

## References

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**Happy Hours: Alcohol in a Woman's Life**, by Devon Jersild. New York: Harper Collins, 2000, 380 + xv pages, \$25.00 (cloth).

This is a well-written book that interweaves the stories of 40 women recovering from alcohol dependence with a thorough overview of research on women's alcohol abuse and dependence. In the introduction, the author describes herself as a "layperson, with no scientific expertise" but with a strong motivation to "understand how alcohol takes over a woman's life" because of her connection to her alcohol dependent sister. The book is easy to read and reflect on in a very personal manner. As Jersild says, all of us know someone who we believe has or may have a problem with alcohol, whether she is a sister, mother, friend, co-worker or acquaintance.

The stories of the recovering women are used to emphasize the differences in women's experiences of alcohol compared with those of men and the similarities among women's experiences. Jersild emphasizes the lack of understanding about, and lack of approaches currently available for, identifying and providing care that addresses issues unique to the alcohol dependent woman (e.g., concomitant depression, partner violence, history of sexual abuse). Her description of the negative manner in which women who misuse or are dependent on alcohol are viewed in comparison to men is familiar to researchers in this area. Alcohol dependent women are seen as more sexually available, sloppier, and less able to hold their liquor compared with men. Treatment approaches often have been developed based on the needs of men; for example, Jersild describes the development of the AA treatment approach around men and how the theme of powerlessness might not be as appropriate or effective for women, particularly women who have been abused and controlled by men.

The book comprises 12 chapters organized into four parts. In each chapter stories from the recovering women are interspersed with well researched information on the etiology of women's alcohol problems. Findings from respected researchers in the field of women's alcohol dependence, such as Sharon Wilsnack and Sheila Blume, are presented. Jersild clearly relied on experts in

the field for help in understanding the current state of our knowledge in this area.

Part I, *The Impact of Alcohol*, provides statistics on women's alcohol consumption, the differences in consumption and health risks to women compared with men, prevailing stereotypes about women who drink and a brief historical overview of women's alcohol use and misuse. The integration of women's stories and the statistics about specific risks to women for developing alcohol problems will be informative for clinicians as well as lay people.

Part II, *On the Job and in Families*, describes the influence that personal relationships (e.g., male partners and mothers) have on a woman's pattern of alcohol consumption and the development of dependence. Jersild presents a balanced view of the research. For example, in chapter 3 she discusses the predominant belief that a woman's drinking is largely influenced by her partners' drinking and more recent findings from longitudinal research that this is not the case. Indeed, as she explains, this newer research suggests that women who drink heavily tend to marry men who drink heavily and "female alcoholics are much more likely than male alcoholics to have a spouse who drinks." This is just one instance of Jersild's ability to synthesize disparate findings in the research literature and make them easily understandable to the reader.

Part III, *Take Two at Bedtime: Drinking as Self-medication*, explores several common themes in the experiences that precede alcohol problems among women, such as loneliness, loss and sexual abuse. The stories of the women are particularly striking in this section, and Jersild does an excellent job of balancing research findings with illustrative stories.

Part IV, *Women's Paths in Recovery*, describes how alcohol problems and dependence often go undetected in women. Special attention is given to issues that are unique to minority women and to treatment programs that have been developed for Native American and black women. The final chapter describes pathways to, and motivations for, recovery among women (e.g., connecting with a supportive family member, getting sober for their children).

This book is appropriate for clinicians, educators, service providers and graduate students (e.g., social work, psychology courses). It could be used as reading material for a client who is questioning her own or another's drinking patterns or as a supplement to textbook reading in a course on women's issues or substance abuse or dependence. I believe that anyone who has contact or works with women with substance use disorders will gain some benefit from the overview of research and the striking personal stories from alcohol dependent women provided in this book.

The strength of this book lies in the synthesis of research findings and personal stories from women. The latter are presented in an empathic manner that emphasizes the inherent dignity and strength of the women who were willing to talk about their experiences. I was left feeling that, despite my own research emphasis on women's substance use, I had a more complete understanding of the current state of our research knowledge and the actual experiences of alcohol dependent women.

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