

**Gender and Addiction: An in depth analysis on gender and the effect it has on
addictive behaviors.**

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Abstract

This paper is meant to examine gender and the effect it has on addictive behavior from a psychological and philosophical view point. An in depth analysis following the different forms of addiction allows for a deeper evaluation on why gender plays a role and which gender becomes more addicted following a specific substance or behavior. The research showed that there is no direct gender that's affected by addiction or causes addiction. Both genders reacted differently depending on the substance due to societal and biological factors which was proven throughout the research. The studies and excerpts reviewed for this piece showed there was a correlation between gender and addiction when looking at the concept from every aspect.

Introduction

Addiction is a common practice that many participate in on a daily basis. This disorder is defined as a psychological and physical inability to cease the use of a certain chemical, substance, drug, or activity even if the use causes physical, psychological, and emotional harm. The concept of addiction has a plethora of components that contribute to why someone participates in said behavior. Addiction takes many roles depending on the individual. Although some addictions are no cause for concern, they exist to some capacity in each individual life.

The concept of gender is the use of characteristics that describe the aspects of male or female. These characteristics are socially constructed overtime. Gender stereotypes are clearly enforced throughout society. Gender is a main component on how individuals act based upon various societal and biological pressures, when relating this ideal with addiction, it's important to note that "Addiction is both a cultural and biological phenomenon. Sex and gender differences are not solely determined by our biology, nor are they entirely cultural; they are interactions between biology and the environment that are continuously played out throughout development." (Becker, Jill B., et al. 2016) Oftentimes individuals will feel societal pressure to participate in activities that are adjacent to their gender. The relationship between both gender and addiction tend to correlate when assessing different forms of addictive behavior. A few examples of some addictions people may take part in contain drug abuse, alcohol abuse, eating, gambling, pornography, etc. The main goal of this research is to look into the relationship between gender and addiction more specifically looking at it from a socially constructed male and female standpoint. This disorder is mainly caused by societal and biological factors. It is also specific to

the individual and the experiences they've had in their lives.

The components that contribute to why someone becomes addicted to a substance or activity are very broad. It's more often the case that addiction is a way to escape the reality of facing trauma. Addiction is psychosomatic, it allows for a temporary pleasure, relief and distraction from the mind's innermost thoughts, the thoughts consist of feelings or memories that people want to run away from. The clinical definition of addiction is a chronic, relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking, continued use despite harmful consequences, and long-lasting changes in the brain. It is considered both a complex brain disorder and a mental illness. (NIDA) It's a disorder that not only affects the individual but the people and the environment around them. It's important to understand the thought process and steps that follow addictive behavior. There are 4 different stages of developing an addiction. First is the stage of experimentation. At this stage, people who try certain substances or behaviors do so for an experience or pleasure not intending to become addicted. Second is the stage of regular usage. This occurs when people start to engage in substances or behaviors more frequently becoming a part of their everyday lifestyle. The third stage is Dependency, this is meant for people who become used to the substance or behavior causing them to need more in order to satisfy the craving and stop their regular life activity to continue this dependency. The last stage is full blown Addiction, this happens when the substance and behavior has taken over the individual's lives completely. Now that it's known that Addiction is the final stage in its development, it's important to dissect the different stages to better understand the results of an individual who becomes addicted.

There are 5 main stages of Addiction which include, Acquisition, Escalation, Maintenance, Withdrawal, and Relapse. The breakdown of the stages give some insight on why

gender is important whilst looking at how an individual becomes addicted. Gender is an important aspect of life from the moment our lives begin. Gender is the state of being male or female in relation to the social and cultural roles that are considered appropriate for men and women. (Collinsdictionary) The main difference of gender has to do with the biological sex given at birth, including body parts, hormones, chromosomes, and reproductive attributes. Another thing that separates gender besides sex are the characteristics created to fit the role of male and female. These characteristics have been compiled based on social construct. It separates people from each other and makes it apparent that there are social roles in place that have to be followed in order to fit a certain normal within society. Some of these social constructions involve the definitions of masculine and feminine. The ideas that men have to be strong and can't show emotions while women are meant to show class and responsibility. The women feel themselves being under constant observation of themselves and making sure they stay within invisible boundaries of respectful behavior. Men on the other hand, do not articulate any such concerns. (Sharon rödner sznitman, 2007) Bem (1981a) originally proposed that individual differences in the robustness of gender schemas vary as a result of the degree to which this gender dichotomy has been emphasized during the socialization process. (Casey, M. B. (1997). Although there are obvious biological differences between men and women, these differences are emphasized through social interaction.

Through the 5 stages, Gender Difference plays a role in which gender is more likely to become addicted, how often they feed their addiction, how fast they become addicted, and which gender may receive help and recover quicker. In terms of Acquisition, females may experience more pleasurable responses to drugs than men (cocaine and amphetamine) and are more likely to self medicate than men. (J. Becker, et al. 2017) Escalation for females includes an increase in the

amount and frequency of drug taking and for those at risk for addiction, escalation is more rapid for women than for men (J. Becker, et al. 2017) The same theme follows Maintenance, females stabilize at higher doses of drugs than men. (J. Becker, et al. 2017) As for Withdrawal, Female smokers reported an increased negative affect and experienced a greater stress response than men do. (J. Becker, et al. 2017) The last stage is relapse, this stage shows statistics that women are more likely to relapse than men and do so more sporadically (J. Becker, et al. 2017) Looking beyond the stages, women with addictive behaviors exhibit higher comorbid neuropsychiatric disorders than men (eg, anxiety, depression, stress-related disorders) which are, in turn, more likely to trigger craving and relapse in women. In general, women are also more likely to have a lower socioeconomic status (eg, lack of education, lower job status, worse financial situation, violent partners, history of sexual violence). (F. Thibaut, 2018) The statistics following each of the stages as well as other studies show evidence that women are evidently more likely to participate in addiction than men, however, this may not be true for all addiction.

