

PORTRAYAL VS REALITY

THE PORTRAYAL OF ADDICTION IN
POP CULTURE



"Life is just so painful and
messy and hard and worth it
and all that stuff."
-Robert Downey, Jr.

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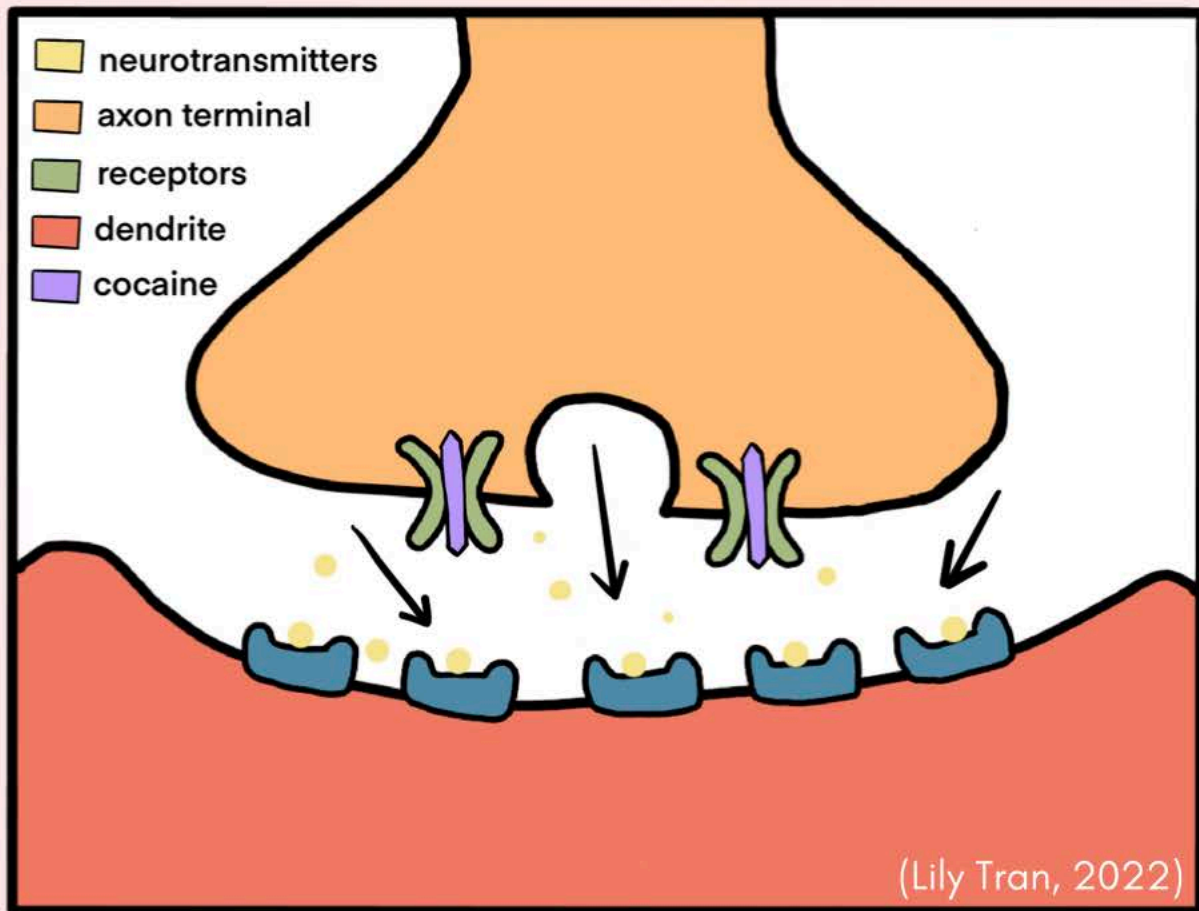
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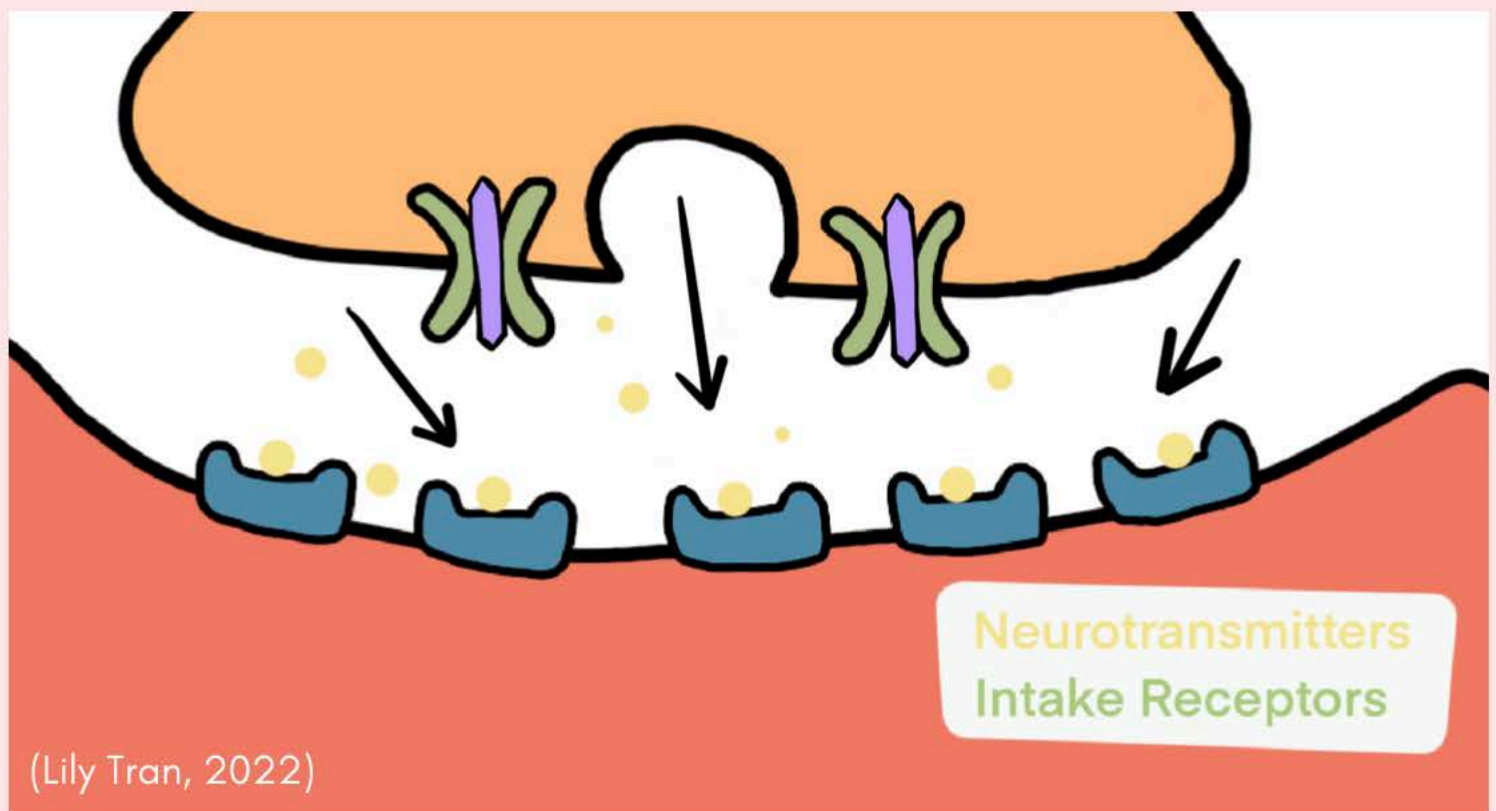
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How Cocaine affects the Synapse



