

## Ep #87: The Allure of Normal



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**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #87: The Allure of Normal

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 87.

Welcome to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you are an alcoholic or an addict, this is not the show for you, but if you are someone who has a highly functioning life, doing very well, but just drinking a bit too much and wants to take a break, then welcome to the show. Let's get started.

Hey everybody, how are you? I'm going to tell you about some work that I was doing with a client the other day, and we were actually not talking about overdrinking. We were talking about overeating. And you know, that's what I love about this work because once you understand how the think-feel-act cycle works, once you understand that your thoughts create your feelings and your feelings drive your actions, and those actions can be overdrinking or they can be overeating, or they can be overspending, or it can just be any action that you take, you really understand that you can apply this cycle to anything.

And you know what? I actually have a lot of listeners who will say, "Drinking is not an issue for me. My problem is food," or, "My problem is money, but I listen to your podcast and I just replace the word alcohol with food or the word drink with shop." And I love that. I love that you can take this work and apply it in so many areas.

And I will tell you this: I truly believe that once I finally understood and made the connection that drinking more than I wanted was not some sort of unique problem that could only be understood in its own silo but was actually connected to overeating, overspending, overworking, all these things we do to numb ourselves, it helped me get rid of all the shame that I was carrying because I had for such a long time, you know, ugh, people who drink too much, that's a special, unique category of people.

And then I understood the think-feel-act cycle, I had that explained to me and I was like, "Oh, no, not at all." It all makes sense. It's all working on the same cycle. It really did erase so much shame for me. So this client said to

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #87: The Allure of Normal

me - because we were talking about overeating - she said, "You know, everybody else gets to have a cupcake but me. Why is it that everyone else can have a cupcake and not weigh what I weigh?"

And I have to tell you, my brain kind of exploded when she said this because it was almost the exact same reasoning that my brain used around drinking. Why is it that everyone gets to drink but me? Why is it that everyone else can drink and not have the same repercussions? It's why I titled my book *Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else?*, because that was a question that my brain just spun around and around on.

But here's the thing: behind both of these statements is underlying belief, "I want to be like everyone else, and if I can't, something must be wrong with me." And that's what I want to dig into this week. What is the allure in being like everyone else? Why are so many people obsessed with being normal? I know that I was for the longest time. The idea, if I could just be normal, if I could just be like everyone else, then I would feel better.

And I want you to think about how this idea may have appeared in your own life. Whether it's related to drinking or not, how much time and energy has your brain spent chasing being normal? Because here's the thing, and you guys know that I love to define words. Being normal means average, common, not out of the ordinary, something usual.

Why do we want that? What is the allure in being average, common, and not out of the ordinary, something that is usual? I think a really powerful way to reframe this idea, our desire to be normal is to ask yourself, why do you love the people that you love in your life? What draws you to them? What makes you single them out as special?

I love answering this question for myself because when I do, when I think about the people that I love, the words average, common, usual, and not out of the ordinary never come to mind. What I love is what makes them unique, what makes them unlike anyone else, what sets them apart from the crowd. That's what I love. I've never been like, "Oh, you know why I love this person? Because they are so normal, because they are a carbon

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #87: The Allure of Normal

copy of everyone else." Not once have I said that and I bet you've never said that either.

Normal is not what most people put forward as an attractive trait. Now, I will tell you, I have had on occasion people who do say - although I seek out "normal people" and often they attribute this to having an experience or growing up in a very dysfunctional environment. But even then, even when they say, "Oh, I'm looking for someone normal," they don't describe that person as average or common or like everyone else. What they really are talking about is not dysfunctional.

So here's the thing: if we aren't seeking normalness in the people that surround us, why are we so hell-bent on being normal ourselves? I want you to keep in mind that humans are a tribal species. Social standing has always been a part of our culture, as is the idea that humans for a very long time had to understand their relationship to the rest of the tribe and how they fit in with everyone else.

Because being part of a group, yes, it was important to build connections and to foster trust, but it also was an evolutionary advantage. When survival was really difficult, it was really important and an advantage to be part of the tribe. So in short, the brain was wired to make sure, hey, do I fit in? Will I be accepted? Because if I'm accepted and I fit in, well then my chances of survival are better.

But now you hear me talk about this all the time. You and I are not living in a world where survival is very difficult, where we have to wonder about am I going to have shelter tonight, am I going to have running water and clean water, am I going to have food? Survival's really not in question for most of us.

But the brain still thinks there is an advantage in being like everyone else. If I don't stand out, if I blend in, then I can feel okay about myself. Why is that? Well, you don't have to look any further than really understanding how the think-feel-act cycle works. Because when you have thoughts like, "Why can't I drink like everyone else?" "Why can't I eat a cupcake and not gain

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #87: The Allure of Normal

weight?" remember what happens when your brain asks a question. I covered this in podcast 48.

When your brain asks a question, "Why can't I drink like everyone else?" "Why can't I eat a cupcake and not gain weight?" Any question at all, it goes to work trying to find an answer. And the reason that questions like, "Why can't I drink like everyone else?" or, "Why can't I eat like everyone else?" feel negative is because your brain is answering that question with a negative thought. A thought like, something must be wrong with me. I'm broken. I'm not like other people.

