

The Sober Curious Are Challenging the Drinking Culture. Here's Why That's a Good Thing.

Accompanying the growing interest in wellness lifestyles is a growing [interest in giving up alcohol](#). The “sober curious” are looking for a way [to socialize without alcohol](#). Millennials are drinking less, and entrepreneurs are eager to give consumers what they want.

This sober curious trend is not limited to single millennials residing on the coasts. [“Wine moms” are giving up alcohol](#). And [according to a report by Bon Appétit](#), the market for low- to zero-alcohol beverages is expected to grow by 32 percent by 2022.

Annie Grace, in her book [This Naked Mind: Control Alcohol, Find Freedom, Discover Happiness & Change Your Life](#), argues that questioning your beliefs about alcohol is the first step in reducing your reliance on alcohol.

The sober curious are challenging the belief you need alcohol as a social lubricant. Grace quotes W. Osler, “Alcohol doesn’t permit one to do things better but instead causes us to be less ashamed of doing things poorly.” She adds,

“You may feel that a little alcohol is good for your conversation skills or your golf game... When you are making a fool of yourself, or when your conversation skills wane, you remain unaware... booze doesn’t make you cleverer, funnier, more creative, or more interesting... We don’t realize how bad we look when drinking.”

Many of us are introverts. Grace observes that alcohol didn’t help her overcome social inhibitions in a healthy way:

“Drinking didn’t make me funnier. How could it? When my brain functioned at a slower pace my wit was dulled. It didn’t make me more interesting. It just removed my inhibitions. I thought this was a good thing. I now realize we have inhibitions for a reason. They protect us, not only from physical harm, but from doing or saying things we shouldn’t.”

Perhaps you think you need a drink to reduce stress? How long can you sustain the initial tipsy feeling at happy hour? Grace explains that alcohol “depresses the central nervous system, exacerbating depression and anxiety.” “Small, daily problems that shouldn’t be much of an issue” may loom large for drinkers.

Grace challenges other social beliefs about alcohol. Alcohol doesn’t give you courage:

“Alcohol numbs your senses and prevents you from feeling natural fear. It is not possible for alcohol to give you courage because, by definition, if you’ve numbed feelings of fear, you cannot be courageous. Courage means doing what is right or just, despite your fear.”

Few fail to understand the harm of heroin and other drugs, but what about alcohol? Grace warns us to not underestimate the harm that “addictive and dangerous” alcohol does to ourselves and others. She writes,

“Researchers scored twenty drugs on criteria related to overall harm, considering both the harm to the user and the harm to people who are around the user but not actually using the drug. The majority of the criteria related to the specific harm to an individual. Overall, alcohol scored as the most harmful drug, with an overall harm score of 72. Heroin came in second with a harm score of 55, and crack cocaine scored third with a score of 54.60.”

We have all read about the horrors of drunk driving. Grace

gives us the gruesome facts: “Every night and weekend one out of ten drivers on the road are intoxicated, and alcohol-related accidents are the leading cause of death among young people. Half of all fatal highway accidents are alcohol-related.”

“Most drunk drivers don’t even realize they are drunk,” writes Grace. She adds, “Their inhibitions have been compromised, and their senses are no longer functioning properly—they literally no longer have the sense to avoid getting behind the wheel.”

Grace also explains how alcohol fuels sexual assaults:

“When drinking, men perceive a greater level of sexual interest than women intend to communicate. This perception of feeling “led on” by a woman when combined with alcohol, which can increase aggressive behavior, makes a man more likely to commit assault. Drunk men are more likely than sober men to find the use of force to obtain sex acceptable. Finally, alcohol affects a woman’s ability to assess and react to risk. We are more likely to take risks that we would normally avoid, such as being alone with a strange man.”

I don’t drink, but I have other bad habits. Willpower alone won’t change a habit if part of you believes the habit is beneficial. Your beliefs will work against you. When beliefs change, so does behavior.

Since reading Grace’s book, I have become more aware of just how conditioned we are to believe in the beneficial social impacts of alcohol. Movies and television often [positively portray drinking](#). Grace observes that alcohol advertisements “sell an end to loneliness, claiming that drinking provides friendship and romance. They appeal to your need for freedom by saying drinking will make you unique, brave, bold, or courageous. They promise fulfillment, satisfaction, and happiness.”

Grace and those in the sober curious movement want us to know that alcohol advertisements and the movies are selling false

beliefs. By helping us lift our blinders, they are doing an important public service. Seeing the truth about drinking leads to lasting change.

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