



## **Addiction**

*Psychological influences on addiction*

### **Narrator**

Many of the guests at this party believe that alcohol helps them unwind. Others believe it gives them a pleasurable buzz. And that's just what Brian used to think.

### **Brian**

It enables you to be more confident around girls, around other people, every kind of situation what you probably wouldn't feel comfortable in, or I wouldn't have felt comfortable in which is almost every situation. You know I think the alcohol or the drug enabled me to interact.

### **Narrator**

To stay dry in a room full of people drinking is an incredible achievement. For Brian, it's meant re-learning his beliefs about alcohol. Psychologist Miles Cox uses a questionnaire to identify the things Brian believes are important to him -called 'concerns'.

### **Miles Cox**

What is your first concern that comes to mind?

### **Brian**

Um, not having enough money.

### **Miles Cox**

Okay

### **Narrator**

Brian has been asked to give the answers he would have given at the height of his drinking.

### **Miles Cox**

Can you think of what would have occurred to you in order to try and resolve that concern?

### **Brian**

Um there's a few options but I think the first one would have been to try and borrow the money.

### **Miles Cox**

OK.

### **Professor Miles Cox, University of Wales**

People are motivated to do things from which they expect some benefits. They may expect those benefits from drinking alcohol. It's going to help them feel better. It's going to help them counteract their negative feelings, but they can expect them from incentives in other life areas.

### **Miles Cox**

How important would that have been to you to borrow the money?

### **Brian**

That would have been extremely important.

### **Miles**

Shall we give it a ten?

**Brian**

Yeah give it a ten; I'm dying for a drink or a drug aren't I?

**Miles Cox**

Yeah, you have to have it.

**Brian**

Desperate.

**Miles**

Yes.

**Narrator**

By scoring the siblings' concerns, Miles can draw up a profile. It provides vital clues about the kind of thought patterns that can underlie addiction.

**Miles**

Brian this is how your profile looks. You were feeling not very optimistic about achieving your goals. You were low on the "how likely" scale. You felt little control in your life, only an average of 3.8 on the control rating. You felt very ambivalent about things, you felt like what you wanted to achieve was going to make you happy but it was going to bring you unhappiness at the same time.

**Miles**

On the other hand though you clearly perceived that continuing to use alcohol and other drugs was going to interfere with your success in achieving your goals.

**Brian**

I'd say that it's a pretty accurate description of the way I was when I first went into treatment, yeah, definitely.

**Miles**

Anne let's look at your profile. We see for example you feel very optimistic about things that you want to achieve in other areas of your life, you feel in control, you feel like you know what steps to take to get what you want. Hardly any indication of ambivalence - you envision being happy if you achieve the things that you really want to but little or no unhappiness. And you feel very strongly committed to the things that you want to achieve. So it's quite a different pattern than we see in Brian.

**Ann**

Yeah it is.

**Narrator**

Many psychologists believe that thought itself can be broken down and measured like the processing speed of a massive computer. Video games rely on mental speed and agility. They are one direct measure of processing time inside Brian and Anne's heads.

**Narrator**

This is psychology's answer to the video game. The challenge is to name the colour of words coming up the screen - and ignore the meaning.

The task is easiest with neutral words. When words like this come up, the emotional significance gets in the way.

**Marc**

And what we can see is, your mean reaction time for the neutral is 712 milliseconds, as compared to your alcohol words which was, a mean reaction time of 1007 milliseconds. So that means you have more of a distraction for the alcohol words than you actually do for the neutral words.

**Narrator**

Anne is not an addict so her times are a standard of comparison for Brian's. If Anne shows significantly less distraction, there may be a fundamental difference in the siblings' mental processes.

**Marc**

What the results show is that you have a fifty millisecond greater distraction to the alcohol words than you do to the neutral words.

**Brian**

But my distraction time was still 250 milliseconds longer than Anne's wasn't it?

**Marc**

You could imply from that that you have more of a concern than Anne for the alcohol words.

**Brian**

Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

**Narrator**

It's like the video games. As Brian responds he has to think fast. But if he's distracted, the thought gets hijacked, and sent off down a longer route. This may have some basis in the physiological hard-wiring of his brain.