

## Media and Adolescent Drinking

### Introduction

It is said that it takes about 8,460 bolts, properly assembled, to make an automobile and *one* drunken nut to scatter it haphazardly all over the road (Adapted from QuoteGarden.com). Egyptian, Greek, and Indian mythologies are replete with stories of the mighty kings falling prey to the power of intoxicated drinks. The power of alcohol does not seem to have waned over the years; contrarily, it seems rejuvenated through the media campaigns, and advertisements. One has to agree with the words of Joan Dunayer in her article "Here's to Your Health", since drinking is portrayed as having positive effects, rather than negative effects in the media, the adolescent youth tend to overlook or take lightly the dangers of drinking. The following paragraphs shall argue that though adolescents are aware of the evils of drinking, peer pressure and powerful marketing from liquor manufacturers have kept alive the practice of drinking in adolescents. It shall illustrate with examples and relevant quotations as to why there may be grounds to agree with Joan Dunayer.

### The State, Society and Media

Drinking was widely prevalent and a major cause for concern in the earlier part of 1980s; the federal government's survey on the subject states that in the year 1982 alone, the number of drivers under the age of 21 who were involved in fatal crashes was 10,270 and that, "Forty-three percent (4,393) of these drivers were deemed to have been drinking prior to their crashes." (U.S. Department of Transportation Report 1982-98, p 3) Though a series of federal and state laws like the Uniform Drinking Age Act in 1984, and the Zero Tolerance Laws, the Minimum Legal Drinking Age was increased to 21 years by 1988 (U.S. Department of Transportation Report 1982-98, p 4), the report admits in its concluding section that though youth drinking did decrease

during 1982-92; however it warns that, “Most youth still drink; a majority drink at least monthly; a substantial minority binge drink regularly.” (p 5) It is clear that while being able to suppress the problem of under age drinking. Hence, the basic problem as mentioned in Dunayer’s essay is valid and alive.

A study on the drinking habits of high-school students and its consequences reports that alcohol consumption is very much a “serious problem” for this student-category, and that a “sizable number of students reported frequent binge drinking as well as numerous negative consequences associated with their drinking.” (Arata, Jeremy & Tims p 1) The alarming thing, according to the report is that most of them did not perceive their drinking binges to be a problem. Rather they seem to consider it as a way of marking their group affinity as rightly pointed out by Dunayer.

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has warned that elders must educate/guide children regarding some of the advertisements seen in the media today. It also warns that “most of the time the impact is not so immediate or obvious”, but the change “occurs slowly as children see and hear certain messages over and over” (p 1). This is especially so when “alcohol [is] shown as cool and attractive, not unhealthy and deadly” (AAP p 1). The above message accurately supports the stand taken by Dunayer that, the myth of alcohol drinking added to the attractiveness of the opposite sex, perpetrated by the media advertisements, does influence the youth. Furthermore, research on the subject reveals that, “Adolescents may have known they were supposed to find PSAs [pro-social advertisements] more compelling, or at some logical level they may have found them more compelling. Still, they were more moved by the beer ads” (Austin, Fujioka & Pinkleton 1), lending more substance to agree with Dunayer’s stand.

## Conclusion

Therefore, one has to agree that though the youth of today do seem to be aware of the evils of drinking, they are unable to break their peer pressure, or resist the pull of illusory culture perpetrated by a section of the media. It may envisage a strong motivation from all sections of the society to curb the trend, and redeem the youth from the clutches of the monster called 'drinking'.

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## List of Works Cited

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