

Ep #86: Mirror Effect



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 86.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host Rachel Hart.

Hey, everybody. Welcome back. Today, we are talking about something that I call the mirror effect. And what I want you to start to think about is what are the judgments that you have about other people who either do drink, don't drink, or drink too much?

And I'm going to tell you, the work that I'm asking you to do today is really challenging. And it's challenging because I am asking you to be open to looking at your judgments of other people. And usually, these are going to be negative judgments.

People hate admitting that they judge other people negatively. We don't like to admit this. But listen, we do. It's okay. You have to be able to look at this part of your mind in order to really understand the habit. And I will tell you this; this so used to be me.

Listen, I still judge people, of course, but for a very long time, I had very, very intense judgments about people and alcohol. Now, I have done a lot of work understanding these judgments in order to be able to do the work to change my own habit, but that's what I want you to be willing to look at today, because if you can acknowledge the judgments that you have, it will help you so much in your own work to change the habit.

So I'll tell you this; when I was drinking, and drinking a lot, and thinking that it was so much fun and the best thing in the world, I had a lot of judgment about people who didn't drink. So I talked about this in episode 84 about drink-pushers, right, because I used to be a drink pusher.

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And I would think very self-righteously, “God, at least I know how to have a good time. At least I’m not a buzz-kill.” But the fact of the matter was that that judgment was hiding the fact that I had shame around this part of me that understood that I didn’t really know how to have a good time without a drink in my hand. And so it was a lot easier to pass judgment on other people that didn’t drink and decide that they automatically weren’t fun than it was for me to look at my own issues around really not knowing how to enjoy myself unless alcohol was involved.

Now, here’s the crazy thing; many times – I’ve talked a lot about how I flip-flopped back and forth between drinking and not drinking, and many times, when I wasn’t drinking, my judgment then totally flipped. So I would look at people when I wasn’t drinking and then my brain would go to, “Oh my god, that person is such a drunk. At least I’m not acting like a fool. They’re acting like an idiot.”

But here’s the thing; behind this judgment, there was also fear. And the fear was that I had a lot of shame around many of the things that I had done while I had been drinking and I had a lot of shame around the fact of what did it mean, who was I as a person if I didn’t drink?

And so again, it was easier to judge other people than it was for me to look at that fear and look at that shame. Now, if you’ve listened to the podcast, you have heard me talk a lot about the idea that alcohol and drinking is neutral. Drinking is not a vice; abstaining is not a virtue. Alcohol is neutral, so are your choices around it.

But for a long time, this concept really eluded me because I had so much shame around what drinking and not drinking meant about me as a person. And I will tell you, I really had to do a lot of thought work. I really had to challenge a lot of my thinking in order to get myself to a place where I understood, “Oh, it’s neutral.” It’s not good or bad. It’s not right or wrong. It truly means nothing about a person.

So today, what I’m going to be talking to you about is what I call the mirror effect. It is why we judge other people harshly. And of course, we’re going

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to talk about this in regards to drinking, but as always, what I'm teaching you applies to any area of your life.

We're also going to be talking about what your judgments reveal about your thoughts about yourself. This is really important and this is where the mirror effect kicks in. but once you understand how it works, you can really use this as a tool to help you change the habit, but also to really understand in any area of your life where you're having a lot of judgment, help you really understand what is actually going on in your own brain rather than what your brain wants you to focus on, which is other people's choices and other people's actions.

So here's something that I think is a really important concept to understand. When you feel confident about your choices, you really have no interest in judging other people's choices. I remember the first time that I encountered this idea and it kind of blew my mind. So I really want you to consider this; when you feel confident in what you are doing, the decisions and choices that you are making, you don't really have an interest in judging other people's actions and decisions and choices.

And this is something that obviously extends well beyond drinking. So if you feel good about what you're eating, you don't care about what other people consume. If you feel really confident about your body and how you show your body and display your body, you're not constantly assessing other people's appearance.

If you feel good about your parenting and how you're raising your kids, you don't really have an interest in judging other people's choices around their children. And if you feel good about how you're spending your money, you don't care how other people spend theirs. It really is something that is so incredibly true; the more confident you feel in your own choices, the less likely you are to judge others in their choices, because the thing is, judgment is all about self-protection.

Finding other people's flaws is an unconscious way that your brain tries to call attention away from any of your own perceived deficiencies. So if I'm

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worried about my drinking, it's a lot easier to focus on somebody else's drinking than mine.

If I'm ashamed about my eating, it feels much safer to have opinions about what other people eat. If I am constantly judging my body then my brain may find temporary relief when it thinks, "Oh well at least I don't look like her." And if I'm not so sure I'm doing a great job as a parent, well, then it's probably easier for me and feels better to point the finger at how somebody else is doing a worse job of it.

