# Ep #490: When no one is pressuring you to drink, but you feel pressured anyway




## Full Episode Transcript

**With Your Host**

**Rachel Hart**

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Have you ever felt pressure to drink even when no one was actually pressuring you? Maybe you automatically order wine because everybody else is drinking or you worry saying no is just going to lead to a lot of questions or having to explain yourself and it just feels easier to drink than explaining why you're not.

Looking back on these moments, it's easy to just think, well, I had a drink because I wanted to. When actually there's a lot happening underneath the surface that is influencing your decision-making. This is episode 490 and I'm talking about alcohol's latent power and explaining why instead of asking the question, how do I drink less, you need to first understand what you're anticipating, so you can understand how that is shaping your choices.

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 recently I was hanging out with a good friend of mine from college and she brought up how she had noticed that people are drinking less and she told me the story of how she recently met up with a former boss for drinks and she got to the bar first and she ordered herself a cocktail and then her boss showed up and he ordered an athletic beer, which is non-alcoholic. And her immediate reaction was like, "Wait, what? If I knew you weren't going to be drinking, I wouldn't have ordered this." And I thought this was so revealing of the complicated relationship that we all have with alcohol and how we often make choices based on what we anticipate or what we see other people doing.

We tend to imagine social pressure as something that is really overt when you decline a drink and someone says, "Oh, come on, live a little" or people around you are wanting you to make an exception. But a huge amount of

social pressure doesn't require anyone to pressure you at all. And I think her story is indicative of that. She ordered a drink assuming that her boss would also be drinking. And when she discovered that he wasn't, that immediately changed her calculations and what she would have done.

So, I had that story in my mind and then I was scrolling through Instagram and I heard a professor talking about the idea of latent power in marriages. And I had never heard this term before, but latent power is when one person shapes their partner's behavior without actively exerting power. So maybe for example, you don't bring up something because you anticipate your partner's response will be negative or you stop asking for what you want because you believe that you're not going to get it. And maybe you're doing this because you've had the same argument millions of times so eventually you just avoid the topic or maybe because the other person has said no so many times to your request that you just stop asking.

This is a form of latent power. The power isn't overt, in fact, it's often invisible. The other partner isn't even doing anything, but it's most definitely there. Because one person is changing their behavior based on an anticipated consequence. And this got me thinking about how latent power exists in the context of drinking. How alcohol can shape your decision without anyone actively pressuring you to drink, just because you anticipate either discomfort or judgment or questions or just feeling uncomfortable.

You end up organizing your behavior around avoiding what you imagine might happen if you don't drink or if you don't join in for another round. The anticipated social discomfort is enough to shape your decision-making. Overt power is something like peer pressure, which gets talked about a lot in the context of drinking, especially for teenagers and young adults. But so many people I work with say, there is no peer pressure. Nobody is pressuring me. I don't even think people would care if I didn't drink or if I didn't have another round, but I still feel this pressure.

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And they assume that the pressure is coming just from themselves. But what I want you to consider is that it's coming from alcohol's latent power over social dynamics. Someone doesn't have to be actively trying to influence your decision on whether or not you drink or whether or not you have another round for you to feel this dynamic and for you to feel this latent power. In fact, nobody has to say anything at all.

Maybe you walk into a social situation already thinking, well, everybody is going to order wine. Or you're getting ready for a party and you think, it's going to be weird if I'm the only person not drinking. Or you meet up with an old friend and tell yourself, she's going to wonder what's going on with me if I order something non-alcoholic. Or you go on a date and you think, well, I don't want this person to wonder whether or not I have a problem if I don't drink. The list can go on and on. Latent power can shape your decision to drink and your decision to have more.

And I think alcohol has latent power when you drink, not because someone is actively pressuring you, but simply because you are organizing your behavior around avoiding an anticipated social consequence. And listen, I know that this doesn't show up for everyone equally. It depends a lot on your drink archetypes. It can change over time. Maybe you dealt with a lot of latent power when you were first started drinking and less so now. That dynamic can also flip. Some people feel it less when they are younger and it grows as they get older.

But latent power does show up specifically for a couple of the drink archetypes. And if you're not familiar with the archetypes, we're going to be talking about two of them in this episode, but you can take the free quiz at FindYourDrinkType.com and learn about all eight archetypes there.

So, the Connector is the obvious place where alcohol's latent power shows up. The Connector archetype is where your brain associates drinking with belonging. It becomes part of the social glue. Drinking can feel like an important part of how you bond with people, it's how you connect, it's how

you create intimacy, how you let your guard down, how you just have fun as a group. And so you might imagine not drinking when you're with people that you care about. And your brain immediately starts anticipating the consequence of that decision.

