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WR 222 Causal Essay

“Oh Grandma, Not Again…”

That uncle, that father, that brother. Those are the types of relatives that many people see as being an alcoholic. However, in my family it is my grandparents. I love my grandparents to pieces and am very thankful for all they have done for me. They have flown the whole family to Hawaii and Disney Land, been very consistent with a hefty gift card for Christmas, and have loved me like I was the best grandkid of them all. Yet, they drink heavily and frequently. As a retired doctor and nurse they know the effects of alcohol, but at this age, I do not think they care. The problem is that I care. When yelling breaks out during a Thanksgiving dinner, I know that those are my grandparents not listening to one another due to too much bourbon and a lost hearing aide. As much as I adore them, I just hope I do not end up like them. Since alcoholism is a result from factors such as the environment a person grows up in, their genetic makeup and their current social influences, should I be worried?

If other students have family like mine then they might want to keep reading. Falling subject to alcoholism comes in many forms. For me being in college brings up the subject of alcoholism. Many students have no idea how susceptible they are to such a disease. I say disease because according the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention alcoholism or ‘alcohol dependency’ is “a chronic disease that symptoms include problems with interpersonal relationships, strong cravings, and the inability to limit drinking” (Frequently Asked Questions). Sounds like my grandparents. If such a disease is so prevalent then how come I do not hear about it in the News? According to FOX News, “a study in the Archives of General Psychiatry found that 18 percent – nearly one out of five- of U.S. college students suffered clinically significant alcohol related problems” (College Alcohol Abuse). I live with four other girls in a Townhouse near campus; I could be the one in the five of us or so could one of my roommates. Those are probably not the best odds for one of us.

The environment that a person grows up in does affect many of the things they do. When I go home for the summer I spend much time with my mom. After a summer with her I find myself wearing the same sweatshirt, saying the same phrases with the same inflection and making facial expressions like hers. It scares me to know I am just like my mother. This makes me think about watching my dad come home from work and have a beer. Will this make me think that this activity is normal? Jim Hewitt who wrote the book “Alcoholism: A Matter of Choice” suggests, “Alcoholism is located at the level of the individuals perception” (Hewlett 40). I have grown up with my grandparents continually bringing a bottle of Vodka and Bourbon every time that they come to visit me, and pour themselves a class with a splash of tonic and ice cubes. They do it everywhere they go and even at home. I have spent much time around their particular behavior. Studies such as the McGue found that the offspring of alcoholics have a greater chance of becoming alcoholics themselves than those whose parents that are not alcoholics (A Snapshot). My dad is the offspring of my grandparents and I know he likes to drink often. Since I am the offspring of him I think continuously about what that means for me.

Just like the environment that a person will grow up in, their genetics has also been shown to play a major role in alcoholism. Only recently has being an alcoholic been classified as a disease. This new idea of alcoholism has led to many studies that begin the same way a study for cancer or any other disease might begin. Researchers look at family history. An article from Alcohol Research and Health, published by National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism, states, “Twin, adoption, and family studies conclusively demonstrated that **genetic** factors account for 50 to 60 percent of the variance in risk for developing **alcoholism**” (Foround). The Collaborative Study on the Genetics of Alcoholism is the largest study to date that was able to link certain genes to alcoholism ( Sloan). “This study collected data from families with alcoholism and has been used for both linkage and association analyses. Researchers have identified candidate susceptibility regions on chromosomes 1, 2, and 7” (Sloan ). To me this study shows not one but three links that alcoholism is a real disease. Since I am short like my grandma, dark like my grandpa and seem to have others of their traits I know that I have a high probability of carrying those genes. Therefore, I try to be careful when considering my intake of alcohol. After research life this students should think more about their families and consider their history in order to be safer with alcoholism.

Current social influences are among the most robust predictors of substance use and misuse (Social Influences). The social influences of alcohol are found not only within college but all over in society. There are commercials on television where alcohol is being promoted; telling me that I will have the best time of my life if I drink their product. I might possibly have fun drinking Skyy Vodka however, they do not know my stakes or the effects alcohol has on me. Movies, another part of society, such as *American Pie* or *Mean Girls* that shows binge drinking and young adults playing drinking games as the main part of the college life style. I go to school and if I had as much time to party like they do in a movie then I would have a fascinating social life. Movies like those construct a social view that alcohol is fun and exciting and many problems do not occur when using it. Many people have stories of that one night they drank and do not need to repeat. College Drinking brings up the fact that, “110,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are arrested for an alcohol-related violation such as public drunkenness or driving under the influence” (A Snapshot).

Students or film producers might say that movies do not portray just the upside of drinking and partying. They might suggest that their movies show scenes where characters puke or are hung over. Many scenes do show the repercussions of alcohol and its effect on relationships. Nevertheless, those movies do not show the other terrible things that can happen. For example, statistics from College Drinking’s website say, “97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape” (A Snapshot). More statistics talk about death numbers being near the 2000, and 25% of students report consequences in their studies such as falling behind (A Snapshot). That 25% bring it back to a higher rate than the one in five and possibly being me or my roommates falling subject.

College is also an issue in the use of alcohol, to the extent of where people may become alcoholics. Much of the atmosphere of college consists of some form of alcohol, with Greek life and days known as “Thirsty Thursdays”. According to a snapshot of statistics from the College Drinking website, “31 percent of college students met criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse and 6 percent for a diagnosis of alcohol dependence in the past 12 months, according to questionnaire-based self-reports about their drinking” (A Snapshot). This is not saying that all college students will become alcoholics, but brings up information that reminds people that sometimes a current social environment can bring its own encouragement in developing alcoholism.

Bring back the subject of my grandparents excessive drinking; I would like to point out their current social influences. They are in their 80’s and are still social people. They have both fought their battles with cancer and are healthy as an older person can be. They have just come accustom to the fact that they have time now to begin their “Happy Hour” before four in the afternoon. This is not the healthiest choice, but they are content yelling at one another and tripping over their dog after their 3rd glass that now only has ice cubes in it. My grandparents continue to be a great influence in my life and in the subject of alcoholism I can honestly say that I have learned from it.

Every disease has its causes. Alcoholism happens to include a much more complicated scope of them. As I mentioned earlier I see that its causes come from one’s environment, genes and even their current social situations. However, if every student in college were to know the significance of alcoholism’s causes, then they would have better vision to see it coming and possibly the skills to avoid it. Students should reflect on their family history and learn from it and also the other half of statistics should be made more visible to the people they effect. Parents should try to remember that what they do can mold the way their child see’s or acts in the world. The avoidance of this disease will make for a better and safer world for not only college students but for everyone.