

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality



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**Dr. Sherry Price**

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## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle Podcast* with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 95.

Welcome to *Drink Less Lifestyle*, a podcast for successful women who want to change their relationship with alcohol. If you want to drink less, feel healthier and start loving life again you're in the right place. Please remember that the information in this podcast does not constitute medical advice. Now, here's your host, Dr. Sherry Price.

Well, hello my beautiful friends. I hope you are having an amazing week. When this episode goes live I will be on vacation, woohoo. My trip is just a couple of days away and I'm getting super excited. But before I go out all on full vacation mode I want to talk about something that I hear people talk about that is just inaccurate. And that is this concept of an addictive personality. I've often described to myself this way in the past. But do you know that there is no such thing, no research that has stated that there is such a thing as an addictive personality.

And you can even go to Google and PubMed and look up all the research on this because experts agree that addiction is a brain disorder, not a personality issue. And the reason I want to talk about it on today's podcast is that if you've ever described yourself as somebody who has an addictive personality I think you can be doing yourself a disservice because when you start to identify as someone or somebody having this trait such as an addictive personality, guess what you are sending to your brain? You're basically saying this is who I am.

And you will even see in the literature that it is actually harmful for a person to say they have an addictive personality because it continues to justify the addiction. And so, when you use these words to describe yourself it makes people who have an addiction think that they are unable to recover if the addiction is hardwired into who they are. If you say, "This is just who I am or this is my personality", you're basically saying it cannot be changed. And this in my mind is absolutely criminal.

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

And this is why I cringe when I hear people describe themselves as having an addictive personality. Because we are not hardwired and our personality is not even hardwired. So, as I was doing my research on this topic I came across a great article in Scientific American and I will put a link to it in the show notes in case you want to go read it for yourself. But they're talking about addiction that was originally framed by both Alcoholics Anonymous and the psychiatry medical community as a form of antisocial personality or character disorder.

But research does not confirm this. So, this was a hypothesis that was never proven true. The article talks about how it goes on to say there has been decades worth of attempts and no single addictive personality common to everyone with addictions has ever been found. And if you've come to believe that you yourself or an addicted loved one because you have an addiction or they have an addiction and you think you have a defective or selfish personality, you are completely misled.

George Koob, the Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has stated that, "What we are finding is that the addictive personality, if you will, is multifaceted. It doesn't really exist as an entity of its own." So basically, this idea of a general addictive personality is a complete myth. And the research supports this because it has found no universal character traits that are common to all addicted people. Some are shy, some are not, they're bold. Some are kind and giving, while some are mean and cruel.

Some are very honest individuals and others not so much. So, the whole range of human characters can be found among people with addictions despite all the stereotypes that exist and that are represented in movies. And if you go on and read the article it'll say, 82% of addicts don't even fit the particular character of addiction. And what I found particularly interesting in this article is they have identified people that have certain characteristics that are kind of unexpected for the stereotypes we have of people who become or have an addictive personality.

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

So, a few of those characteristics, one is they're overly moralistic people and highly sensitive people can be more prone to compulsive and out of control behavior around a substance. And they also found that high IQs and being gifted are higher linked to more drug use. And that makes sense. If people don't feel like they fit in, if they feel that they're at odds on the bell shaped curve, they're not the norm, this can be a painful thing. They're not accepted by their peers or they don't feel like they get along with their peers or they're connected to their peers.

And that is a common need, to feel and belong to a group. They also point out in this article that women in particular, feeling sad, anxious or inhibited tend to find a way to self-medicate to deal with these painful feelings. And it's the number one reason women tend to overdo it with substances. So sad, inhibited, and feeling anxious. And this article goes on to state that most people can learn self-control and to moderate if they want.

And when you think about it, the inability to really self-moderate, or self-control, or self-regulate, it comes from the inability to modulate fear and other emotions that come up. Fear of missing out, fear of who will I be, what will be my identity. Fear of what will I do with this anxiety, or what will I do with this sadness. How will I handle these emotions?

I also want to point out a very powerful book that I've read by Ben Hardy and his book is entitled Personality Isn't Permanent. And there is a lot of good nuggets in that book, particularly when he talks about we play different roles around different people. And so sometimes the roles we are playing will bring out certain personas within us. So, we might be with a group of people and wearing a certain hat.

So maybe we are a coworker. We are at work. We're wearing the coworker hat. And so, we might want to be perceived as smart so we speak up even if we are 'introverted', but we want to contribute to the team, and we want to be seen as a valuable player. So, our persona will be different than maybe the way we interact with our loved ones in our house. And so, we might exhibit different personalities depending on the environment,

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

depending on the players, depending on the hat we're wearing and depending on the context we find ourselves in.

