

## Ep #196: Why We Need Cocktail Hour



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With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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Welcome to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you're 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.

Well hello everyone. We are talking about one of my favorite topics today, cocktail hour. It was a thing that I observed for a very long time in my life, so maybe for you that means heading to the bar after work to decompress, or maybe it means you're at home and you're waiting until it's five or six o'clock so that you can fix yourself a drink and unwind from the day.

Needless to say, this is a ritual that is observed by a lot of people. It is very ingrained in the habit of drinking, and I want to help you understand it today. And I'm going to sneak in some history. If you listen to this podcast, you know that I am a lover of history, so we're going to be talking about that today.

But cocktail hour, happy hour, wine o'clock, it really has become a part of our culture. And I want you to go along with me on this journey today and understand why that is. Why did society create a ritual around a specific time of day to drink? What forces were at work creating this really widespread need to unwind with alcohol?

And I also want you to consider how this ritual is often connected to our ideas about alcohol and what it means to drink. So I talked about this before on the podcast, but I really grew to love fancy cocktails and cocktail culture in my probably mid to late 20s.

At that time, I was dating a guy who was very into bourbon and scotch and whisky and spending a lot of money on buying bottles of that. We would go

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to liquor stores sometimes and I remember first when I started dating him, my jaw would just drop at how much he would spend on a single bottle.

And at that time in my life, I was drinking Budweiser and PBR at dive bars in Brooklyn. So cheap drinks were totally fine by me. But this guy was older and he had a fancy job and he had a lot of fancy things. And he spent a lot of money on drinking.

So meeting up for happy hour, that's really how our relationship started off. And eventually, we went from meeting up at the bar for a drink to meeting up at his apartment. And we got into that routine of we'd meet up after work at his apartment, we'd have a drink and then another and then another.

And this just became an ingrained part of our relationship. And I remember one day he came home with all of these ingredients for a really fancy cocktail for me. I think it had something like five different ingredients, two of which I had never even heard of before.

And just getting this all together, I can't even imagine. He probably spent like, \$100, which was mind-boggling to me. I remember just thinking like, this is crazy, this is so much money. But you know what? There was a part of me that also thought it was kind of special and kind of sophisticated.

I had never even heard of some of the ingredients he had brought home, and I liked it. I liked the idea of being fancy and adult and sophisticated. Now keep in mind, we were sitting on his couch drinking our fancy cocktails in our fancy glasses, one after another watching TV. We were just getting drunk watching TV.

And I think about this now. I think about myself kind of looking down on that scene now and looking at myself when I was 26 or 27 doing this and just thinking, "Rachel, there's really nothing fancy or sophisticated going on here. I know that a lot of money was spent on the alcohol itself and now

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you've got this fancy little pale purple drink in a cocktail glass that you're sipping, but you're just spending a lot of money to get drunk on a couch.”

But I had really been sold this idea that part of what was alluring about cocktails was that it was fancy and it was sophisticated and it was adult. Now, that's not how I started drinking. When I started drinking in college, I was drinking mystery punch from a red plastic cup. But as I got older, I wanted to be seen differently, and so the alcohol that I consumed changed.

I eventually started spending more money on what I was drinking. I didn't stay in the place of drinking cheap beer at dive bars. And so I really, unconsciously I think, embraced this concept of cocktails and cocktail hour as a sign of being kind of cultured and sophisticated.

But I think it's really interesting to go back beyond just the story of what we make certain alcohol means and certain drinks mean about the person who is consuming them. I think it's really interesting to go back a step further and consider, hey, what is this all about? When did and why did humans decide that the time after work and before dinner was time to drink?

Because certainly, cocktail hour didn't always exist. And maybe it's not a cocktail with five ingredients like I was talking about. Maybe it's just sitting down at a bar and having a couple of beers. But when did society create this special time of day for drinking and why?

