

Ep #419: What Envy Reveals About Your Drinking



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Have you ever felt envious of normal drinkers? I know I certainly have. I used to watch friends nurse a glass of wine and feel utterly perplexed at how easy it was for them to drink so slowly. Or I had friends who could get drunk, but they never seemed to get sloppy. All I wanted for the longest time was to be a normal drinker, and I was really envious of everyone who was.

This is episode 419 and I'm going to explain why envy is actually a very helpful emotion when it comes to understanding why you're over drinking, how to drink less and how to change your relationship with alcohol for good.

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.

So the other day, I was chatting on the phone with one of my oldest and dearest friends. It had been a couple months since we last connected, and she was telling me all about a bunch of really amazing things that were happening in her life. And I was truly happy for her, but when I hung up the phone, I realized I felt a little bad.

I was listening to her and saying the right things, but part of me on the inside was really envious, which is not something that I like to admit. And I think not wanting to admit, when we feel envy, I think that's common for most people, right? Because who wants to feel envious of others? It feels so insecure and petty and just kind of unenlightened.

I know for me, I think, like, okay, hello, you're 44. Shouldn't you have grown out of these childish emotions? Shouldn't you be secure in yourself by now? Plus, you know what? I have a lot of good stuff going on in my life too, like, why can't I just be happy for my friend and also grateful for all that I have?

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Well, that got me thinking about how envy connects to our drinking, and I realized how much it used to come up for me when I would look at people who were, what I believe to be normal drinkers. So I will tell you that the envy, it started before I was kind of fixated on normal drinkers. It starts for many people when you look at your friends that are older than you, and maybe they can go to bars, they can drink legally, and you can't, right?

I remember spending many years trying to worry about getting into a bar with a fake ID. I had some very questionable fake IDs that I used back in the day during college, so my envy kind of started there. But it changed and transformed into being envious of how I felt like other people could handle their liquor.

But for me, I never felt totally secure in it. It always felt very hit or miss, like I never really knew what tonight was gonna look like. I had plenty of friends who could go out and get drunk, but somehow they seemed to know, even when they had had a lot to drink, they seemed to know when it was time to cut themselves off and avoid getting sloppy. And I didn't always know that.

I would also watch my sister drink, and she would drink at a glacial pace, and I would just wonder, like, how on earth did we come from the same parents, right? And she goes so slowly, and I drink so quickly. I remember people also, you know, this would be kind of later in my 20s and my early 30s, people who had just kind of, you know, mentioned, oh, I'm not going to drink tonight, like it was no big deal.

And I was envious of that, because it felt like all of my decisions around drinking, you know, whether or not I was or wasn't, or how much I was drinking, always felt like a really big deal, and that they carried so much weight.

And you know, if you want to just be totally convinced how much envy showed up in my own relationship with alcohol, just look at the title of my first book. It's called, *Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else?* That is a

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question that I wrestled with for the longest time, but it's also indicative of how much envy I had towards people who I believed could drink normally.

Now, I think when envy comes up, especially around other people's drinking, the knee jerk response is to try to talk yourself out of feeling envious. So I will tell you, I used to try to do this a lot, especially when I was going through periods where I wasn't drinking and so like I was a sober one, and everyone else that I was out with, they were all drinking, I would often try to talk myself out of feeling envious for their experience by imagining all the repercussions that everyone who was drinking was going to experience.

I remember telling myself like, Oh, they're not going to feel good tomorrow. Or, you know, it's so bad for you and they're poisoning themselves. I mean, part of me was really on this kind of virtue train for a while, right? The idea of, I don't like the fact that I'm not drinking, but at least I can feel very virtuous about it.

Sometimes too, I might be thinking to myself, like, oh god, they don't realize, you know how loud they're being, or how over the top they're being, it's embarrassing. I tried to find all these negatives about other people's drinking as a kind of coping mechanism, a way for me to stop feeling envious of them. And I'm sure, you know, back then, when I was doing this, I was not really aware that this was going on. And I truly think that if you had asked me back then, like, hey, Rachel, are you like, envious, I'd be like, no, no, no.

I was very much in this place of trying to latch on to this idea of, you know, what I'm doing is very healthy and it's very virtuous. And I don't think I was even aware that this was happening. But, you know, in retrospect, it definitely was happening, but I will also tell you it really didn't work. So yeah, there were plenty of times where I would sit there while other people were drinking and I wasn't, and I would be feeling very virtuous, and I would be, you know, telling myself, oh, you know, you're doing such a good job of how healthier being. But if I'm honest with myself, and if you're

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honest with yourself, in the moments when you might be relying on the virtues of not drinking, a lot of times, it doesn't feel that great, right? When you're positioning yourself above somebody else, or you're positioning your choices above somebody else's choices, or your choices are better than someone else's choices, that positioning does not feel great, because here's the thing, there's no need to put yourself or your choices as superior if you feel secure with what you're doing.