When the brain is first exposed to addictive drugs like cocaine internal structures can cause an addiction. This changes the inner workings of the brain involving the reward circuits and dopamine systems that negatively affect a person's mood and emotional states. Some long term changes include depression, paranoia and restlessness. People can also show signs of increased levels of psychosis and blood pressure level.

(AAC Editorial Staff, 2022)



When Cocaine is introduced to the synaptic gap in between two Neuron cells, it will stop the flow of neurotransmitters. The intake receptors are blocked by the cocaine and thus the neurotransmitters within the synaptic gap remain there for longer. This blockage is critically bad within neurons that work with dopamine making those neurotransmitters release more than they should.

(S. Helen, personal communication, February 2022)

Euphoria: Romanticizing Addiction

People look towards entertainment to relate with others. It helps many feel less alone and more understood. Addiction is commonly portrayed in popular shows. One example is the popular teen drama, Euphoria. The show follows the main character, Rue, through her struggles in life with addiction. While her father is dying from cancer, Rue steals his opioid medication. After his death, she continues taking the pills to decrease the pain and emotions that followed her loss. This pattern grew into a dependence, eventually taking over her life.



(Euphoria, 2022)



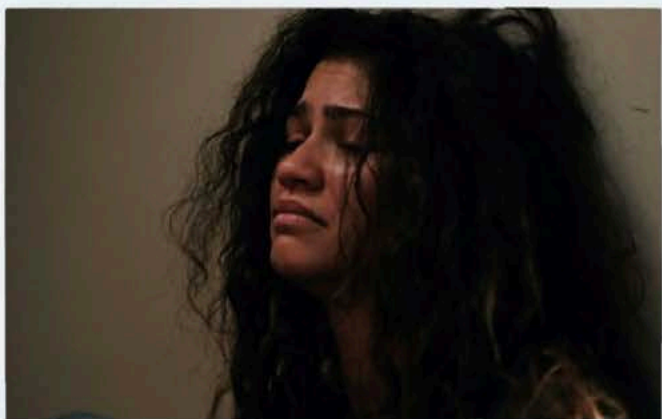
(IMBD, 2022)



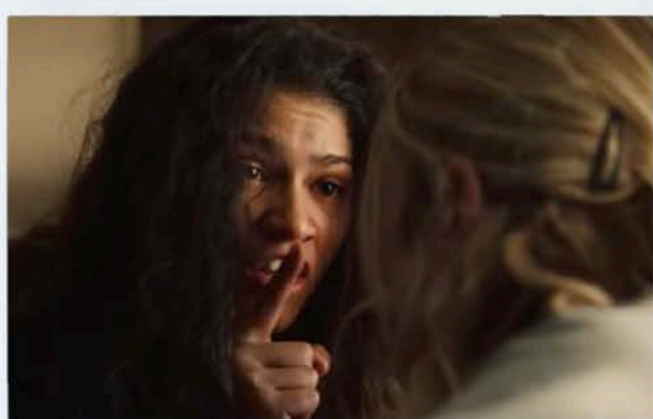
(IMBD, 2022)

Rue's main downfall in Euphoria is when she emotionally abuses two people she cares about most in her life. They tried to provide an intervention after Rue had already gone to drastic, life-threatening measures to obtain a case of drugs. It illustrates how much addiction has taken over her life.

Though the show does glamorize the feeling of "euphoria," it also portrays some real, negative consequences. Audiences need to understand that while drugs can be momentarily "fun," they are ultimately destructive.



(IMBD, 2022)



(IMBD, 2022)

Romanticizing Addiction

College Life



College life is a core part of drinking culture. It is finally legal for newly become adults to drink alcohol and has grown into traditions. It is normalized in parties, fraternities/sororities in rituals, and other large social events. It is also crucial for acts of drinking and drug usage in order for those to “fit in” or socialize which can be a toxic standard. (Kosoglou, 2019)

General



Drugs and alcohol have become so normalized and promoted in our culture. Starting from teenage years and on, people are becoming more dependent on drugs and alcohol to participate in any social situation. It has grown to be the reason for social events. (Ex. going out for a drink for celebration)
(Kosoglou, 2019)

Celebrity Experiences with Addiction

Robert Downey Jr.

