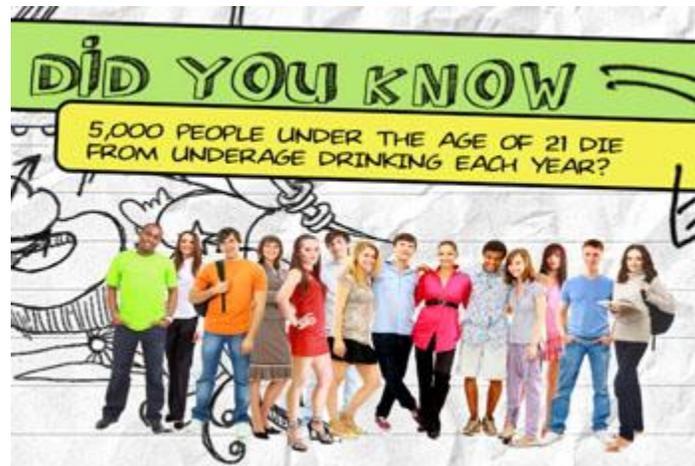


MYTHS AND REALITIES OF UNDERAGE DRINKING

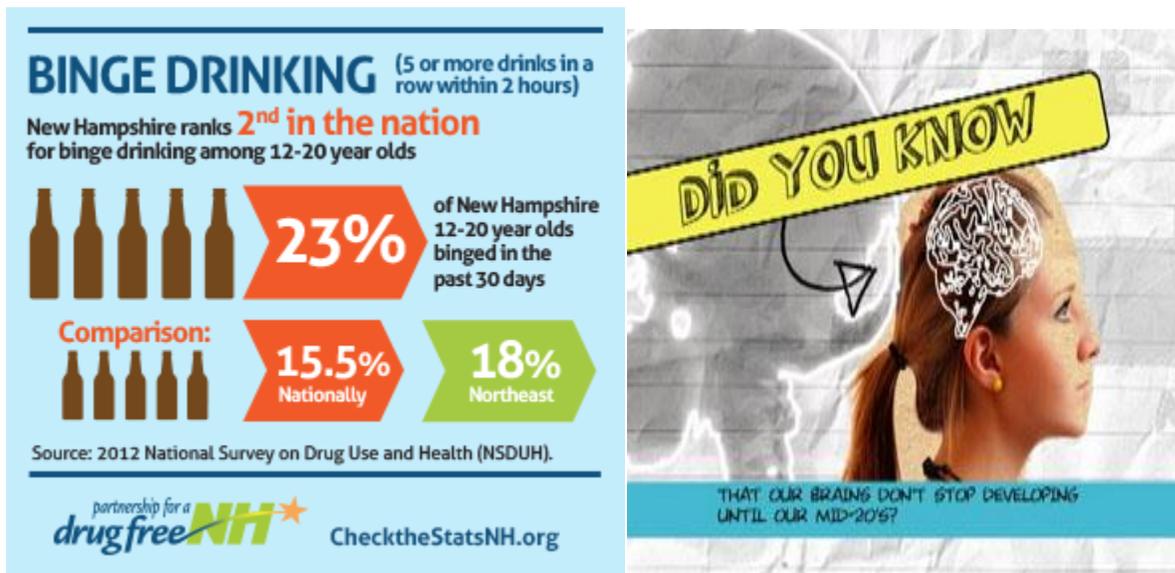
- Drinking before age 21 will cause you to lose 10% of your brain power.
- Legal Age 21 keeps people under 21 from actually consuming alcohol.
- Legal Age 21 is solely responsible for the reduction in alcohol-related traffic fatalities.
- All we need to do to cut back on underage drinking is to enforce Legal Age 21 more strictly.
- In 1984, Congress enacted a national minimum drinking age.
- Prohibition works.
- 25% of alcohol consumed in the United States is consumed by underage drinkers.
- It is OK for parents to serve alcohol to their underage children and their children's friends in the privacy of the home.
- "The drinking age is working better in blue-collar America than it is in Ivy League America." (Chuck Hurley, executive director of MADD)



Myth: Drinking before age 21 will cause you to lose 10% of your brain power.

