Weaknesses and Strengths of Hari’s Argument

The negative effects of drug addiction touch and effect almost everyone. Johann Hari’s *Huffington* *Post* article, “The Likely Cause of Addiction Has Been Discovered, & It’s Not What You Think,” recognizes that addiction transcends social, political, racial, and gender lines. Hari, though, posits that has society been treating addicts wrong with the traditional tough love approach, and instead if you want addicts to recover from their addictions, addicts must be helped to reconnect with their fellows. As his main claim is refreshingly and sentimentally powerful, his argument does some superficial things quite well in supporting the claim. However, his argument does have some glaring weaknesses that diminish the overall impact of his intriguing claim. Among the argument’s strengths are his ethos-building use of the conversion narrative as well as the effectively jarring use of pronouns. Hari tells the audience that before he set off on a tremendously long journey “to figure out what is really driving the drug war, I believed it too.” What Hari believed was that drugs cause drug addiction, and the ensuing article serves as a conversion from the wrong way of thinking to the right way of thinking as he claims that “[w]e will have to change ourselves” in order to really help stop the war on drugs and cultivate a healthy culture for the addict to recover. This conversion story creates a willingness in the audience to be open minded to his claims and evidence because he used to be like us, and he too had people help teach him what is true and right. Hari’s use of pronouns, almost manipulatively, urges the audience even more to his side in ways subtle and effective. For example, as Hari describes the positive effects of decriminalizing and destigmatizing drugs in Portugal, he insists, “This isn’t only relevant to the addicts I love. It is relevant to the all of us, because it forces us to think differently about ourselves.” This pivots the reader’s attention from thinking about the addict as an other and repositions the audience as the subject of the argument. The ethos created with this pronoun movement suddenly shifts from Portugal’s addiction problem, or lack thereof, and repositions this as an “our” and “we” problem and solution. Conversely, while Hari does do some nice things in terms of ethos and how he relates with his audience, his argument does have some startling logical fallacies at hand that are difficult to ignore. In one instance, Hari attempts to dissuade the audience from believing that chemical hooks have a dominant role to play in addiction as he shockingly suggests that because 17.7 percent of ex-smokers can quit a nicotine patch, that that means, remarkably, that “chemicals drive 17.7 percent of addiction.” This false equivalent sounds really nice when read through quickly, but upon further inspection the logical leap without evidence other than a forced causal-correlation relationship stuns the reader and creates a heightened suspicion of the rest of Hari’s claims and evidence, especially with regards to the legitimacy of equating human socializing as exactly relational to rats. As this has demonstrated, much good will from Hari, the rhetor, can be had through a skillful use of ethos, but much of an argument’s effectiveness can be wholly disintegrated with logical oversights or fallacies.

he indirectly pleads with the audience to