

Abstract

Addiction, characterised as a disease within the medical model, continues to stir debate among scholars, some of whom challenge its characterisation through reductionist models that posit it as primarily a physical-level disorder. Treating the behavioural symptoms without considering the social influences is problematic. I propose a philosophical examination and critique of the concept of addiction before delving into its non-evolutionary and evolutionary determinants on our behaviour. To truly assist those grappling with addiction, we must prioritise understanding the profound impact of culture, viewing it as a potent tool for emotional regulation that can bolster and reinforce human agency over time. Culture, functioning as both a technology and a translator of experiences, is already deeply embedded in our lives and can significantly aid in treating substance and behavioural dependencies alongside traditional medical approaches. I give a central role to culture in this context intending to clarify processes of cultural meaning-making. Culture in this sense is a technology, a tool that becomes translational at both objective and subjective levels. As it already plays an active role in our everyday lives, it can assist in the further treatment of substance and behavioural abusers alongside the medical model of care. I present a narrow account of culture with its interactive influence to positively affect a person's mental state, allowing for connection to self, and others in a meaningful way. As culture is conscious and ubiquitous, it is a proactive, transformative process that is busy at work in the lives of each human being. When harnessing its influential role, the two explanatory models of addiction need not compete but work together to support people, especially youth presenting with early-stage addiction. A combined approach is necessary to deliver innovative ways to reduce harm in addiction populations.

Keywords: Addiction, Culture, Emotions, Decision-making