

# Ep #393: Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else?



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #393: Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else?

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 393.

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.

Welcome back, everyone. I was thinking a lot about today's episode. I was planning what to talk about and I realized I've never done an episode directly addressing the question, "Why can't I drink like everyone else?"

I will tell you... Because I know if you listen to the podcast, you've heard me talk about this question before. This was a question that plagued me for so long about my own drinking.

I would look at my best friend, I would look at my sister, I'd look at other people in my life, and I always felt like something about my drinking was off. I drank too fast. I always wanted more. I didn't know when enough was enough. And to be really honest, and I'm not even sure that part of me back then could have been honest about this, but there was a part of me that deeply craved getting fucked up. Truly, despite all the negative consequences.

Sometimes I really just wanted nothing more than to feel totally separate and separated from me, the everyday me that was moving through my life. I didn't want to hear my inner critic chattering on all the time about how I didn't measure up. I didn't want to feel awkward around people. I didn't want to feel anxious or worry what people thought of me. And I didn't want to have to try to be someone that I wasn't. I just wanted to feel totally and utterly free.

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And for the longest time, getting drunk was the only way that I knew how. So my drinking, even though it caused a lot of problems in my life, it gave me what I truly believed at the time was this immense freedom from having to be myself.

Now, of course, the next morning, I would often wake up... I would open my eyes, right? Your eyes kind of open first thing in the morning after a night of having too much to drink. And at least for me, it was immediately all of the chatter of, "Oh God, not again. Why are we so stupid? Why can't you learn your lesson? Why can't you just be normal and drink like a normal person?"

I struggled with this question for years. Honestly, it really would haunt me. Why can't you just be like everyone else? Why can't you be normal like everyone else? Why can't you drink like everyone else? There were so many variations on this theme, but that question would come up again and again.

And at some point in my journey, it took me a while, but I eventually figured out that my drinking actually had very little to do with alcohol, which is kind of crazy when you hear me say that. It's kind of crazy, when I had that revelation that my drinking had very little to do with alcohol. It felt like this very specific problem, right? "Rachel, you're drinking too much. You're getting too drunk."

It felt like this very specific problem, but I started to connect all the dots. It really did feel like that. It felt like I was starting... I was looking up at a universe full of stars, and it was like all of a sudden, I was starting to see constellations, right? I was starting to notice these patterns.

And I noticed that my drinking, it was very similar to some of my behaviors around food. There were also similarities with my quest to do everything right and never make a mistake. And similarities with my longing for

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attention, or the belief that I just needed to find the right book or the right exercise plan or the right diet plan and that would fix me. All of these things.

I started to see how they connected with each other. And the day I realized that my drinking wasn't really about alcohol, it wasn't really about my drinking, that just blew everything open for me.

I can remember when it happened. I remember where I was, and it was just such a stark realization. I was just seeing my relationship with alcohol, which of course I would never have termed a "relationship with alcohol" back then, but I was seeing it in this very different light.

And I will tell you this, I don't even know that I can articulate fully, even as I sit here today, I don't know that I can articulate fully why it changed everything for me. But I think in some way, some piece of it was that in that moment, I just felt a little less broken, I guess.

I always approached myself for the longest time as if I had kind of like a million and one problems that needed fixing, and drinking was one of what I viewed as many, many problems that I had. And for me to realize, "Rachel, you don't have a million problems. You have one problem," and literally it is the exact same problem that every human on this planet has. It just manifests for all of us in very different ways.

That moment, that understanding was so healing for me. Because the problem, of course, that I was struggling with was how do I cope with my humanness? How do I figure out how to have a peaceful relationship with all the stuff that's happening inside of me? Namely my thoughts and my feelings and my emotions.

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How do I coexist in those moments when I feel anxious or awkward or I'm afraid or I'm grieving or I'm jealous or I'm just steeped in shame? How do I figure out how to manage this without running to the nearest thing to try to blot out how I was feeling?

