even have existed, that is how deeply I was taken into the realm of the slot machine. In fact, I imagine that players who were truly invested could go hours without interacting with another soul. What then would be the possible good of the slot machine? To further investigate this I spoke with people about their time doing slots. These were the same people who talked about how they were mainly there for the rewards, so they did not speak much about the social experience of the slot machine. Even though some of them came with friends, lovers, or at parties, the slot machine has a unique ability to isolate. This rings true for most of the people I spoke with, but not one couple who I briefly spoke with in my final interview. These two people were unlike everyone else that I spoke to in that they were just together because they were invited there for a birthday party. When asked why they were there together they replied, “We have been together for 34 years, we do everything together.”, which was quite a glittering moment of hope in a sea of money and addiction. To be fair for the slot machine, there were a lot of these similar groups of either friends or couples that sat close together and gambled together, there are even special seats that are longer and can fit multiple people on one slot machine.



Figure 3. A picture of one of the casino's slot machines that has a couch fit for two people rather than the seats in the rest of the casino that are fit for one.

While this couple was likely an outlier, as a large portion of my interviews were people who went to the casino weekly, it is interesting that the slot machines are often for groups. This would initially shed some light on the idea that maybe the casino is still alive and breathing with social energy. However, these friend groups and couples likely still act as individuals in many ways. They are not talking to people around them that they do not know, and they are gambling together, so they are likely under the same plan as each other when it comes to winning. Furthermore, they are engaging with possibly addictive slot machines, so at all levels, slot machines can still be seen as entities for isolation. With these social notes in mind, the next step to analyzing slot machines is to look at how exactly they capture people.

It is no surprise that slot machines can make up 65% to 80% of a casino's total revenue, depending on the state (UNLV n.d.) when you consider a casino's apparatus. Slot machines

themselves operate in ways that make it easy to become addicted. Studies have suggested that slot machines utilize lights and sound to act as stimuli that are subconsciously linked with rewards (Chase and Clark 2010). This becomes important as when an individual enters a casino, they are being blasted by stimuli in all directions as the seductive, loud, flashy, slot machines attempt to lure them in. As such, there is a very real reason for concern about the risk of addiction within the casino. Slot machines are perfect vehicles for the delivery of dopamine. When someone plays the slot machine, they are chasing wins, of course, but they are subconsciously also left chasing after near misses. In a study on this subject, rats were presented with a setup of three rolling lights meant to mimic a slot machine. On this machine, there were two levers the rat could push: collect or roll again. When each light lit up and the rat collected, they would be rewarded, but if less than three lights lit up, the rat would receive a time penalty when they hit the collect lever. This study found that rats showed a much greater preference for the collect lever on not just three-light winning trials but also two-light losing trials. Though these are rats, the researchers of this study suggest that this is very much analogous to the gambler's mindset when it comes to being driven by not just wins but near wins (Chase and Clark, 2010). Slot machines then stand out as a clear way that people are attracted, can begin their journey by gambling responsibly, but always have the risk of irresponsible or addicted gambling. It is the idea that a gambler can win that is not just reinforced by their wins, but their near wins that keep them coming back. With a firm view of the present pokes and prods that these vehicles of addiction give, it is important to look to the future.

The Future of Gambling

It was very interesting to see all of the people that were in the casino, as each of them was making a decision to be there rather than anywhere else. This doesn't just mean that they are gambling rather than doing some other recreational activity, but they are also there when the option to gamble online does exist in some form. Currently, online casinos cannot legally operate within Illinois, despite some previous efforts made to legalize it (110 ILCS 205 n.d.). Despite this, this only holds for websites that are within the United States, so casinos that operate outside of the U.S. are fully accessible to customers from places such as Illinois (Corefy, 2024). Due to this, as long as people can find ways to access these websites, the people who go to Wind Creek Chicago Southland could just as easily access their beloved slots online.

