



## LONELINESS AND ADOLESCENT ALCOHOLISM

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### ABSTRACT

This paper first shows how the feelings of separation anxiety, hostility, and loneliness are intrinsically related. In pursuing this line of thought, the views of Fromm-Reichmann, Fromm, and Erikson are synthesized. The foregoing emotions are then discussed within the context of Freud's speculative postulation of the "oceanic feeling." All these conceptual connections, in turn, are then analyzed as essential factors contributing to, and indeed determining, adolescent drinking disorders. Traumatic issues and conflicts, initially centered in the infant's sense of separation from the mother, are later reexperienced and revived during the critical period of adolescence as the child is confronted with a sense of separation from the family. The paper concludes with a more empirically oriented treatment of the concrete features exhibited in adolescent alcoholism.

In previous publications I have argued on empirical grounds, demonstrated from epistemological principles, "shown" through phenomenological "evidence," and described by existential methods each human being's condition as essentially and intrinsically lonely. I have also claimed that it has always been thus ever since the dawn of human consciousness—from the time of the earliest Eastern and Western myths to the most recent verbal expressions of our contemporary civilization and culture. And I have further endeavored to say *why* this is the case, to formulate the universal features of reflexive self-consciousness which condition this primary sense of loneliness.

Throughout this intellectual and emotional odyssey, I have discovered that loneliness is dynamically related and structured by a variety of universal and necessary implications, including anxiety, hostility, depression, narcissism, the primacy of a Cartesian paradigm of self-consciousness, a primordial sense of personal identity, the primacy of thought over language, the limits of communication, and an individually subjective but universal structure of internal time-consciousness. In other instances, the relations exhibited have been contingent but nevertheless far reaching in their consequences and include suicide, sexual dysfunctions, and the dissolution of the contemporary family (Mijuskovic, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1977d, 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1980c, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1987a, 1987b, in press).

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**ADOLESCENCE, Vol. XXIII No. 91, Fall 1988**  
**Libra Publishers, Inc., 3089C Clairemont Dr., Suite 383, San Diego, CA 92117**



This paper concentrates on adolescents because it is the first stage of human development during which serious questions about the self are generated. Loneliness and the reflexive character of thought, i.e., self-consciousness, are intrinsically related (Mijuskovic, 1977b, 1979, 1987a). Adolescents are more "reflexive," self-conscious than infants or children; they are more concerned with problems of "personal identity" and the relation of the self to others. The roots of separation and abandonment experienced during infancy and childhood, the growing feelings of anxiety and resentment nurtured throughout the prior years and stages of life finally culminate in bitter fruition during adolescence and bear a poisonous product.

In this analysis, I try to show how the related feeling/concepts of the oceanic feeling, separation anxiety, loneliness, and hostility function as contributing factors in teenage drinking disorders. The first part of the inquiry consists of a theoretical elaboration describing the dynamic structure which exists between loneliness, anxiety, and hostility, and the second section deals with a specific application of the theory in understanding adolescent drinking. Thus, the question addressed is why teenagers drink and the answer I offer is that they are primarily motivated by feelings of loneliness. But first, I offer some general comments about loneliness and its accompanying feeling/concepts.

As early as 1949, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (1959) noticed a necessary connection between the concepts of loneliness and anxiety. Her initial formulation describing the interrelation was provisional and tentative: "Anxiety causes impairment of relatedness to others, fear of friendliness in giving and taking, loneliness and hostility—all well-known symptoms in mental patients" (p. 93).

By 1955, she was convinced that both loneliness and anxiety constitute the most universal emotional features of human consciousness, and she further went on to puzzle about the nature of their interrelation. Were they identical or was one the "cause" of the other? Hence she declared that: "The most unpleasant and at the same time the most universal experience except loneliness is anxiety" (p. 306).

Citing the works of Fromm, Berdyaev, Riesman, and other social psychologists, Fromm-Reichmann emphasized that these writers all agree in "finding the source of man's anxiety in his psychological isolation, his alienation from his own self and from his fellow men." As she further indicated, these authors consider loneliness "the common fate of man in modern society" (Fromm-Reichmann, 1959, p. 308).