Because sometimes, yeah, the answer was buy a bottle of wine and take it home and just drink it. And sometimes the answer was go face down in food. Other times it was throwing myself obsessively into work and working late, night after night after night. Sometimes it was running until I would injure myself. Sometimes it was about tearing apart my closet and reorganizing it from top to bottom simply so that I could stay busy and didn't have to think or feel or be present with what was going on with me.

I was just constantly searching for things to keep my mind occupied and my feelings at bay. And so when I figured this out and I started doing the work, not just on my drinking, but on this bigger piece, this big picture, I truly felt like something clicked.

Even though in the beginning nothing changed yet, right? It's not like I had this realization and then it was like, "Okay, right, I'm done," right? There were a lot of steps that I had to take. But I felt as though I had found this kind of secret to the universe.

I started to see that I didn't need to feel such intense shame about my drinking. That was huge. Again, it's not that my shame just disappeared overnight, but I just got the glimmer. I just could see the beginnings of, "You don't need to feel so much intense shame about this."

Because although society tells us, and we get this message from a very young age that over-drinking is different. Alcohol is different. It's this big, serious problem, and it requires lifelong help and lifelong treatment. I was starting to see and recognize something else.

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I was starting to realize that the conversations that we have as a society about drinking are actually the real problem. Because it boils down in this very simple explanation without a lot of nuance, right? The explanation is, "If you can't control your drinking, you're an alcoholic. And if you're an alcoholic, the only solution is lifelong abstinence. The end."

It's telling people, "Yeah, there's help for you," but it's predicated on the insistence that you must label yourself, and you must go through a process of "confessing your sins" and surrendering to a higher power and admitting that you're powerless.

And to me, this mass acceptance that AA and what it teaches is the only way, it always felt so bonkers to me. I just could not square myself with the idea that the system, developed by Christian evangelists in the 1930s to treat what they termed as a spiritual disease, was the only option available to me.

But that's what it felt like for me 20 years ago. It really felt like there were no other avenues, there were no other options. Now, if you listen to the podcast, it's because you are looking for something different. I am all about helping you get curious. I'm all about, let's examine your drinking and your relationship with alcohol and how much you drink from a place of nonjudgment.

Let's assume that your cravings have an intelligence that they're trying to reveal to you, rather than looking at your cravings as a sign of, "Oh yeah, your brain is different and you have a problem."

Now, I don't think that my approach is the best or the only solution for everyone. I just want there to be more options. And I think society as a whole would benefit from having more and more varied approaches to alcohol education and use and abuse.

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And I think when that happens, guess what? When we have more approaches, more people are going to listen to that early intuition, that early whisper that they have, that something about their drinking feels a little off or doesn't feel quite right to them.

That doesn't happen for so many people right now. That didn't happen for me. I instead was in that place of ignoring the voice. I didn't want to listen to that intuition, because I also didn't want to head down the only prescribed path that I knew. Which is, "Well, then you've got to admit that you're an alcoholic, Rachel, and stop drinking forever."

But I think we need more conversations and more approaches, because the truth is, if you're not afraid to listen to that little voice, that little whisper inside of you, guess what? You will intervene with your drinking so much sooner.

And by intervene, I don't mean that you'll stop. I just mean that you'll start to look at it. You'll start to be curious about it. You'll start talking to people. You'll start taking more action instead of kind of what I was doing for a long time; not talking to anyone and then trying to change. But, of course, trying to change through the only means that I thought were available to me.

Which was, I need to set a bunch of rules. I need to grit my teeth. Or I just need to avoid ever being around alcohol. And those three things, I could get limited success for a short period of time. But eventually they'd stop working. We need more, and there is more than just set rules, use willpower and avoidance.

And I will tell you this, that little whisper, that little voice inside of you, it's not necessarily saying, "Hey, you have a big problem." It might be that moment of wondering, right? When you're out with people, you're sitting across the table from someone, you're watching them just kind of nurse their drink, and meanwhile, you were done five minutes ago.

