

Caron Treatment Centers

A Qualitative Study of Online Discussions About Teen Alcohol & Drug Use

A word-of-mouth audit

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Project Background

As part of its 2007 public relations plan, Caron identified mothers of teens as a primary audience. Caron plans to create “an open dialogue about addiction and begin establishing Caron as a valuable resource for information and possibly treatment” by educating mothers on what their teens are saying about substance abuse online.

Research Objectives

- Where does online discussion of alcohol and drug use among teens take place?
- What are topics of discussion within conversations about alcohol and drug use by teens?
- What words and phrases do teens use when they talk about their alcohol and drug use?
- BuzzMetrics’ analysts will specifically look for conversations in which teens ask questions about drugs.

Methodology

Nielsen BuzzMetrics used proprietary software and analytic methodology to tap into the unaided conversations teens have in public online communities, such as web message boards, discussion forums, blogs and public areas of social-networking sites (i.e., MySpace and Facebook).

The first step in Nielsen BuzzMetrics' study of teens was to identify where their online conversations are taking place. Our analysts used a combination of automated and manual techniques to identify individual communities that include teen focused discussion. We also looked for communities and sources that included discussion on drugs and alcohol use. Examples of sources included in our analysis are:

- forums.student.com
- boards.ym.com
- www.teenspot.com
- www.teenhelp.org

Nielsen BuzzMetrics used its proprietary software to gather and process conversation data from teen focused sites, putting it into one standard format in a single database. We were then able to use our analytic software to run analyses to gain insight into how teens are discussing drugs and alcohol online.

Strategic Findings

- 1. Teens focus their discussion of alcohol and drug use on message boards, rather than on blogs or online groups- due in part to privacy concerns.** Young adults, however, are discussing drugs and alcohol use on their blogs. Older teens and college students post anecdotes, memories and plans about recreational drinking to their online journals.
- 2. When teens do post about drugs or alcohol on their blogs, it is usually in the form of a quiz about past experiences.** These quizzes usually ask participants to check off experiences they've had, such as "smoked marijuana" or "got drunk."
- 3. Many teen messages about drugs and alcohol overlap.** Many teenagers discussed topics such as getting together with friends to drink and smoke marijuana, or they shared their experiences of getting drunk and/or high.
- 4. There are main themes of conversation that appear across each topic (alcohol, marijuana, other drugs).** Whether discussing alcohol, marijuana or other drug use, teens expressed concern for their friends/significant others, discussed their parents' opinions on drugs and alcohol and warned each other about the dangers of substance abuse.
- 5. Teens ask more questions about other drugs than they do about alcohol or marijuana.** While they were curious about experimenting with alcohol and marijuana, they sought the most information about other recreational drugs, such as Ecstasy, DXM and shrooms. Teenagers asked other teens about the drugs' effects, how they would feel when they were high and dosage levels.

Sources of Discussion: Key Findings

Message Boards vs. Blogs

The vast majority of teens who are discussing recreational drug and alcohol use online are doing so on message boards and forums. Teenagers rarely posted their experiences on their blogs, nor did they include information or questions on their online journals. One reason that teenagers may shy away from including messages about drug and alcohol abuse on their blogs is privacy. Teens are still living at home and their parents are more likely to play a larger role in their lives. Parents may know about their teen's blog, or the teen could be concerned that a parent could identify the blog. Additionally, the teen may be using the family computer to update his/her journal. Rather than risk getting caught, teens may be using message boards to engage in their conversations, which are more difficult to track.

Teens may also prefer the type of conversation that a message board or forum can provide, especially when asking questions. Rather than wait for a friend or reader to post a comment on their blog, teens can engage in quicker dialogue via a message board. Their questions can be answered more quickly, and they can interact with a diverse group of other teens. The Internet is global, so teens can have discussions with others in their age range, but from other parts of the globe.

However...Older Teens and Blogs

While most teenagers avoid posting about drugs and alcohol, older teenagers (18-19) and college students (early 20's) are recounting their experiences on their blogs. Many young adults posted stories about going out to bars and "getting wasted," as well as their plans to do so during their spare time. Weekend and Spring Break plans were popular topics related to alcohol. This could be due to the fact that many of these young adults are no longer living at home and many have their own computers. With that in mind, they have more privacy to express themselves online without the watchful eye of a parent.

Additionally, some of these young adults recount memories of things they did in high school on their blogs. These memories sometimes include stories about their recreational drug and alcohol abuse.

