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Defining Adulthood: The Debate of the Legal Drinking Age

Today, controversial subjects are debated heavily among the citizens of various nations. With the majority of these debates, people waste time arguing over the areas in which they disagree and therefore, never seem to come to any consensus to solve the problem. Alternately, their focus should be on trying to find the points of similarity when it comes to particular subjects in order to increase the prospects of reaching a mutually satisfactory solution. In the United States of America, there is an ongoing debate over what constitutes adulthood, when adulthood begins, and what privileges and responsibilities citizens are entitled to when they reach this stage in their lives. One particular privilege typically requiring adulthood is the consumption of alcohol. In the United States, there remains a continuous debate among its people regarding the age at which an individual should be permitted to legally consume alcohol. As with any debate, two sides exist in the argument: some people argue that the drinking age should be lower than its current standard, which is twenty-one years of age and others who say the drinking age should remain “as is”. Particularly, Ruth Ann Dailey, a writer for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette expresses her opinion on the matter in her article *Lowering the Legal Drinking Age Will Reduce Alcohol’s Allure*. Similarly, a non-profit organization known as Choose Responsibility concurs that there are multiple reasons why the minimum legal drinking age should be lowered and expresses those reasons in an article entitled, *The Minimum Legal Drinking Age should be Lowered*. On the other hand, writers at AlcholPolicyMD.com believe that the drinking age should remain at twenty-one years of age, noting their position in an article entitled, *Arguments for Lowering the Legal Drinking Age Are Not Valid.* As a whole, arguments both for and against changing the drinking age are present, but there are specific issues both sides target to support their points.

To begin, the minimum legal drinking age is a privilege that in some people’s minds helps to define when adulthood begins, a topic that is, itself, debated. One argument supporting this is the idea that other activities, though they have a risk greater than that of consuming a beer, allow citizens to participate legally at a younger age. In 1970, when the many age laws were established, a popular complaint from the people was “I’m old enough to vote and go to war but not to discuss it over a beer” (Dailey 2). Because there are other privileges that are high risk and require responsibility that eighteen years-olds can participate in, drinking should also be allowed. Furthermore, the general assumption in the U.S.A. is that a citizen becomes an adult at eighteen years of age. Strictly by law, “American society has determined that, upon turning eighteen, teenagers become adults [and therefore have many legal responsibilities] but strangely, at 18, one cannot buy a beer,” which suggests that this activity is appropriate for all adults (Choose Responsibility 2). Therefore, it does not make sense for a person to be considered legally a responsible adult who can buy cigarettes, fight in the military, and vote, but cannot be responsible enough to take a drink of alcohol. However, the counter argument stresses that the age minimum laws were put into place for specific reasons and that those reasons are rational. Although “these ages may appear arbitrary, but they take into account the requirements, risks, and benefits of each act” in order to promote safety and keep the country running as smoothly as possible (AlcoholPolicyMD.com 3). So, even though the minimum legal age for some activities is eighteen, it does not mean that all activities that have higher age restrictions should be lowered because certain activities simply bring risk and require more maturity. In summary, the age at which an individual becomes an adult and all the responsibilities that came with this achievement are disputed each day, and the subject of the appropriate age for the legal alcohol consumption is part of this dispute.

Additionally, when it comes to the issue of alcohol consumption and the age at which a citizen of any state should be entitled to drink legally, one debate concerns the idea that individuals are more likely to drink underage because alcohol is unlawful and, therefore, a means for them to rebel. For example, if the drinking age were to be lowered, there would be less of an allure for teenagers to participate in underage drinking. Specifically, the laws enforcing a twenty-one year old as the age for legal alcohol consumption “have driven drinking underground, making it more attractive and more dangerous” (Dailey 2). Since teenagers are constantly looking for ways to rebel against authority, drinking is one of the first things they turn to, which is the reason why the legal drinking age should be lowered. In contrast, the opposing view believes that lowering the drinking age will only increase even younger teenagers such as those of the years of early high school, and even those in elementary school, to begin consuming alcohol. In their opinion, “legal access to 18 years-olds will provide more opportunities for younger teens to obtain illegally from older peers, making enforcement that that much more difficult among high school students” (AlcoholPolicyMD.com 2). With easier access for younger citizens to alcohol, there will only be an increase in the number of episodes of binge drinking and further negative affect on children over time. All in all, there is controversy over the drinking age involving the idea of its appeal for those under the legal age.

Furthermore, the topic of prevention education is a much-debated subject with the legal alcohol consumption among citizens in America. For instance, education about the risks of consuming alcohol, as well as how to drink responsibly, needs to be provided to teenagers in order to foster prevention of irresponsible actions involving the use of alcohol. Particularly, it is imperative that “colleges should be given the chance to educate students, who in all other respects are adults, in the appropriate use of alcohol” since campuses house many of the underage drinkers (Dailey 2). If college students are given more information about the effects of alcohol and prevention courses are available, they should be less likely to drink to excess. Moreover, there are multiple opportunities for this education to be given and distributed amongst our students that could help foster responsible drinking into people’s lives. Today, “there are both formal education, through schools and institutions, and informal education through family and peers” which means there are programs available dedicated to making a difference and there to help keep drinkers under control (Choose Responsibility 3). In other words, with more pervasive reminders to always be mindful of one’s actions involving alcohol, there will be a reduction in the number of drinkers under the age of twenty-one. Instead, there are others who believe that education on the matter of alcohol consumption for those under age has never proved to be successful in reducing the number of drinkers. It is their opinion that “responsible consumption comes with maturity, and maturity largely comes as certain protective mechanisms, such as marriage and a first job, begin to take hold” (AlcoholPolicyMD.com 2). Accordingly, the drinking age should stay where it is because without successful programs, there is no chance for limiting of the problems drinking has caused in the past. Overall, the effects of alcohol education are debated when the discussion of whether or not to lower the drinking age is addressed.

The legal age of alcohol consumption is disputed among the citizens of America, but arguments revolve around the same subjects such as, the age of adulthood, alcohol’s allure, prevention education, To emphasize, Dailey believes that lowering the drinking age with decrease the drive and motivation underage individuals have for alcohol consumption because it will be allowed, rather than performed underground. Moreover, the argument for a change in the minimum legal drinking age includes the fact that minors drink despite the law, other countries have lower drinking ages, and education is available. Still, there are those that firmly believe the current age is accurate and should remain in place. So, what does this say about the United States? Clearly, our country is divided on this subject, as we our about many, but truly how can the age of adulthood be defined? As of now, we define it by a number and the privileges that coincide with it, with legal alcohol consumption excluded from those privileges. How can we expect to ever come to a consensus if the concept of adulthood is one that seemingly will never be concretely defined? At this point in time, it is fair to say that people have differing opinions there is no evidence to think that a resolution will soon be found. Nevertheless, if a solution is to be found, it is necessary for compromise to be made and reasonable debate to be accepted.

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