While it's important to understand each stage of addiction and what causes those steps to transpire, it's also important to dissect each kind of addiction in order to make a proper assessment on which gender each addiction has more influence on. Although statistical evidence is present regarding the correlation between both addiction and gender, some studies suggest that gender has no effect on addiction and shows no significant reasoning to believe the two ideas are related to each other. A study done in the UK suggests that being a woman doesn't necessarily make you prone to addiction which is supported through the research done on alcohol in later studies. Lifetime prevalence rates for adolescent experimentation show that race, gender, and socioeconomic status are no longer significant predictors or protectors from drug use in the ways they were before 1990. (e.g Leitner, Shapland and Whiles, 1993) Even if there's statistics to back

up this claim, the socially constructive narratives including race, gender and socioeconomic status are still present in today's society and will be around for a long time after. Another study done in the UK suggests that there are other factors that come into play when discussing gender and addiction, one of the factors specifically for adolescence include parent monitoring which describes how closely parents pay attention to what their children are doing and prevent further addiction from taking place. This follows the theory that besides gender, environmental factors are crucial in assessing addiction. Several studies have reported a gender difference in parental monitoring of adolescents. A study of 1,772 adolescents using regression analysis and structural equation modeling showed that females used less alcohol and received more parental monitoring than males. (Webb J, Bray et al. 2002)

A study done in Scotland regarding binge drinking found that it is striking that substantial gender differences in hazardous drinking were seen in all three age cohorts in both 1990 and 2000. Indeed, gender differences would be even more marked for heavy and binge drinking if the same definitions were used for men and women, as is the case in some European countries. (C. Emslie. et al 2009) This proves that studies done in the UK regarding gender and addiction may not be looking at all the components to make a valid claim that gender has no effect on addiction. It's hard to say there's no correlation between gender and addiction because there are so many forms of addiction that have an effect on both genders differently. It also shows that the differences vary when looking at the forms of addiction and substances related to addictive behaviors. There isn't an obvious answer whether or not males are more addicted to a substance or behavior than women, it's all subjective when examining each addiction and which gender seems to be more affected by this behavior. The research done for this paper reflects this claim

because it allows for extensive exploration of studies and excerpts that cover which gender participated in what addiction more or less than their counterpart.

Social Construct and Gender

When discussing gender it's important to consider the role social construct plays in the conceptualization of gender in society. Social construct was put in place to obtain social order and understand social interaction. Social construct has given society a starting point on how to act based on the gender role we were given but this "starting point" can be extremely detrimental in terms of how we think about gender as a whole. When growing up, it's obvious there are innate differences between male and female that cannot be overlooked. The obvious differences have to do with biological factors, however, the differences society focuses on are the social factors that separate the male and female experience.

The male experience focuses heavily on masculination, some of the male characteristics that follow masculination are a result of social constructivism because it's a collective theory that if all men are the same then you have to be too. The role toxic masculinity plays within society is important because it exemplifies the idea that if you're not ultra masculine then you aren't a male. This thought process can be very taxing on the mind because it highlights the concept that if you show emotion then you are not a part of the male experience. How gender is perceived within society is how people want to act in order to fit the mold that has been set forth by past societies. It's hard to feel alone in a community that's supposed to be who you are at your core. Gender isn't the only aspect of who you are but by following the social construct of gender, it seems like it's what you're supposed to do in order to feel like you belong in society. This is shown through many examples of how we act based on the gender we are given, especially in the way we physically present ourselves. "A recent study by Halim et al (2014) of three- to

six-year-old children from diverse ethnic and parental income backgrounds suggested children's behavior in relation to their appearance was both gender-related and inflexible, reflecting an early knowledge about gender identity. One finding was that girls exhibited greater gender appearance inflexibility than boys. The authors suggest one possible explanation: 'For girls, being a girl might mean looking like a girl. For boys, we speculate being a boy might largely mean something else, such as acting like a boy.' One might infer from this that 'being a girl' is defined mainly by appearance, but 'being a boy' is defined less by how a boy looks but by how he behaves.' (George F. Winter. 2015) This describes both gendered experiences because as previously stated, men and boys feel the need to fit the masculine narrative because in doing so, they may feel more connected to the gender they were assigned at birth and the other males within society.

This is different from the female experience because as the study done by Halime states, being a female means looking like a female from a physical aspect, this can be done by the clothes that are worn, wearing makeup, etc. This is harmful because it's demoting the female experience to how they present themselves visually to other people. Women being objectified has never ceased to be a part of society and the reason why is because society is comfortable telling young women they have to dress to impress in order to meet the criteria of what is expected in order to meet the male gaze. The social construction of being female has been made to adhere to the submissive part of the female experience that society has tried to make strives to move past that idea. Even though there has been progression, the narrative is still there and people still follow it because it reminds them of a traditional time in society.

