

# **Sobriety Epidemic Endangers Nation's Well-Being**

April 15, 2003

Experts are warning of an alarming new plague overtaking our community and our very culture: sobriety. Everywhere the seemingly ubiquitous face of sobriety appears to be rearing its ugly head.

Although some may in the name of tolerance seek to make light of sobriety or dismiss it as a passing, harmless fad, disturbing statistics reveal what may turn out on closer inspection to be merely the poisonous tip of the iceberg of woe. As just one example, newly released FBI statistics have revealed that a shocking number of crimes are committed by people who are legally sober at the time. In 1997, over half the murders and robberies, and nearly half the assaults that resulted in arrest were perpetrated by sober people. In many cases, both the assailant and the victim were found to be sober.

Official traffic statistics suggest that sober people are often a menace to themselves and others. Sober people have been found to be responsible for half the fatal car crashes and a large number of lesser accidents. If one includes both drivers and passengers of all cars involved, a whopping 87 percent of all automotive accidents involve at least one sober person – sometimes even a child. Sobriety is implicated in many serious injuries and deaths. Many unfortunate people die while sober, in tragic contrast to the fortunate individuals who have some control over their final hours and generally choose to be heavily lubricated throughout the experience.

The effects of sobriety on mental health are believed to be no less calamitous than the havoc wrought on the physical self. Sobriety causes a dampening of emotional state. Sober people are often described by clinical experts as overly restrained, a condition that is sometimes attributed to their unnatural habit of thinking about the future or their excessive, fastidious concern with preserving the so-called shreds of dignity.

It is tragically ironic to think how many hapless individuals fall prey to the primrose path of sobriety only to sorrowfully discover that life has become a stark, barren wasteland utterly devoid of fulfillment. Their daily lives are punctuated only by the dull thuds and cloyingly earnest rhythms of sober conversation, which usurp the place of the scintillating wit that enlivens badinage among the intoxicated.

Surely the mass media bear part of the blame. Many television stars now portray characters who seem to almost revel in a sober lifestyle, thereby polluting the airwaves with pro-sober propaganda and misguiding or enticing innocent, unsuspecting portions of our nation's youth into experimenting with sobriety as if that were a perfectly acceptable way to live. Looking back, however and unfortunately, sobriety has been wreaking its monumental toll for enough myriad years to have utterly soiled our nation's moral compass.

For concerned friends and family members, spotting sobriety is not always easy, even though it is best to do it early. Here are three major warning signs that someone may be experimenting with sobriety:

**1. Humorlessness.** Although it is an exaggeration to say that sober people are unable to laugh, studies do confirm that in most cases something will have to be genuinely funny before a sober person can laugh at it, and even then they may laugh only in only a forced or shallow manner. Sobriety robs its victims of the ability to appreciate many entire categories of humor, such as the time-honored tradition of penis jokes.

**2. Straight walking.** Sober people can often be spotted by their peculiar method of walking, which typically consists of moving quietly through space in a fairly straight line. One California Highway Patrol officer describes the walk of sober individuals as 'the ghost float,' in recognition of how they seem almost supernaturally able to avoid crashing into walls, door frames, barstools, parked cars, fellow patrons, and other alleged obstacles.

**3. Sexual Pickiness.** Sober people have been observed to display an inordinate, almost absurd degree of picayune fussiness in their choice of sex partners. Researchers have proposed that sobriety causes an unnatural rise in personal standards and criteria for what would qualify as an acceptable person to engage in sexual activity with. As a result, many potential partners who would seem instantly fine and charming, even glamorous, to any normally intoxicated person will be judged unsuitable by sober individuals. Sober people have even been known to refuse to have sex with someone for the most shallow and superficial of reasons, such as lacking intelligence or not smelling just perfect.

Sober people tend to spend time together, shunning the company of society at large. One possible reason for this is that sober people believe that they will meet with disapproval from normal, intoxicated persons and may feel ashamed or self-conscious about their painfully uncool sobriety. Whatever the reason, though, this may result in a vicious circle of enabling in which the sober people end up encouraging each other to be sober and giving each other a false sense of consensus that sobriety may be normal and widespread. Indeed, the sexual pickiness noted above may result in sober people only having sexual relations with other sober people, which can foster a kind of inbreeding.

Many people enter into sobriety innocently or naively, not realizing the full extent of the dangers or perhaps underestimating the seductive lure of being sober. College students, for example, may start with the accidental discovery that writing a term paper or programming a computer seems (subjectively) to go more smoothly when one is sober. The student may even cultivate the delusion that his or her work is actually better in quality if produced while sober, and this may encourage the student to try being sober on other occasions or in other contexts.

Our nation's youth may certainly be at risk for vulnerability to sobriety, but again there is no cause for general worry. The kids are all right. The younger generation has shown a staunch, almost heroic capacity to resist the blandishments and temptations of sobriety, and many individual stories attest to the power of the human spirit as individuals manage to extricate themselves from the empty and dehumanizing swamp of life without drugs or alcohol, into which the young and innocent may all too easily be led astray.

Most disturbing is the still relatively small movement to present sobriety as a positive good and try to encourage unwitting, innocent people to convert to sobriety. In some places clinics and detox centers have sprung up (often with murky financial backing) to try to promote sobriety. At these places, inmates are forced to wear unfashionable clothing and attend boring meetings while being systematically

deprived of all drugs and alcohol. Although these institutions reveal the existence of a fanatic and proselytizing corps of sober people, there is no immediate reason to worry about this movement. A quick count of the relative number of such detox clinics versus the number of bars will reassure anyone that society in the whole still has its priorities straight.

*Editor's Note: Happy April Fool's Day.*