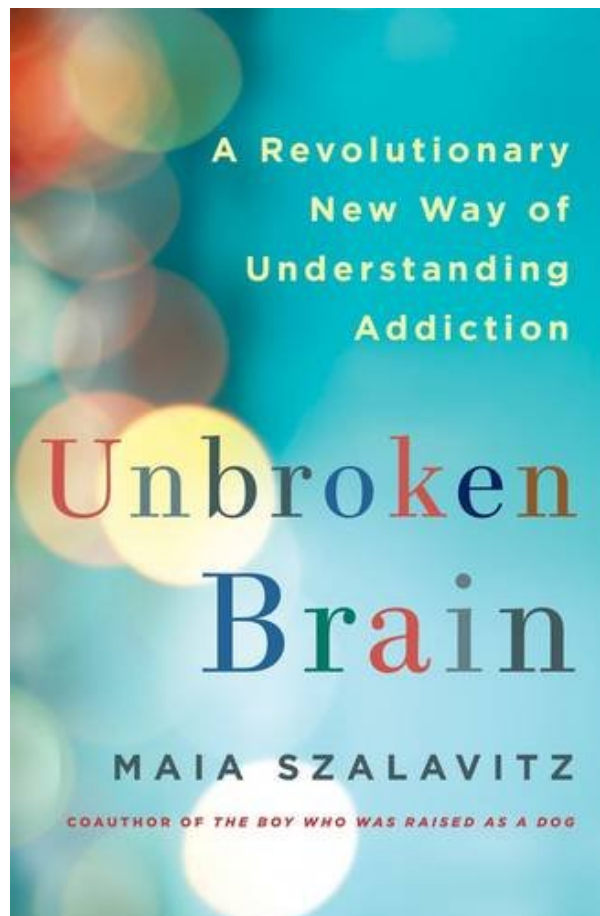
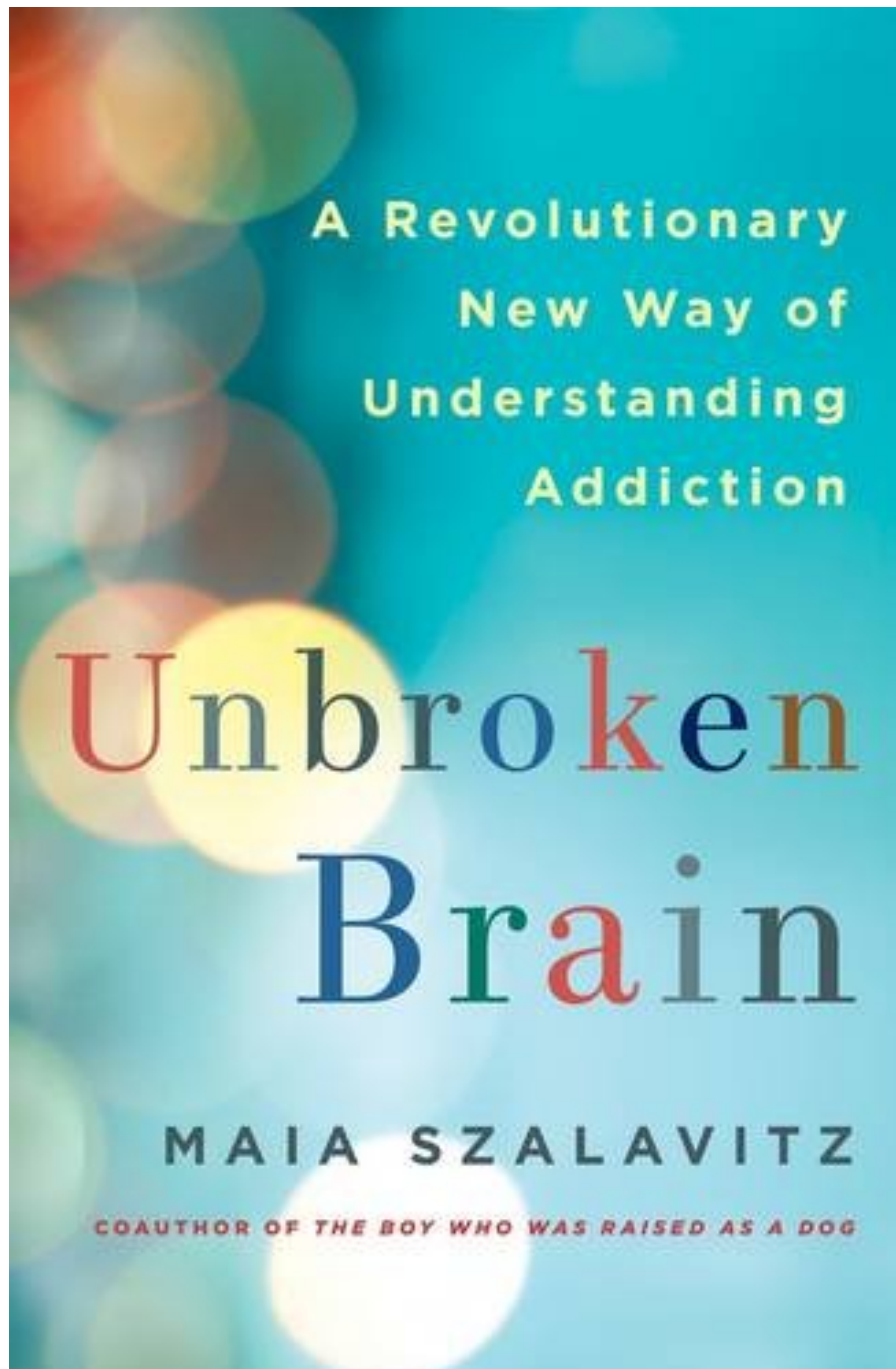