The gender differences are important when looking at addiction because it's an introduction to society. Gender is the first thing that separates us from the moment parents find

out the sex of a baby. Growing up with these different experiences following what it's like to be both male and female can have negative effects on each individual. Obviously gender isn't the only indicator for what can cause someone to become addicted to a substance or activity but it plays a part in the human experience which can contribute to addictive behavior.

Biological Factors of Addiction

It's known that there are many different factors that play a role in why someone may become addicted to a certain substance or behavior. Biology research may be one of the most important factors in predicting addiction because it evaluates brain changes in relation to substance abuse which differs between genders. It's also important for gender research in general because it allows for the prediction of gender differences. "These differences reflect sexual dimorphisms in brain, endocrine (e.g., ovarian hormones), and metabolic systems, among others." (R. Kathryn McHugh, 2019) Social and Environmental factors are always present but the effect they may have develops throughout time. Biological Factors are present from birth. "Exposure to drug cues known to increase craving increases activity in the amygdala and regions of the frontal cortex. Gender differences also have been reported with cue-related activation in the amygdala and frontal cortex of cocaine dependent individuals. Cue-induced craving for nicotine, methamphetamine, and opiates also activates regions of the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, hippocampus, insula, and ventral tegmental area" (Sinha, Rajita. 2011)

It's apparent that there are gender differences within different parts of the brain. The parts that are affected by gender also seem to be affected by varied forms of addiction following cravings and relapse. This study exemplifies that there is an obvious correlation following brain activity with gender and addiction. There are certain chemicals in the brain that drive addictions so when they are deprived of these addictions they start to send the body signals of feeling sick

which is known as detoxing. The process of detoxing is extensive which is why so many individuals would rather carry on with the addictions instead of getting the necessary help needed to kick the habit. Neuroimaging research has identified a number of sex differences in brain volume and function in response to various substances; however, many studies have not detected sex differences, have not tested sex differences, or were insufficiently powered (Lind et al., 2017).

A study examining the effects of frontal dysfunction associated with chronic marijuana use in adolescence noted that there is a difference following how cannabis and other substances have different effects on the brain when looking at gender. “During adolescence, gender may moderate the effects of MJ on the brain (Huttenlocher 1979; Benes et al. 1994; Huttenlocher & Dabholkar 1997; Block et al. 2000; Spear 2000; Giedd 2004). In healthy adolescents, on average, females’ PFC gray matter volumes peak 1 to 2 years earlier than males (Giedd et al. 1996). In contrast to prior studies of WM neuromaturation suggesting increased myelination of the PFC among female adolescents (e.g. Pfefferbaum et al. 1994; Reiss et al. 1996; Giedd et al. 1999), our laboratory found that, among females, PFC WM volume actually decreased from age 15–18, while males’ PFC WM remained relatively stable (Nagelet al. 2006).” (Medina, Krista Lisdahl et al. 2009) This further shows gender differences regarding the brain because the healthy female brain tends to carry gray matter volumes earlier than the male brain.

“Increases in CB1 availability and introduction of chronic MJ use may cause greater disruption of the above outlined cannabis related neuromodulation in girls. It is also notable that the female MJ users demonstrated marginally higher lifetime drinking episodes and significantly greater alcohol dependence symptoms compared with male MJ users.” (Medina, Krista Lisdahl et al. 2009) The healthy female brain exhibits higher gray volume matter than the male brain.

However, when substance abuse is introduced following alcohol and other drugs female PFC volumes drop and become smaller. This statistic differs when looking at recurrent cannabis usage but when looking closely on the effects of other substances, there is a substantial difference following the male and female brain. Sex hormones that the male and female body experience carry extreme differences as well in regards to substance abuse.

Females contain the hormones estrogen and progesterone whereas men contain testosterone. “Sex chromosomes and hormones affect the structure, physiology, and function of various organ systems throughout the lifespan, with impact of hormonal changes at different life stages, such as puberty, pregnancy, aging, and menopause. Indeed, significant sex based differences exist in the regulation of diverse behavior and metabolism” (Shi, Haifei, et al. 2015) These changes can attribute to addiction because of how the mind and body reacts to the hormones. The rapid changes come at vulnerable life stages which can cause distress based on the circumstances and state of their lives. Changes in hormones are also known to affect behavior which may result in highs and lows. The high is met with feelings of euphoria and happiness which is all that people strive for in life. This is what makes the lows feel debilitating because when feelings of anxiety and depression arise it can be hard to remember that high feeling which is why so many turn to substance abuse. Individuals who deal with this may get addicted to certain substances in order to self medicate and be in control of their emotions. Certain substances may emulate the “high” feeling which can trick the mind into thinking that part of the brain is being fulfilled but it’s only temporary and an extremely unhealthy method of self medication.

“There are also gender differences in other co-occurring psychiatric disorders among those with SUDs, with higher rates of anxiety and depressive disorders in women and higher

rates of other externalizing disorders such as conduct disorder and antisocial personality disorder in men (Conway et al., 2006, Khan et al., 2013). Mental and personality disorders can be caused by genetics meaning the disorders are present from birth and have been passed down to certain individuals. The biology behind the disorders involve the brain which has been proven to affect males and females differently. When looking at addiction from a biological standpoint, researchers are able to properly assess the underlying causes for addiction in order to see where the differences are when considering gender.