At the time of her death in 1957, she was working on a paper which was posthumously edited and printed as an epilogue to her *Selected Papers*. In that final effort, she expressed her last conclusions about



the feeling/concepts of loneliness and anxiety. Closely following Harry Stack Sullivan's discussions of loneliness, she summarized:

Most authors agree, explicitly or implicitly, with the definition of anxiety as a "response to the anticipated loss of love and approval by significant people in one's interpersonal environment." It is my impression that *loneliness* and the fear of loneliness, on the one hand; and *anxiety*, on the other, are sometimes used interchangeably in our psychiatric thinking and in our clinical terminology. I would not be surprised if, after learning to differentiate the two dynamisms more sharply from each other, we would see that loneliness in its own right plays a much more significant role in the dynamics of mental disturbance than we have been ready to acknowledge so far. (Fromm-Reichmann, 1959, p. 334)

Intrigued by this vital realization, she ends her paper with the following programmatic proposal regarding further study:

A significant interrelatedness between loneliness and anxiety has been postulated, along with the need for further conceptual and clinical examination of loneliness in its own right and its relatedness with anxiety. (p. 336)

The important feature of Fromm-Reichmann's remarks centers around two recognitions. First, of course, she stresses the connection between loneliness and anxiety but, secondly, she also insists that loneliness should be studied "in its own right." Countless authors had offered passing insights and provided illuminating descriptions of loneliness ever since the dawn of Western thought and expression, but no one had isolated the sense of painful aloneness as a distinct psychodynamic category in its own right, as a configuration of thoughts and emotions which exhibit an identifiable unity. Fromm-Reichmann's own methodological model of approach was provided by Gregory Zilboorg's (1938) pioneer article, "Loneliness." In that short paper, Zilboorg described and analyzed the interconnections between the feeling/concepts of Freud's oceanic feeling, the infant's sense of omnipotence and megalomania, narcissism, and hostility and further postulated that these feelings were mutually implicative and directly involved in the dynamics of pathological loneliness. And although clearly both Zilboorg and Fromm-Reichmann are discussing abnormal states of loneliness, nevertheless, as they themselves point out, their conclusions are applicable to "normal" states of loneliness as well.

Accordingly, I shall explore the intrinsic interrelation between loneliness, anxiety and hostility in an effort to show how they function within a psychoconceptual system, which in turn can be demonstrated to underlie adolescent drinking patterns.



The clearest and most extended formulation of the oceanic feeling occurs in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. It is described in that work as the initial stage of consciousness, a stage prior to the distinction between the ego and the external world or between self-consciousness and the consciousness of the other, usually the mother (Freud, 1961; Fromm, 1956; Mijuskovic, 1980a). This "moment" or stage of undifferentiated unity dialectically transcends itself; it thrusts beyond itself by a reverberating recognition—literally re-cognition—that the other consciousness exists independently and in opposition to its own (self-) consciousness. This realization and its ensuing sense of separation engenders an immediate feeling of estrangement, confusion, and anxiety. As Freud characterizes it, the conflict creates a sense of longing for the original unification in the infant ego, a feeling of loneliness which is intrinsically and necessarily accompanied by a state of anxiety. Freud (1960) termed this early traumatic experience "separation anxiety." It is, as we shall see, the original loneliness event of infancy, which adolescents will later experience on a more self-conscious level as a "crisis of identity," as a desperate need to define themselves within the context and against the background of an often alien and estranging social environment.

After Fromm-Reichmann, the connection between separation/loneliness and anxiety is further heightened by no less a theoretician on loneliness than Erich Fromm (1956) when he declared that:

The experience of separateness (i.e., loneliness) arouses anxiety; it is, indeed, the source of all anxiety. Being separate means being cut off, without any capacity to use my human powers. Hence to be separate means to be helpless, unable to grasp the world—things and people actively; it means that the world can invade me without my ability to react. Thus, separateness is the source of intense anxiety.

Generally, we think of lonely individuals as depressed and passively sad. But in doing so, we fail to realize that lonely people are actively hostile, that within their respective consciousness the seeds of aggression have already germinated and are in the process of rapid—conscious or unconscious—development. This is the connection which Zilboorg (1938) propounds so forcefully; it is a paper which should be read by anyone who seriously undertakes the study of either loneliness or hostility. (Indeed, as I shall show, the two concepts cannot be separated.) And it is a relationship which has been acknowledged by other theoreticians of loneliness (Mijuskovic, 1983; Moustakas, 1961). Thus, Moustakas (1961) emphasizes that:



**Often accompanying this feeling of loneliness anxiety is a smoldering but helpless rage and a desire for revenge for being "left out" of life. . . . Aggressiveness often is a disguise of loneliness anxiety and may be expressed as cynicism and contempt for love and cultural interests. (pp. 28–31)**

