

Hannah Puetz

Mr. McClure

College Composition II

29 January 2015

Rogerian Essay

Draft #3

Drinking Age Dilemma

When teenagers finally turn 18, it is an exciting time for them. Turning 18 is a rite of passage that opens up a completely new world of opportunities and experiences that thus far they have not had the luxury to indulge themselves. They can now legally plunge in to the world of tattoos, piercings, tobacco, lottery tickets, and night clubs. They are also somewhat thrown into the world of adulthood. This new status comes with many new responsibilities including living on their own, paying bills, renting an apartment, paying taxes, being summoned for jury duty, and voting. These young adults are now expected to make important life decisions and are given the opportunity to make all the choices about how they want to live their lives... well almost all of the choices. The one choice that is still being withheld from these eager newbies is the privilege to drink alcoholic beverages. There has been much debate about whether the drinking age, now sitting at age 21, should be lowered to allow these 18 year-old-adults to partake in the activity, or if the allowable age should remain at age 21 and they should be denied the privilege that so many of their slightly older peers enjoy.

There are many reasons that people believe that the drinking age should stay right where it is. Firstly, most believe that 18 year-olds are not mature enough to handle alcohol responsibly, and that that maturity is not formed until the age of 21. They also argue that because of this poor decision making, there would more likely be more fatalities and injuries relating to alcohol. After instituting the MLDA-21 they found that among fatally injured drivers between the ages of 16-21, 61% of the drivers had positive BACs, or Blood Alcohol Contents, before the law change, and only 31% had positive BACs after the law change (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety).

There is also the dilemma of many teenagers still attending high school when they reach their 18th birthday. The worry is that because they are still students and legal to drink, partaking in activities where they are drinking alcohol could cause them to lose focus on their schoolwork in this critical senior year of high school. There is also concern that these adult high school students would purchase alcohol for their younger peers still attending school also. Finally, there is a fear that with 18-year-olds also being fairly new drivers, the added pressure of being new drinkers will cause an incline of traffic accidents among the 18-20 year-old age group. According to the US National Library of Medicine, lowering the drinking age to 18 would increase highway crash deaths among young people (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety).

Proponents of lowering the drinking age would argue that teenagers are going to drink whether it is legal or not and that the higher drinking age causes more young adults to drink heavily, sometimes called binge drinking. However, since the drinking age was raised in 1987, drinking-related problems in college-aged-youth have

increased. From 1982 to 1987, 46% of students reported drinking so much that they vomited compared to over 50% after the MLDA was initiated. Increases were also found in other variables such as cutting class after drinking (9% to 12%), missing class because of a hangover (26% to 28%), getting lower grades because of drinking (5% to 7%), and fighting after drinking (12% to 17%). This irresponsible “binge” drinking is most likely the result of “underground drinking,” which occurs when students drink without adult supervision in order to evade the law (Engs).

It also seems a bit unfair to most 18-year-olds that they are denied the benefit of drinking when they have been given all of the other benefits and responsibilities of adulthood. If we are going to expect them to make responsible decisions about all other aspects of their lives, then alcohol consumption should not be excluded. In most states, excluding Alabama and Nebraska whose age of majority is 19 and Mississippi whose age of majority is 21 (“The Age of Majority in America.”), 18-year-old men and women are given the opportunity to join the military and fight for our country. It seems hardly fair that we would allow these so-called “immature teens” to go overseas and fight for our rights but we don’t allow them to enjoy the right of drinking an alcoholic beverage.

Lowering the drinking age would also benefit more than just the 18 to 20-year-old whom it concerns, for it would also be good for the economy. More business at bars and restaurants would be good for business owners, and since more people would be purchasing alcoholic beverages there would be more tax income for the U.S. government.

However, keeping in mind that an 18-year-old drinking age could be detrimental to education and increase drinking-related car accidents, maybe there is a compromise that could be made. Instead of lowering the drinking age to 18, legislators could lower it to 19 years of age. This would allow another year of needed maturity for fresh young adults. Lowering the drinking age to 19 instead of 18 may also ensure that most of these new drinkers would be out of high school so it would not affect their schooling, and possibly sever many of the ties these young adults had with their younger high school aged peers. This may also cut down on “underground drinking” (Engs) by underage drinkers and binge drinking by 19 and 20 year olds since they would be allowed to drink in public bars and restaurants. This would reduce drinking-related accidents and injuries because these new alcohol consumers would be drinking in a safe and controlled environment. This would also help to decrease an 18-year-old’s rebellious attitude about alcohol consumption because he or she would only have one more year that he or she would have to wait instead of three.

So, although there are many advantages to a drinking age of 21, I think that lowering the drinking age to even 19-years-old would show many more benefits to U.S. citizens. It would reduce illegal drinking activity and accidents that could be related and give these young adults the total independence that they deserve. It would also change our nation’s economy in a very positive way. Although lowering the drinking age to 19 may have some flaws, as does any compromise, it seems to be presenting itself as the best solution to the drinking age dilemma.

Works Cited

- Engs, Ruth C. (1997, 2014). Why the drinking age should be lowered: An opinion based upon research. Indiana University: Bloomington, IN. Web. 11 Feb. 2015.
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. *PubMed*. U.S. National Library of Medicine. Elsevier Ltd., 2010. Web. 11 Feb. 2015.
- "The Age of Majority in America." *HubPages*. n.p., 16 May 2014. Web. 11 Feb. 2015.