Drug Addiction and Gender

Drug abuse is very common found in both men and women. It happens quickly and it takes over the lives of the individual's who experiment with this addiction no matter what the choice of drug is. Adult men are 2 to 3 times more likely than women to have a drug abuse/dependence disorder (Becker and Hu, 2008) Drug experimentation is most common in adolescence, it starts the initial use when individuals are young to fulfill an experience or give in to the societal peer pressure that's commonly found in both genders.

Males are said to have experienced participating in experimentation much earlier than females possibly due to the fear of being seen as weak if they don't partake in substance abuse behaviors which are constructed by social norms following the masculine point of view. There's something that interests the male mind when it comes to the risk and adventure that comes with the use of certain drugs. Men also play into the "reckless stereotype" meaning the drug excites the male brain and adrenaline which in turn can cause further usage. Men also tend to hide their feelings and emotions which is a big reason as to why they would experiment with drugs in order to escape the mind. Furthermore, it has been suggested on a priori grounds that alcoholism and

drug addiction are an almost exclusively “male” problem, for which well-known psycho pharmacotherapeutic strategies have been developed. (Bokhan et al. 2011) Certain drugs present themselves as a quick fix to the issues of the world especially when it’s relating to emotional and mental distress. Typically, men are more likely to abuse illicit drugs and alcohol – 11.5% of boys and men over 12 have a substance use disorder, compared to 6.4% of women and girls. However, women are more likely to go to the emergency room or fatally overdose due to substance abuse. (Bezruczyk, D. 2021)

A main theory following gender and drug abuse seems to be that men have a history of turning to drugs for emotional support and it’s more common that they’ll abuse drugs over women. In addition, researchers have found that drinking to cope with distress predicted increases in alcohol related problems over one year in a community sample of men but not women. (Nolen-Hoeksema, Susan, and Lori Hilt, 2006) This could also be attributed to how negatively society views women who drink compared to how they view men.

Although it’s easier for women to discuss certain traumatic experiences they’ve endured, it's not as easy when those experiences involve unwanted physical abuse specifically in a sexual manner. Sexual violence is perpetrated upon (and to a lesser degree, by) people of all gender identities, as I point out to my students: but the transformations of masculinity required to eradicate men’s violence against women (sexual and otherwise) are also the key to eradicating all forms of gender-based and sexual violence. (Jeremy Posadas, 2017) It’s statistically proven that women experience more sexual abuse in their lifetime than men. As previously discussed, the social stereotype that women are supposed to maintain a certain level of class and innocence is primarily why when faced with sexual abuse, females tend not to share that experience. There’s a great shame that women feel upon sharing because they believe it taints the image of innocence.

Societal impact has made it so that men succeed and women have to work harder in order to achieve similar merits. This ideal is primarily the reason why women turn to drug abuse because it's a way to alleviate the stress of living in a man's world. Women are more often objectified than appreciated for their intellect which can be extremely taxing on mental health especially when this concept is so common within society. In past years this societal narrative was accepted and most women complied with the stereotype of what was expected of them but the rate of women addicted to substances is rising at a rapid pace. It has been found that substance use disorder progresses more rapidly in women than in men; this factor may contribute to the reason for women with harmful substance use becoming the quickest-growing population in the United States. (Marsh JC et al. 2018) Women have accepted the narrative for so long that they are starting to rebel against it and experiment more with substances in order to fill the void that the stress of being a female in society has created.

A study done on the Gender Heteronomy of heroin use states overall, the establishment of addictive behavior in girls was identified as self-identification with borderline criminal environmental conditions, induction by a dominant partner, a utilitarian approach to sex life; there was a strong tendency to multiple addiction.(Bokhan et al. 2011) Many addicted women in treatment report that they began using drugs after a specific traumatic event in their lives (Doshan & Bursch 1982) incest and rape are commonly cited precipitating events for drug use among women (Volpe & Hamilton 1982-1983) and rates of sexual and physical abuse reported by women in treatment run as high as 75% (Forth Finegan 1991) other traumatic events that precipitate heavy drug use in women include sudden physical illness, accidents, and disruptions in family life (Reed, 1985). This indicates that the objectification of women in relation to sexual assault, sexual violence, and traumatic experience directly affects how they rationalize addictive

behaviors. It has been reported that women experience greater adverse symptoms after cessation of drug use, as well as worse effects on their mood and anxiety levels, which could help explain their increased risk of recurrence of use. (Becker. 2017) Women tend to have a harder time within the recovery stage of addiction, it's hard to kick the habit and even harder to stay clean and avoid relapse.

