**The New American Epidemic-Draft 1**

We have all done it, or will at some point. As much will power you claim to possess, the temptation to consume alcohol while you are underage is just too great. You are in college, the turning point where adolescents turn into adults, and childish immaturity evolves into rational decision-making. Yet, somewhere in the middle of this great transition, there is always the urge to try and have the best of both worlds. That is, act like a wild child and have a good time, while under the influence of an adult privilege.

Imagine this scenario: you are a college freshman, attending your first real college party. There is a keg of beer, and plenty of liquor going around. Everywhere you look, people have red plastic Solo cups in their hands. What those cups are filled with is blatantly obvious to you. There are people around you being loud and acting foolish. Then, it's your turn. A cup is passed your way, and you take it. Never having drunk before, you decide to taste what you have in your hands, though you have no idea what it really is. A couple of cups later, the ability to act rational and control yourself has diminished, and after talking to random people, you pass out.

That scenario is as close to reality as it gets for underage college students. In society today, underage drinking is a major problem. It contributes to poor decision making, which may result in driving under the influence and even fatal car crashes. However, the problems that result from being intoxicated never seem to be in the mind of those that decide to drink. Why do the underage even decide to drink? Is it really a necessity to consume alcohol in order to have a good time? Many of those people who believe that it is in fact a necessity, fail to remember that alcohol still remains a drug. It is a psychoactive depressant that is extremely addicting and alters the way you think, feel, and act. From beer to liquor, alcohol comes in many different ways and flavors. It can be consumed in an even more dizzying array of methods. The fact that it comes in such a wide variety makes it even more appealing to the masses.

College is a place to have fun while at the same time, prepare for your future. But truth be told, the words alcohol and college are two very closely related words. Many people have the impression that a party isn't a party without alcohol. What exactly is alcohol? According to Christine Bichler's "Teen Drinking," "Alcohol is a common name for a substance known as ethyl alcohol. It is created through a process called fermentation. In fermentation, grain, fruit, honey or other foods containing sugar are mixed with yeast. Yeast, a living organism, consumes the alcohol and produces carbon dioxide along with ethyl alcohol.

There is a disturbing increase in this underage drinking trend. My purpose is to shed some light as to why it's so popular and even to analyze the risks and long-term effects of drinking at a young age. To help answer some of my questions, I decided to interview and shadow a student in such a tempting environment. Brandon "R." (Who will remain anonymous for the purpose of his confidentiality) is a college freshman at Florida State University. Located in Tallahassee, Florida, Florida State University has a reputation of being the number one party school in America. With such a reputation, the answers to my questions should be easy to find. Brandon "R." is currently eighteen years old and has previously never consumed alcohol before coming to college. I asked him, "What tempted you to drink for the first time?" His answer? After several moments of silence and "Um..," he finally answered "Peer pressure." Perhaps the fact that it took him several seconds to come up with a reason, implies that he doesn't really know why with certainty. Peer pressure is very influential in college. Especially in Brandon's case, where being a freshman makes him vulnerable to try and fit in. I then proceeded to ask Brandon, "Can you now say that you like alcohol?" He replied with a smile on his face, "I hate Jack Daniels...." When asked to elaborate on what he meant, he said, "Because it made me sick to a point where I threw up." From an objective point of view, it is obvious that he, like many other underage drinkers, do not know their "limit." That is, where to stop drinking before you have too much. Remember, too much of anything is a bad thing. Many people drink past their limit because they want to reach that state of drunkenness and euphoria where they can act on impulse and not be blamed for their actions based on their circumstance. A closer look at Brandon's situation also shows that he now enjoys alcohol. It can be inferred from his example that many first-time drinkers enjoy what they taste and wouldn't say no if offered future alcohol.

I also found out that Brandon is a pledge for a fraternity here at Florida State University. The fraternity will also remain nameless for specific reasons. I asked him if being in such an organization has had an influence on his drinking. He replied, "Most of the time I drink is when I'm with my brothers." He also admitted that there were several cases when the fraternity would gather for the sole purpose of intoxicating the pledges. Being a pledge, it is almost impossible to say no to an established brother in the fraternity. Once again, peer pressure is to blame for this example of underage drinking. What is the answer to solve this problem? It is simple - do not surround yourself in an environment that is going to tempt you to drink. Who you are with and your surroundings have a tremendous influence on your actions.

Brandon's instance brings to light the influence that Greek life has on underage drinking. Fraternities and sororities play a big role in providing the underage the opportunity to consume alcohol. Remember, since alcohol can only be legally purchased at the age of twenty-one, it is not hard to have an older member of the organization to provide the alcohol for others. I was granted permission to observe a social event between fraternities and sororities called "pomping." It is a pre-homecoming tradition that consists of a fraternity being paired with a sorority. Each brother is coupled up with a sister and is traditionally expected to purchase alcohol for the other. As shocking as it may seem, there has been no known case of it being stopped. Could it be that the police and administrators "turn their back" on such a long established tradition?

I have attended several college parties myself, in hopes of documenting this trend first hand. Curiosity is what persuaded me to come; and amazement is the reaction I left with. It’s shocking to see the creativity involved in getting intoxicated. There are keg stands, where several people hold a person nearly upside down, and allow the person to drink straight from the keg. Then there is “beer pong”, a twisted version of ping-pong, in which the object of the game is to bounce a ping-pong ball into the opponent’s cups containing beer. Once a ball is made in a cup, the person must drink the beer in it. There was also another drinking game called “flip cup” going on, as well as people taking shots of liquor and chasing it with beer. What is frightening about all of this is the fact that most of these underage drinkers are unaware they are “binge drinking.” Bingeing refers to consuming an excessive amount of alcohol within a short period of time. In fact, according to “Alcohol 101: An overview for teens” by Margaret O. Hyde and John F. Setaro, an estimated 2.6 million teenagers are unaware that a person can die from alcohol overdose. An overdose occurs when the liver, which is responsible for metabolizing the alcohol, cannot keep up with the amounts of alcohol being consumed. “Therefore, the body simply shuts down and death from heart or respiratory failure can be the result.” Scariest of all is that friends may think a person who has passed out just needs to sleep the alcohol off. In fact, this may end up with the person never waking back up.

As college students realize they are becoming adults, they are faced with new opportunities and privileges. With this new burden, comes great responsibility. Being aware of the effects, and risks, both short-term and long-term is vital in their maturity. Aside from the already mentioned risks of overdosing and driving under the influence, drinking under the legal age has many other risks. Behind cancer and heart disease, alcohol is the third most “preventable killer.” However, alcohol deaths typically occur at a much younger age than the first two threats.

Long term effects of alcohol consumption range from cancer to high blood pressure and even to strokes. Drinking alcohol at a young age can even affect the reproductive system, hindering a person’s ability to conceive a child. The reach of alcohol does not stop there. A child born from an alcoholic may even have disabilities or be born with a handicap, even be born prematurely. For college students, and those underage that believe they are too young to worry about such risks so far in advance, alcohol can affect you right as we speak.

How would it sound to tell your parents after your first semester in college that you are failing? Alcohol and partying are the two biggest distractions for any student. They are the temptations that will lure you away from your goals, aspirations and your focus. “Alcohol usage is involved in 40% of all academic problems and 28% of all dropouts. Students who make low averages such as D’s and F’s drink, on average, three times as much as students with A’s.”

According to the federal government, college drinking contributes to 1,700 deaths per year. [ cont. with NPR broadcasting] …………….