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Same Bottles, Different Stories

Jacqueline Cordova
Iowa State University

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"In college there are no alcoholics," says Trent Pease, a junior in agricultural studies. "I think we have some traits that might fit an alcoholic but not all of them."

So what exactly does drinking in college look like? According to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), 4 out of every 5 college students drink. It's football season and 6 a.m. is never too early to crack open a beer and walk your way towards the tailgates. Night game? Don't worry, more time to drink. For most college students having a beer doesn't always just have to be "having a beer," because you can always shotgun it, or beer bong it. A fast way to down as much alcohol as possible, no matter the time of day.

There is no denying tailgating is like an early Christmas for the community of Iowa State, "We've all seen the statistics and heard the consequences and students still don't change their drinking habits. It's just the way things go," said Martin. and just about anyone in the state of Iowa. It can be an extremely enjoyable and fun way to honor game day; but a high number of drunk people can lead to accidents, from people crossing the street where or when they shouldn't, to alcohol poisoning from drinking all day.

Sporting events, among others, only help increase binge drinking in students. According to the NIAAA, binge drinking is defined as consuming five or more drinks for men, and four or more for women, resulting in raising someone's BAC (blood alcohol concentration) above a .08 in roughly two hours.

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school advisors and cops assigned to her dorm building have all given her the same lecture.

“We’ve all seen the statistics and heard the consequences and students still don’t change their drinking habits. It’s just the way things go,” said Martin.

Officer Anthony Greiter, an ISU Police Officer, says that realistically looking at the college drinking culture, he realizes there isn’t much to do when stopping the underage drinking or the breaking of the laws. His focus is on education and reminding students of the financial consequences of bad decisions.

“Everyone is going to school to make money at some point in their life and most college students don’t have a lot of cash to be throwing around when in school,” says Officer Greiter. “Isn’t a $330 ticket for underage drinking a good lesson? The financial aspect is something students really pick up on.”

Officer Greiter hopes that students can be more educated when it comes to reality of what can happen when heavy drinking is involved and the consequences. Not only arrests and big legal bills, but the danger you may be putting yourself into.

“As police officers, we are the ones who have to call the families and tell them their son or daughter is dead,” says Greiter. “We are the ones who have to collect all of your belongings from your dorm room or apartments and hand them back to your families, we see the longing impact from that and most college students don’t.”

A lasting impact that can result from being so drunk is that you forget to look both ways before crossing a street, you drive drunk, you cause injury to yourself or others, or you can suffer from untreated alcohol poisoning.

Iowa State students only need to hear one word to be reminded of the negative effects of binge drinking: “Veishea.” It was taken away from the community in 2014 due to student’s drunk actions leading to dangerous behaviors. Two parties got busted at the same time, leading to a riot where students climbed the clock tower on Welch Avenue, flipped several cars and engaged in other acts of vandalism.

All of this led to the traumatic event in which students’ intoxication got so out of hand that a light pole was taken down and caused serious head injuries to a student standing
nearby. The student laid unconscious and bled a lot longer than he should have due to the large amount of rioters blocking out police and firefighters access.

David Jennings, a junior in management information systems, learned the hard way we don’t always have all the control. He says one night, he thought he was fine to drive himself, his roommate and a friend home when he saw lights flashing behind him during the drive that could have taken no more than 10 minutes.

“Getting the handcuffs put on made me feel so powerless,” says Jennings.

He blew a .09 into the breathalyzer, a very low BAC considering the legal limit when driving is a .08. Unfortunately for Jennings, he was underage at the time so blowing anything over was illegal.

“I learned my lesson — I’ll sleep in a ditch at this point before I drink and drive again,” says Jennings.

When taking a closer look into college drinking, Michael Knight, a senior in agriculture communications, sees the philosophy of the culture being heavily influenced behind where you stand in your college career.

“It’s actually quite complex and is more than just 36,000 of us drinking our faces off every single night. In my opinion, it kind of really just depends on where you’re at in your college career,” he says.

Knight says he believes that the stages of drinking depend mainly on your age or specific year in college — something Officer Greiter agreed with, noting that most arrests come from underage drinkers.

For freshmen, it’s easy to feel the newfound freedom they didn’t have before. Going into college, drinking can feel like something that’s assumed and expected. Martin remembers very clearly how her parents picked up on this when she came to college, reminding her to be safe and smart when going out.

Looking back at her freshmen year, Kenzie Klemme, a sophomore in kinesiology, says she agrees with the concept of freshmen having heavier drinking habits. Last year, she found that drinking was just what was being done — it was almost odd not to associate drinking with going off to college.

Knight and Pease both noticed that they started slowing down in the year leading up to their 21st birthday, going out less on the weekends as house parties started to lose their shine.

Klemme remembers that she started to notice her grades slipping from how much time she was going out to drink and party, something “everyone else” was doing. When her sophomore year rolled around, she realized it was time to focus on the reason she came to college to begin with.

Officer Greiter says that for those doing night shifts, their responsibilities also change depending their focus. If they’re out monitoring the streets and busting parties, the list of things to focus on and the responsibilities can be higher due to underage drinking whereas when watching the bar scene, you have more focus on things staying orderly as everyone is of age.

It’s all fun and games until someone gets hurt or lands in jail. So why not keep it fun and avoid the risks and dangers in being irresponsible? Drinking isn’t a bad thing or frowned upon. Simply keeping it safe is the most important and sought after request.

“I think if you’re smart about it, drinking can be a really fun, social aspect and a way to meet people you otherwise wouldn’t have met. It makes memories you can enjoy looking back on. It’s a way to be a little irresponsible while you still can!” says Klemme. ☃