Reality: What exactly is brain power? We wondered the same thing. Nowhere in scientific literature can you find reference to "brain power" or any statement that provides younger drinkers can lose a certain percentage of it. The above statement, which can be found on the MADD website, represents a misinterpretation of sophisticated research. It dangerously oversimplifies the conclusions made by many neuroscientists who research the effects of alcohol on the adolescent brain. Their research, all performed on laboratory rats, clearly demonstrates a connection between alcohol abuse and detriments to the developing brain, especially in terms of

memory storage and processing. It does not make any assertions about percent loss of "brain power."



Myth: Legal Age 21 keeps people under 21 from actually consuming alcohol.

Reality: Legal Age 21 has failed utterly at its goal of protecting young people from the dangers of excessive alcohol use. To cite an alarming statistic from the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth: 96% of the alcohol drunk by 15-20 year-olds is consumed when the drinker is having five or more drinks at a time. The field of neuroscience tells us that this has devastating consequences for developing brains. Since Legal Age 21, less young people are drinking, but those who choose to drink are drinking more. Young peoples' drinking is moving to the extremes: between 1993 and 2001, 18-20 year-olds showed the largest increase in binge drinking episodes. This trend should serve as a call to action for parents, educators, and lawmakers, for while moderate consumption represents little harm to young people and may even be psychologically beneficial, excessive and abusive consumption-binge drinking-spells disastrous consequences for our nation's youth.

Myth: Legal Age 21 is solely responsible for the reduction in alcohol-related traffic fatalities.

Reality: While Legal Age 21 may have played in role in the decline of alcohol-related traffic fatalities documented over the past two decades, it is impossible to claim a cause and effect relationship. Instead, the decline represents the cumulative effect of a series of changes that have combined to make driving under the influence the target of social disapproval in the United States. Motor vehicles are safer, air bags are required by law, law enforcement has been made more vigorous with improvements in Breathalyzer and radar technology, the legal BAC limit is lower, designated drivers--a term unknown before the mid-1980s--are used frequently, and, perhaps most importantly, seatbelt use has increased from about 14% in 1983 to 80% in 2004.

All of these changes have combined to create a set of societal norms and attitudes that promote sober and responsible driving and discourage drunken driving.

Your teens are listening. What are you saying?



Myth: All we need to do to cut back on underage drinking is to enforce Legal Age 21 more strictly.

Reality: It seems like a simple answer: "all we need to do to keep kids from drinking is enforce Legal Age 21." But, if it were the possible, we would have brought an end to underage drinking long ago. Legal Age 21 has been in place for over 20 years across the nation and there remains a complete lack of consistency in how it is carried out and enforced. One study predicts that only two out of every 1,000 cases of underage drinking results in citation or arrest. Such low rates of enforcement present inadequate deterrence to young people under 21 who choose to drink. If the 21 year-old drinking age were enforceable, it is unbelievable that we would have the problem of reckless and irresponsible drinking by young people that we have in America today.



Myth: In 1984, Congress enacted a national minimum drinking age.

Reality: Despite that fact that Legal Age 21 is the law of the land in America, the right to set any drinking age remains in the states' control. The National Minimum Drinking Age Act effectively established a nationwide limit by removing 10% of annual federal highway funding from states that chose an age below 21.

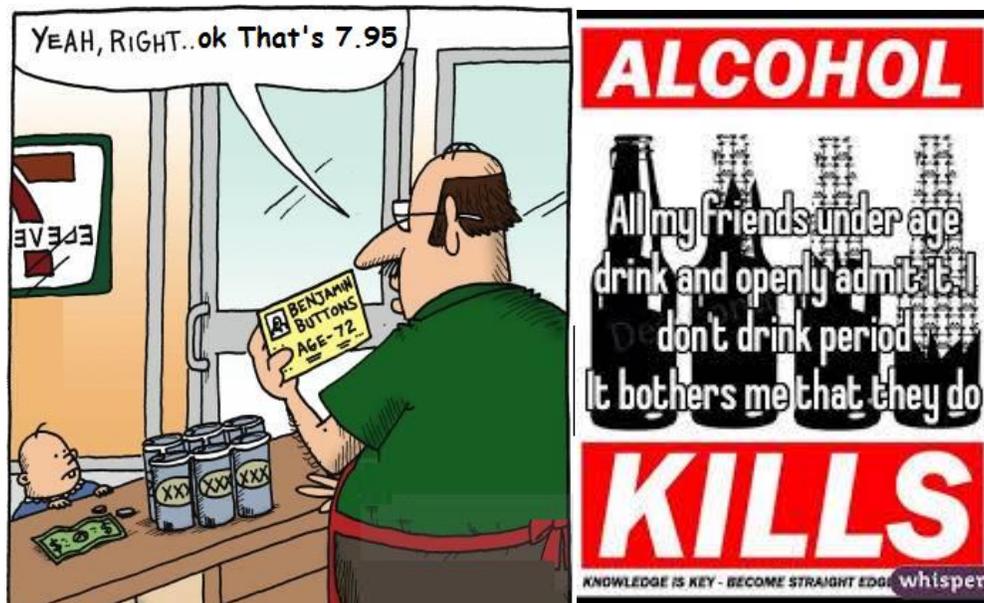
Myth: Prohibition works.