So, we play different roles in our life at different times. And what I really liked about that book and what I really think is important to highlight in this podcast is not so much your addictive nature or addictive personality but really what is it that you're desiring? Because if we tend to overdrink or we are an over-drinker, we have a desire for alcohol. And what I love in this book and so many others that I've read, we know that our desires are trained.

We train ourselves to desire things. And that's what the brain does. The brain desires things. And as Ben points out in his book, "Our desires are trained by experiences we've had, society, media and those around us. They are trained and fueled, and they are clung to and identified with. Your desires you think are the real you. But they are simply things you've become attached to or throw meaning towards. Which you can also detach from and change the meaning of.

Just because you want something now doesn't mean you'll want it in five years from now. It doesn't even mean you'll want it in six months from now. Often your desires are at odds with better outcomes. And knowing that your desires can be trained and that your current desires were trained allows you to question your current desires. It allows you to proactively choose desire worth having and then training those desires worth having to become genuinely and deeply rooted into the brain."

And that is the work we do in my programs. Because you can get yourself to want anything, guaranteed. And if that's the case you might as well be intentional about it. You might as well tell your brain what you want it to want. And I think that's the greatest news ever because now that we know that we can train the brain and the neural plasticity part of our brain, and that we can accomplish this, that becomes the most important work in the world in order to get the life that you want. So, it's not about having an addictive personality or not.

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

It's about training your brain to desire the things that you want it to desire. And listen, you can become addicted to anything. So, I know when I'm talking about addictive personality, a lot of times our brains will go to the word 'addiction' and then it'll come up with opioids, and drugs, and cigarettes, and pornography, all of that. But I want to remind you that you can be addicted to anything.

And I just want to run through a quick list with you because I really want you to see that you really can be addicted to anything, anything can become an addiction. So, alcohol obviously can become an addiction. But think of the people that don't like all forms of alcohol. Maybe their form of addiction is just wine. They don't have a problem with any other alcohol, just wine because they've trained their brain to desire wine but not to desire other forms of alcohol.

Or people are just addicted to beer, they just like beer. They don't even like wine. They don't like the taste of wine. They don't even want wine. Or those that just like scotch on the rocks, or just vodka, or cigars, or overeating, slot machines, TV, videogames.

Could be addicted to ice-cream, cake, candy, poker, chat rooms, the internet, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, card games, working, talking, sex, snacking, reading books, going out to eat, politics. Talking about yourself, shopping without spending, shopping to spend, spending money, cars, biting your nails, pulling your hair, twirling your hair. Exercise, going to the gym, walking, sitting on the couch with your dog, your pets. You could become addicted to collecting things, saving things. You can become addicted to being comfortable.

You don't want to do anything uncomfortable, anything outside your comfort zone. You could become addicted to taking the easy way all the time, become addicted to clothes, lipsticks, shoes, handbags, music, driving fast, driving slow, swearing and cursing, playing the lotto, buying scratch off cards, having to look perfect before stepping outside or going to the store, dancing, strip clubs, making money, looking at your phone 100

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

times a day, texting, people pleasing, talking to yourself like a piece of crap. How many people do that?

Coke Zero, soda, whining and complaining. I know a few people like that. Watching YouTube videos, soap operas, game shows, caring for others, your house, cooking, chocolate, cookies, pizza, travel. Yeah, I might be a little addicted to travel. Anything can turn into a compulsion, an obsession, I've got to have it or else I don't feel safe, else I don't feel good, I need this.

And if you read Gabor Marté's work, he talks about addiction is anything that we do to solve a pain in our life. It meets a need. Now, as I read through that list you might be able to say and see yourself in some of those examples or some of the people that you hang out with. Oh yeah, I see myself there, or, oh yeah, that's my friend so and so. But telling yourself you have an addictive personality is basically saying and announcing to your brain you're hardwired to be this way.

What I want to offer is that you just have a strong preference for something or a desire right now that lights up a part of your brain with excitement and anticipation. And it's known and therefore it's comfortable to the brain. It knows it's going to experience these emotions when you embark or engage upon this activity. And it becomes an identity of how we see ourselves. I like to travel. And I often refer to myself as a jetsetter because I love to go to far away places that require an airplane. It lights up my brain. I'm super excited to go to Europe here in a few days.