**UNBROKEN BRAIN: A REVOLUTIONARY
NEW WAY OF UNDERSTANDING
ADDICTION BY MAIA SZALAVITZ**



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"Maia Szalavitz is one of the bravest, smartest writers about addiction anywhere. Everything she writes should be read carefully - I guarantee you'll have a lot to think about, and you'll know far more than at the start."

– Johann Hari, New York Times bestselling author of Chasing the Scream

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More people than ever before see themselves as addicted to, or recovering from, addiction, whether it be alcohol or drugs, prescription meds, sex, gambling, porn, or the internet. But despite the unprecedented attention, our understanding of addiction is trapped in unfounded 20th century ideas, addiction as a crime or as brain disease, and in equally outdated treatment.

Challenging both the idea of the addict's "broken brain" and the notion of a simple "addictive personality," The New York Times Bestseller, *Unbroken Brain*, offers a radical and groundbreaking new perspective, arguing that addictions are learning disorders and shows how seeing the condition this way can untangle our current debates over treatment, prevention and policy. Like autistic traits, addictive behaviors fall on a spectrum -- and they can be a normal response to an extreme situation. By illustrating what addiction is, and is not, the book illustrates how timing, history, family, peers, culture and chemicals come together to create both illness and recovery- and why there is no "addictive personality" or single treatment that works for all.

Combining Maia Szalavitz's personal story with a distillation of more than 25 years of science and research, *Unbroken Brain* provides a paradigm-shifting approach to thinking about addiction.

Her writings on radical addiction therapies have been featured in *The Washington Post*, *Vice Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*, in addition to multiple other publications. She has been interviewed about her book on many radio shows including *Fresh Air with Terry Gross* and *The Brian Lehrer show*.

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Most helpful customer reviews

127 of 130 people found the following review helpful.

One of the best books I've ever read on addiction

By Deanokat

As a recovery advocate and the father of someone in long-term recovery, I've read more books about addiction than I can count. When my son first started struggling with drugs, I made a vow to educate myself as much as I possibly could. Knowledge is power, and I wanted to know *everything* about addiction. I still do. So I read about it. A lot. And I can honestly say that Maia Szalavitz's "Unbroken Brain: A Revolutionary New Way of Understanding Addiction" is one of the best books I've ever read on the subject.