**I would amend this passage by changing the word "often" to read *always*.**

**We blame others for our loneliness. Rightly or wrongly we hold them responsible for our desperate situation. And we respond with contempt for their values, and not uncommonly we exhibit open hostility toward them as well. We indulge in critical and abusive language that is intended to be overheard. These are common forms of loneliness aggression frequently used by adolescents. Like everyone else, adolescents try to "get back" at others in varied and subtle ways. I do not know if it is fair or not, but I am convinced that it is natural, as natural as it is for widowed spouses to blame and be angry with their departed partner for having left them all alone in the world. Loneliness is interwoven not merely with anxiety, but just as surely with the very fabric of hostility, and those of us who cannot unravel this thread that runs throughout our sense of isolation will never be able to see the whole tapestry.**

**The American Psychiatric Association's (1983) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* points out several interesting features about anxiety disorders. First, the age at onset "often begins in late adolescence"; second, its complications often include the abuse of alcohol; and third, the predisposing factors generally can be traced back to separation anxiety disorders in childhood (pp. 230–231). Again, the essential defining characteristics of separation anxiety disorder in childhood and adolescence describe it as "excessive anxiety on separation from major attachment figures or from home or other familiar surroundings" (p. 50). Once more and significantly enough the predisposing factors involve life stresses—"typically a loss, the death of a relative or a pet . . . a change in the child's environment such as school change or a move to a new neighborhood" (p. 53).**

**Ironically—and indeed perhaps even tragically—DSM-III does not offer "loneliness" as a diagnostic category. Despite the fact that an increasing number of psychologists and psychiatrists have researched its pathological depths and dimensions, it still does not seem to have achieved the level of a clinical heading. This is extremely unfortunate because it means that we are neglecting an essential dynamic component, if not the major contributing factor underlying anxious and**



aggressive states of consciousness. Again, we recall that Zilboorg and Fromm-Reichmann connect pathological loneliness with the more virulent forms of anxiety and hostility. Indeed, Fromm-Reichmann sees intense and prolonged loneliness as conditioning certain psychotic states, such as schizophrenia.

But perhaps the skeptical reader is unconvinced that these extreme forms of loneliness have anything to do with the more normal varieties of loneliness prevalent in most adolescents and indeed in the general population. But let me make the following observation. Before psychologists and psychiatrists "discovered" the universal significance of loneliness, say, beginning with Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* in 1941, it was most clearly and quite possibly best expressed in Thomas Wolfe's novels, *Look Homeward, Angel*; *Of Time and the River* and *You Can't Go Home Again*. Wolfe (1935) not only fully grasped the universal meaning of loneliness, but also recognized its connection to feelings of hostility:

The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary men, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence. When we examine the moments, acts, and statements of all kinds of people—not only the grief and ecstasy of the greatest poets, but also the huge unhappiness of the average soul as evidenced by the innumerable strident words of abuse, hatred, contempt, mistrust, and scorn that forever grate upon our ears as the manswarm passes us in the street—we find, I think, that they are all suffering from the same thing. The final cause of their complaint is loneliness.

And certainly one of the classic and most poignant expressions of adolescent loneliness, as well as the awareness of it in others, is exemplified by Carson McCullers' brilliant novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, published in 1940. Like Wolfe, the young writer sees and describes loneliness as the very essence of individual human existence as she exposes, throughout her sensitive work, the various characters as specific instantiations of their own peculiar forms of loneliness.

Following the "clue" of the universality of loneliness as provided by the writings of Wolfe and Fromm, as well as a few others, I have repeatedly argued at length that the fear of loneliness and the desire to avoid it constitutes the ultimate primary motivational principle in man. Correspondingly, I have also maintained that the drive to escape isolation accounts for all our passion, thought, and action. In all we think, say, and do, we are animated by a fear of loneliness (Mijuskovic, 1977a, 1980a, 1987a). Assuming that this interpretation of human nature is correct, it is now possible to apply it within the more specific area of adolescent behavior.



## UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT ALCOHOLISM

Adolescence, as suggested by Erik Erikson, is a time of special crises. It is a period or stage of development in which questions of personal identity become paramount. Novelists, such as Carson McCullers, offer literary descriptions depicting the trials of adolescents, while psychoanalysts, such as Erikson, provide a theoretical framework for understanding adolescence (Erikson, 1950a, 1950b, 1968). One of the major dangers for adolescents today stems from their increasing use of alcohol.