I love to explore and try new places. I also like to do it on my terms, I don't like to sign up with tour buses or groups of people going on a tour, or being locked in on a cruise ship, that's not my idea of travel. I like to go off the beaten path, down into the culture, yes, see the famous sites but my way on my terms. I like to talk to the locals if I can speak any of the language. And I crave meaningful experiences. And this is part of how I meet that desire and that craving. And it's also why I love hosting retreats to meet other people and to create these meaningful enriching experiences in our life.

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

And I love to lift others up to get their best life which is why the birth of Epic You. It's one of my greatest joys. But here's the reason it doesn't become an addiction, because an addiction is defined as something that is associated with negative consequences. I don't travel excessively that I can't afford it and I bankrupt myself. I have control. I have self-control around it. I plan for it. I save for it. And there's nothing about my type of travel that hinders my life in any way.

Just like when I choose to have chocolate it does not have negative consequences to me in any way. I choose a chocolate that doesn't give me a sugar high, doesn't cause sugar cravings afterwards and doesn't negatively affect my weight. So, when I do enjoy chocolate there is no downside or negative consequences to my life. And when I choose to have a drink, a nice glass of wine, a Cosmo, a martini of some sort, it doesn't lead to a drunken stupor anymore because I have self-control. It's not out of control compulsive behavior.

Because I taught my brain how to have self-control around this substance. And I ask you to look at your life. Is anything running rampant in your life that you don't like? Then I say you owe it to yourself to learn control or eradicate it completely. It may sound hard but it doesn't have to be with the right tools and the right steps, and following the right process.

It's like if I had a dangerous animal enter my house, let's say a rattle snake, I wouldn't just let it stay there and say, "I guess I just have to deal with this rattle snake in my house. I know it could come and bite me at any time and find me but no, I'll just let it go." No, you wouldn't let it stay there. You would call for help. You would get the snake people to come and take it out of your house because you would be fearing what can happen if you stayed in. But yet we let this happen with our drinking. We know it's not good. We know it's harmful and we have fear.

But you can live free of the fear, you can call for help, you can get help and eradicate this from your life. Or if you don't want to eradicate it, you can learn self-control. I got over my QEC 'addiction'. I got over my overdrinking habits or addiction. It was my nightly habit to self-soothe. And if I'm going to

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

be somebody that calls themselves an addictive personality then let me find things that I want to be addicted to, the desires that I want to have. And that's not even addictive personality, that's just my preferences.

As you heard from the beginning of this podcast there is no such thing as an addictive personality, it doesn't exist. And that's the best news. So, let's not walk around talking about something as if it's a truth when it is false. And let's talk about the real issue, the realness of the problem. And for most people they overdrink because it's on habit. It's what they've trained their brain to desire. And just like that was learned, it can be unlearned. You can change the pathways of the brain.

And if you're using alcohol to solve a problem in your life or a pain, let's get to the root of that pain and solve it. It's way better than having to put on the daily band-aid, change out the band-aid, put on a new one, change out the band-aid, put on a new one because all we're doing is keeping that wound alive. This is it. It's just that simple. Do not make it more complicated than that. Do not say that this is a character flaw, or I'm just selfish, or I'm just a bad person, that is not the case.

The truth of the matter is you just have a brain that desires alcohol now and it can learn to desire alcohol less. And when you do this your whole life improves, not just your drinking. And I want to leave you with a story, I helped a lovely woman who is in her late 60s, she came to me because she was a grandma and couldn't see her grandchildren. They weren't allowed to come over to her house. Her daughter would not let those kids in her mother's house because of her unpredictable behavior around alcohol.

And what did that do, that kept her drinking, that was so painful. She wanted to see these grandkids. She wanted to be a part of their life. And I get it, that she couldn't be trusted around alcohol because she's never learned the technique and the process to master her self-control. So, we dialed in her drinking so she could control it. After weeks of working with me she was able to see her grandkids again. It went so well, she got to see them again, and again. And eventually the grandkids got to sleep over her house.

## Ep #95: Addictive Personality

Her relationship with them and with her daughter has been restored. She learned how to get control over her alcohol, something she hasn't been able to do in 20+ years. And it didn't just change her relationship with alcohol. It changed her relationship with her entire family. And I tell you that story because it's never too late. You can always learn to do this for you. You can choose to learn control. It's the biggest gift you can give to yourself and to your family.

And this is what I promise to you when you work with me, your life will change. Alright my beautiful friends, have a wonderful day and I'll see you next week.

Thanks for listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle*. If you're ready to change your relationship with alcohol, check out my free guide, How to Effectively Break the Overdrinking Habit at [sherryprice.com/startnow](http://sherryprice.com/startnow). That's [sherryprice.com/startnow](http://sherryprice.com/startnow). I'll see you next week.