And when you think that thought, even though it may be unconscious, you will feel shame, and when you feel shame, you try to hide. And remember, blending in is a form of hiding. So I want you to consider this: if you don't understand how the think-feel-act cycle is working to create your feelings and your actions, your brain will just conclude incorrectly that the way to feel better is by changing yourself or changing the world.

So if I feel negative when I think, "Why can't I drink like everyone else? Why can't I eat like everyone else?" then my brain will believe, aha, the solution is to find out how to be like everyone else, how to be normal. Because the brain thinks, oh, then I'll be happier. But of course it doesn't work that way. How we feel about ourselves is always only a result of what we think about ourselves. So as long as we keep thoughts like, "Something is wrong with me, I'm broken, I'm not like other people," guess what? You can't feel good about yourself.

Here's what I know: some people don't struggle with drinking, but they struggle with money or they struggle with food or anxiety or their body or relationships or with a career or love. People struggle. It's part of being human. It really is. And you can make whatever struggles you have mean that there is something wrong with you and that you're broken, and trust me, I did that for a really long time. Or you can make your struggle mean that there's something more for you to learn. There's an area where you need to grow, you need to evolve. Doesn't have to mean that anything is

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #87: The Allure of Normal

wrong with you. Doesn't have to mean that you're broken. It doesn't have to mean that you're abnormal. Those are all thoughts that you can reject.

Because the allure in being like everyone else is your brain believing that's how you feel better. But it's simply not true. You will only feel better when you think better thoughts about yourself. When you drop thoughts like, "There's something wrong with me, I'm broken, drinking too much is a character flaw, everyone else can do X, Y, Z, but me." Those are the thoughts that you have to drop in order to feel better about yourself. It's not trying to be like everyone else.

Because you know, overdrinking, overeating, overspending, over whatever, all these things are a signal that your brain has not yet learned how to respond to an urge other than to immediately act on the urge. And you know why your brain does this? It's not because there's something wrong with your brain. It's because no one ever taught you anything about how the brain works. I mean, really think about it. Think about what you learned in school. I learned about grammar and history and algebra and foreign languages. Nobody ever taught me anything about how the brain was working, how habits are created. What produces desire, the brain's preference to be rewarded, what was creating my feelings. I never learned any of this and my guess is you never did either.

So you really do get to decide, do you want to make whatever habit that is not serving you right now, do you want to make it mean something negative about you? Do you want to say, well, the only way I can feel better is if I can be like everybody else? Do you want to spend all your time and energy into trying to be normal? Thinking that that is how you will finally feel good? It will not work, my friends. It's not what we seek out in other people. It really isn't.

So why are you seeking it out so hard in yourself? Only because your brain is misguided on this point. I want you to consider that you don't want to be like everybody else. You know what? I don't want to be like everybody else. that's not why I was put here. I'm pretty sure that I was not put here to be a

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #87: The Allure of Normal

carbon copy of everyone around me, and that's not why you were put here either.

The point of life is not to blend in. It's not to be average and common and usual. The point of life is to fully express, fully embody who you are. What motivates you? What do you have to offer to the world? And you know what? There was an advantage in the past when survival was not a given to being a member of the tribe and making sure that you fit in, but we're not in that place anymore. And one of the things that I have learned over and over again with the work of managing my mind is that my brain has not caught up to where we are in this modern world.

It has not caught up to the fact that I'm safe, survival is not that challenging, I don't need to spot the negative everywhere I turn, and I have to keep reminding myself of that because it is such a crucial piece when you want to do the work of learning how to supervise your own mind, learning how to use the think-feel-act cycle.

Because really, there is zero allure in being like everyone else. The only allure is in being you. So here's the thing: if you haven't figured out the habit of drinking yet, okay, so there's room for you to grow, there's room for you to evolve, there's room for you to understand your mind better, understand your urges and your desire in a deeper way. But in the meantime, you have got to drop this question, "Why can't I drink like everyone else?" You have got to let go of this idea of the only way to feel good is if I'm "normal."

And normal people drink. But not too much, right? You've got to let go of that. There's no allure in being normal. There is no feeling better in being just like everyone else. There's only ever feeling better about yourself if you are willing to do the work, to examine your mind and then clean up those thoughts that are creating all this negative emotion for you in the think-feel-act cycle and leading you to the action of trying to be normal.

I want you to really think about this this week. It really changed so much for me. Do the work. Trust me, it is so worth it. Alright, that's it for this week. If

[Take a Break From Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

## Ep #87: The Allure of Normal

you have any questions or you want to hear me talk about a topic on the podcast, send me an email at [podcast@rachelhart.com](mailto:podcast@rachelhart.com). Otherwise, I will see you next week.

Hey guys, if you're finding this podcast helpful, and I really hope you are, I would love if you head on over to iTunes and leave a review. And as a special thank you, I've updated and expanded my free urge meditation giveaway. I've created two audio meditations plus a brand-new workbook that will teach you a different way to respond to the urge to drink. The meditations are super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones. And each one now comes with a follow-up exercise in the workbook to help you dig deeper and really retrain your brain when it comes to the habit of drinking. So after you leave a review on iTunes, all you need to do is head on over to [rachelhart.com/urge](http://rachelhart.com/urge), input your information, and I'll make sure you get a copy of both meditations plus the workbook in your inbox.

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