Word-of-Mouth Analysis

Topics of Discussion: Alcohol

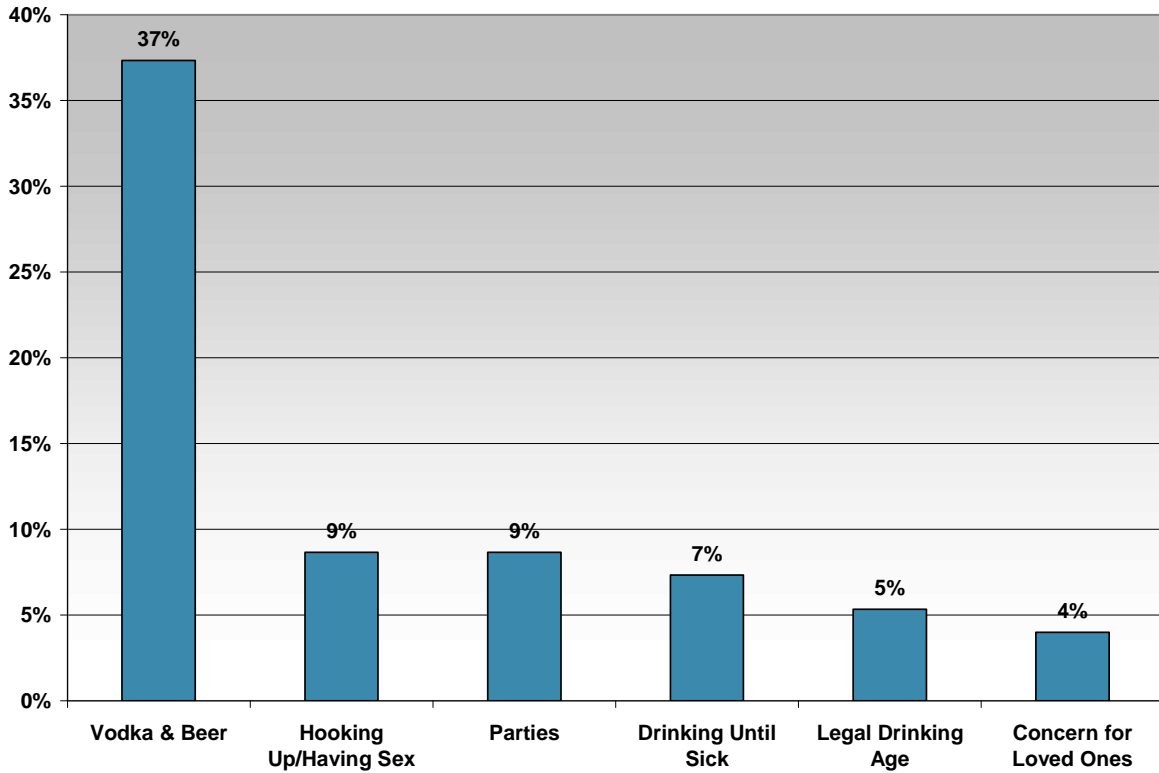
Research Objective and Methodology

Nielsen BuzzMetrics examined topics of discussion in teens' online messages about alcohol. Using keywords and proprietary software, we created random samples of messages discussing alcohol between April 1, 2006 and March 31, 2007. Analysts manually analyzed and coded messages to determine topics of discussion. The following topics emerged as key themes throughout teens' conversations.

Alcohol

- **Hooking Up/Having Sex:** Teens think hooking up/having sex is fun while drunk.
- **Social Gatherings:** Teenagers also report that social gatherings are more fun while drunk.
- **Concern for Loved Ones:** A significant portion of discussion focuses on teens' concern for their friends or significant others who drink too much.
- **Vodka/Beer:** Vodka and beer are teens' drinks of choice.
- **Drinking Until Sick:** Many teens drink until they get sick and/or blackout.
- **Legal Drinking Age:** Teenagers also discuss and debate the pros and cons of the legal drinking age.

Figure 1: Breakdown of topics discussed in alcohol-related discussion, as a percent of sample.



Note: n= 150 messages from boards, blogs and networks, between April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Key Findings: Alcohol

Hooking up/having sex

In their discussions about drinking, teens frequently address the topics of hooking up and having sex. Teens have noted that alcohol lowers their inhibitions and makes them feel more “adventurous.” They find it easier to hit on people they are attracted to and/or be intimate with boyfriends or girlfriends.