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It's that little wondering of, "Huh, I wonder why I'm drinking so fast? I wonder why it feels challenging for me to go slowly?" That's it. That's what I'm talking about.

It can be taking out your trash and doing a double take when you open up the recycle bin, and go, "Oh my God, I didn't know we drank that much this week." It could be watching a friend of yours, who used to drink as much as you did and used to seem to at least love it the same way that you did, and suddenly they cut back. And also it appears not only did they cut back without any problem, but they don't have any drama around it.

There are so many different ways that we will have this quiet whisper. But I think a lot of times what ends up happening is that we just ignore and ignore and ignore, through no fault of our own. We're ignoring because it's like, "Well, what are my options? I've been told what people who struggle with alcohol have to do, and I don't want to do that. And I don't even think it applies to my situation." We ignore and we ignore and we ignore.

And then, eventually, especially if you're like me, it was like the voice was getting louder and louder and louder. Because, of course, my drinking wasn't actually changing. I will tell you, having worked with so many people, this internal questioning, this kind of quiet whisper, it's so much more common than you think.

It is not just for people who have a "problem" with alcohol. It's not just for heavy drinkers or regular drinkers. So many people have questions. Have that little moment of wondering about their own relationship with alcohol. But because society insists on this one-size-fits-all shame-based approach, it will take people many months, or even many years, before most people are ready to acknowledge, act on, or talk about their concerns about their drinking.

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Certainly that was the case for me. Now, the problem with that is that the more time that passes, the more ingrained your habits and your patterns and your thoughts around drinking become, right?

So you may watch time passing and your attempts at change, especially if they are just focused on rules and willpower and avoidance, you may find that they're not working very well for you or they just end up being very hit or miss. And as time passes, it may feel like it's getting harder to say no to temptation.

And you may actually notice that you're drinking more rather than drinking less. Again, your brain will make all of this mean... because society has given you this message... that this is a sign that you're the problem. That something's different about you.

I want to suggest that that is not the case. All right? So let's go back to the question that brought us here to this episode: Why can't I drink like everyone else? Here is my answer, you're asking the wrong question. In fact, the question is part of the problem.

The question "Why can't I drink like everyone else?" is a shame minefield. It sets you up to be the lone weirdo and everybody else is normal. Everybody else has it figured out, but not you. This question, it just sinks you into a shame spiral.

I promise you; you cannot shame yourself into a healthy, peaceful, neutral, take it or leave it, don't drink and have no qualms about not drinking relationship with alcohol. You cannot shame your way into whatever goal you have with your drinking. If shame was going to work, I promise you, it would have worked by now.

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Most people have plenty, plenty of experience using shame, or attempting to use shame, as a lever to create change and it just doesn't work. Here's the deal. Yes, your drinking may look different from other people's drinking. And yes, these differences can be influenced by a ton of factors, right?

It can be influenced by the brain and biology and genetics, and your childhood and your friends and family, cultural traditions, socialization, the media, marketers, past trauma. I mean, I could add more to this list. All of these things can influence your drinking, but the piece of the puzzle that you're missing is what alcohol does for you.

What drinking did for me was not the same thing as what it did for my best friend or my sister or other friends of mine, even friends who like to drink a lot just like me. So, of course, my drinking wasn't going to look the same. We were drinking for different reasons. We had different experiences while drinking, and we used alcohol for different purposes.

Now, I just want you to know that my 20-year-old self would have probably heard that explanation and given me the finger, right? She'd be like, "You're dumb. You don't know what you're talking about. My friends and I, we all like to drink. We all like to go out on the weekends and have fun. I'm just the dummy that takes it too far."

But my 20-year-old self also lacked a lot of self-awareness. I thought I had a lot of self-awareness back then because I spent a lot of time writing in a journal and listening to my inner critic. And of course, I believed that my inner critic was my capital "S" self.