Reality: It doesn't. It didn't work during the 1920s and it isn't working now. Prohibition--the only amendment to the US Constitution that has ever been repealed--was a failed social experiment that led to smuggling, violence, and organized crime while doing little to reduce the negative and harmful consequences of excessive alcohol use on American society. The Prohibition culture of bathtub gin, rum runners, speakeasies is echoed clearly in the keg parties, pre-partying, and drinking games of today. Both Prohibition and Legal Age 21 created a national climate in which violation of the law is encouraged and socially acceptable behavior is criminalized--subversive consequences in a society like ours which is governed by the rule of law.



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Myth: 25% of alcohol consumed in the United States is consumed by underage drinkers.

Reality: This widely-cited statistic is just plain wrong. It was published in *Teen Tippers: America's Underage Drinking Epidemic*, a report generated in 2002 by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA). According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the agency that provided that statistic and was misquoted by CASA, the actual figure is 11.4%.

Myth: It is OK for parents to serve alcohol to their underage children and their children's friends in the privacy of the home.

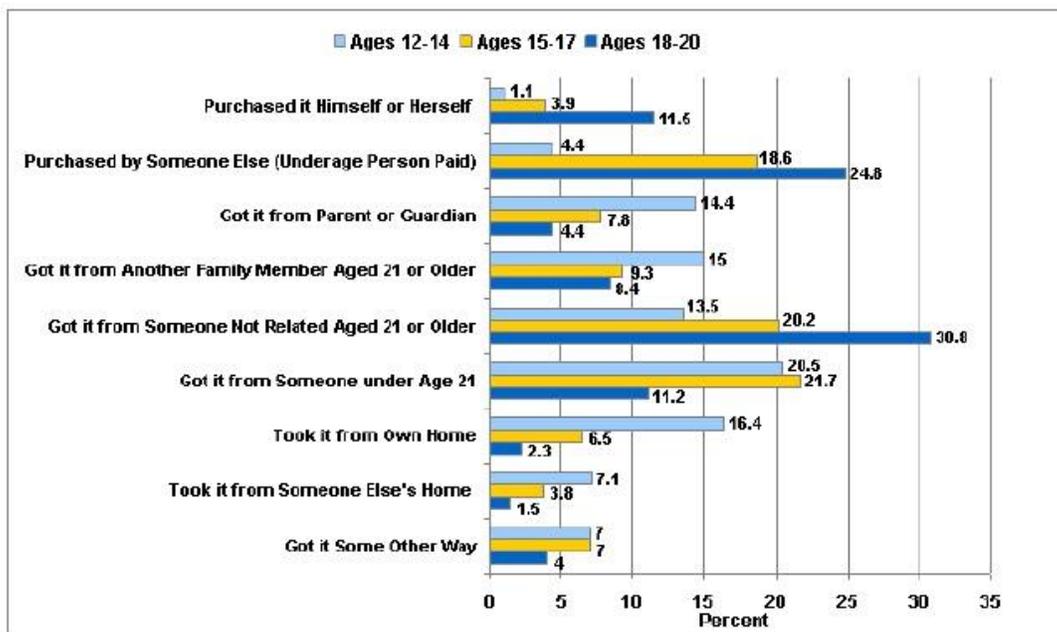
Reality: While parents in 30 states may choose to provide alcohol to their own underage children, it is never legal for parents or guardians to provide alcohol people under 21 other than their children. There is little consistency nationwide in the laws governing furnishing of alcohol to young adults--in 20 states, parents are never allowed to provide alcohol to their under 21 children, while in the remaining 30, parents may choose to provide their children with alcohol at any age.