So we're going to really back up in time. I'm going to go all the way back to talking about how humans were initially hunter-gatherers. So that means they were moving from place to place in search of food. But about 10,000 years ago, humans for the first time started putting down their roots.

And this wasn't just about planting crops and domesticating animals. It was about totally changing how humans lived together. So suddenly, because we were able to farm, we could have permanent dwellings. So you had

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more people living together, and you had people living in community in new and different ways.

So this really starts about 10,000 years ago. And for the majority of the last 10,000 years, that's how humans have been existing. Now, this all starts to change with the Industrial Revolution. So in the late 18th century, the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution start.

And this is when agrarian societies start making whey for large scale industry. And this doesn't just impact what the countryside looks like. It doesn't just mean that farms are making whey for factories. It impacted how people lived and worked in community.

So in agrarian societies, people didn't have jobs the way we think of a job today. We think of a job today as having a set workweek and set hours. So maybe it's nine to five, maybe it's specific shifts. When you have a job the way we think about it today, you're paid for your time by a specific employer.

None of this was the case in agrarian societies. There wasn't this kind of structure to work. Now, it's a pretty recent phenomenon that people started not just having this structure around their jobs, but also giving their job, what they do in the world so much importance in their life.

I know that I used to think that my job was who I was. It was a reflection of me. It was part of my identity. And I will tell you as an aside, that's part of what made the switch for me to go from spending over a decade in human rights to becoming a coach and an entrepreneur. It was very challenging for me to do that because I thought no, this is just who I am, I'm just someone who works in human rights.

It was a huge shift in my identity. And it's not just how we get caught up in our job being our identity. We also in modern times have given our job responsibility for our self-worth and our purpose. How many times have you

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thought or have you heard someone say if I just find the right job, then I'll be happy, then I'll have it figured out?

So in many ways, our conception of what a job is, how we conceive of a job today, it started with the Industrial Revolution. Because if you're going to transform agrarian people, people who are used to working in nature, outside, outdoors, in farms, if you're going to transform them into factory workers or office workers, you need to revamp their entire conception of work and what work is.

Because if you're going to have people working in factories, which is how it started out, you need a lot of people coming to work at the same time every day and staying for the same amount of time. You need consistency, you need predictability.

And this is not how people understood work in agrarian societies. Yeah, there was a lot of work that needed to get done for a farm to function. But the work was much more haphazard. It was much less structured. You weren't tied to a single set of tasks or a single employer.

There wasn't this notion of nine to five or Monday through Friday, or this really sharp distinction between work and leisure. Work was about completing a specific task at hand. Let me churn this butter, let me shear this sheep, let me harvest this crop, let me weave cloth.

It was not about creating your identity and your self-worth and your happiness and your purpose in life. Now, just because work in agrarian societies was less structured and more haphazard, it didn't mean it didn't have to get done and it didn't mean there wasn't a lot to do.

You got to do something with all that excess milky you're producing, like make butter, or it's going to spoil. You've got to actually shear the sheep in your herd because if you don't, they can actually overheat and die. And PS, this is actually the case with sheep because they don't shed their wool.

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And if you don't go out into the field and harvest the crop, it's going to rot in the field and then what are you going to do when winter comes? So there was a lot of work to get done. But you weren't really tied to someone else's clock. You weren't necessarily tied to set hours in the day or someone telling you when to work or how long to work.

Now, please keep in mind that I am speaking a lot in generalizations here. You have to acknowledge that along with agrarian societies throughout the world, there was a long history of oppressing people via agricultural labor. So whether you are serf or an indentured servant or enslaved, that is also the case here.

So do keep that in mind. But what I want you to just understand at a very high level is just how a general conception of work was different. Your work activities were very different from the structure of how we think of our job today and working at our job today.

Many things in agrarian society that were task oriented were often treated as social occasions or celebrations. So you had neighbors coming together to build a home or harvest a crop. So work and leisure was much more fluid than how we understand it in our modern workday, in our modern workweek.