Maia Szalavitz is a fabulous writer who has penned a wonderful, very forward-thinking book about addiction. She introduces us to some new theories about addiction, several of which may have people re-examining the way they've thought about one of the most prevalent and deadliest problems in America today.

Szalavitz sets out to show that addiction isn't a choice or moral failing. "But it's not a chronic, progressive brain disease like Alzheimer's, either," she notes. "Instead, addiction is a developmental disorder--a problem involving timing and learning, more similar to autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and dyslexia than it is to mumps or cancer." Yes, Szalavitz is blazing new trails here.

The author contends that "addiction doesn't just happen to people because they come across a particular chemical and begin taking it regularly. It is learned and has a history rooted in their individual, social, and cultural development." She adds that the addicted brain is not "broken," as many other researchers and writers have suggested. Instead, she says, the addicted brain has "simply undergone a different course of development....addiction is what you might call a wiring difference, not necessarily a destruction of tissue."

Looking at addiction as a learning disorder may seem strange to some, but Szalavitz states that doing so "allows us to answer many previously perplexing questions." And in "Unbroken Brain," Szalavitz--who is 25+ years in recovery from cocaine and heroin addiction herself--tells us how learning is a part of every aspect of addiction, oftentimes drawing upon her personal experience to illustrate her points.

There are so many interesting and thought-provoking topics covered in this book. From the problems associated with waiting for someone to hit "rock bottom" to the myth of the addictive personality; and from the issues surrounding 12-step programs to why harm reduction isn't a bad thing. ("Harm reduction recognizes [the] social and learned components of addiction. It 'meets people where they're at,' and it teaches them how to improve their lives, whether or not they want to become abstinent." Amen to that.)

If you or someone you love has been touched by addiction, or if you're just interested in this fascinating subject, I cannot recommend "Unbroken Brain" highly enough. This book contains a wealth of information, but Maia Szalavitz presents it in an organized manner while writing in a clear and understandable voice. Trust me: You will not be bombarded with a bunch of scientific language that you don't understand.

Szalavitz writes in the introduction, "Only by learning what addiction is--and is not--can we begin to find better ways of overcoming it. And only by understanding addicted people as individuals and treating them with compassion can we learn better and far more effective ways to reduce the harm associated with drugs." That is definitely the approach we should be taking with addiction. Hopefully, Maia Szalavitz's innovative new book will be the catalyst for some positive change.

24 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

"Unbroken Brain" shows struggling 12 Stepper a "Brave New World!"

By Allison Strong

I HAD to buy a brand new copy of this book. At 55, after a long history of polysubstance abuse, and a 12-step groups expat, I'm at a loss to explain how the urge to 'Use' or "Drink" to excess has faded into memory. Other compulsive behaviors have remained however, so I needed to read this book.

Even if you don't like to read, you'll find this blockbuster-compelling ; as Szalavitz, both both a truther and survivor of addiction, rehab and recovery, from an 'Inside Out' frankness so poetic it knocks my socks off.

It shows the WHY our country's punitive, even "Draconian" measures and laws put in place failed to yield lifesaving results as we foolishly abused people with addiction on the "War On Drugs."

Another thing.....AA'ers, often say "Once and Alcoholic always an Alcoholic." (I'm not sure if this is said verbatim in The Big Book but it's implied)

They apply similar dogma with regards to recovery from other compulsive behaviors.

In my life...well, maybe not so much.... It's all in the book.

If you are affected by or interested in addictive behavior, people who are dually diagnosed with a mental illness and substance abuse..

Even if you're not ready to 'recover,' (another stigmatizing term).this book is written for you. ...