It's known that mental state is a big indicator on why an individual experiments and gets addicted to certain drugs, biological factors play a role in the causes of addiction as well. The results of a study conducted on both male and female rats wanted to assess the psychomotor skills in relation to the usage of cocaine found that IntA to cocaine did indeed produce psychomotor sensitization that (1) was greater after a long (30 days) vs short (1 day) period of withdrawal; (2) was greater in females than males; and (3) resulted in cross-sensitization to another psychomotor stimulant drug, amphetamine. (Carr, Crystal C et al. 2020) This means that female rats were more likely to self administer cocaine and became more dependent on the drug. Research found that there are sex differences within laboratory animals in regards to substance abuse. More specifically including the factors of acquisition, maintenance, and relapse. Further research suggests that sex differences have been reported during all phases of the addiction process as assessed using various self administration paradigms. When a low dose of a drug is used, intact female rats acquire cocaine self administration at a faster rate than do intact castrated males. (J. Becker and M. Hu. 2007)

Although there is a difference between humans and animals, the differences are still similar between the two species regarding the psychomotor function amongst other processes of the brain. This also means that individuals don't necessarily want to become addicted to a drug or substance, there are certain chemicals in the brain that suppress the mental psyche that causes

thought processes. When individuals experiment with a certain type of drug, the mind starts seeking repetition of these actions in order to alleviate the part of the brain that craves that feeling once more. Drug dependence drives addiction just as much as trauma. Traumatic events may start the addiction initially but drug dependence is the reason that individuals keep participating in the addictive behaviors. It's important to look at the gender relation of different drugs to see if there's any correlation between certain drugs regarding gender. Addiction isn't sought out, it finds the individual. From what's known about the process of addiction, it starts as an experimentation into a world that's filled with substances and ends in a lifelong struggle. In some cases it doesn't start as experimentation, it starts as a simple fix.

Pharmaceutical drugs are the main solution for any health issue. When people think of drug addiction, they assume it's an addiction to the extremity of drug abuse such as using cocaine, heroin, or meth. However, the rise of the opioid epidemic is hard to miss and it's even harder to miss how exactly these drugs are being distributed while knowing there's a possible cause of addiction. A big part of drug addiction has to do with the process of medicalization. This is the idea that pharmaceutical drugs and medicines are pushed onto people in order to satisfy the fears of the masses. It's a ploy to push big pharma as the main fix to all health problems to appeal to its consumers in order to earn more money. Capitalism benefits from addiction and the process of which is greatly gendered. Social medicalization is concerned with encroachment of the medical profession into areas traditionally controlled by other professions, such as the legal profession for deviant behavior, eg, drug abuse, or the ecclesiastic profession for reproductive decisions. (Poitras, 2012)

Due to genetics, men and women go through different biological experiences involving health. The medical field benefits from this because they're able to sell various forms of

medication to help fix specific medical issues geared towards sex differences. Some drugs are beneficial in terms of combating specific health problems. However, the medical field tends to push pain medication and opioids for treatment unnecessarily even if the patient doesn't require high doses of the drug. It may not be administered to patients for the purpose of causing an addiction but it's easily accessible. Every individual goes through traumatic experiences, if there's a possibility that consuming certain drugs helps take the pain away from those life events it can be extremely easy for anyone to become addicted especially if the initial use was harmless and prescribed by a doctor or physician. The fact of the matter is that all types of drugs, either pharmaceutical or recreational can result in addiction. From the information found in this section it's obvious different forms of drug addiction affect both genders differently.

Gender and Alcohol Addiction

Alcohol is the most accepted form of addiction and it's commonly consumed daily. It contains a liquid called ethanol that is derived from grain and is used to alter the mind and body. Alcohol is consumed for celebration, this includes holidays, special occasions, a night out, a birthday, and many other life events that individuals experience on a daily basis. The issue is that some individuals take advantage of the fact that alcohol is the easiest drug to purchase and consume. It's sold everywhere and it's advertised extensively so people are convinced to buy more of it.

This drug is consumed by both genders in different aspects. It starts to get introduced to individuals at a young age, it's extremely popular amongst high school and college students. Binge drinking is defined as an excessive amount of alcohol consumed in a singular period, this practice is highly encouraged and commonly seen within the youth. The average age where individuals experiment with alcohol is 12-13 years old, this means that most individuals consume

alcohol before they are legally allowed to do so. Based on Monitoring The Future longitudinal data obtained on a national sample of adolescents, drinking behavior at age 18 predicted later drinking outcomes from ages 22 to 35 (Zucker, 2008). An earlier age of drinking onset is also a strong predictor of the increased risk for the development of an alcohol use disorder and alcohol problem severity (Grant, Stinson, & Harford, 2001; Hingson, Heeren, & Winter, 2006a; Muthen & Muthen, 2000). Youth is where the concept of gender is commonly emphasized and talked about amongst peers. Young people who grow up in harmful environments are most likely to develop alcohol problems later on in life.

It's a common concept that men are more likely to become addicted to alcohol than women. This concept is seen in mainstream media and emphasizes the narrative of the drunk aggressive male who develops a drinking problem to compensate for whatever he's dealing with emotionally.. This has been an ongoing narrative since the prohibition period adult males generally report a higher prevalence of individual alcohol problems (e.g., alcohol-related violence, driving while intoxicated, and drinking in hazardous situations) compared to females (Schuckit, Daepfen, Tipp, Hesselbrock, & Bucholz, 1998; Scott, et al., 2008), while ages of onset for alcohol problems varied based on the population studied. (Chartier et al, 2010)