The point being that even though the idea of growing your food and sewing your clothes and repairing your home, even though all of this might seem exhausting and indeed, people in agrarian societies worked longer hours, there was more flow and freedom to how you were working in the day.

There was more overlap between work and leisure. There was more connection between people and family and communities. I'm not trying to glamorize how hard it is to work on a farm. Lord knows I have no idea. I have the diaries from my great-grandmother and my great-great-aunt who both lived on the same farm in the 1930.

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And when I read through them, I am just in awe about how much they did in a day and how hard they worked. But they were also more socially connected to family. They were more connected to the seasons and nature. They were more connected to their body; they weren't sitting eight or 10 hours in a single position all day long behind a desk.

They weren't standing in a single position on their feet all day in a factory doing one repetitive motion. They had responsibilities because they were living on a farm, but I can just see through their diaries how much more fluid their day was than my day was working in an office.

Now again, I think it's important to not glamorize this. You can also talk a lot about how these women, they had a lot less opportunity. Maybe my great-great-aunt Georgie didn't want to be churning butter every day. I don't know. She didn't write about how she felt about churning butter in her diaries, but she did write about doing it and she did write about what her days looked like.

So what I just want you to consider, why I'm bringing up all of this is I want you to consider that the transition from agrarian labor to the Industrial Revolution to working in factories, working in offices, it changed how people worked. It changed how people used their bodies. It changed how people conceived of time and how people were connected to community and family.

And it changed how people perceived the work that they did in the world. Now, the Industrial Revolution was not a bad thing. It's led to a lot of amazing advances. But at the same time, it has taken a toll on humans.

We spent thousands of years working and existing in a way that connected us to our body and connected us to nature and connected us to community. And only over the last 200 years or so are so many humans living in a way that is so very, very different.

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Where so many more people are sedentary, they're more disconnected from nature, they're disconnected from family and community, they're breathing recycled air, they're existing all day under artificial light. Because that's often what's required to work in a factory or an office.

And so I want you to consider that it is no surprise that the advent of happy hour or cocktail hour coincided with the Industrial Revolution and the new ways that people were spending their time during their days. People needed relief from a new kind of toil.

And this idea that a certain time of day was our moment to be happy, our moment to seek out relief, it became part of the consciousness in many places. A lot of people actually trace back the advent of cocktail hour or happy hour to 19th century Paris. What was called the green hour, and it was called the green hour because people were ending their workday and then going to the pub and drinking absinthe.

People needed relief from this new way of existing and this new kind of toil. They wanted connection to people as well. And when they were disconnected from their body and they were disconnected from nature and they were disconnected from community, they found that relief in a drink.

The Industrial Revolution radically changed people's lives. And it changed it in a way that I think so often we dismiss. We don't really spend time thinking about yes, there were so many advances. But here's the thing; your connection to nature matters.

It is not just a nice thing to have. The human body is intimately connected and evolved on this earth, to the place where it lives, the place where you reside. Think about what happens when you take animals out of their natural habitat and put them in an enclosure. They suffer. They're not happy.

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This isn't conjecture. All of this research has been done about how just being able to see greenery, just being able to see a tree through a window from your hospital bed drastically reduces the need for painkillers and speeds recovery. You don't even have to be outside with the tree. You just have to be able to see it.

It's not just nature that we need. It's our connection to community. Humans are social creatures. And for so many people, because of the ways in which we work, we are no longer connected the way that we would like to be. People feel lonelier, they feel more socially isolated.

And when that is the case, it's not just like, oh too bad. It actually impacts your health. You're at higher risk for high blood pressure and heart disease and obesity and a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline. Your connection to community matters. It's not just a nice to have thing.

And certainly, you do not need to be told how problematic it is to sit all day long or what happens to the body when it's forced to do repetitive movements all day long. It has a dramatic impact on our health. The Industrial Revolution changed how humans existed, how we spent our time, how we connected to nature, how we connected to community, and how we were in our own bodies.

