

Why do People Drink and Drug?

Because They're Bald or Balding

By G. Raymond McCullough

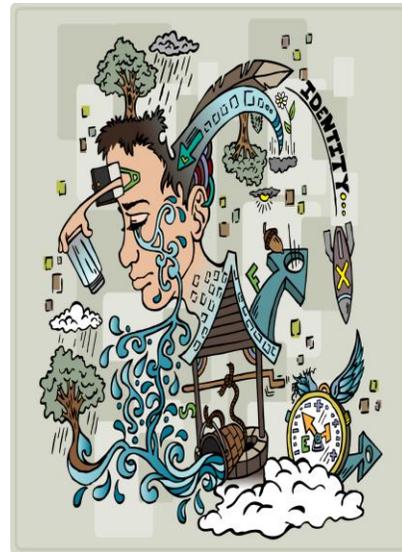


Now that I have your attention, let me assure you this article has nothing to do with the loss of hair or male pattern baldness—a condition that mildly afflicts me. The Bald I refer to encompasses the emotional states: Boredom—Anger—Loneliness—Depression. When I have asked people over the years why they use alcohol or other drugs the common response is “I like it...it makes everything seem more fun.” When I encourage them to look deeper into their motivation for using alcohol and other drugs their response typically reveals the reason may be related to a recurring state of being Bored, Angry, Lonely, or Depressed (BALD). This seems especially true for young people (ages 17-26 years old), who are single, are somewhat socially isolated, and whom appear to lack focus and direction in their lives.

I could bring this article to a quick end by surmising that the vast majority of people that feel compelled to abuse alcohol and other drugs do so to cope with negative emotional states. These

negative emotional states are an inevitability and a product of daily existence. However, we all know people abuse alcohol and other drugs for a myriad of other reasons, and it's not necessarily a coping mechanism for everyone.

Nonetheless, I can say with some certainty that most people who experience problems related to alcohol and other drug use have repeatedly used these substances because they are BALD (Bored, Angry, Lonely, Depressed).



Many of us may be able to think of situations when Boredom has been the precipitator of alcohol or other drug abuse. I believe boredom manifests, in part, from a sense of general dissatisfaction with life and likely is rooted in an inability to self stimulate without the use of some chemical. On countless occasions, I've heard people say “There is nothing

to do here but use alcohol and other drugs.” Just for clarity, I’ve heard this expressed belief from teenagers, and adult women and men who live in Port Angeles, Seattle, Everett, and Tacoma—it’s not endemic to rural areas. Granted, finding alternatives to using alcohol and other drugs can seem to be more challenging in some locations as opposed to others. However, this shouldn’t be the excuse for using. The alternatives to using can cost money and so do alcohol and other drugs—even more if you get into trouble.

Anger is the next precipitator that requires some discussion. Does this sound familiar, “I am so angry with _____ (you fill in the blank) I don’t know what I might do.” Hence the call for an elixir of some type that will calm your nerves. Your hope is that it will enable you to forget about the transgression that has been committed. Anger dealt with inappropriately often is a bridge that leads to legal problems. An example: Mr. or Ms. X had a bad day at work. The boss had been on Mr. or Ms. X’s case. They believe the expectations of their boss were unreasonable and as a result they felt disrespected. Neither can wait to have a drink or possibly smoke a bowl. They get to their respective destinations where they rendezvous with friends. The ensuing conversation with their friends is about their boss. The more they talk about their unreasonable boss, championed on by their friends, the angrier they become. In fact at one point, they become so incensed and full of rage that their

behavior becomes aggressive and violent. The drinking, drugging, and ranting go on for hours. Eventually, the night ends when one ends up in jail because they assaulted a stranger and the other is in the hospital because their anger and rage led to them inflicting harm on themselves—an overdose. As unlikely as this scenario may seem I’ve seen it play out on numerous occasions.

What can I or anyone say about Loneliness that you don’t already know? We have all experienced it with varying intensities at different times in our lives, and I suspect that many of us have found this feeling quite uncomfortable. Interesting enough, many people believe the feeling of loneliness will go away if we have other people around. Hence, this would explain the attraction to bars or to places where there is some kind “action”—the drug house or a friend’s house that always has drugs. It’s intriguing that I have rarely had anyone tell me that going to a bar or the place where they score drugs has ever been the long-term solution to their feelings of loneliness. Actually, what I have heard is that the resultant isolation that accompanies their abuse of alcohol or drug abuse over time intensifies their feelings of loneliness. Loneliness and boredom, I believe, have a great deal to do with non-fulfillment. A possible long-term solution is to find out what interests you and to identify which of these interests hold deep value and meaning in your life. I caution you that, after years of drinking and drugging, this may not be the easy and may

require the assistance of a professional. The process of discovering what you value (other than alcohol and other drugs) will give you reasonable assurance that you will stick with an activity or practice that in the end eliminates your loneliness and boredom. So start looking, get involved, and leave the excuses behind with the people who have decided that they are happy being miserable.

Depression, for some, can be the result of being overwhelmed by boredom, anger, loneliness, or a combination of one or more and our inability to deal with these feelings in a constructive way. In any case, often times when we hear someone say “I am depressed” we might experience a sense of uneasiness and, at a minimum, concern. This reaction could be attributed to the belief that everyone who is depressed will inevitably commit suicide—this is not factual.

Nonetheless, long-term feelings of depression (more than two weeks) can indicate serious problems and those individuals should seek medical and/or mental health assistance without delay. A couple of other thoughts about depression: I have never had anyone tell me that their depression was resolved over the long-term because they abused alcohol or other drugs. I believe the opposite is likely the case. However, it should be noted that there is a much higher incidence of alcohol and other drug abuse with people who suffer from anxiety, depression, or both.

In conclusion, we all experience feelings of boredom, anger, loneliness, and, at times, depression. Our use of alcohol and other drugs is never the best method for dealing with these feelings. Don't be afraid to pursue the things in your life that have value and that you find fulfilling. Remember, you fail only if you don't try to deal with BALDing in a constructive way. Seek assistance from your doctor or a counselor if your coping skills are not working.



**Your endeavors require patience
and balance**