

0:00 What causes, say, heroin addiction?
0:03 This is a really stupid question, right?
0:05 It's obvious; we all know it;
0:07 heroin causes heroin addiction.
0:10 Here's how it works:
0:11 if you use heroin for 20 days, by day 21,
0:15 your body would physically crave the drug ferociously
0:17 because there are chemical hooks in the drug.
0:20 That's what addiction means.
0:22 But there's a catch.
0:24 Almost everything we think we know about addiction is wrong.
0:35 If you, for example, break your hip, you'll be taken to a hospital
0:38 and you'll be given loads of diamorphine for weeks or even months.
0:42 Diamorphine is heroin.
0:44 It's, in fact, much stronger heroin than any addict can get on the street
0:48 because it's not contaminated by all the stuff drug dealers dilute it with.
0:52 There are people near you being given
0:54 loads of deluxe heroin in hospitals right now.
0:57 So at least some of them should become addicts?
1:00 But this has been closely studied; it doesn't happen.
1:03 Your grandmother wasn't turned into a junkie by her hip replacement.
1:07 Why is that?
1:09 Our current theory of addiction comes in part from a series of experiments
1:12 that were carried out earlier in the 20th century.
1:15 The experiment is simple:
1:16 you take a rat and put it in a cage with two water bottles.
1:20 One is just water, the other is water laced with heroin or cocaine.
1:25 Almost every time you run this experiment,
1:27 the rat will become obsessed with the drugged water
1:29 and keep coming back for more and more, until it kills itself.
1:33 But in the 1970s, Bruce Alexander, a professor of psychology,
1:37 noticed something odd about this experiment:
1:39 the rat is put in the cage all alone.
1:42 It has nothing to do but take the drugs.
1:45 What would happen, he wondered, if we tried this differently?
1:49 So he built Rat Park, which is basically heaven for rats;
1:53 it's a lush cage where the rats would have colored balls, tunnels to scamper down,
1:57 plenty of friends to play with, and they could have loads of sex—
2:00 everything a rat about town could want.
2:02 And they would have the drugged water and the normal water bottles.
2:06 But here's the fascinating thing:
2:08 in Rat Park, rats hardly ever use the drugged water;
2:11 none of them ever use it compulsively; none of them ever overdose.
2:16 But maybe this is a quirk of rats, right?
2:19 Well, helpfully, there was a human experiment along the same lines:
2:22 the Vietnam War.
2:24 20% of American troops in Vietnam were using a lot of heroin.
2:28 People back home were really panicked,
2:29 because they thought there would be hundreds of thousands of junkies
2:32 on the streets of the United States when the war was over.
2:35 But a study followed the soldiers home and found something striking:
2:39 they didn't go to rehab; they didn't even go into withdrawal;
2:42 95% of them just stopped after they got home.

2:45 If you believe the old theory of addiction, that makes no sense.
2:49 But if you believe Prof. Alexander's theory, it makes perfect sense,
2:53 because if you're put into a horrific jungle in a foreign country
2:56 where you don't want to be, and you could be forced to kill or die at any moment,
3:00 doing heroin is a great way to spend your time;
3:02 but if you go back to your nice home with your friends and your family,
3:06 it's the equivalent of being taken out of that first cage
3:08 and put into a human Rat Park;
3:11 it's not the chemicals, it's your cage.
3:14 We need to think about addiction differently.
3:17 Human beings have an innate need to bond and connect.
3:20 When we are happy and healthy, we will bond with the people around us.
3:24 But when we can't,
3:25 because we're traumatized, isolated, or beaten down by life,
3:28 we will bond with something that gives us some sense of relief.
3:31 It might be endlessly checking a smartphone;
3:34 it might be pornography, video games, reddit, gambling, or it might be cocaine.
3:40 But we will bond with something, because that is our human nature.
3:44 The path out of unhealthy bonds is to form healthy bonds,
3:47 to be connected to people you want to be present with.
3:51 Addiction is just one symptom of the crisis of disconnection
3:54 that's happening all around us.
3:55 We all feel it.
3:57 Since the 1950s, the average number of close friends an American has
4:01 has been steadily declining.
4:02 At the same time, the amount of floor space in their homes
4:05 has been steadily increasing.
4:07 To choose floor space over friends, to choose stuff over connection.
4:12 The War on Drugs we've been fighting for almost a century now
4:15 has made everything worse.
4:17 Instead of helping people heal and getting their life together,
4:20 we have cast them out from society,
4:22 we have made it harder for them to get jobs and become stable,
4:25 we take benefits and support away from them if we catch them with drugs,
4:29 we throw them in prison cells, which are literally cages,
4:32 we put people who are not well
4:34 in a situation which makes them feel worse and hate them for not recovering.
4:39 For too long, we've talked only about individual recovery from addiction.
4:43 But we need now to talk about social recovery.
4:46 Because something has gone wrong with us as a group.
4:49 We have to build a society that looks a lot more like Rat Park
4:52 and a lot less like those isolated cages.
4:55 We are going to have to change the unnatural way we live
4:58 and rediscover each other.
5:01 The opposite of addiction is not sobriety; the opposite of addiction is connection.
5:10 This video is a collaboration with Johann Hari,
5:13 the author of the book
5:14 "Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs".
5:18 He was very kind to work with us on this video to spread the word.
5:21 We recommend that you give the book a try.
5:24 Our videos are made thanks to your support on Patreon.com.
5:27 If you want to help us make more of them, we really appreciate your support.
5:32 We made an interactive version of this video together with some friends.
5:36 See the link in the description.

5:39 Subtitles by the Amara.org community