More than a few teens claimed that having sex and making out were more fun while they were drunk. Sex or hooking up appears to be two of the main activities for teens when they are drinking. Where gender is identifiable, teen girls tend to talk about it online more than teen boys. Both genders, however, discuss the activity. While a few teens expressed regret over things they had done while drunk, many chalked it up to “fun”, “and being wasted” and “having a good time”

Parties

Teens also note that parties are more fun when alcohol is available or if they are already drunk. Teens use the term “pre-game,” which means that they drink before going to a party. Since their inhibitions are lowered from alcohol, teens find it easier to act silly or “get crazy” in the name of having fun.

Concern for loved ones

A great deal of teens express their concern for friends and/or significant others who indulge in alcohol online. Where gender is identifiable, both sexes ask their peers for advice on how to help with the problem. More girls than boys, however, ask their peers for their opinions on whether or not they should date someone who drinks recreationally.

Vodka & Beer

Vodka and beer are the two types of alcoholic beverages discussed most by teenagers. When teenagers call out specific drinks in messages, beer and vodka mixed with another beverage appear the most.

Drinking until sick

Many teens admitted not knowing when to stop when drinking alcohol. Teenagers often recount stories about how they drank until they “puked.” Some reported being embarrassed afterward. Though they were embarrassed about what happened, they also noted that they would continue to drink for fun.

Teenagers also shared stories about how they drank so much they passed or blacked out. Some say that they do not remember parts of the night before. A portion of these teens express concern or regret, while others consider it a part of or proof of having a good time.

Legal drinking age

A recurring topic found in teens' discussion of drinking and alcohol abuse is complaints about the current legal drinking age. Teenagers bring up the fact that at 18 they will be able to vote and serve their country, but they will not be able to legally purchase alcohol.

Teens also claim that the law does not stop them. They can still, and do, get alcohol when they want to – despite the fact that they are under the legal drinking age.