A big indicator of alcohol addiction has to do with an individual's genetic makeup which varies from person to person. The main genetic difference between males and females has to do with the sex chromosome, this is the main thing that separates males and females from a biological standpoint which is an important part of gender conformity. "A very similar pattern of results for alcohol use was obtained through a life-history method used with male twin pairs from the Virginia Adult Twin Study of Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders ([34]). At age 14, all twin resemblance resulted from shared environmental factors. From ages 14 to 23, shared

environment became progressively less important, and genetic factors, more important. These changes likely reflect the increasing relevance of genetic variation in alcohol response as individuals move from early experimentation to more regular patterns of alcohol use, as well as the ability of individuals to increasingly select and shape their social worlds as they gain autonomy across this age range (as detailed further in the section on gene–environment correlation)”. (Dick, D. M. 2011) Genetics play a big role in alcohol addiction later on in life along with the influence of environmental factors which is closely related to societal and gender attributes. Twin studies suggest that male twin pairs have similar experiences when it comes to societal and environmental factors resulting in alcohol consumption.

Once individuals start the experimentation of addictive behaviors, it’s more common they continue on the path leading into addiction. A study relating to the differences in Gender and drinking patterns found that “the gender differences in drinking behavior have been shown to be linked with many aspects of biological differences between men and women leading to women's greater vulnerability to alcohol, of women's and men's differing needs, reasons and motivations in relation to drinking, of gender-specific roles in other areas of life and of ways in which societies regulate peoples' behavior, often giving women the role of warden or moderator of others' drinking.” (Holmila M, Raitasalo, 2005) These findings suggest there is a direct correlation when it comes to gender construct and alcohol consumption. As discussed previously, the idea that the role of a woman is supposed to constitute class and elegance is commonly seen throughout the findings, women being given the role of “moderator” is another reprise of being responsible and motherly.

On the other hand men are stereotypically known to be more irresponsible with the way they drink due to aggression and the need to comply with “manly” behaviors which lack the

presence of vulnerability. The fact that drinking behaviors are introduced at the age of adolescence, also being around the same time that gender stereotypes are at their height, attributes to why addiction is so common. Both genders are separated from birth and continue to be separated during every practice of life. This is precisely why there are such differences when it comes to addiction because there are gender differences when it comes to everything.

Eating Addictions

It's known that society attributes most to how we view and perceive every aspect of the world. As stated previously, addiction takes on many forms and affects everyone in different ways. Another form of addiction that relies heavily on the societal view of gender is eating. Eating food is a process we partake in because it's healthy for our bodies to get the proper nutrients and calories needed for us to survive. The process of addiction is complicated because although eating isn't seen as a harmful substance and activity, it can be when people partake in this activity in unhealthy ways. The unhealthy behaviors take place as overeating or undereating which is followed by disorders that cause people to become addicted to the way they look.

A common disorder caused by eating addiction takes place as "Binging". The process of binge eating creates the unhealthy habit of consuming a lot of food at once and not eating for a long period of time after. Some behavior following binge eating may be purging which is the process of throwing up after eating a copious amount of food in order to lose the calories right after they are consumed. "Gender differences in food cravings and eating behaviors may result from numerous factors including psychological or physiological changes related to menstruation 12,13, differences in nutrition awareness and knowledge 14, cultural influences, and differences in dietary and mood-regulating neurotransmitters 15." (Chao, A. M., Grilo, C. M., & Sinha, R.

(2016) Although there are many factors that play into why an individual participates in these eating behaviors, psychological changes related to physical appearance is a societal construct that continues to be a problem especially when looking at it from a gendered lens.

Gender stereotypes around eating contribute to addictive behavior. “Males and females engage in comparable rates of binge eating, but gender differences in what constitutes a “binge” may contribute to the disproportionate likelihood of females meeting diagnostic criteria for binge eating disorder” (BED). (Summar Reslan, Karen K. Saules 2011) Binge eating is an example of one disorder that individuals take part in that make themselves feel better about their eating habits and how they present themselves physically. To binge means to eat a considerable amount of food in a short amount of time. This behavior is followed with guilt and despair after a binge and it affects individuals both mentally and physically. This goes back to the idea that all aspects of gender are socially constructed to fit a narrative that’s hard to achieve.

Females tend to participate in this behavior more than men because of the beauty standard that has been constructed by society. Being “thin” for a female is essentially the goal and this ideal is represented throughout multiple forms of media. When presented with such harmful content regarding women’s bodies, it’s easy to get discouraged if you don’t look like that which can cause others to try to emulate this ideal in unhealthy ways. People become addicted to all parts of who they are and how they present themselves, eating is one behavior that allows for people to have control of this.

One study regarding food cravings, binge eating, and eating disorder psychopathology found that “gender moderation was only partially supported, though it does corroborate prior work suggesting significantly higher associations between general food cravings, chocolate cravings, and eating disorder psychopathology for females 10,28. Though all food cravings are

clearly not pathological, the results suggest that females who experience high levels of food cravings may also have increased eating disorder psychopathology.” (Chao, A. M., Grilo, C. M., & Sinha, R. (2016) Females tend to have a bad relationship with food because they are meant to fit a standard that is unattainable but is glamorized which is where the addiction starts. Addictive behavior is a mental process, it’s the process in which the brain continues to participate in unhealthy behaviors because it suppresses the mood-regulating neurotransmitters and tricks individual’s into thinking they feel better about the mental issues they are desperately trying to get away from. Mental health plays a big part in addiction and how someone feels about themselves and their bodies seems to be what drives addictive eating.