Most known for his Marvel role as Tony Stark/Iron Man. Robert Downey Jr. has had a long battle with addiction to drugs like heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and also being a daily drinker. Downey had been arrested multiple times for drug possession and was in and out of rehab, but finally, in 2003 Downey quit drugs for good with lots of help and support. Since then Downey has done very well in his profession.

(AACES, 2021)



(Cheatsheet, 2021)



(Mubi, 2021)

Drew Barrymore

Drew Barrymore is known for her iconic role in *Scream* (1996) but growing up she battled with many things. At 12 she had become a drug addict and at 13 she had gone to rehab to battle her drug and alcohol addiction. She is now doing extremely well as an actress after getting the help and support that she needed.

(Hattenstone, 2015)

Elton John

Known for his iconic songs such as *Im Still Standing* (1983), *Tiny Dancer* (1971), *Rocket Man* (1972), and many more. With his success there was a lot of struggle and addiction that followed. Elton John was addicted to cocaine and alcohol. During his time while he was addicted he was self-absorbed and didn't care for his loved ones, even the ones dying of AIDS during the peak of the epidemic. Later around the 1990s quit his addiction to cocaine and since then he has done extremely well in his music career going on to sell 300 million records. (NIDA, 2012)

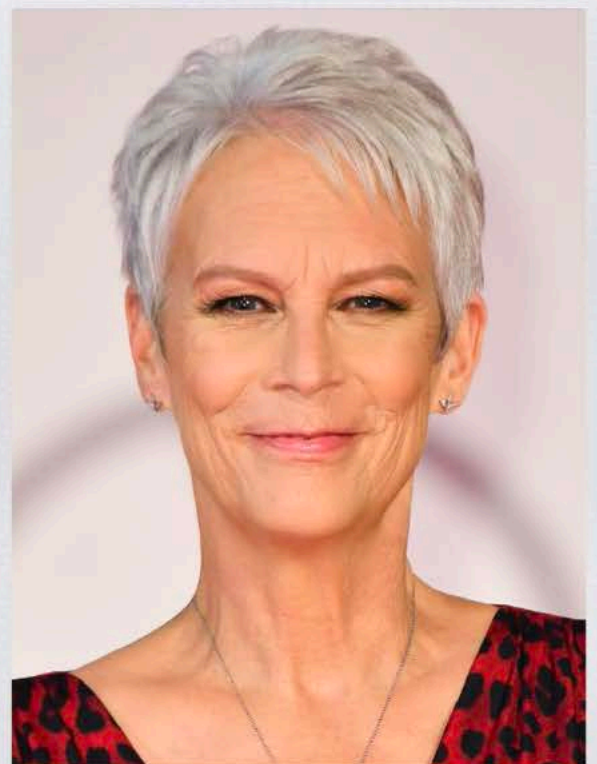


(Disney Wiki, 2016)

Jamie Lee Curtis

Known for her most iconic role as Laurie Strode in *Halloween* Jamie Lee Curtis is another celebrity that has struggled with drug addiction. Jamie Lee Curtis struggled with a Vicodin addiction for over 10 years around the late 1980s. Around 1999 is when Jamie decided to get sober for her own good. Jamie after that has done very well for herself going on to do more roles and win multiple awards.

(Weisholtz, 2021)



(Buzzfeed, 2022)

Effects of Addiction on Social Media Users

Within our modern culture, substance use has become ingrained in the media we expose ourselves to everyday. The United States in particular has seen the topic of substance abuse make the jump into the entertainment world.
(Kaliszewski, Oct 2019)



- Drugs make an appearance in nearly 50% of all music video
- Often in television shows and movies a illicit drug usage is shown every 112 minutes and smoking scenes every 57 minutes
- The average teenager will take in nearly 85 drug references everyday in popular music.
(Kaliszewski, Oct 2019)



These addictions are often glamorized more than they should and spread myths surrounding addictions further spread by celebrities. Many music genres in particular portray substance abuse and drugs as common themes. The glorification of this topic does not often portray the side effects and long-term damage to end drug addiction can cause.
(Kaliszewski, Oct 2019)



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**If you or someone you know needs help with
addiction, reach out to**

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-4357

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