So that's the first thing. When we're doing this, it's because of this deeper insecurity that we're trying to cope with. But the other thing is, you know what? It just disconnects you from other people, right? I wasn't going out with my friends to feel disconnected from them. I wanted to feel connected with them. I wanted to have a good time.

But when I was having this internal conversation with myself and kind of patting myself on the back for being so good, and like, oh, I'm so thankful that I'm not acting like they are, I wasn't connecting with them. I was judging them. It doesn't work in the long term, because ultimately it doesn't feel very good. It doesn't feel very good to always be pointing at how your choices are better and the choices other people are making are worse. And I had to recognize that this was not working, this reliance on virtue, it wasn't feeling good.

So it forced me to kind of look inward and really start to engage with the envy that I felt. And the thing that I realized that really blew my mind was that envy is not actually a bad emotion. It's not something that you need to be ashamed of. It's not something that you need to talk yourself out of. It's actually a really powerful emotion in that it will show you all of your painful beliefs. So it showed me all the painful beliefs that I had about myself that needed attention, regardless of whether or not I was drinking.

When I allowed myself to acknowledge that, yeah, I was envious of normal drinkers, I had to then ask myself more questions. I had to ask myself, well, why do you think, Rachel, that it's not possible for you to drink normally?

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Now, you know that sends us down a little bit of a rabbit hole, because this question, this question about why some people struggle with alcohol and other people don't. As a society, we really don't encourage a lot of curiosity around this. We encourage putting everybody into their respective buckets. And so, you know, we're going to put all the people over here who have quote, unquote, normal brains and can handle alcohol, and then all the other people in this other bucket, right? The people who struggle their brains are different. They can't handle alcohol. That's really how we are taught to view it.

And it's very frustrating when you struggle with your drinking, to be told, you know, you just need to accept that you're in this camp or this group of people, and your brain is different. I don't know how to explain it, but this message that this is all there is to it, right? Just some people, their brains are different. They can't handle alcohol. That message just never sat well with me, even when I had moments of being truly convinced that, like maybe I was just one of those people. Maybe I truly couldn't drink. Maybe my brain was different. Maybe I just had to accept that this was my fate.

I really struggled with that message, and I will tell you this, I 100% believe that brains are different, and different brains have different sensitivities towards dopamine, and that some people experience rewards more intensely than others. I just don't think that the structure and function of the brain is the entire story when it comes to why people give into their cravings and why people struggle to say no.

I don't think that a purely physiological explanation is telling us or giving us the full picture. I work with too many people who drank moderately for years and years and then something shifted, maybe a relationship ended, or they moved to a new city, or they got married, or they had kids, or their kids left the house, or they started taking care of elderly parents. Or, you know, they started struggling with something, or someone they loved got a major diagnosis, or they got a major diagnosis. They can point to something shifting in their life that took what was normal, moderate

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drinking, and all of a sudden it became more problematic for them, because people's drinking can shift and change over time.

But not only that, your drinking can look different in different circumstances. It's not always about like, oh, some big thing happened. I work with lots of people who drink moderately at home, or maybe not even at all, but then they find themselves overdoing it when they're out.

I work with lots of people who are in the exact opposite situation, who drink way too much at home, but then they drink very moderately when they are around others. Now I will tell you, I am not someone who drank moderately from the get go and then watched it start to gradually pick up. I drank a lot right out of the gate. My drinking looked very similar to my patterns with food that I had developed as a child at a much younger age.

So my patterns were more is always better. I was a faster eater, and that very much translated into my relationship with alcohol, but I will tell you that my drinking did not always look the same, even though I, you know, right from the get go, drank a lot.

I did drink a lot. It didn't always cause problems for me. I didn't always overdo it. I didn't always have every single night turn into, you know, 2am at the kebab truck. Sometimes I would drink more moderately. Many times I would call it a night and go home. And it was this inconsistency in my own drinking that was so frustrating and perplexing for me, and why, I think this purely physiological explanation for what was going on didn't make sense.

So I don't chalk, you know, everything up to differences in brain structure or differences in sensitivity to certain neurotransmitters. I do think that they play a role, but I don't think that they fully explain how our behaviors can shift and change over time or in different circumstances. To me, that's really where the drink archetypes come in.

How does really one explain these sorts of inconsistencies? Well, we have to really look at what the brain is learning and what the brain believes around alcohol and around drinking, which brings me back to envy.

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So when I started to realize that just trying to make myself, you know, feel really virtuous, and give myself a gold star because I wasn't drinking. That wasn't working either, because it was disconnecting me from the people that I was with, and also it wasn't dealing with the underlying insecurities that I wasn't addressing.

What I had to do was really get curious about envy. I had to understand, well, what's my explanation for why my drinking looks different than these other people? That was one question I had to understand. And what was I truly envious of? So I want you to think about this. What is your explanation for why you don't drink “normally?”

I will tell you, I had lots of answers for this. They usually started with the words, I'm just someone who... I'm just someone who loves to drink. I'm just someone who thinks more is better. I'm just someone who consumes everything really fast. I'm just someone who doesn't have enough willpower. I'm just someone who isn't good at keeping the promises that I make to myself, but I'm very good at keeping the promises that I make to other people.