Sex Addiction and Gender

There are gender differences found in many aspects of the human experience. The definition of sex in the simplest term is the act of being physically intimate with another person. It’s not that simple when looking at the term from all angles because there are many ways the act of sex can be carried out. For many individuals, sex is a vulnerable practice and it’s subjective meaning everyone has a different method on what they like to consume and how often they consume it. For example, Pornography is an addiction that many partake in and this involved sexual acts that can be viewed digitally meaning it’s easily accessible.

Anything that can be commonly accessed will most likely result in higher levels of consumption. Like many of the concepts previously discussed, it’s easy for someone to become addicted to sex due to social and environmental factors. Sex contains many healthy benefits and can lead to a better physical and mental way of life when it’s done in moderation. The addiction arises when people are unable to stop themselves from partaking in sexual activity and sexual content either with other people or themselves. “The compulsive element includes looking for

new sexual partners, high frequency of sexual encounters, compulsive masturbation, regular use of pornography, unprotected sex, low self-efficacy, and use of drugs. The cognitive-emotional component includes obsessive thoughts about sex, guilt feelings, a need to avoid unpleasant thoughts, loneliness, low self-esteem, shame, and secrecy about sexual activity, rationalizations about continuation of sexual activity, preference for anonymous sex, and lack of control over several aspects of life” (Weinstein, Zolek, et al., 2015). Men and women tend to conceptualize sex and sexual behavior in different ways. “There are sex differences in sexual behavior and these relate to differences in male and female hormones but also in emotional and psychological aspects of sexual behavior (Fattore et al., 2014). The idea of celibacy for women is ingrained at a very young age. Women are made to believe that sex is for reproductive purposes and it should be saved for marriage. This idea creates a stigma around sex which is why so many women have a complicated relationship with it. Its also common that women experience sexual harassment and assault, experiencing this creates an even more complicated relationship with sex because it involves the act of someone forcing this behavior making it unenjoyable and extremely traumatic for the other person involved. “It is argued that, in women, sex addiction is closely associated with early traumatic experiences and also that unfulfilled expectations from a relationship can result in deviant sexual behavior” (Fattore et al., 2014).

Due to the complex relationship most women have with sex, it makes sense that they carry this behavior out in unhealthy ways because it’s hard to discover what they enjoy personally when the choice is often taken away. Women have been made to take on the submissive role from very early on within society, this narrative relinquishes any power they may have both sexually and socially. Women are objectified immensely throughout society so participating in sexual activity is no different because it’s where the objectification of women

arises from. It's often women are seen as objects especially when taking sexual harassment and assault into consideration because it involves others forcing their own sexual prowess on an unwanted party. The addictive behavior that's derived from traumatic experiences like sexual harassment and assault is due to the need to take that power back. It may not be ethical but it's understood why many women develop an addiction to sexual activity.

On the other hand there is a hypersexual construct that's attached when discussing sex and men. Most men tend to focus more on sex and physical attention in order to fulfill what may be lacking from an emotional standpoint. "From a biological perspective, the testosterone system plays a crucial role for the development and maintenance of sexual behavior" (Baumeister, R.F.; Catanese, K.R.; Vohs, K.D. 2001) Biologically male hormones tend to interpret sex differently than those of females, it creates this notion that sex is more of a need and a primal instinct for men. Men think about sex in a different light than women.

A study done examining Attachment Styles and Male Sex Addiction found that "sex-addicted men were likely to be found to have both high anxiety responses in their romantic relationships as well as high avoidance behaviors. This is shown by the larger percentage of sexually addicted men (44%) demonstrating the Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style (characterized by high scores in anxiety and avoidance) compared to 28% in the Preoccupied Attachment Style (high anxiety, low avoidance), 20% in the Dismissing-Avoidant Attachment Style (low anxiety, high avoidance) and only 8% in the Secure Attachment Style (low anxiety, low avoidance)." (James L. Zapf, 2008) This shows that men avoid thinking of sex emotionally because of fear. The thought of being emotionally disregarded by another person invokes a fear response that results in higher avoidance attachment styles. Developing an addiction to sex for men is not only biological but mental as well which could be caused from prior experiences that

turn them off from thinking about the act romantically. It also ties into the societal stereotype that men aren't supposed to interpret things emotionally because it makes them less of a man. When this idea is internalized it can cause men to give into toxic masculinity and think about sex and relationships in a negative way. Although sex addiction affects both genders in different ways, social construct plays a part in how people think about sex and why they may get addicted to the act.

Relapse and Recovery

Addiction is a lifelong battle that both men and women face throughout their lives. A big part of addiction is the aspect of recovery. Those who are seeking recovery are looking to put the addiction behind them and work on living a healthier life for both themselves and the people around them. Recovery is a tough process both mentally and physically. It takes many trials to finally kick an addiction which is where relapse comes into play.

