

GROWN UP KIDS 

Should We Lower the Drinking Age or Ban Cellphones?



MARCH 29, 2010

KARIN KASDIN 

My seventeen-year old son asked if he and his friends could toast the arrival of 2010 with a glass of champagne at our home on New Year's Eve. The kids, all of whom are polite, well-brought-up young people, were spending the night in my basement. It was a no-brainer for me. Except that it wasn't. Of course the kids could celebrate with a few sips of the bubbly. Except, no they couldn't. What about [Elisa Kelly and George Robinson](#) who, in 2007 spent 27 months in jail for allowing alcohol at their eighteen-year-old son's after-prom party? Was I willing to risk a diet of bread and water just so my kid's friends would think I was a totally groovy parent? I wasn't...willing to risk it or totally groovy. (Any parent who still uses the word *groovy* probably isn't groovy at all... or cool or awesome or chill or...*whatever*.) I refused to allow private, monitored, light drinking to occur at my home, not because I am a prude about social drinking, but because I am afraid of cold, dark, places with bars on the windows.



My son is now eighteen. He is required to register for the selective service. If, God forbid, a draft is instituted, he may be asked to risk his life for his country. The fact that he can be asked to die without ever having been allowed to have a beer is ludicrous to me, and I seem to be in good company.

Last year [60 Minutes produced a feature](#) about a consortium of more than 100 college presidents, including the heads of Dartmouth, Virginia Tech, and Duke, who signed a declaration stating that the 21 year old drinking age is not working. It's amazing that any of these presidents are still standing or still in their jobs after the slaughter they suffered from groups such as MADD. The presidents claim that the lowered drinking age has done nothing to slow or curtail the amount of binge drinking on college campuses, and may, in fact, have accelerated it. Read the story [here](#).

Remember Columbine? Eric Harris was eighteen years old and legally able to possess firearms. Is anyone else experiencing cognitive dissonance with this?

John McCardell, former president of Middlebury College, said, "The law has been an abysmal failure. It hasn't reduced or eliminated drinking. It has simply driven it underground, behind closed doors, into the most risky and least manageable of settings."

Case in point: [Gordie Bailey](#), a freshman at the University of Colorado in Boulder who died from alcohol poisoning in 2004 while undergoing a fraternity initiation. He was deposited unconscious on a couch in the library by students who were afraid of the punishment they would be subjected to if they called 911.

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And speaking of punishments, my oldest son was severely punished when the RAs in his freshman dorm at Boston University found out that he had hosted a party in his room and alcohol had been served. The university banished him from the dorm and gave us ten days to find him off-campus housing. We were furious at him and rightfully so. He showed flagrant disrespect for the rules. But what kind of punishment was this? Our poor boy was forced by the university to live in his own apartment where he could throw as many unsupervised parties as he liked and serve as much booze as he could amass with his fake ID. My son, (who, just for the record, does not have a drinking problem and is now married, gainfully employed and a credit to BU and his parents) was going to drink at college whether or not drinking was permitted. Most parents' children drink at college. I would have preferred supervision. I would have slept better at night knowing that if he overdid it, he could have been taken to the infirmary without being turned in to the cops.

What about the statistics that **MADD** and other groups insist support the current laws? According to McCardell, even as the drunken driving deaths decreased for 18-21 year olds by 13% since the drinking law went into effect, deaths of 21-24 year olds have increased. We have simply moved the age of fatality up a few years. And drunken driving deaths are not the only casualties at issue here.

Alcohol related deaths of 18-21 year olds are increasing at an alarming rate despite the fact that these young people are not supposed to be drinking. The surgeon general says that more than 3000 Americans under the age of 21 are dying each year of alcohol-related causes. If the drinking age were lowered schools would be more inclined to offer alcohol education. We need to arm young adults with the information they need to drink responsibly, perhaps requiring them to pass a test before they are given a "license" to drink. Why not toughen the DUI laws? One violation and your license will be revoked?

And what about cellphones? Last year nearly 6000 deaths and more than 500,000 injuries occurred as a result of texting while driving. **Recent studies** have shown that even talking on the phone without texting can be as fatal as driving while drunk. Distracted drivers are as serious a threat as drunk ones and more difficult to prosecute. There is no blood test that can reveal if a driver was talking or texting while driving. Phone records have been shown to be inconclusive. A large number of these accidents are caused by teenage drivers. Do we ban teenagers from owning cellphones until they are 21?

I did not allow my underage son to drink on New Year's Eve. Throughout the night my husband and I paid surprise intermittent visits to the kids in the basement to see if we could catch them in the act. We found no evidence of contraband. The next day I went downstairs to begin my New Year's resolution to exercise more. As I hopped on the elliptical I caught sight of a paper bag on top of the refrigerator in the storage area. Inside was a receipt for a bottle of champagne. Groovy.

There are a million websites dedicated to this issue. To view an objective list of all the pros and cons of lowering the drinking age [click here](#).

Photo by **Jeffrey**

Karin Kasdin

Karin Kasdin is a playwright, author and essayist whose books include *Oh Boy Oh Boy Oh Boy: Confronting Motherhood, Womanhood and Selfhood in a Household of Boys* and *Watsamatta U: A Get-a-Grip Guide to Staying Sane Through Your Child's College Application ...*

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MC says:

Great article...It also should be noted that it is often much easier for those under the age of 21 to obtain illicit drugs than it is for them to obtain alcohol. My high school and college dealers never asked for ID. Kids who are unable to legally buy alcohol will turn to marijuana, cocaine, prescription drugs, heroin, etc., which, aside from marijuana, are equally, if not more dangerous and addictive than alcohol.

Ultimately, it all begins with an education on the responsible use of alcohol though.

March 29, 2010, 1:43 pm

Jessica says:

Though I agree with the fact that if people at the age of 18 can vote, can die in war, can buy firearms, should also be allowed to drink legally -- I do wonder if binge drinking at an earlier age would occur more often. That being said, I think it's readily apparent that going to college leaves open the door to unfettered access to alcohol and expressing more rebellion, as well as peer pressure. I think it's a joke that at least half the student body of a college or university can drink and that we would believe that those that legally can't wouldn't. What a strange school your older son attended where they felt he was better off living off campus. I'm glad everything turned out for the best.

March 30, 2010, 10:41 am



Karin Kasdin says:

Thanks for the comment. Yes, it was very strange that the school threw him out of the dorm.

He had many apartment parties, I'm sure, though I don't ask. Today he is a well-adjusted, responsible citizen of the world and not an alcoholic.

March 30, 2010, 12:28 pm

Sarah says:

Whats is also interesting though, is that for colledge students that live in say...maine, they could just drive to Canada for the night, then import it into the us. Its seems like prohibition era, except for only for certain legal adults.

April 1, 2010, 11:44 pm

joe says:

Why drink alcohol when you can [help yourself to all you want to eat of THIS!](#)

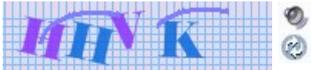
Take all you want, kiddies, but please eat all you take!

April 3, 2010, 5:09 pm

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