Topics of Discussion: Marijuana

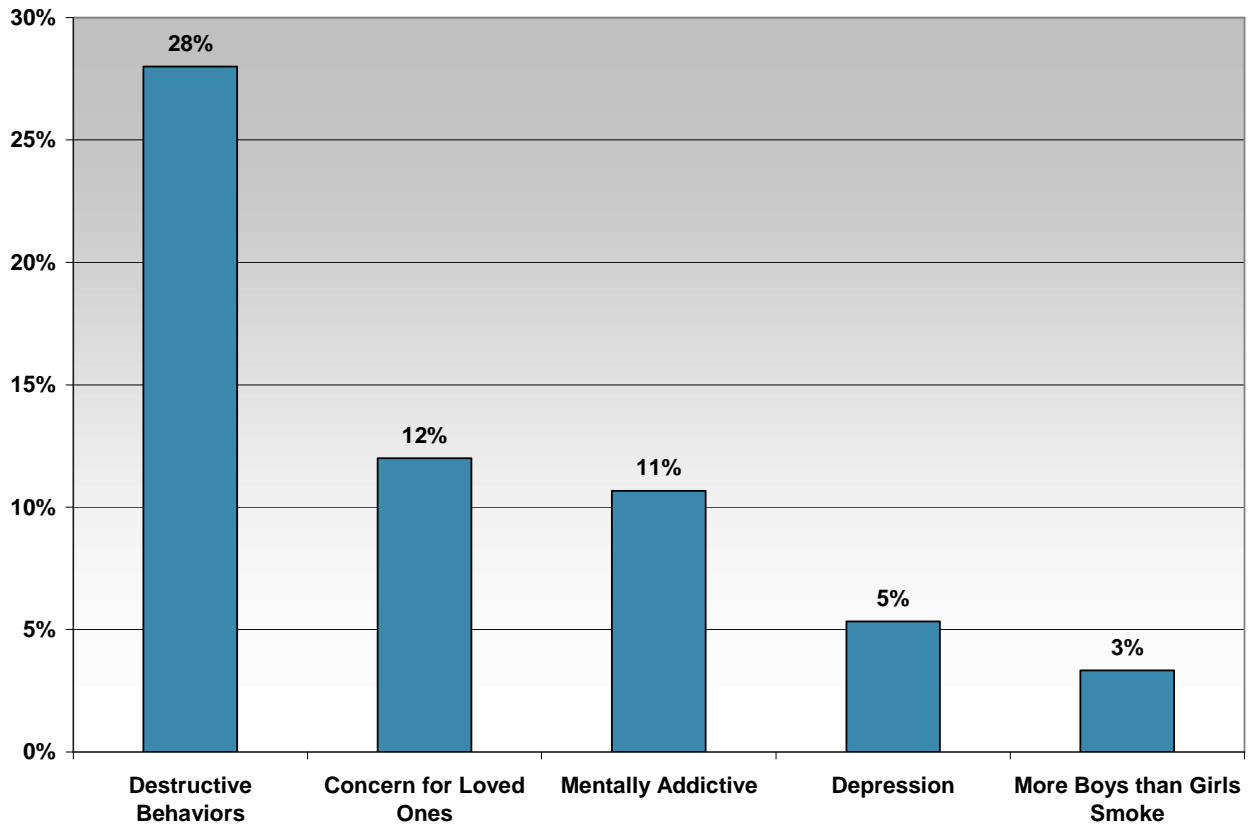
Research Objective and Methodology

Nielsen BuzzMetrics examined topics of discussion in teens' online messages about marijuana. Using keywords and proprietary software, we created random samples of messages discussing marijuana that occurred between April 1, 2006 and March 31, 2007. Analysts manually analyzed and coded messages to determine topics of discussion. The following topics emerged as key themes throughout teens' conversations.

Marijuana

- **More Boys Smoke than Girls:** Teenagers are under the impression that more boys than girls smoke.
- **Mentally Addictive:** Teens also debate the addictive properties of marijuana, noting that it is mentally, but not physically addictive.
- **Concern for Loved Ones:** Teenagers also often express their concern for their friends and/or significant others.
- **Destructive Behaviors:** Messages about marijuana also often discuss other destructive behaviors such as drinking, smoking cigarettes and cutting (self mutilation).
- **Depression:** Many teens also claim that smoking marijuana helps with their depression.

Figure 2: Breakdown of topics discussed in marijuana-related discussion, as a percent of sample.



Note: n = 150 messages from boards, blogs and networks, between April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Key Findings: Marijuana

More boys than girls smoke

Though our findings showed that more teenage girls discussed marijuana online, many messages noted that teenage boys smoke more than girls. Where gender is identifiable, image is often cited as a concern for girls. They don't want to be perceived as a "druggie" or "one of the guys." Additionally, some teenage girls think that if they smoked marijuana it would be a turn off for boys. Teenage boys seem to be under the assumption that more boys smoke as well, as a few noted that they "wished more girls would smoke."

Mentally addictive, not physically

A main topic of discussion and debate for teens is whether or not marijuana is physically addictive. The majority of teens believe that it is not, but most agree that it is mentally addictive. Some teens suggest that a mental addiction is as difficult, and possibly more difficult, to overcome than a physical one.

Concern for friends/significant others

Similar to teens' discussion about alcohol consumption, teens expressed a great deal of concern for friends and/or significant others who they felt had a problem with marijuana. In this category, however, girls showed more concern over friends who smoked marijuana. Girls were concerned with the image attached to pot smokers and did not want to get caught up with the wrong crowd. They grew angry and concerned if friends lied to them to go get high.

Often associated with destructive behaviors

In their online dialogue, some teens associated smoking marijuana with other destructive behaviors. Teenagers noted that they had cut class, drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes and cut themselves (self-mutilation) while getting high.

Additionally, teens also debated the health effects of cigarettes vs. marijuana, claiming that marijuana is better for you. Many teens suggested that since you're not smoking the tar that is contained in cigarettes, you will not get lung cancer from marijuana.

Depression

Another theme throughout teens' marijuana discussion is the notion that it helps them cope with their depression. Teens reported feeling more relaxed and happy after having smoked marijuana, and said that they used it to cope with the stress of teenage life.