Who knew some people outgrow this 'learning' issue? and furthermore explains why those laws and policies have never worked and how sadistic protocols, like being in the 'hotseat' during rehab group therapy doesn't help anyone, only reinforces low self esteem, shame and stigma. I'm so excited about the promise of this new direction in thought on how to more effectly address the Opiate epidemic and other consequences of addictive patterns (compulsive gambling to an extreme on both sides of my family tree..) even including new ways to deal with eating disorders and health problems like Obesity...well, you've just got to read this book.. That's the end of it. I'm going back to it now. Allison Bizantz Aka "Strong"

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent review of important advances in addiction science.

By Stephen S. Mulkey

This book is not "revolutionary" but evolutionary. It is a more personable and less didactic version of The Biology of Desire. It is very accessible and provides an intelligible review of the science supporting the concept of addiction as a developmental learning disorder. In my estimation, this thesis has considerable merit. This book is a vast improvement over Hari's Chasing the Scream, which I think is gratuitously self promotional and lacking in basic research.

The central issues of addiction science are (1) understanding why some people become addicts and others don't, and (2) accurately predicting how an addict can stay clean and sober. This book is an excellent review of current understanding.

Here are some of the take-homes:

- * Addiction is obsession and compulsion. Some (not me) would add that it is obsession and compulsion in the face of negative consequences.
- * Addiction has relatively strong genetic heritability, but environmental set and setting greatly facilitate its expression.
- * Trauma has a big influence on expression of addiction, but it is neither necessary or sufficient. This can

happen via organic plastic changes in the brain that occur in response to traumas, or quite possibly through epigenetic processes. The latter offers a fascinating potential for further understanding of this baffling disorder.

- * Addiction is a dysfunction of the brain and is not best characterized as a disease.
- * The expression of addiction represents a process of plastic reorganization of brain form and function that develops over the course of the addiction. In this sense, it is developmental.
- * Although it can occur at any age, it is far more common in late adolescence and early adulthood. The brain is still remodeling itself, although it is functionally plastic for a lifetime. Up through early adulthood the executive functions are still forming. Most of us survive bad decisions during this time.
- * All learning involves mostly the same neurobiological processes. Learning like addiction is utterly dependent on affective state. Any good teacher knows this.
- * Romantic love is addiction. Several other behaviors can result from the neurobiology of obsession and compulsion. These may or may not be associated with drugs or alcohol.
- * Treating addiction as a disease has led to inappropriate management of those afflicted. Similarly, treating it as a choice is counter our now well developed understanding of the neurobiology. Criminalization is barbaric and reprehensible. The War on Drugs is simply monstrous.
- * Use of mandatory 12 step programs is a violation of separation of church and state. Always has been, always will be. It matters little what adherents think about it not being a religion.
- * She offers compelling evidence of who official policies to support harm reduction are of great benefit to addicts and society.
- * The author does a great job of separating incentive salience (wanting) from the effect of a drug (liking, or in the case of crack and, say, end stage alcoholism, definitely not liking).
- * Recovery for the vast majority of addicted souls is utterly dependent on sharing and connection with other people, preferably others in recovery. This is the one demonstrably essential part of all recovery programs.

Issues that are poorly dealt with in this book:

- * The reality that renewed use after any period of sobriety can result in renewed obsession and compulsion.
- * While the author correctly points out that addiction is not a character flaw or moral failing, she does not address dealing with the moral baggage that almost every addict carries as they enter recovery.
- * At times it seems that she has forgotten the process of her own recovery and is engaging in speculation about what must have happened.
- * She believes that 12 step programs have no place in treatment. I say, it depends. Surely 12 step recovery has been abused. Bullying has no place in any stage of recovery.
- * The review of New Zealand's drug policies is encyclopedic and dry without any meaningful analysis.
- * She is dead wrong about Moderation Management being an option for anyone who is truly manifesting organically based obsession and compulsion (i.e., true addiction rather than physiological dependence). This is an amazing lapse coming from someone who was without question addicted and should know better. Perhaps she did not bother to look up the history of this disastrous program.
- * None of the current spate of books on addiction makes a decent attempt to understand the neurobiology of recovery. This is truly the frontier.

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