

A FULLER PROCESSING OF JOHANN HARI'S “EVERYTHING YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT ADDICTION IS WRONG”

In a nutshell, Hari's discussion is this: experiments – with both rats and humans – demonstrate that meaningful connection in community overrides dependency and addiction.

His starting point, of course, as the title suggests, is addiction... and the traditional ways that it has understood and treated.

Here, he points to an American-British model that has held sway for the last 100 years: framing addiction mostly as a physiological reality (i.e., bio-chemical “hooks” promote dependency)...in which the best societal response or remedy is 1) restricting availability of and access to these hooks and 2) punishing those who do not live responsibly within these limits.

From there, he builds an alternative basis of understanding and treating addiction.

In part, he questions the tight connection or association between prolonged exposure to the “hooks” and it automatically leading to addiction.

- The fact that a majority of people who are given high doses of heroin-type drugs (to treat pain after surgeries... for a prolonged time) do not, thereby, become dependent users.
- Or again, the results of a Archives of General Psychiatry study – in which 95% of those Vietnam veterans who had been using “loads of heroin” during the war were able to return home—without withdrawals or any need for rehab.

But, the real core and foundation of Hari's presentation and argument is grounded in the research of Dr. Bruce Alexander as well as the results of a national-wide social “experiment” in Portugal.

In the first case, Alexander, professor of psychology in Vancouver, is introduced as a challenger of the protocols of established addiction studies of the day. Here, single rats might be put into cages with a choice of two water bottles: one with just water... the other, water laced with either heroin or cocaine. And the regular outcome? Within a short amount of time, most rats preferring the drug water... and almost always dying within a short time.

“But,” Alexander came along, asking, “what happens under the same circumstances if the rat is not alone?!”

Hari goes on to describe and explain...



Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong

What really causes addiction -- to everything from cocaine to smart-phones? And how can we overcome it? Johann Hari has seen our current methods fail firsthand, as he has watched loved ones struggle to manage their addictions. He started to wonder why we treat addicts the way we do -- and if there might be a better way. As he shares in this deeply personal talk, his questions took him around the world, and unearthed some surprising and hopeful ways of thinking about an age-old pro...

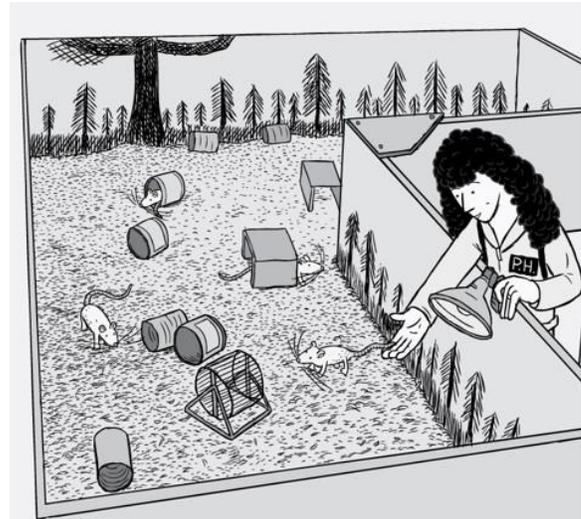
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Alexander built a cage that he called 'Rat Park,' which is basically heaven for rats. They've got loads of cheese, they've got loads of colored balls, they've got loads of tunnels. Crucially, they've got loads of friends. They can have loads of sex. And they've got both the water bottles, the normal water and the drugged water.

But here's the fascinating thing: In Rat Park, they don't like the drug water. They almost never use it. None of them ever use it compulsively. None of them ever overdose.

You go from almost 100 percent overdose when they're isolated to zero percent overdose when they have happy and connected lives.



In the other case Hari highlights, Alexander's work with rats would appear to have a human counterpart – via a social experiment conducted in Portugal at the beginning of this century. In 2000, he notes, "Portugal had one of the worst drug problems in Europe. One percent of the population was addicted to heroin, which is kind of mind-blowing." In a move of desperation, politicians across the spectrum work a panel of scientists and doctors to figure out what could be done.

The proposed solution? "Decriminalize all drugs from cannabis to crack," Hari explains, "but (and this is the crucial next step) take all the money we used to spend on cutting addicts off, on disconnecting them, and spend it instead on reconnecting them with society." Residential rehab and psychological therapy, yes. But also, more out of the box concepts — like job creation programs, microloans for small business start-ups....

"The goal," concludes Hari, "was to make sure that every addict in Portugal had something to get out of bed for in the morning"—promoting a recovery of purpose and, along with it, "rediscovered bonds and relationships with the wider society."

And the results? Hari, one last time:

It'll be 15 years this year since that experiment began, and the results are in: injecting drug use is down in Portugal, according to the British Journal of Criminology, by 50 percent, five-zero percent. Overdose is massively down, HIV is massively down among addicts. Addiction in every study is significantly down. One of the ways you know it's worked so well is that almost nobody in Portugal wants to go back to the old system.