So what our brain ends up doing in what it thinks is self-protection is trying to use other people as essentially launching-pads out of our own areas of shame and insecurity because – the logic is kind of, well if somebody else is doing worse then at least I'm doing better.

So I can feel better about myself because here's this other example of someone doing worse. And what ends up happening is that you judge people in areas where you are the most vulnerable to shame and, by extension, the areas where you lack the most self-confidence. It is so fascinating when you understand this.

And this is the mirror effect. Your brain's tendency to judge other people harshly is a misguided and misdirected way to create more self-confidence and to feel better about yourself. "At least I'm not doing what they're doing. At least I don't look like that. At least I'm not eating that. At least I'm not spending my money that way."

This mirror effect is an unconscious attempt to distract from your own perceived deficiencies so that you can feel better in areas where you're currently lacking self-confidence. But listen, once you uncover this pattern, it really will show you how, not only how to change the habit, but how to create deeper and more sustained self-confidence and feel better about the choices that you're making.

I want you to consider that self-righteousness is a form of fear. It's a way to protect yourself from being wrong or being blamed. I think about all the areas in my life in the past where I have been incredibly self-righteous. And

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listen, I have not completely cleaned this up. I still watch as sometimes self-righteousness will appear.

And it's really interesting now for me to understand it in this kind of self-protective way where my brain is trying to help me, but really, it's not being very helpful. And I want you to be really careful because whenever I teach this topic, I always encounter people who are quick to say, "Oh, I don't do that. I don't judge other people."

And my first thought is, "Really?" because, you know what, it's part of how the brain is wired. The brain was built to judge and assess and label and you know what, judging is not the problem. The problem is when you don't investigate why you are so quick to judge other harshly. I do this work all the time. I am really putting these skills to practice, these tools to work and managing my mind, and still, I find my brain judging people, and that's okay.

It doesn't mean I'm doing something wrong; it just means I need to take a deeper look at the thought that is behind the judgment and how it applies to me because the more entrenched, the more reactive you are on an issue, the more you need to investigate your own resistance. And this will be some of the most challenging work that you embark on. This was exactly what was happening around my own drinking for such a long time. I had so much shame about it.

I was so sure that either overdrinking or not drinking was some sort of reflection of who I was as a person, some sort of moral failing, some sort of character defect, that all my own judgments of myself were then mirrored onto other people and their choices. So, for a long time, I judged people harshly who didn't drink.

I had all this shame about my own drinking. Instead of looking at that, it was safer to judge people who didn't. And then, when I was trying to change my drinking and I wasn't, I noticed myself judging people who drank too much. It's so crazy. My brain just flip-flopped.

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But again, it makes sense when you understand the mirror effect because I had shame both around my drinking and not drinking. And so instead of looking at that source of my own internal shame, which, of course, was my thinking, I didn't understand that at the time, it felt so much safer to judge other people's choices.

But the real problem was not the judgment that I had. That actually was the window in for me to understand what was really going on here. The real problem were all the thoughts that I had that were creating so much shame for me.

And it's really fascinating to see how that shame was created on both sides of the equation, whether I was drinking or not drinking. Sometimes, you notice something like this and it's just like, "Eurgh, thanks, brain..." But really, that was a really important piece for me to uncover because that's what I needed to clean up; my own thoughts about drinking and not drinking and what it meant about me as a person. And noticing where I was quick to judge other helped me do that.

Listen, people are hard on other people precisely because we are hard on ourselves. So noticing someone else's flaws is so much more comfortable than noticing your own and judging others, being self-righteous about others subconsciously calls attention away from your own perceived flaws. "Well at least I'm not that. At least I'm not doing this..."

But there really is a way to utilize these judgments, if you're willing to look at them. And I know, for some of you, that is challenging right now. You don't want to be a person who judges others negatively. All I can tell you is that is not the problem. In fact, it's really normal. The problem is the underlying thoughts that you have about yourself.

So when you find yourself deep in judgment about another person – and it can be around drinking, it can be around really anything, what you can ask yourself is, first, is there another feeling under here that is harder to feel? I promise, it is usually something like shame.

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And the second thing you can ask yourself is, what am I afraid of? Because if you recognize, my brain only judges others in areas that I am vulnerable to shame, then what am I afraid of? And I think for me, it was important to really understand that this manifested in all different parts of my life. It wasn't just happening around alcohol consumption.

And I'll tell you, one of the things that I noticed is how this used to manifest around work. So back before I became a life coach, when I had a, quote unquote, regular nine to five job, I had a lot of judgment around the people that I worked with, some of them.