And guess what? It took a toll. Humans started seeking out relief. Now listen, of course alcohol was popular before the Industrial Revolution. But this widespread idea of needing relief from work, relief from your day, relief from your toil, this idea of having a green hour or a cocktail hour or happy hour, that's what was new.

And that's what I want you to consider. That if your experience during the day wasn't taking a toll on your body, if you weren't ending the day so exhausted, if you weren't feeling disconnected from nature or community, if you weren't sitting in place the whole day or using your body in this very,

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very limited way, would the pull of happy hour, would the pull of having a drink at the end of the day be so strong?

I'll tell you, I don't think it would be. I see this in my own life. 100% when I was living in New York City, I needed a lot of relief from my day. I was often working 10 hours a day. It was very normal for me to get to work, eat my lunch at my desk, and then stay for dinner, and then just order delivery to the office.

So some days, I would go my whole day and never see the sun. My time in nature on most days was simply my commute from my apartment to the subway entrance. That was it. That was my time in nature. I was hundreds of miles away from my family and yeah, I had friends in the city, but I didn't get to see them on a regular basis.

In fact, it was one of those things where I could have a very close friend, I had a very close friend of mine actually who lived a couple blocks away from me on the Upper West Side. We went to college together. And we could sometimes go months without seeing each other because of her work schedule and my work schedule and she was traveling and I was traveling.

I so rarely connected with people. Not to mention that my body was sitting oftentimes motionless for hours on end staring at a screen in one position. The only part of me moving was my hands that were either typing or scrolling with a mouse.

This is not a recipe for feeling good. This is not a recipe for enjoying your day. Not to mention the fact that I gave my job the responsibility of making me happy and making me feel good about myself and making me feel smart and bringing purpose to my life.

So no wonder I was in need of happy hour. No wonder I wanted a couple cocktails when I got home. No wonder I had to anesthetize myself from my day. Now here's the thing; I didn't know that any of this was going on. I

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wasn't aware of any of this because I just totally bought into this idea that cocktail hour and my fancy cocktail, it was just this fun, sophisticated, adult thing to do. I just was someone who loved cocktails. I loved craft cocktails.

I remember that I used to say that a lot. And as long as I could slip into this story of what it meant about me and how it was fun and fancy and sophisticated and adult, as long as I could slip into that story, I didn't have to examine what was actually going on.

I didn't have to examine the fact and I didn't even know to examine the fact that my entire body was calling out for relief. I just slipped into the story of oh, I just love a fancy drink. I didn't have to examine the fact that I was completely disconnected from nature, that I was very disconnected from family and friends.

That my body, my whole existence was calling out for something that I was not giving it. I was just giving it the job. I was just giving it work. I thought that was the most important thing. But it wasn't about the fancy drink at the end of the day. It wasn't even about this fancy little glass and my fancy drink. It was about what I wasn't paying attention to.

How I wasn't paying attention to how I was feeling, what was happening for me. So really, is it any wonder that my desire kept growing? My desire to drink just increased. And I kept going back for more and more. Because no amount of drink was ever going to be able to satisfy what I was truly in need of and truly wanted.

So that's what I want you to consider. There's a reason that humans started searching for a happy hour in our day. And it was to counteract these really dramatic changes that happened when it comes to our body, our family, our community, our connection to nature, and this idea that our job is who we are and how we get happiness and how we get self-worth.

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And if you're willing to examine that, you will be willing to examine cocktail hour, happy hour, whatever you want to call it, you'll be willing to examine your desire for a drink at the end of the day in a different light. Alright, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

Hey, if you're a woman who enjoys this podcast and wants to have me as your coach, you have to join the *Take A Break* program. It's a 30-day break from drinking that will teach you how to say no to your urges without deprivation, the secret to not needing a drink in any situation, including not needing a drink to take the edge off, and never again feeling like you can't trust yourself around alcohol. Join me over at [RachelHart.com/join](https://RachelHart.com/join). Together, we're going to blow your mind.