



THE PIEDMONT HIGHLANDER

Not my cup of tea

by [Emma Seevak](#) | October 14, 2015 |

Because anonymous junior “Nora” chooses not to drink, she rarely spends time with a particular friend group outside of school.

28 percent of seniors, 29 percent of juniors, 51 percent of sophomores and 71 percent of freshmen at PHS have never consumed a full drink of alcohol, according to the 2014-15 California Healthy Kids Survey.

Teenagers choose whether to drink based on a variety of factors, including engagement in extracurricular activities and parental influence, said Maite Durán, a youth organizer at Alcohol Justice, an organization that advocates for better regulation of the alcohol industry.

Junior Jordan Marcus said that his choice to abstain gives him greater control over his actions and decisions.

“It gives me a sense of self because I can make my own choices without the peer pressure,” Marcus said. “It gives me self-confidence and self-worth.”

Marcus said that not-drinking contributes to his reputation of being innocent.

“I’m not looked down upon, but the people who do drink think that alcohol and drugs make them cooler and on a higher level than everyone else,” Marcus said. “By not drinking, they never perceive me in that hierarchy, which is totally fine by me.”

Similarly, anonymous sophomore “Diane” said that her decision not to drink causes her to be known as a “goody-two-shoes.”

“I feel like as soon as you refrain from drinking you’re known as that girl, the good girl,” Diane said. “You’re not rebellious. Everything you do should be perfect from then on.”

Diane said that she does not attend parties because people know she does not drink.



“A lot of people know it wouldn’t be my scene, which is totally right,” Diane said. “I definitely miss out on having that social experience but I’m not really upset about it because I don’t want to do that to my body.”

An anonymous junior, “Karen,” said that she feels a bit self-conscious about not drinking.

“I feel like a lot of people associate it with not being invited to parties but that’s not the reason I don’t drink,” Karen said.

Karen has never felt pressure to drink because none of her close friends do.

“I feel like alcohol isn’t the only way to have fun,” Karen said. “I’m still enjoying myself without it. My friends and I go out and make memories and do more significant things.”

On the other hand, Nora has friends who drink and has felt self-inflicted pressure, not external pressure, to partake.

“Being around people who are drinking makes me feel like I should,” Nora said.

Nora said that she has attended parties but not on a regular basis.

“It’s kind of awkward and uncomfortable because a lot of people around you won’t remember that you were even there or what they did,” Nora said.

In general, Nora’s choice not to drink does not affect her social life, she said.

“There are a few times where my friends are just going to hang out to drink and they don’t invite me,” Nora said. “But I wouldn’t want to go anyway so I don’t really care.”

Nora said that growing older has made the choice not to drink both easier and more difficult.

“It’s harder that more people are doing it,” Nora said. “But I’m not pressuring myself as much because I think that a lot of people have just accepted that I won’t drink. It’s something that’s stable and doesn’t need to be changed and I’m more comfortable with that.”

On the other hand, anonymous senior “Logan” does enjoy going to parties.

“It’s funny, I mess with people a lot of the time,” Logan said. “It’s fun seeing my friends drunk, you see a different side of them.”

Logan said that although his friends often encourage him to drink, he is not tempted.

“My friends always say ‘Logan, just drink this beer dude,’” Logan said. “I always say, ‘not me, I’ve got to drive you home.’”

Logan said that his choice not to drink definitely affects his social life.

“My friends will hang out and I won’t get invited,” Logan said. “I ask why and they say ‘we were just drinking, you probably wouldn’t have had a lot of fun.’”

Karen and Nora both said that while they do not abstain because of limitations set by their parents, their parents prefer that they do not drink.

“They make it very clear that I should be safe and not drive but they understand that it’s a part of high school for most people,” Nora said.

Professor Emerita at Indiana University School of Public Health Ruth C. Eng said that among college students, lower rates of drinking are associated with students who have high grade point averages, are female, are very religious, are not smokers, are not recreational drug users and are African-American.

Eng said that the best way to curb underage drinking is to teach youth methods of responsible alcohol consumption in controlled environments, which include any time with parents or at restaurants, campus sponsored parties or pubs. Getting drunk is not responsible drinking behavior, Eng said.

“In the United States, Prohibition in the 1840s did not work, Prohibition in the 1920s did not work and prohibition against those under 21 years of age is not working today,” Eng said.

On the other hand, Durán said that she advocates alcohol prevention for high school students because the leading cause of death among youth ages 18 to 25 in the US is alcohol related incidents.

“Studies show that the earlier a person starts drinking, the probability of alcohol dependence increases,” Durán said.

Durán said that education and programs such as Every 15 Minutes are not effective in preventing teenage alcohol use.

“Engagement is [effective],” Durán said. “Knowing the truth is. Young people being active and engaging others in understanding how they are being seduced by the [alcohol] industry to consume their products is.”

While they have abstained throughout high school, four of the five of the students interviewed said that they plan to eventually try alcohol.

Diane said that she does not plan to drink until after high school.

“I’ll do it eventually, it’s not that I’m against it,” Diane said. “It’s just about moderation, timing, who you’re with.”