Taylor Freeman

Dr. Kuck

POLS 1101

3 October 2017

I Can Die Defending My Country, but I Cannot Drink a Beer

As of right now within the United States of America, the minimum legal drinking age is set at twenty-one. Some feel that twenty-one is an appropriate age to start engaging in the consumption of alcohol because an individual should be more responsible at the age of twenty-one rather than at the age of eighteen. Some of the main concerns within the country when considering lowering the legal drinking age includes vehicular accidents involving inexperienced drivers who are under the influence and critical health factors such as alcohol poisoning, or even death, due to lack of knowledge about appropriate alcohol consumption. On the other hand, some feel that since becoming eighteen not only makes an individual a legal adult, but also provides the right to vote, purchase tobacco products, and enlist in the military, then alcohol consumption should be legal as well. Although alcohol is now an extremely common substance throughout every inch of the country, this has not always been the case considering it was legally prohibited from the United States at one point. Throughout the continuance of time alcohol has been introduced legally, and ever since then there has not only been a national debate concerning the legal drinking age, but also fluctuation of the minimum legal drinking age ranging as low as eighteen and as high as twenty-one.

When considering the introduction of alcohol to the United States in the past, it is obvious that the minimum legal drinking age has always been a popular subject of discussion that never seems to satisfy the public. In January of 1919, the ratification of the 18th Amendment started the process that prohibited any production, transportation, or distribution of alcohol in exchange for money, which did not take effect until January of 1920 (George and Richards). Thirteen years later in December of 1933, the 21st Amendment repealed the 18th Amendment resulting in the allowance of making, selling, and consuming alcohol (George and Richards). According to James C. Fell, a previous research scientist for the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, after the prohibition of alcohol was lifted, the first minimum legal drinking age laws were created. The original age at which an individual could legally consume alcohol within the majority of the United States of America was twenty-one. However, in 1971 when the legal age for voting was reduced to eighteen by the ratification of the 26th Amendment, some states decided to lower the minimum legal drinking age as well (3). It was not until 1984 when the National Minimum Drinking Age Act was passed that all states within the country adhered to the prohibition of purchasing or possessing alcohol while under the age of twenty-one (APIS).

One main concern many people have about lowering the legal drinking age is not only safety, but more specifically vehicular safety. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the leading cause of death for teenagers involves vehicle crashes. Drivers aged between sixteen and twenty-four years old are responsible for 44% of crashes related to alcohol impairment (Drunk Driving 2017). This means that this particular age group is more likely to consume an excessive amount of alcohol which will raise the body’s blood alcohol content, and then choose to operate a motor vehicle, putting their own lives at risk and also the lives of others who do not choose drive while under the influence. Vehicle accidents are not the only worry of lowering the drinking age, however.

Another factor that aids in preventing lowering the legal age includes the amount of alcohol overdoses and deaths each year among young adults. In a study done by Amie Haas and Sergio Flores of Palo Alto University in California, only 123 out of 336 first year freshman college students were able to correctly identify the signs of alcohol poisoning without error through an online survey (59-65). This statistic proves that less than half of the students surveyed are properly educated and able to recognize actual signs of alcohol poisoning. At this rate, it is no wonder young adults are consuming too much alcohol for the body to handle.

Although alcohol poisoning is common in young adults aged 15-20, the average yearly amount of deaths only totals 44. The most popular age group known for alcohol poisoning is between the ages of 35-64. This particular group totaled 1,681 deaths within a two-year timespan (Kanny, Dafna, et al.). Therefore, this statistic contradicts the excuse that young adults is the only age group not responsible or educated enough to know a safe limit of alcohol to consume. Though it is possible that there is a higher number of alcohol overdoses in the age group of 35-64 due to the fact that these individuals can easily obtain alcohol by purchasing it themselves, whereas individuals below the age of twenty-one must find other means of possession; alcohol poisoning can happen to anyone at any age. Maturity level and responsibility level does not always depend on how old a person is. This means that an individual in their sixties could make poor decisions just as likely as someone in their teenage years could make safe decisions.

In the United States, at the age of eighteen, an individual has the right to vote, can legally purchase tobacco products, and most importantly can enlist in the military. Some say that if a person can put their life at risk in order to defend the country, then they should also be allowed to drink a beer. If turning eighteen years old gives you the title of being an adult, then there is no difference between an adult that is eighteen and an adult that is seventy-three. The same laws should be applied to these two hypothetical individuals, no matter their age, if they are both considered a legal adult.

When comparing the previously listed reasons as to whether or not the minimum drinking age should be lowered, it is obvious that the main concern preventing the minimum age from dropping is the safety of those who choose to drink irresponsibly as well as others who do not. However, it is also obvious that a person of any age can easily find themselves in a dangerous situation. It is how a person chooses to react and respond to a situation that determines the outcome. I, personally, feel that the drinking age could be lowered under certain circumstances. For example, before a person is able to renew their driving license or identification card when turning eighteen, they must take a course explaining all there is to know about alcohol, how to properly and safely consume it, and then pass an examination afterwards. This would ensure that every individual who has a driving license or identification card showing they are at least eighteen years of age has undergone a rigorous course educating them on the possible dangers of drinking alcohol, and the precautions they should take to keep themselves and others safe.

Entering the late teenage years, such as eighteen and nineteen, can be difficult because others expect individuals within this age group to act as an adult, however this group does not receive the same adult treatment as the rest of the population whom are older. Therefore, the hands of the individuals who fall within this age gap are tied when trying to please the public. This age group is expected to go to college, work, and begin the journey of life without being able to release their stress in ways that most other adults do. If the playing fields were even among all adults, aged eighteen years and older, maybe the younger population would feel more accepted and become more active members of society alongside their elders.

Work Cited

“APIS - The 1984 National Minimum Drinking Age Act.” *National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, alcoholpolicy.niaaa.nih.gov/the\_1984\_national\_minimum\_drinking\_age\_act\_2.html.

“Drunk Driving.” *NHTSA*, 27 Sept. 2017, www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drunk-driving#age.

Fell, James C. *An Examination of the Criticisms of the Minimum Legal Drinking Age 21 Laws in the United States from a Traffic-Safety Perspective [Electronic Resource] / [James C. Fell]*. [Washington, D.C.] : National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, [2008], 2008. EBSCO*host*, proxygsu-alb1.galileo.usg.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/

login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgpr&AN=gprocn644578767&site=eds-live&scope=site.

George, Robert P., and David A. J. Richards. “The 18th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.”

*National Constitution Center*, constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments

/amendment-xviii.

George, Robert P. , and David A. J. Richards. “The 21st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.”

*National Constitution Center*, constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments

/amendment-xxi.

Haas, Amie and Sergio Flores. "College Student Awareness of Signs of Alcohol Poisoning."

*Journal of Alcohol & Drug Education*, vol. 56, no. 3, Dec. 2012, pp. 59-76. EBSCO*host*, proxygsu-alb1.galileo.usg.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?

direct=true&db=rzh&AN=107944714&site=eds-live&scope=site.

Kanny, Dafna, et al. "Vital Signs: Alcohol Poisoning Deaths - United States, 2010-2012."

*MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 63, no. 53, 09 Jan. 2015, pp. 1238- 1242. EBSCO*host*, proxygsu-alb1.galileo.usg.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/

login.aspx?direct=true&db=mnh&AN=25577989&site=eds-live&scope=site.