Topics of Discussion: Other Drugs

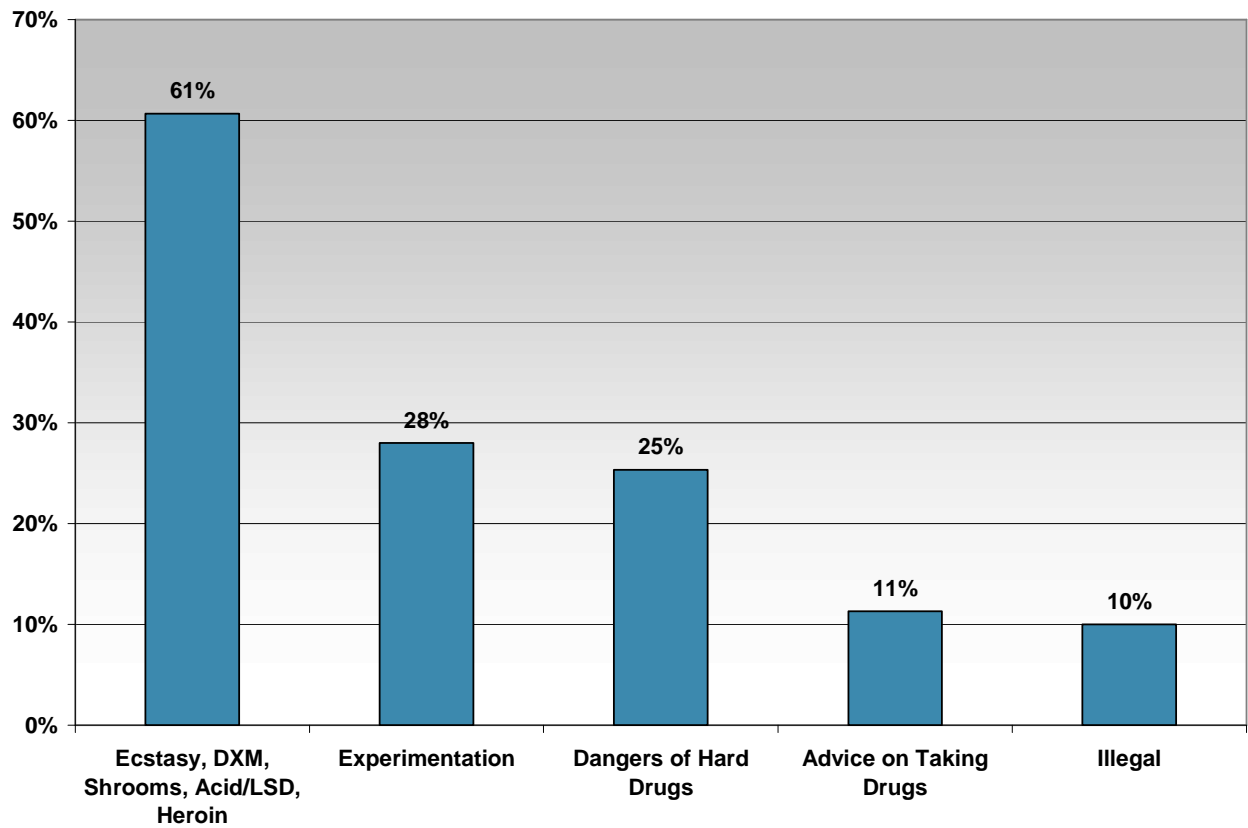
Research Objective and Methodology

Nielsen BuzzMetrics examined topics of discussion in teens' online messages about drugs other than marijuana. Using keywords and proprietary software, we created random samples of messages discussing these drugs that occurred between April 1, 2006 and March 31, 2007. Analysts manually analyzed and coded messages to determine topics of discussion. The following topics emerged as key themes throughout teens' conversations.

Other Drugs

- **Experimentation:** The majority of teens' messages about other drugs center on teens listing the recreational drugs they have tried.
- **Dangers of Hard Drugs:** Teens also give each other advice or warnings to stay away from harder drugs, such as cocaine and heroin.
- **Advice on Taking Drugs:** On the other hand, more experienced teens also give each other advice on how to take specific drugs such as DXM or shrooms.
- **Illegal:** The illegal status of many recreational drugs is a recurring topic of discussion.
- **Ecstasy, DXM, Shrooms, Acid/LSD, and Heroin:** Teen discussion of recreational substance abuse centers on the following drugs: Ecstasy, DXM, shrooms, acid/LSD, and heroin.

Figure 3: Breakdown of topics discussed in other drug-related discussion, as a percent of sample.



Note: n= 150 messages from boards, blogs and networks, between April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Key Findings: Other Drugs

Experimentation

When teenagers talked about using recreational drugs, other than marijuana, the main topic of discussion was how many different drugs they had tried and which ones they wanted to experiment with.

Online quizzes showed up often in discussion when teens would check off which drugs they had taken.

Dangers of hard drugs

It is important to note that not all teens are experimenting with drugs. Amidst conversations about the substances teens are using are messages that address the dangers of recreational drugs. Those who have had bad experiences with certain drugs will often warn others against using them, or at least against using them in excess. Teens that have family members or close friends who have had negative experiences with recreational drugs also join in the discussion. Additionally, teens who do not believe in using drugs advise those who are curious against it.

