

Drinking Games

Contributed by [Lily Lozovsky](#)

Source: Essay by Malcolm Gladwell

How much people drink may matter less than how they drink it.

Steele and his colleague Robert Josephs's explanation is that we've misread the effects of alcohol on the brain. Its principal effect is to narrow our emotional and mental field of vision. It causes, they write, "a state of shortsightedness in which superficially understood, immediate aspects of experience have a disproportionate influence on behavior and emotion."

Alcohol makes the thing in the foreground even more salient and the thing in the background disappear. That's why drinking makes you think you are attractive when the world thinks otherwise: the alcohol removes the little constraining voice from the outside world that normally keeps our self-assessments in check. Drinking relaxes the man watching football because the game is front and center, and alcohol makes every secondary consideration fade away. But in a quiet bar his problems are front and center—and every potentially comforting or mitigating thought recedes. Drunkenness is not disinhibition. Drunkenness is myopia.

Myopia theory changes how we understand drunkenness. Disinhibition suggests that the drinker is increasingly insensitive to his environment—that he is in the grip of an autonomous physiological process. Myopia theory, on the contrary, says that the drinker is, in some respects, increasingly sensitive to his environment: he is at the mercy of whatever is in front of him.

Full article: <http://gladwell.com/drinking-games/>