**Pleasure Through Depressants**

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**Prompt:**

We often do those things that give us pleasure. What are the causes of drinking alcohol and which of these is directly related to seeking pleasure? On the other hand, there are cultural and social factors that affect drinking patterns. How do these factors affect or mediate the seeking out of pleasure?

"Of all vices, drinking is the most incompatible with greatness" (Sir Walter Scott). Although alcohol is a widely consumed substance these days, it comes with its own share of problems. When used in small amounts, some will say it gives them pleasure. However, the more alcohol that gets consumed leads to less pleasurable and more dangerous circumstances. It is important to realize why people are attracted to drinking alcohol, especially in the reasons dealing with pleasure, and why cultural and social factors will change drinking patterns.

Alcohol is classified as a depressant type of drug, and has many effects associated with depressants. The most well-known effects of alcohol are anxiety reduction, impulsiveness, slurred speech, disorientation, slowed mental and physical functioning, and limited attention span (Feldman, page 136). While not all of these effects are seen as positive, people will overlook the negatives and seek the effects that will help to increase their pleasure. When I asked my friends why they choose to drink, their answer was always related to alcohol's anxiety reduction and impulsiveness effects. For most people, including myself, social interactions can cause a bit of anxiety, so the anxiety reduction effect of alcohol appears to be a big bonus. By drinking, some people may have a more pleasurable experience socializing with others because they are not so anxious. Also, drinking is most common in large groups of people. Larger groups cause even more anxiety for some, which gives them another reason to use alcohol to seek the pleasure of being less anxious. It is also very common to see alcohol served at large social gatherings (assuming everyone is of age), and our culture has adapted to this being the norm.

In United States culture, at least all that I have been exposed to, it is very common to have alcohol at any sort of planned event. Whether it is a party or a fancy new product unveiling, alcohol is most likely there. At most of these events, the presence of alcohol is not made into a big deal, and people will normally have a drink or two to get the anxiety reduction effects. However, the college culture is vastly different. Alcohol is the center of attention at most parties and gatherings, and this causes problems. Since alcohol is such a centerpiece at these college parties, some students will drink more than they would normally in order to get attention from their peers. In fact, it is such a common problem that 51% of college men and 40% of college women are classified as "binge drinkers", which is 5 or more drinks for men and 4 or more drinks for women (Feldman, page 137). Not only is this a dangerous habit that can lead to severe impairment and even death, but college drinking affects even those who don't drink. "Two-thirds of lighter drinkers said that they had had their studying or sleep disturbed by drunk students, and around one-third had been insulted or humiliated by a drunk student. A quarter of the women said they had been the target of an unwanted sexual advance by a drunk classmate" (Feldman, page 138). In the past decade, alcohol consumption has been steadily decreasing, most likely due to changes in our culture (Feldman, page 137). Nowadays we have more alcohol awareness programs in our schools, and we are beginning to better understand the effects alcohol has on our body in the long term. I have chosen to not drink myself, because I do not want the negative health effects associated with drinking, and I feel that some of my peers feel the same way. This change in culture is moving towards less reliance on alcohol to have a good time and seek pleasure, and hopefully the trend continues in later years. It has also become much more socially unacceptable to be constantly drunk, so our society is also affecting our views on drinking.

Drinking is seen as a common way to relax and seek pleasure, but with more awareness about the effects alcohol has on our bodies and changing social and cultural factors, alcohol is slowly becoming less of "necessity" to have fun. If the current decline in drinking continues, hopefully some day we as a society will not need to rely on alcohol at all to help us seek pleasure, and we won't have to face the negative effects alcohol has on us.

Extra Sources Used:

**Essentials of Understanding Psychology**, written by Robert S. Feldman, 5th edition.