I was really quick to label some people as doing subpar work on the job. And I could get pretty self-righteous about it. And it had this kind of, "Well at least I'm working my butt off. At least I'm showing up 100%." And you know, sometimes that self-righteousness felt kind of good, but I'll tell you this; when I understood how the mirror effect worked and I understood that we are most self-righteous and we are most quick to judge others and judge others harshly in areas where we have shame, I was able to look at my judgments in another way because the truth was, underneath that judgment was something that I was afraid to feel.

I did have shame around the fact that I really did not know how to separate myself from work. I did not know how to set clear boundaries and not let work seep into every part of my life and every moment of free time. And when I really looked closely at that, I didn't like how it felt. I didn't like the results that I was getting, but I didn't know how to change it. So it was a lot easier to judge other people who I perceived as not showing up the way I thought that they should, when, of course, what was really going on was my own shame around how I was showing up at work.

So the mirror effect, it can pop up in all sorts of areas in your life. That is why I love these tools so much because you use it to really understand your drinking, and then hey, you can really use it to understand anything.

I just want you to consider this; that your judgment is born out of a lack of self-confidence. And self-confidence is based on two twin beliefs. One – I don't know how to do everything, but I trust that I can figure it out. I trust

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that I can handle any emotion that comes my way. And two – I am not perfect, but I love and accept myself regardless of my imperfections, inadequacies, and flaws.

These are the two twin beliefs that really create self-confidence. And I will tell you that before I started doing the work of the think-feel-act cycle before I started doing the work of managing my mind, I did not know how to connect to either of those beliefs because I needed a plan for everything; a roadmap, a set of instructions.

I didn't trust that I could figure anything out. I didn't trust that I could handle any emotion. I needed a plan to keep me safe, which, of course, is never true. The only thing you ever need are your thoughts.

And the second part, I was obsessed with fixing myself. And it wasn't just my drinking. I've got to fix my body, I've got to fix my job, I've got to fix my relationship status, I've got to fix my imperfections and my inadequacies and my flaws. They were never acceptable.

I couldn't love myself having all these things that needed fixing. I had to fix myself and then I could love myself. But the truth is that self-confidence really is and really comes from the thought, I love myself regardless. And it's not arrogant, loving yourself regardless, because the love I have for myself is not at anyone's expense. It's not because I'm better than someone.

I love myself regardless and because of that, I can love all of you too. Now, this was not something that I knew how to practice or create in my own life for a really long time. The love that I had for myself was totally conditional. It was conditional on fixing myself and doing everything right.

But listen, those judgments that I had about myself, I was able to use to my advantage, and that's what you can do too. You can start to look and see, where are the areas where I am struggling to love other people? Where are my judgments popping up? Because those are the areas – maybe there is some work for you to do to explore how you might be vulnerable to shame.

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Wherever you're judging someone else, how does it mirror back to you? Because remember, focusing judgment on other people diverts attention away from yourself. And so, if you want to feel more self-confident in your choices, then the best question to ask yourself is, okay, so where am I judging others?

And this is a great question to pose to yourself around other people and other people's relationship with alcohol. That will really open a window into your mind and once you do that, you can start to see the mirror effect at work. If you feel confident in your choices, you have no reason to judge other people.

So, a couple of questions for you guys to think about today. First – what are your judgments about people who drink, people who don't drink, people who drink too much? And be honest. Really let yourself go there. Don't hold back.

Second – you can ask yourself, in what other areas do I judge people harshly? It doesn't just have to be around drinking. Where do you find yourself being your most self-righteous? We all are in different areas of our life. It's okay. If you understand the mirror effect, it actually is such a perfect tool if you can identify that self-righteousness to start to see how you can change some of the thinking you have about yourself.

The third question – how are your judgments – how is this self-righteousness a reflection of your own judgments and or fear when it comes to yourself. Now listen, you may have to dig here a little bit. That's okay. You are not used to understanding your judgments in this manner, but dig; it's worth it.

And then finally – what would you need to think in order to love this part of you right now as is? So big. This part of you that is the part of you that is most vulnerable to shame, the one that your brain wants to say, "Oh, don't look there. Look at that other person. That's how you'll feel better." What would you need to think in order to love that part of you right now just as you are?

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It's a lot to think about this week. This is a really challenging topic. I really encourage you to just dive in and be really honest. There is so much good stuff to uncover here if you are willing to go deep.

Alright, as always, if you have any questions, if you want to hear me talk about anything on the podcast, just shoot me an email at 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, input your information, and I'll make sure you get a copy of both meditations plus the workbook in your inbox.

Okay, listen up, changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out. It starts with my 30-day challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change. Decide what works best for you when it comes to drinking. Discover how to trust yourself and feel truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.

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