From my interviews, it became apparent that there was a distrust of online gambling. The casino is, then, the safer option for gambling money. When I asked most of the people that I spoke to, "Why are they in the casino rather than playing slots online?" they answered that they did not trust putting their information online. This makes sense because the people that I spoke to were quite a bit older than me, so ideas like putting money online to gamble likely seemed doubly unsafe. On top of this, these fears are not exactly unfounded, as a report by IQ Gambling (2025) suggests that as online gambling rises, so too does fraudulent activity. Another very interesting thing that one of the people that I spoke with mentioned was the fact that it wasn't just their devices that they did not trust but their own self-control. When asked why he didn't want to play slots online, he simply answered, "Too convenient." This was someone who said that they definitely don't play to hurt themselves and that they always had control over their gambling, but they still found online gambling too risky. To them, if it was as simple as turning on their computer or their phone and getting on a website, then they were afraid of the possibility

of addiction. This makes sense, especially when we return to the idea of the slot machine as a strong factor for addiction. By having constant access to this vice, you are able to play whenever you want. Each spin goes from a drive away to a few taps of the finger. Each bet doesn't require an ATM and withdrawing cash, but just plugging in a credit card.

In briefly exploring online gambling, it becomes clear that while gambling is gambling, there is something that feels more addictive and dangerous in online gambling. We remove the ability for people to interact with each other. We remove the almost hidden barriers of cash withdrawal and driving. Online gambling then becomes a view of pure addiction. In this sense, because of the decision of the individuals that I met at the casino to go to the casino, they were at least avoiding online gambling. If the goal then is to prevent addiction, then for these people, the casino would at least be providing this hidden service. With that all said, however, it is finally time to begin to leave the casino and zoom back out to look at the questions mentioned earlier.

Leaving the Casino

When I was getting ready to leave the casino for the final time, I did not know what time it was. Time in the casino passes oddly because of the lack of clocks and windows, a well-documented method of keeping gamblers inside the casino's walls (Sharma, 2024). Pausing at the Starbucks before I left, though it was only 4:00 PM, people passing by the Starbucks were being told to have a good night as they entered into the casino. This began to make me look back at the passage of time within the building. There was the poker player who stayed for eight hours because it was his job. There were slot players that I passed by that I saw hop from slot to slot over six hours. Even I, on one of my visits, looked at my phone and was shocked to see that somehow ten hours had passed. To return to my earlier mention of the freedom that draws people

in, I was left questioning this notion. How free could someone truly be if they are in some ways trapped within these walls? A gambler isn't trapped by force, or even by suggestion, but this combination of sights, sounds, and chemicals that keep them there. Before they know it, the whole day has come and gone, and they are left heading home, hopefully, up in money but likely not.



Figure 4. The view of the casino as one leaves it at night.

In my first question, I asked about the manifestation of the aspects of gambling on the casino floor. I saw glimmers of light in the social aspect of the casino and the fact that at least gamblers were not engaging in online gambling. However, the darkness of the casino blocks these glimmers, as individuals are made so comfortable to stay and gamble for as long as they can. Furthermore, the reward mechanisms specific to Wind Creek Chicago Southland were a unique way of keeping people there. This is especially apparent as the majority of the people I spoke to were not just random customers but were weekly visitors. The free wins entice them, but eventually, something free becomes very expensive. The dark face of addiction then breaks down the possibility for the benefits to outweigh the risks, as my other question asks. Thus, in taking all of this into consideration, by expanding casinos within Illinois, it remains true that this

tax revenue is off the backs of those who lose in the casino. There are likely many such individuals, but more concerning than singular events of financial loss is the constant threat of addiction. As I leave behind Wind Creek Chicago Southland this final time, the implication of all of this is that if casinos continue to expand, then so too does this acceptance of addiction as a vehicle for state revenue. One could argue that this is fine. They may argue that the state can and should tax its people and their decisions. However, if the point of taxes is for the benefit of those within the state, then it could not be that this is a fine decision. If the state wants to reduce the damage by these casinos, then it would make the most sense to return to the idea of restricting losses within a day, but also preventing overall gambling time. Since the overwhelming majority of sentiment was that it was the sweet taste of victory that kept people coming back, then in order to curtail addiction, the state would need to limit overall playing time. Thus, there would be less chasing of losses and less obsessively searching for wins. However, as it stands now, the very measure made to strengthen infrastructure has just built infrastructure for addiction, and this structure is continuously damaged by the losses incurred by the people of Illinois.

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