Some researchers have contended that adolescent drinking is basically a learned behavior and that it is a reflection of the patterns of adult society (Offer, 1969; Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Jessor & Jessor, 1975). Grace Barnes (1981) concurs with this conclusion and argues that:

the development of adolescent alcohol use does not appear to be so much a function of unique adolescent subcultural phenomena as it is a reflection of the norms and behaviors in the larger adult society.

By contrast, my own view is much closer to that of James Coleman. Coleman (1961) holds that the adolescent is:

cut off from the rest of society, forced inward toward his own age group, made to carry out his whole social life with others of his own age. With his fellows he comes to constitute a small society, one that has most of its important interactions within itself, and only maintains threads of connection with the outside adult society. (p. 3)

I think this is true, but beyond this I believe the adolescent suffers more intensely from a need to belong than does any other developmental group with the possible exception of infants. Thus Tim Brennan (1982) insists that:

Adolescence is a particularly significant life stage for examining loneliness [and the] available evidence suggests that there is more loneliness among adolescents than among any other age group. (p. 269)

Yearning for intimacy with peers is the positive aspect of the need to belong. Criticism of the adult world is the negative perspective. It is an aggressive response to the disenchantment elicited by no longer feeling secure within the "identity" of the family unit. But both tendencies are motivated by the fear of aloneness. Brennan himself provides an exhaustive matrix of causes of loneliness in adolescents. They include physiological and highly visible maturational changes, separation from parents, an increasing and frightening sense of autonomy,



radical disruption of the self-concept, the struggle for meaning, excessive feelings of rejection and the assumption of failure roles, unrealistic expectations; changing family structures, and poor parent-child relationships (Brennan, 1982). And that is the normal adolescent!

As a result of these forms of anxiety and stress, the lonely adolescent often sees drinking as a solution to his or her sense of alienation. Indeed, in an article on loneliness and alcoholism, Bell (1956) maintained that drinking is a frustrated response to childhood experiences of disappointment with family members and peers. Unable to count on, and prevented from sharing with significant others, the child increasingly turns inward. Thus the cause of alcoholism lies in the painful interpersonal experiences of early upbringing, which predispose the adolescent toward becoming an alcoholic; or perhaps in Erikson's terms, we could speculate that the original conflict between trust versus mistrust, characteristic of the oral stage of development, continues unresolved throughout the maturational development of the adolescent (Erikson, 1950a).

In any case, whether we consider alcohol use, abuse, or dependency by adolescents, I think we can assume that in most cases—if not all—alcohol consumption is a response to problems concerning loneliness, anxiety, and hostility. Today's American youth is certainly more estranged than it was in previous generations. If for no other reason, the increasing divorce rate and the collapse of the extended family has contributed greatly to a sense of alienation among the young (Lynch, 1977).

If we further assume, along with Erikson, that the psychosocial stage of adolescence is naturally more preoccupied with the problems of identity and that this is a source of anxiety, then we can further infer that in a significant way much of the affective content of the original separation, which transpired at the early stage of infant development, will be reexperienced during adolescence. Just as the infant feels a sense of loneliness, confusion, and anxiety surrounding the primal feeling of separation from the mother, similarly, years later, the revived loneliness, now conditioned by separation from the family and entry into society, becomes a source of renewed fear and hostility.

As infants explore their sense of identity within their own spheres of consciousness and define themselves in contradistinction to the consciousness of the other, so adolescents correspondingly struggle to define their rapidly growing sense of self within a peer group and against the background of an impersonal society. This is a crucial difference between infant identity development and adolescent identity processes. The former is worked out primarily within the sphere of consciousness,





while the latter develops against the flux of social change. The infant's natural and social environment is relatively stable whereas the teenager's is rapidly changing. In addition, if there are problems within the nuclear family unit—divorce, separation of parents, remarriage, death of a parent, both parents working, single-parent households—difficulties with the opposite sex, problems with peers, moving, and changing schools, then obviously the sense of loneliness will be correspondingly pronounced. Under such stressful situations and conditions, the adolescent is easily induced to experiment with alcohol.

Positively, drinking serves as an excuse to socialize with peers in a forbidden and romantic activity. Also positively, it releases anxiety and social-inhibitions. The sense of shyness so prevalent during adolescence is suspended for a while at least. In effect, alcohol allows the teenager "to be himself," without "hang-ups."

