

# Review of: "A Unified Theory of Addiction"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

Robert Pretlow's Unified Theory of Addiction is an attempt to account for the horrifying prevalence of addiction in our culture, estimated in his paper at 50%. Finding a reason and a treatment is a noble endeavor.

Unfortunately, there are a number of flaws that undercut his efforts.

1. I would not claim to be an Einstein equivalent in the opening paragraph, not until the theory gains notoriety.
2. The idea of displacement of stress is reminiscent of Lance Dodes 1996 article in the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Dr. Dodes suggested similarly that addictions are a subset of compulsions. Compulsions undo a hostile impulse that is consciously unacceptable while addictions displace the intent into an addictive behavior.
3. Robert uses smoking as his main example. Why inhaling burning tobacco leaves that hurt the throat, cause dizziness and nausea, would be a pleasant experience that one would want to return to, is not explained.
4. Wanting a drug cue, such as moving one's hands, sounds like autoshaping. The chicken pecks the key, corn is delivered. The chicken comes to want the key.
5. Drive should be defined. I have written that a drive has to do with a hormone from the periphery lodging in the lateral hypothalamus and tuning nonspecific ventral tegmental dopaminergic SEEKING to a particular goal. My current list of drives is food, water, sex, sleep, relationships. The list of hormones is ghrelin, angiotensin, estradiol/testosterone, adenosine, oxytocin.
6. The main reason, as I understand it, that nicotine is addictive, has to do with its action on SEEKING. Nicotine produces a storm of dopamine barrages. While breathing may become associated as a drug cue, it is not the primary reason for nicotine addiction.
7. I agree that detox has nothing to do with addiction.
8. The section on immune function is a distraction. I would take it out.
9. Using one study about opioid addiction to suggest that addiction is not permanent seems inadequate. Why are all those fools going to Alcoholics Anonymous for years after they stopped drinking? Are they wasting oceans of time, or could it be that once tuned to alcohol, SEEKING does not change back? The AA aphorism is, "You can't change a pickle back into a cucumber."
10. I would consider whether you mean eating addiction, or carbohydrate addiction. The mechanism of the latter is hypoglycemia caused by an outpouring of insulin after ingesting carbs, causing ravenous hunger that produces more carb consumption.

In summary, we need a unified theory of addiction. Producing one would require that Dr. Pretlow do a substantial rewrite.

If I were refereeing this paper for publication, I would reject.

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