Maybe you start thinking, well, it's going to be awkward, I'm going to be the only one who's not drinking. What are they going to think? I'm not going to have a good time. I'm going to feel left out. Notice how all of this unfolds just in your anticipation. The anticipated possibility of disconnection can be enough to change your decision before you even encounter it. And I think this is why my friend's story was so interesting for me. She wasn't telling me that her former boss pressured her into having a cocktail or that he even cared. Quite the opposite. When he showed up and he ordered a non-alcoholic beer, she thought, wait, why didn't you tell me? I wouldn't have ordered this. His decision changed the social meaning of her drink.

When she thought they were both drinking, the cocktail made sense. Had she known he wasn't going to be drinking, she would have made a different decision. And I think that moments like these are really worth paying attention to because sometimes we think that our desire to drink exists entirely inside of us. Right, we think, I just wanted a cocktail, I just wanted a glass of wine, I just wanted a beer. But our desire doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's complex. The situation matters. What other people are doing often matters. What we believe other people expect of us often matters. And what we believe drinking together means often matters. And sometimes alcohol has power simply because we've learned that drinking is what you do in a certain situation.

Now, the Mask archetype is another place where this can show up. It can create a slightly different version of what's going on because the Mask is about drinking as a way to deal with social anxiety. Now, again, there can be overlap between the Connector and the Mask. But with this archetype,

the anticipated consequence may be less about disconnection and more about exposure.

So maybe you think to yourself, if I don't drink, someone might ask me why. If they ask why, what am I going to say? What if I don't have a good excuse? Are they going to think I have a problem? I don't want to have to explain myself. It would often show up for me in the sense of, well, if I'm not going to drink then there's no point even going.

So often with the Mask archetype, it just feels easier to drink. This again was very true for me in so many situations. I just wanted my choice to be a non-issue. But I never feel like it was a non-issue. And so saying yes to a drink let me avoid the possibility of feeling awkward or having the awkward conversation or at least that's what I was telling myself at the time.

And here's what I find so fascinating about alcohol's latent power. The conversation that we have with other people doesn't even have to happen. Nobody has to even ask us why you're not drinking. Nobody even has to make a side comment. Nobody has to pressure you at all. Nobody has to say anything at all. The anticipation of what might happen is enough to shape your decision-making.

You can be standing in your bedroom getting ready to go out and already changing your behavior based on a conversation that hasn't happened yet. That's a tremendous amount of power to give a hypothetical. And listen, I want to be careful here because I'm not saying that the fears you have are imaginary. Sometimes people really will ask a lot of questions after you say no thanks. Sometimes your friends really will make a big deal about it or pressure you to have another round or make snide remarks. And sometimes when you change your drinking, it really does disrupt an established dynamic in a relationship.

The point isn't to tell yourself nobody cares whether or not I'm drinking, this is all in my head. The point is to notice how what you're anticipating is

shaping your behavior oftentimes before you even get there. So alcohol isn't just powerful because it's a psychoactive drug that impacts our conscious experience. It's powerful because it has a latent power that is often totally invisible, but it is there and it is influencing us.

So maybe you order a drink, maybe you say yes to another round, not realizing how much of alcohol's latent power has shaped that decision in the moment. And this is one of the ways that latent power, I think is able to maintain itself because the more we predict an uncomfortable consequence, the more we're going to organize our behavior around avoiding that consequence. And just like in a relationship where we're not bringing something up because we're trying to avoid the fight or we're not asking for what we want because we're trying to avoid hearing no, while that might feel very protective in the moment, the problem underneath just keeps growing.

So the work here is not to become someone who magically doesn't care what people think or always anticipates that saying no is going to be easy. The work is just pausing and noticing the invisible calculations that your brain is making ahead of time. And noticing the amount of influence that your anticipations have on your decision-making. And also once you see it starting to challenge those calculations, not to pretend that they're not there, but simply to start questioning some of your conclusions.

And here's something important. You know, whether or not your prediction is accurate, it truly really isn't the point. Maybe nobody would care that you're not drinking. Maybe you know your friends really well and you're pretty sure they will care and they will make a big deal or they will feel disappointed or they will want an explanation. Latent power doesn't mean the reaction you're anticipating isn't real. It's about recognizing that the anticipated reaction is already influencing your decision before that reaction even happens. Because otherwise it is just so easy to experience the

decisions that you make around alcohol simply as I had the drink because I wanted to drink.

And listen, a part of that may be true, but I'm going to tell you, there is often a lot more happening underneath that desire. Maybe you didn't want to feel like the odd man out, maybe you didn't want to disappoint someone, maybe you didn't want to have to explain yourself, maybe you just don't want to change a dynamic that you've had with someone for years. These are all important pieces of the puzzle that need your attention if you want to learn how to drink less.

Because the question isn't just, well, how do I say no or how do I drink less? The question really is, what am I anticipating will happen if I change? And how is that influencing the decisions I make next? Again, if you want to learn more about the drink archetypes, you can go take the free quiz at FindYourDrinkType.com. That's it for today. I will see you next week.

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