

Breanna Hildebrand

Professor Sheil

ENG01A MM

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### Alcohol: A Hard-Hitting Topic

Alcohol has become a massive problem in America that not only creates physical harm throughout years of use, but can also put many people in harm in other ways. Growing up, I know I personally was told many times the dangers of alcohol, but I never took any meaning from any of it until I reached an age when the issue became relevant. As a child, I witnessed the effects alcohol can have on a family and how easily alcoholism can be passed down from father to son. I was told that drinking caused many damaging, long-lasting effects on a person's body and that drinking and driving put many people in danger; however, my step-father's drinking problem became more of a joke within the family than a serious threat, so I never took an interest in the terrible decisions he was making or how they affected the people around him.

When I entered high school and began making new friends, I realized that I wasn't the only person with an alcoholic in my family. I remember spending the night at a friend's house, and her dad stumbled in the door very late at night. He called her into another room and began yelling at her for a chore she neglected to do. She ran back into the room with tears falling down her face and a massive welt on her arm, begging me to leave. The next day and every other week, I would recognize a new bruise upon her face or body, and when asked why, she would tell me she wished her father would stop drinking. I couldn't help but notice a few similar characteristics between my step-father and her own. I failed to understand the importance and harm in alcohol until I had witnessed it in more harmful situations than my own. Within the following weeks, I

realized that although alcohol is not the only cause of violence, it is a key property among violent and harmful situations, which can be prevented with public awareness and recognition of the correlation between the two.

Many may see the fact that both of our fathers had been drinking, but only one of them chose to create a harmful situation, and claim that this is a clear case that alcohol does not create violent situations, and instead it is the person himself who makes the decision whether or not to create violence. Because the relationship between alcohol and violence is very complicated, many think that alcohol is an excuse for domestic violence rather than a clear reason for it, and they claim that each person has a decision to make him/herself to create violence and alcohol does not play a major role in that decision- making process; however, alcohol may play a major role in formulating an excuse as to why an individual chooses to create violent situations after the fact.

Larry W. Bennet explains in “Alcohol and Domestic Violence” that “While an abuser’s use of alcohol may have an effect on the severity of the abuse or the ease with which the abuser can justify his actions, an abuser does not become violent because drinking causes him to lose control of his temper” (par. 1). He goes on to explain that alcohol is merely an excuse. He admits that there is a strong correlation between alcohol and domestic violence, but because it is so complicated, there is no hard evidence linking the two. There is a link between men with specific personality traits and chemical imbalances in the brain and the likeliness of abuse within an intimate relationship, but the evidence isn’t enough to say this is a specific cause of violence (par. 6).

In two very interesting experiments, researchers used electric shocks to measure the relationship between aggression and alcohol. Catherine West elaborates in “The Effect Of

Alcohol On Aggression” on an experiment done by Peter Giancola, a University of Kentucky psychologist, and his student Michelle Corman, who decided to explore the correlation between alcohol and violence. This experiment consisted of a group of young men who consumed a couple of drinks and another who stayed sober. They all had to compete in games that required quick responses. Losing a round of the game meant receiving a shock, and winning meant transmitting a shock to someone else (par. 3). The researchers also distracted some of the participants with more tests and games, assuming they would be less likely to react in a negative way to the shock because “alcohol does affect the user’s ability to perceive, integrate and process information” (Bennet par. 3). By distracting inebriated participants, researchers expected the shock to be less painful and the participant to be less likely to be cruel to the person who shocked him. West explains that the inebriated participants who had nothing to distract them were much more often rude to their partners, which meant willingly shocking other participants with higher voltages.

Turning to facial expression as evidence of violence, Buddy T. discusses a similar study done in “Alcohol Facilitates Aggression.” “Practically, facial expression is probably one of the best ways of knowing if someone is angry,” explains Robert O. Pihl, professor of psychology and psychiatry at McGill University. “Even infants can detect that emotionality. And frankly, how else are you going to measure anger? Asking somebody doesn't work because people are not very good at discerning their emotions, and sometimes they just lie. That's why Paul Ekman's Facial Action Coding System has been proven so valuable in discerning lying, anger, and other kinds of things” (Buddy, par. 7). With this insight, he began researching the correlation between aggression and alcohol with an experiment, and just as in the previous study, “participants were told they were then going to compete against another individual on a reaction time task, during

which they might receive electric shocks from their opponent." While engaged in this fictitious task, which included both high and low shock levels or "provocation," the participants' experience of anger was unobtrusively assessed using the Facial Action Coding System, which classifies all observable facial activity into 44 unique "action units" (par. 5). Throughout the entire experiment, intoxicated participants were more likely to convey expressions of anger than sober participants and were more likely to act out in violence when exhibiting these aggressive expressions. Although many things may cause stress or anger in everyday life, this experiment has shown that alcohol helps people act on these aggressive and violent emotions without regard to the consequences at the time.

Violence is something that cannot be easily prevented, but the massive correlation between alcohol and violence cannot be overlooked and must be prevented. Alcohol is not the only cause of violence, and banning it will not completely prevent violence. However, alcohol is a key element in creating violent and harmful situations, and there must be regulations and steps taken to prevent this from happening any further. With this research we can see the root of anger and the many ways that alcohol enables a person to lose control of his/her sense of right and wrong. Alcohol is a clear element in creating violent and harmful situations. Some preventative measures are discussed in "Intimate Partner Violence and Alcohol Fact Sheet," such as reducing alcohol availability, regulating alcohol prices, treatment for alcohol disorders, and screening and brief interventions (par. 18). This article also states many situations, mixed with alcoholics, can take a violent turn. By researching these statistics, causes, and solutions, we can potentially take a strong hold on the outbreak of aggressive behavior caused by alcoholism in America and stop it. These may seem like harsh measures to be taken, but many other countries have been successful in taking these vigilant measures, and we must follow in their footsteps to help end

violence caused by alcohol in America.

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