Neutrally, it permits the adolescent the illusion of adult freedom by indulging in behavior which is falsely assumed to be free of insecurity in the adult.

Negatively, drinking is often motivated by an aggressive repudiation of the legal, cultural, and moral norms of an impersonal society. It is a way of "getting back" at the system. Also negatively, alcohol is a depressant. It increasingly restricts one's field of cognitive awareness and concern; it enables one to be less conscious of absent or distant persons and situations. It collapses the world beyond into the immediacy of consciousness. In effect, it is a regression toward the more satisfying stage of the oceanic feeling. Just as infants initially regress when they are first confronted by the sense of separation from the mother, so may adolescents drink themselves into a state of forgetfulness which diminishes the sense of alienation from significant others while accentuating feelings of narcissistic self-sufficiency.

In the context of peer contact, drinking blurs distinctions and reduces the capacity to discriminate and individualize. Through the immersive qualities of alcohol, adolescents are able to fuse, to unify, to belong more completely "within" the identity of their chosen group. But in losing their selves, they believe they have gained a sense of greater identity. Hence the extreme sense of loyalty to the group so characteristic of adolescents, which Erikson emphasizes as ascendant at this particular stage of development.

Negatively, alcohol releases aggressive tendencies which are then directed at those who have contributed to the adolescent's feeling of loneliness. These hostile impulses are often directed against society at large and manifested in such behavior patterns as driving while intoxicated. Littering, for example, is not mere carelessness; it is a dis-



guised form of aggression. Surreptitiously taking alcohol from the home is not merely borrowing; it is a way of punishing the offending parents for having contributed to the adolescent's loneliness.

Negatively, intoxication engenders a feeling of megalomaniac omnipotence as analyzed by Zilboorg (1938) in his article on loneliness and hostility. The adolescent feels invulnerable and self-sufficient under the influence of alcohol. That is why adolescents are particularly dangerous when they are driving. This sense of power once more undoubtedly originates in the oceanic feeling, that original state and stage of consciousness which, if only we understood it more fully, would quite likely explain much of subsequent individual thought and behavior.

And, finally, there is the "Miniver Cheevy" effect. Intoxication often promotes the unrealistic dreams of high expectations and allows adolescents to indulge in nostalgic fantasies, daydreams, and reveries which permit them to achieve all that has eluded them thus far and perhaps always will.

All things being equal, the two most traumatic psychological stages in an individual's life concern, first, the loneliness experienced when the infant initially realizes his or her separation from the mother, which nevertheless serves as a condition for entry into the world of selfhood. Should maternal affection be completely withdrawn, death often ensues in children under the age of one (Lynch, 1977; Mijuskovic, 1987a). Second, the most critical period of adjustment occurs within the context of the adolescent's growing sense of estrangement from the previously integrative functions of the family. This analogously serves as a preliminary condition for the adolescent's entry into the adult world of society, a chaotic universe of separate, atomistically independent beings. Only when we can appreciate the special quality of loneliness experienced in adolescence will be able to empathize with the anxiety and hostility generated during this period of life.

The solution to loneliness is ever the same, for adolescents as for everyone else. It consists in a sense of belonging to something—a value, a greater being, a special person, a group—beyond one's self; to belong without losing one's sense of personal identity; to unify with, to relate to another consciousness without losing one's self-consciousness or principle of individuation (Mijuskovic, 1987a).

Philosophers and sociologists distinguish two models of human association, the Hobbesian, atomistic society (*Gesellschaft*) and the Platonic, organic community (*Gemeinschaft*) (Fromm, 1956; Tonnies, 1957; Mijuskovic, 1977a, 1987a). American society is predominantly atomistic, individualistic, contractual, liberal, capitalistic, mechanistic; it stresses personal freedom at the expense of wholeness, unity, stability. The automobile symbolizes freedom to go anywhere we like whenever



we wish—to do as we please. The camper and the “mobile home” represent our desire to move even our residences at a whim. But there is a price for this freedom, and that is increasing loneliness.