But despite spending a lot of time hanging out with my negative thoughts, I was not particularly self-aware because I didn't know how to observe my thoughts. I certainly did not know how to observe my emotions, right? I only knew how to listen to my thoughts and be at the mercy of my emotions.

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And when that's the case, it is going to show up in how you behave around alcohol and food and work and your body and exercise, and all of the things. If you want to change your relationship with alcohol, you need to understand what it does for you.

For those of you listening to me right now who are like, "Yeah, I know what it does for me, Rachel. It makes me feel relaxed. It makes me feel good," I just want you for a moment to consider that right now, you're only scratching the surface of the answer to that question for you.

So creating The Drink Archetypes™ was, for me, the first step in helping all of you listening figure this out; figure out what alcohol does for you. If you haven't taken the quiz, go to DrinkType.com. You can get your results for free.

But I want you to know that The Drink Archetypes are just the beginning of what I have in store for everyone. Because my big goal, what I'm doing is about creating more pathways for early intervention. That's what we're all missing. Hardcore drinkers aren't the only people who need help with their drinking.

When you look at the statistics, it's something like only 10-15% of people who struggle with their drinking fall into the category of severe alcohol abuse. That leaves 85-90% of people who have more mild or moderate concerns about their drinking with nowhere to turn, right? So despite our vast numbers, we are a group that is overlooked by medical professionals and researchers. We need more support.

And I've been working on something that I am so excited about that I believe is going to help all of you out there who are looking for another way. I have written a do-it-yourself guide called *The Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less*.

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I'm laughing because this guide is a beast, no joke. It is over 200 pages. It's got 75 different exercises. It's really focused on what I believe are the three building blocks of drinking less. So educating yourself on the basic facts, reviewing and implementing best practices, and working with your drink archetype.

And I will tell you, the reason I have so many exercises is because there are eight different Drink Archetypes. I wanted everyone out there to be able to put together an individualized blueprint to help them figure out how to drink less. Figure out how to change their relationship with alcohol rather than just lumping everyone together and throwing a cookie cutter approach at you guys.

So *The Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less*, it's not ready to purchase right now. It's going to be available in the next couple of weeks, but I wanted to tell all of my listeners about it now. And if you want to be the first to hear when it is ready, so that you can grab a copy of this guide, make sure that you are on my email list. That's where I'm going to be announcing it.

The easiest way to get on my list is to take that free quiz at DrinkType.com. What I want to leave you with today is this: Please, please, please stop setting yourself apart as different. Stop believing that everyone else has a normal relationship with alcohol and you're the only outlier.

I'll tell you this, I've worked with thousands of people. I've seen the whole spectrum of drinkers. And I will tell you that the drama that people have about their drinking and their relationship with alcohol has very little to do with how much they actually drink.

And finally, just know this. Know that there are more solutions out there every day. With every day, every passing year, there are more and more people getting into this space who believe that we need to have more and

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different and varied ways to approach alcohol education and use and abuse.

So mine is but one of them, but I hope if you are drawn to looking at your drinking with more curiosity, practicing non-judgment instead of shame, I hope that you will check out this guide, *The Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less*. I cannot wait to share it with all of you. We're going to be talking about it a lot on the podcast.

All right, that's it for today. I will see you all next week.

Hey guys, you already know that drinking less has plenty of health benefits. But did you know that the work you do to change your relationship with alcohol will help you become more of the person you want to be in every part of your life?

Learning how to manage your brain and your cravings is an investment in your physical, emotional and personal wellbeing. And that's exactly what's waiting for you when you join my membership *Take a Break*. Whether you want to drink less, drink rarely, or not at all, we'll help you figure out a relationship with alcohol that works for you. We'll show you why rules, drink plans, and Dry January so often fail, and give you the tools you need to feel in control and trust yourself.

So, head on over to [RachelHart.com](http://RachelHart.com) and sign up today, because changing the habit is so much easier when you stop trying to go it alone.

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