I had a lot of I'm just who statements, and I will tell you, all of them felt terrible. All of them created a lot of shame, and also made me feel very hopeless. I looked at my behaviors, and I thought that they were indicative of my personality, just who I was, and it was kind of crappy luck that I was born with this personality. And you know, this was me, but you know, what are you going to do? There's nothing you can do. You can't change it.

What I didn't understand back then. I didn't understand that my behaviors, all of my actions, were part of a bigger cycle unfolding in my mind. I didn't understand about the think, feel, Act cycle. I didn't understand how my thoughts and my feelings were connected to my actions.

It wasn't just this is how I came out of the womb. It was these repetitive, often unconscious thoughts that I was repeating again and again in the moment and the feel. Things that that was creating for me that led to the

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decisions that I was making around alcohol. And learning that, of course, which I talk about the think-feel-act cycle all the time on the podcast, because it was so transformative for me.

All of a sudden, I could look at my actions, and instead of being like, you know, I'm just someone who... all of a sudden, I had not only a framework to understand them, but a means to start to go about changing them. That is really the power of the think-feel-act cycle.

So I had all that I'm just someone who statements, but when it came to answering the question why I couldn't drink normally, I also had what I believed at the time was just a lot of evidence that it wasn't possible. Over and over, I would wake up and say, oh my god, we're never doing that again. And maybe I wouldn't have a drink for a couple days, or a couple weeks, or a couple months would pass, and then I would start again. And then guess what, I would very quickly end right back up in my old ways.

And I had also tried so many rules, so many restrictions. I mean, the number of things that I attempted right, the rules that I set for myself to try to reign myself in, there was like nothing under the sun that I hadn't tried. But again, none of them worked consistently. When it came to following rules around my drinking, it was totally hit or miss.

And then I also had the beliefs about how moderation actually was impossible because of my identity. Everybody knows me as the girl who likes to party and the girl who's always up for having a good time, and the colleague at work who's always game for drinks after work, or the friend who's always going to have another round. How could I possibly change that? How could I possibly just, like, shift to being someone who was like, no, no, no. Like, not tonight, or, you know, I'm just like, fine with two glasses and I'm done, right?

How could I possibly change this part of my identity and also keep all my friends? I truly believe that wasn't possible. So you know, that's how I was really understanding that first question, my explanation for why it was that I

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couldn't drink normally. But then there's the second question, what was I truly envious of?

And this has been something really unlocked for me. When I really sat with that question, I could see that my answer wasn't about alcohol at all. It was a desire to feel normal, to feel like I fit in, to feel like I belonged. It was a desire to have something that would help me get rid of my anxiety and my insecurities and my hang ups and that inner critic that like to chatter away all the time.

It was my desire to really be free of so many of the thoughts that I had about myself. It was the desire to just have something that would help me forget about work, or forget about the guy that wasn't texting me back, or forget about what was bothering me. When I answered that question for myself, I could see what I was truly envious of was not alcohol itself, but the things that I thought only drinking could provide me with. That's what I really, really was envious about.

Now you're going to have your own answers to these questions, but what I want you to consider is that the envy that you may feel towards other people, towards people in your life who drink slowly, or just it's no big deal when they say like, oh, I'm not going to have anything tonight, or the people who you know can get tipsy, but never take it too far. What I want you to consider is that that envy is actually very useful.

It is a very useful starting point when it comes to figuring out how to change your relationship with alcohol, because not only is it going to show you all of the limiting beliefs that you have about yourself and you have about your ability to change, and let me tell you, if you want to change, you're not going to be able to do it without working on these limiting beliefs. So often we have this backwards. We're like, no, no, no, I'll change, and then I'll stop believing these negative things about me. It doesn't work like that. We have to start with the belief first.

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But when you answer these questions, it will also give you a window into your drink archetypes and what your brain has learned from drinking and your deeper desires and what the drink represents beyond just, oh, that's my go to order, or that's my favorite thing to drink. And I will tell you that all of this understanding, all of this is really necessary if you want to create lasting change, because this is how we work, at the root level of the habit.

So the next time you feel envious about someone's drinking, what I want you to do is stop and consider these two questions. Number one, what is your explanation for why you can't drink like them? And number two, what are you truly envious of? What do you feel like you will never be able to have or feel or do if you can't also drink normally.

Your answers are going to show you your archetypes and what you're truly craving. And I will tell you after that phone call with my friend, when I recognized what was going on, I recognized the envy. And instead of being like, oh, Rachel, you shouldn't think that, I embraced it. I asked myself versions of these questions, and I found my own limiting beliefs on why her good fortune wasn't possible for me.

So the tools that you learn here, the tools that you learn to shift your drinking, they are foundational skills that you can use in every part of your life. 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

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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 and sign up today, because changing the habit is so much easier when you stop trying to go it alone.