Myth: "The drinking age is working better in blue-collar America than it is in Ivy League America." (Chuck Hurley, executive director of MADD)

Reality: Reckless and excessive alcohol consumption by young people--a direct by-product of Legal Age 21--is a national problem. Binge drinking is commonplace on college campuses from Massachusetts to California, from Wisconsin to Texas, and virtually everywhere in between. It plagues neighborhoods and high schools, especially in rural areas where teens have little else to do besides consume large quantities of alcohol and play drinking games in basements and at

backyard parties. Legal Age 21 and its many unintended consequences know no class distinction. In fact, underage drinking is usually more prevalent in rural areas--Chuck Hurley's so-called "blue collar America"--where drinking represents the only late-night or weekend social outlet for many teens. To cite a recent statistic from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (a US governmental agency), rates of drinking among persons aged 12-20 were highest in North and South Dakota (42.7% and 39.1% respectively). A recent *New York Times* article, "Youthful Binge Drinking Fueled By Boredom of the Open West" (September 2, 2006) cast a stark portrait of alcohol abuse by young people in the rural west, namely Wyoming, where "Barely five people per square mile live on the high, wind-raked ground." Boredom and curiosity combine in Wyoming's remote townships to create a climate where teens believe there is little else to do drink. This dangerous environment is perpetuated by Legal Age 21, which places an allure around alcohol that appeals to all young people, from the Harvard freshman, to the 15 year-old in rural North Dakota.

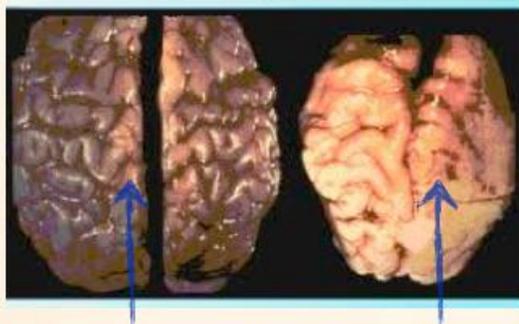
Figure 2.15 – Source of Last Alcohol Used Among Past-Month Alcohol Users Ages 12 to 20, by Age Group: 2008-2009 (SAMHSA, CBHSQ, NSDUH, special data analysis, 2010)



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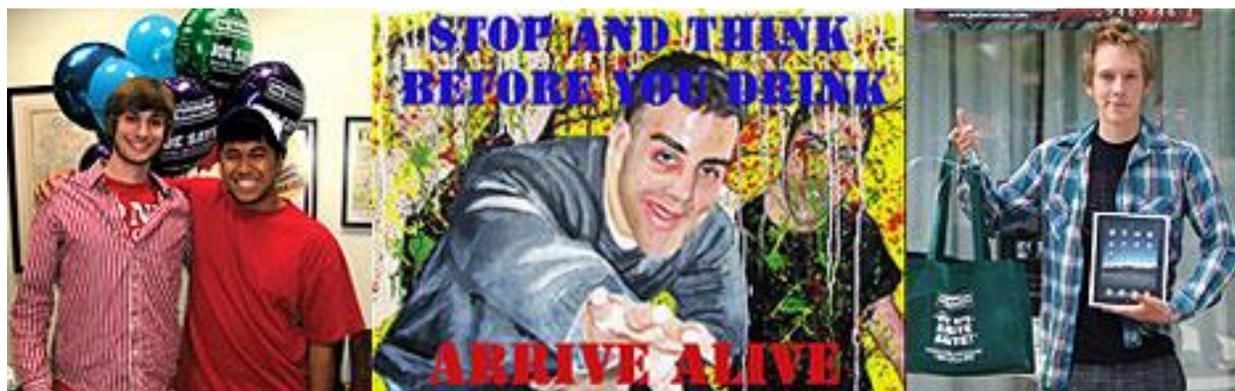
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EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL ON YOUR BRAIN



Before Alcohol After Alcohol

Activeness of the brain



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