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The Fundamental Reasons Many Creatives End Up with Addiction

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The struggle of creative people with addiction is a well-documented phenomenon, but what are the fundamental reasons for this connection? Find out more, here...

Creative people, especially celebrities, often find themselves addicted to drugs. We've all seen innocent creatives become famous, get addicted to drugs, and die at a tragically young age. The infamous 27 Club, spanning multiple generations of musicians, has seen fame and fortune take the lives of countless young creatives through drug addiction.

This connection has been studied more frequently in recent years, and we actually have some definitive answers. Whether a creative takes or sells drugs, these [conspiracy to supply class a drugs sentencing guidelines](#) show you what they may have had to face in court. The question is, are there fundamental reasons why creatives seemingly always end up on the wrong side of the law?

In this post, we're going to cover the main reasons creatives develop drug addictions to shine a light on the true connection between addiction and creativity.

Why Do Creatives Develop Drug Addictions?

Over the last four decades, nearly 300 celebrities have died for reasons related to drug addiction. Most of these people were either musicians or actors, but the list also includes athletes, artists and writers.

This number is much higher than in the general population, and the numbers have actually been increasing. There are several reasons for this, including:

1. Genetic predisposition

Neuroscientist David Linden of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine has spent a long time studying the connection between creativity and addiction. In his book, *The Compass of Pleasure*, Linden explains that 40 percent of a predisposition to drug addiction is genetically determined.

There is no single addiction gene, and all the genes involved haven't yet been discovered. That said, the ones we do know are related to dopamine signalling.

Dopamine is the chemical released in the brain to signal pleasure and reward. Addicts tend to have weakened dopamine receptiveness which makes them crave things that give them a stronger dopamine high.

Genetic variants, specifically in D2 receptors, are responsible for this low-functioning dopamine system. The people with these variants are more risk-taking, novelty-seeking and compulsive. These character traits can help people be more creative, e.g.:

- **Risk-taking:** leads people to go out on a limb more.
- **Novelty-seeking:** can spur creative juices.
- **Compulsivity:** increases motivation to put your art out into the world and not fear the consequences.

Remember, genetics only counts for 40 percent, so it's possible to have these D2 variants and not be addicted to drugs, or not have these variants and be addicted to drugs.

2. Believe it helps them come up with new ideas

Genetics play some part in the connection between addiction and creativity, but the idea that drugs can help someone be more creative also convinces creatives to form a drug addiction.

This stereotype – that drugs fuel creativity – has never been proven through scientific study, and is likely just one of those things people believe to be true. Drug abuse isn't necessary to create music or cure writer's block; these require determination, discipline and hard work.

David Shenk, the author of *The Genius in All of Us*, says that extraordinary talent is the consequence of interactions between nature (genetics) and nurture (our external environment). The nurturing required by creatives can take the form of:

- Exposure
- Instruction
- Practice
- A drive to learn and succeed

These are the fundamentals to being a successful creative, as all drug addiction does is make you feel more creative. For example, [LSD produces a psychedelic state](#) that decreases restraint on the brain making you feel more open to new ideas.

However, LSD also decreases a person's ability to appreciate cause and effect and 'organise, categorise, and differentiate the constituents of conscious experience'. So, it actually impairs your ability to create something original. You get the feeling that your mind is being opened up to a new creative realm, but you lack the ability to express it in a creative art form.

3. Coping mechanism

On top of being genetically predisposed and believing drugs can fuel your creativity, drugs can also work as a powerful coping mechanism for creatives who are dealing with other issues.

Stress can cause a lot of substance abuse issues, and there aren't many people more stressed than creatives who need to come up with new ideas all the time to stay relevant.

There is also a strong link between mental illness and creativity. In 2012, Sweden's Karolinska Institute used a psychiatric registry of over 1.2 million Swedes to [perform a study](#) on creativity and mental illness.

The study showed that “people in creative professions are treated more often for mental illness than the general population”. Bipolar was the most prominent disorder, and writers were the most likely to suffer from a mental incapacity.

This prevalence of mental health issues amongst creatives has undoubtedly contributed to their over-representation as drug addicts.

On top of this, those creatives who are budding celebrities, desperate to fit in, dealing with increased sociability. In need of something to combat their performance anxiety, they might also develop drug addiction as a coping mechanism.

Are These the Only Reasons Creatives Become Addicted?

In this post, we've managed to cover three major reasons why creatives become addicted to drugs. Genetic predisposition forces them to seek out ways to feel excitement and pleasure, and a belief that drugs make them more creative increases their use. Then, the stressful lifestyle of a creative, often underlined by mental health issues, make drugs appeal as a coping mechanism.

Hopefully, this article has shed some light on the connection between addiction and creativity. There are likely many more reasons out there to be discovered but, as of now, these are our best guesses.

Photo by [Wendy Wei](#) from [Pexels](#)

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