

The Relationship between Low Self-Esteem and Alcoholism

by Mindy Checkon

Low Self-Esteem Defined:

- ❧ A discrepancy between one's ideal self-concept and actual self-concept
- ❧ Esteem: Hold in high regard; to respect, admire, revere oneself (Webster)

Alcoholism Defined:

- ❧ A disease of continued, excessive and usually uncontrollable use of alcoholic drinks (Webster)
- ❧ An attempt to self-medicate/remediate self deficits

Previous and Current Research

- ❖ Limited research studying self-esteem as a predictor of alcoholism
 - Models of Addiction focus more on antisocial behavior, personality and learning theory
- ❖ Alcohol Study at CU; Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale
 - A widely used measure with demonstrated reliability and validity (Greenberg, p.567)

Instruments used to test Self-Esteem of Abusers

- ✿ Adjective checklists
- ✿ Q-sorts
- ✿ Inventories
- ✿ Self-Concept Scales

Tennessee Self-Concept Scale

- ✿ Physical Self
- ✿ Moral-Ethical Self
- ✿ Personal Self
- ✿ Family Self
- ✿ Social Self

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale

❖ (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

- 1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
SA A D SD
- 2. At times I think I am no good at all.
SA A D SD
- 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
SA A D SD

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, cont.

- 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. SA A D SD
- 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. SA A D SD
- 6. I certainly feel useless at times. SA A D SD

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, cont.

- 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

SA A D SD

- 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

SA A D SD

- 9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

SA A D SD

- 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

SA A D SD

Reduction of Negative Affect and Reduction of Self-Rejection are highly correlated (Saul, p. 311)

- ❧ S.R. Gold (1980) argued that drug users rely more and more on drugs for feeling good and in control
 - reaffirm their belief that they are powerless to cope without drugs
 - drug use escalates as a coping mechanism
 - particularly for person lacking social skills and low in self-esteem and self-efficacy

Less Distress When Intoxicated

- ❖ Negative personality characteristics of alcoholics are perceived to be lessened when using alcohol, serves as a “time-out”
- ❖ Feelings of low self-esteem are consistently prevalent among male and female alcoholics, but especially acute among female alcoholics
 - One explanation for this is that the defensive style of male alcoholics enables them to neutralize their feelings of low self-esteem (Maisto, p.217)

Alcohol, Self-Esteem and Sexual Problems

- ❧ Many studies have focused on these three factors
- ❧ Sexual problems relating to sexual roles, sexual identity and sexual orientation are prevalent among male and female alcoholics
 - This suggests that each type of problem exacerbates the other (Maisto, p.217)

Substance Abuse vs. Alcoholic Self-Concepts

- One study specifically compared Heroin Abusers to Alcoholics and found that Alcoholics have more pronounced feelings of low self-worth
 - Addicts tend to react defensively rather than in a “self-effacing” manner (Maisto, p. 218)
 - Although their Self-Concepts were similar, Alcoholics had greater emotional distress and were more passive and compliant than addicts (Maisto, p. 218)

Personality Factors

- ❖ Locus of Control: Alcoholics who have External Locus of Control tend to have more severe drinking problems (Galizio, p. 230)
- ❖ Strong sense of adventure and disregard for social mores (Galizio, p. 233)

Findings

- ❖ Effect of alcohol on self-awareness and self-esteem; especially for self-conscious
- ❖ Married women in social drinking situations vs. married men
- ❖ Low self-esteem does not necessarily occur prior to alcoholism, but is associated with alcohol abuse
- ❖ Feelings of low self-esteem often become ingrained (Galizio, p. 217)

In Conclusion

- ❧ Personality characteristics play an important role in Alcoholism
- ❧ Greater stress reduction after consuming alcohol in problem drinkers
- ❧ Alcohol Abuse serves to immediately decrease negative characteristics while long term use proves to intensify negative personality characteristics

In Conclusion, cont.

- ❧ Alcohol Abusers eventually turn to drinking for medicating effects habitually
- ❧ Longitudinal research and Instruments especially designed for Alcoholics are needed

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