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Lowering the Minimum Legal Drinking Age to Eighteen

For teenagers, your eighteenth birthday is one of the biggest milestones you can possibly hit. In the eyes of the law, they're deemed an 'adult'. You're granted the right to vote; your opinion now matters. My dad talks about to this day, the thrill of being able to go out to the polls and choose who would be the next leader of the free nation. You also are gifted with the unfortunate reality of jury duty and the ability to sign leases. You can also choose to put your life on the line for your country and join the Army when you turn eighteen. Serving in the military presents many more risks and dangerous situations than winding down with a beer at the end of the day. The MLDA (minimum legal drinking age) should be lowered to eighteen because doing so would remove the thrill of drinking, and help prevent injuries from alcohol related injuries.

If people in the age bracket of 18 and 21 were allowed to drink in a supervised environment, it would remove the thrill and recklessness that normally coincides with underage drinking. According to a study put out by youthfacts.com, 72.2% of high school seniors admit to have consuming alcohol with pleasurable intentions (Covey). If teenagers are going to drink anyways, why leave the age at 21? It only serves as a catalyst for audacious and irresponsible behavior that can lead to lives ended too soon. John McCardell, the former president of Middlebury College said "[The MLDA] hasn't reduced or eliminated drinking. It has simply driven it underground, behind closed doors, into the most risky and least manageable of settings."

The stereotypical drinking environment of a party encourages 'binge drinking'. Impulsive decisions like this lead to many of the 190,000 drinking-related hospital visits annually, according to the NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse). If it were legal for eighteen year olds to purchase alcohol, they would not have to resort to such unsafe means of obtaining it. We oftentimes hear about the 'wild' parties that are caused by reckless drinking. Many of the stories you hear result in someone getting severely injured, fighting, or other dangerous situations. More often than not, the characters in those stories are underage. There's an obvious trend between parties and underage drinking.

Almost every day you hear about yet another reckless twenty something-year-old that made terrible decisions with alcohol which resulted in their demise. If the drinking age was lowered, it would give people more time to figure out how to safely drink, especially if it was in a controlled, public environment. When a twenty-one year old goes out for their first drink, of course they won't know when to stop. They're finally being lifted from the heavy restrictions and being granted access to something that seemed like a myth up until that point. This can continue for months, and possibly even years. Behavior like this can lead to a plethora of unforeseen consequences later in life, such as liver failure, cirrhosis, job loss, and alienation from the ones you love most.

People who stand by the current MLDA of twenty-one will claim that it protects people on the road from having to drive alongside intoxicated eighteen year olds. In reality, the twenty-one to twenty-four year old age group has the highest percentage of drivers in fatal crashes with BAC (blood-alcohol concentration) levels of .08 or higher (Dee). People are going to be rash no matter the MLDA, and the highest concentration of alcohol-related accidents will

always rest above the age, whether it be eighteen or twenty one. This is just one of the sad realities of drinking in today's day and age. However, if youth are legally granted access to alcohol earlier on, this could make the rate drop by teaching them the value of designated drivers and not driving under the influence.

Many eighteen to twenty year old drinkers find unique and interesting ways to injure themselves when intoxicated, such as tumbling down a flight of stairs. However, most, if any, don't seek medical attention after said injuries occur. If a twenty-one year old gets intoxicated in his own house and thinks it is wise to climb a tree, only to fall down and break his leg, he can have someone drive him to the hospital where he can receive treatment. An eighteen year old in the same shoes doesn't have the ability to do that. They fear calling the paramedics or anyone to help due to the fact that they're underage and intoxicated. Thoughts such as "I'm going to get arrested," and "my parents and work are going to find out," serve as valid excuses to minors for not receiving help.

Many youth drink because of societal expectations. Drinking has always been a taboo thing in society, and underage drinking has been romanticized greatly. Movies and shows, even songs, depict underage people getting intoxicated and making bad decisions. If the MLDA was lowered, the appeal would be lessened greatly. You would no longer be considered 'edgy' for getting drunk before a huge test, or 'misunderstood' for drinking when you're sad and calling your ex-lover to ramble about how much you miss them. It's constantly referenced throughout the digital, materialistic world we find ourselves in today. If the drinking age was lowered, this expectation would cease to exist.

Germany is a prime example in that lowering the MLDA does not come along with the negative side effects. Over the past twenty-five years, the rate of intoxicated driving in Germany has almost always managed to stay lower than that of the United States, even though the MLDA is 16, and the legal BAC is .05 compared to the United State's .08 (World Health Organization). An MLDA of twenty-one encourages young adults to acquire and use false identification documents to get their alcohol. You probably remember the guy from college who would constantly talk about how he had yet another wild night running away from the police. High non-compliance with MLDA twenty-one promotes general disrespect and non-compliance with other areas of US law (Kleiman). In an era riddled with national security concerns such as terrorism, illegal immigration, and other threats, it would be better to have fewer fake IDs in circulation and more respect for the law and its enforcers.

To conclude, the drinking age should be lowered to eighteen for a slew of reasons. Not only would it decrease the amount of alcohol related deaths, but it would also lower drinking rates, make drinking a safer activity, and prevent injuries from alcohol related incidents. Having a drinking age of eighteen works and has worked in 115 countries around the world, with the most notable example being in Germany. Lowering the drinking age can only lead to good things. In normalizing this thing that is currently viewed as taboo, lowering the MLDA can only help the youth of today, as eighteen year olds will no longer have to turn to unsafe places to hang out and have a beer.

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