By contrast, as previously intimated, the organic community is essentially modeled on principles of interdependence. Relationships are living as opposed to formal; they emphasize duties rather than legal rights; the good of the whole is more important than the freedom of the individual; freedom here means *doing as you should* in order to promote stability and unity. There are great strengths and terrible weaknesses in both models. For example, the atomistic model tends toward competitive anarchy, a war of all against all, whereas the organic paradigm tends toward totalitarianism, where the ruler or parent “knows” what is best for others. But the point is that in our particular society we have overemphasized the values of individual freedom. Quite predictably, the symbol of adulthood for adolescents is owning their own car so that they can go wherever they like when they like. They can change friends and even schools “if things don’t work out.” Young people go away to college and marry outside of their “area.” (Who marries the girl next door any more? It is unusual if we even know our neighbors. Our best friends live across the city, and we see them once every two weeks.) But the consequence of this freedom to escape is that problems do not have to be worked out. We can change spouses, jobs, residences, friends, hangouts. And the adolescent continually observes this. (How many adolescents today think of going into their parents’ business or occupation?) The time is, of course, long past when the teacher, the minister, the scoutmaster were taken seriously by youth. They are forgotten symbols of the organic community. So be it; they are gone. But we had better “replace” them with something of nonindividualistic value; otherwise the loneliness of the adolescent, the “crisis of identity” in youth will insidiously continue (Mijuskovic, 1987a).

What is the remedy? What I would suggest is a conscious methodological approach on the part of counselors and therapists to integrate positive features and values of the organic model in their work with adolescents. Similarly, parents and teachers must try to emphasize loyalty to something beyond the individual self and avoid the tendency toward encouraging overweening narcissism so prevalent in today’s adult “advice” to the young, encapsulated in such destructive clichés as “Be aggressive,” “Competition makes you stronger,” “Try harder,” and “You can do better.” How often have we heard parents, teachers, and coaches exhort the young in this fashion?

Adults must consciously avoid the type of mentality that says it is best if “everyone does his or her own thing.” The adolescent has a



tremendous potential virtue—fidelity (Erikson, 1968). And although we as parents, teachers, and psychologists obviously cannot become adolescents ourselves again, nevertheless through empathy and sympathy we can get much closer to adolescent feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and hostility. Perhaps then we can get adolescents to realize that we are not so different from them and maybe then their sense of loyalty will include us more than it presently does. That would be a start.

Perhaps alcoholism is simply caused by an idiosyncratic chemical dependency which can be explained physiologically. Maybe adolescent drinking is merely an emulation of adult behavior as some researchers have contended. But I don't think so. Rather it is my strong conviction that the ubiquitous underlying factor conditioning all alcoholism is the feeling of loneliness and the desire to escape it. Consequently, I can conclude my argument in no better way than by appealing to the following passage written by an anonymous recovered alcoholic.

Alcoholism has been described as "the lonely disease," and very few recovered alcoholics argue the point. Looking back at the lost years or months of our drinking, literally hundreds of thousands of us remember feeling isolated even when we were among a lot of happy, celebrating people. We often felt a deep sense of not belonging, even when we cheerfully acted sociable.

Many of us have said we drank originally to be "a part of the crowd." Many of us felt we had to drink to "get it," and to feel that we fitted in with the rest of the human race.

It is an observable fact, of course, that our chief use of alcohol was egocentric—that is, we poured it into our *own* bodies for the effect we felt within our *own* skin. Sometimes, that effect momentarily helped us to behave sociably or temporarily assuaged our inner loneliness.

But when that effect of alcohol wore off, we were left feeling more set apart, more left out, more "different" than ever, and sadder. If we felt guilty or ashamed of either our drunkenness itself or anything we did while drinking, that compounded our feeling of being an outcast. At times, we secretly feared or even believed that we deserved ostracism because of the things we did. "Maybe," many of us thought, "I really am an outsider."

The lonely road ahead looked bleak, dark, and unending. It was too painful to talk about; and to avoid thinking about it, we soon drank again.

Although some of us were lone drinkers, it can hardly be said that we completely lacked companionship during our drinking days. People were all around us. We saw, heard, and touched them. But most of our important dialogues were entirely interior, held with ourselves. We were sure nobody else would understand. Besides, considering our opinion of ourselves, we were not sure that we *wanted* anybody to understand.

No wonder, then, that when we first listen to recovered alcoholics in A.A. talking freely and honestly about themselves, we are stunned. Their tales of their own drinking escapades, of their own secret fears and loneliness, jar us like a thunderbolt.



Thoughts of a drink seem to sneak into our minds much more smoothly and slyly when we are alone. And when we feel lonesome, and any urge for a drink strikes, it seems to have special speed and strength. . . .

If the notion of taking a drink crosses your mind any time soon . . . tell somebody, fast. That at least starts to relieve the loneliness. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1983)

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