There are many factors that go into relapse. "Various attempts have been made to predict relapse and identify antecedents, focusing on variables like employment instability, residential or marital status, sex, age, ethnicity and family history" (Polich *et al.*, 1981; Rounsaville *et al.*, 1987; Miller *et al.*, 1992), Relapsing is an unfortunate but inevitable part of the addiction process. This step happens when an individual is unable to fully kick the addiction and reengages in the addictive behavior even after a period of staying sober from it. Every individual interprets their addiction differently so this means how they recover is a unique process. Since every aspect of addiction is gendered as well as the specific addictions themselves, it's apparent that the recovery process would be as well. "Research from a national treatment outcome study showed that drug treatment use among men was associated with stronger family opposition to their drug use and more support for treatment, whereas for women it was associated with more mental

health problems and self-referral into treatment” (Grella and Joshi 1999). This research shows that women seek out recovery because of self reflection meaning they tend to think more about why they are continuously participating in this behavior and what it has done to them and the people that care about them.

Men seek help if their foundation is strong because addiction and social construct tends to repress emotion which can cause a lack of self awareness. Men seem to need more of a push from peers and family to make the change into recovery. Women also seem to get more out of rehabilitation than men because they are able to articulate the cause of the addiction and share it with others who are willing to help them. An article examining Men and Women in Drug Abuse Treatment Relapse at Different Rates and for Different Reasons includes input from Dr. Florentine, a doctor who commonly helps those struggling with recovery stated that “Women appear to be more willing to seek help for their problems, including their substance abuse problems," he says. "Men, on the other hand, are more likely to say, “I'm OK. I don't need help. I can take care of this. It's just a little problem.” He recommends that treatment providers discuss with male drug abusers the possibility that their reluctance to seek help may be hampering their recovery.” (NIDA. 1998) This reinforces the idea that societal pressure affects the way men recover from addiction because they are unable to speak about how they feel and their experiences with the addiction in order to help them truly recover.

Discussion

When looking at the different forms of addiction it's apparent that there are differences between males and females. In order to properly assess the differences in gender it's important to break down the topic of addiction and understand the stages that lead up to becoming addicted to a substance/behavior to understand the mind of a person who's experienced this process.

Biological and Societal pressures needed to be taken into consideration when exploring this idea because both concepts go hand in hand with the differences of gender and gender expression. Although there isn't direct proof that men are more addicted to substances and behaviors than women and vice versa, there is evidence that supports gender differences when looking at the specific behaviors that form addiction. When looking at drug addiction, statistical evidence found that males are proven to become more addicted to drugs than women but the cause of the addiction is different when looking closely at both genders.

A lot of men go into drug abuse because they enjoy taking part in risky behaviors but also to suppress the emotions they feel have to be kept inside to fulfill the socially constructed idea of what a man is supposed to be. For women, drug abuse is a way of an escape for stress due to experiences of sexual abuse and violence because society has created the idea that being a woman is cause for objectification. This makes it evident that socially constructed notions become a part of why someone gets addicted to drugs and further participates in this behavior.

The same concept applies when evaluating Alcohol addiction. Research found that men tend to participate in excessive drinking behaviors more than females. There is evidence that suggests this is caused by the stereotype that men are aggressive and women take on the moderator role when it comes to alcohol consumption. It supports the societal idea that women are meant to fit a certain standard of grace and men are meant to participate in chaotic behavior fueled by aggression. There are also studies that examine twin studies and the effects genetics have on alcohol addiction and they found that there is a correlation with the social and environmental aspect male experience and alcohol consumption.

Another addiction that was examined closely was eating. The evidence found within the research shows that women experience issues with eating more than men. Women partake in

unhealthy methods of eating such as binge eating disorder to fulfill their need to have a skinnier looking physical appearance. From a societal standpoint, Females have been subject to scrutiny for how they present visually based on their body types, body parts, face, etc. This ties into the objectification of women because it allows for others to voice and comment on how they think women should look. This behavior and observation from others results in eating disorders and addiction because there is a constant need to fit this beauty standard of what a woman is supposed to look like. Men are subject to this view as well but not nearly as much as women and don't go through the same scrutiny involving their bodies.

The last form of addiction that was researched for this paper was sex addiction. The studies found that men participate in sexual deviance and behaviors more than women. This is because male hormones tend to crave sex interpreting it as a need rather than a want. There's also a socially constructed narrative that men are hypersexual so they feel the need to fit that stereotype so people don't see them as emotional beings. The fear that's attached to combatting this ideology is precisely why the addictive behavior continues. There's a lot of shame attached to sex especially for women which is why they don't participate in this behavior as much. Women also experience more sexual assault and trauma attached to sexual behavior which has resulted in a complicated relationship following gender and sex.

The recovery process was examined as well while looking at the differences between gender in relation to addiction because recovery is a vital part of the addiction process. There is evidence that supports gender differences within the recovery process because a big part of recovery has to do with interpreting and understanding your emotions in order to comprehend what started the addiction. It's evident that men struggle with voicing their emotions and describing how they feel to other people. This is because of the social construct that men are

made to be strong and aggressive so they can't express themselves emotionally. Women have an easier time voicing these emotions so they recover from addictions at a faster rate.

After examining a multitude of addictions and dissecting the aspects of gender, it's evident that there's a correlation between gender and addictive behaviors. What was interesting in the research found is that both males and females vary on which gender gets more addicted depending on the specific behavior or substance. The cause of the addiction has many different elements which is why it's important to evaluate the effect of gender because it is present socially, biologically, environmentally, economically, etc. Gender is a component of every aspect in the human experience. The research supported the claim by providing evidence on the differences between genders and forms of addiction as well as insight on the role gender plays in every factor of the world.

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