Advice on taking drugs

Other teens, however, offer advice on how to “safely” experiment with recreational drugs. A number of users post dosage levels and techniques for taking drugs such as DXM, Triple C’s, Ecstasy, and acid. These teens often claim that these drugs are not addictive and can be enjoyed safely in moderation. Many recount their own positive experiences with the drugs, and suggest that the potential user not take them alone.

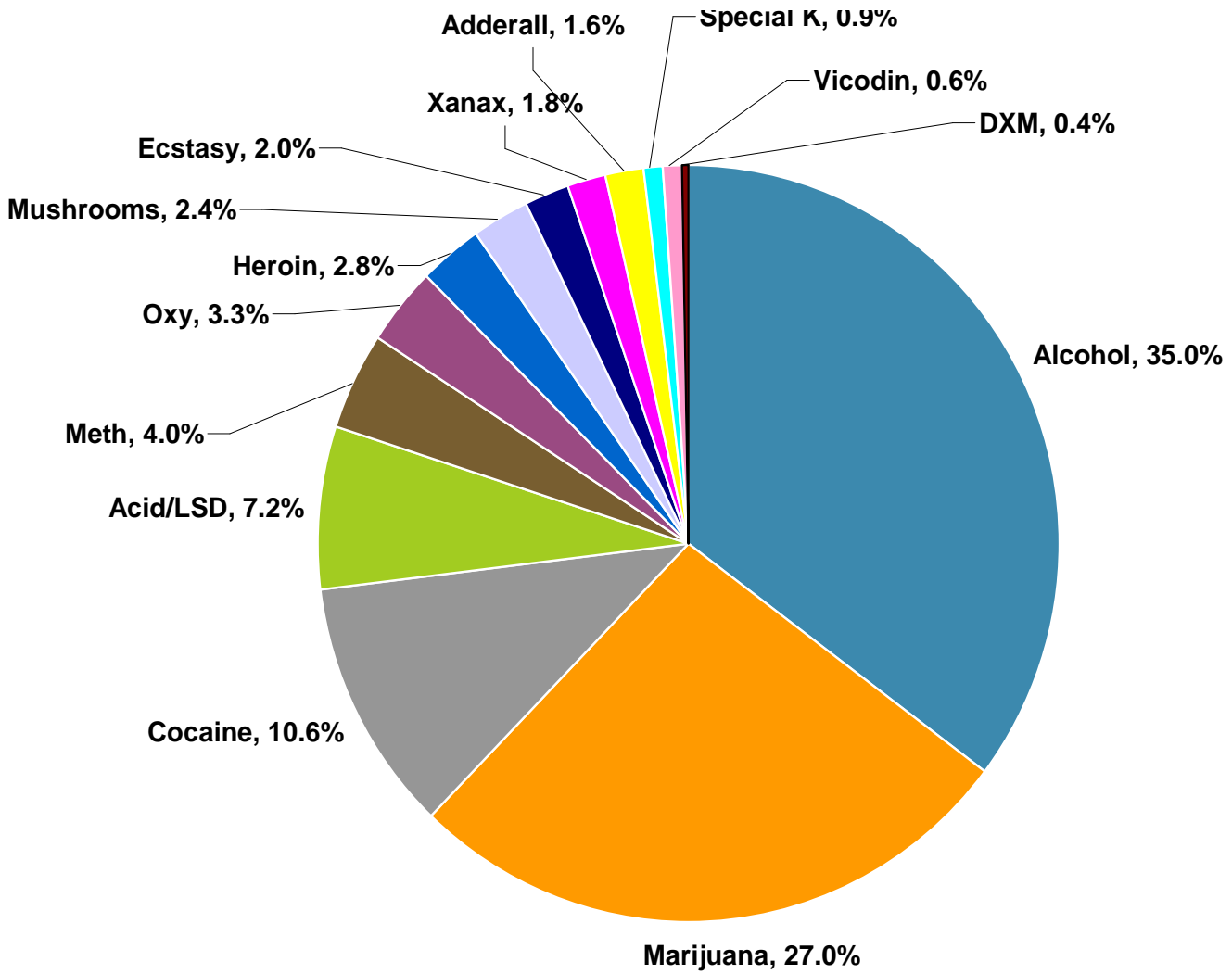
Illegal

Similar to discussions about alcohol and marijuana, teens also debate the illegal status of many recreational drugs. Some teens feel that all drugs should be made legal, as that would take away the allure of their forbidden status.

Ecstasy, DXM, Shrooms, Acid/LSD & Heroin

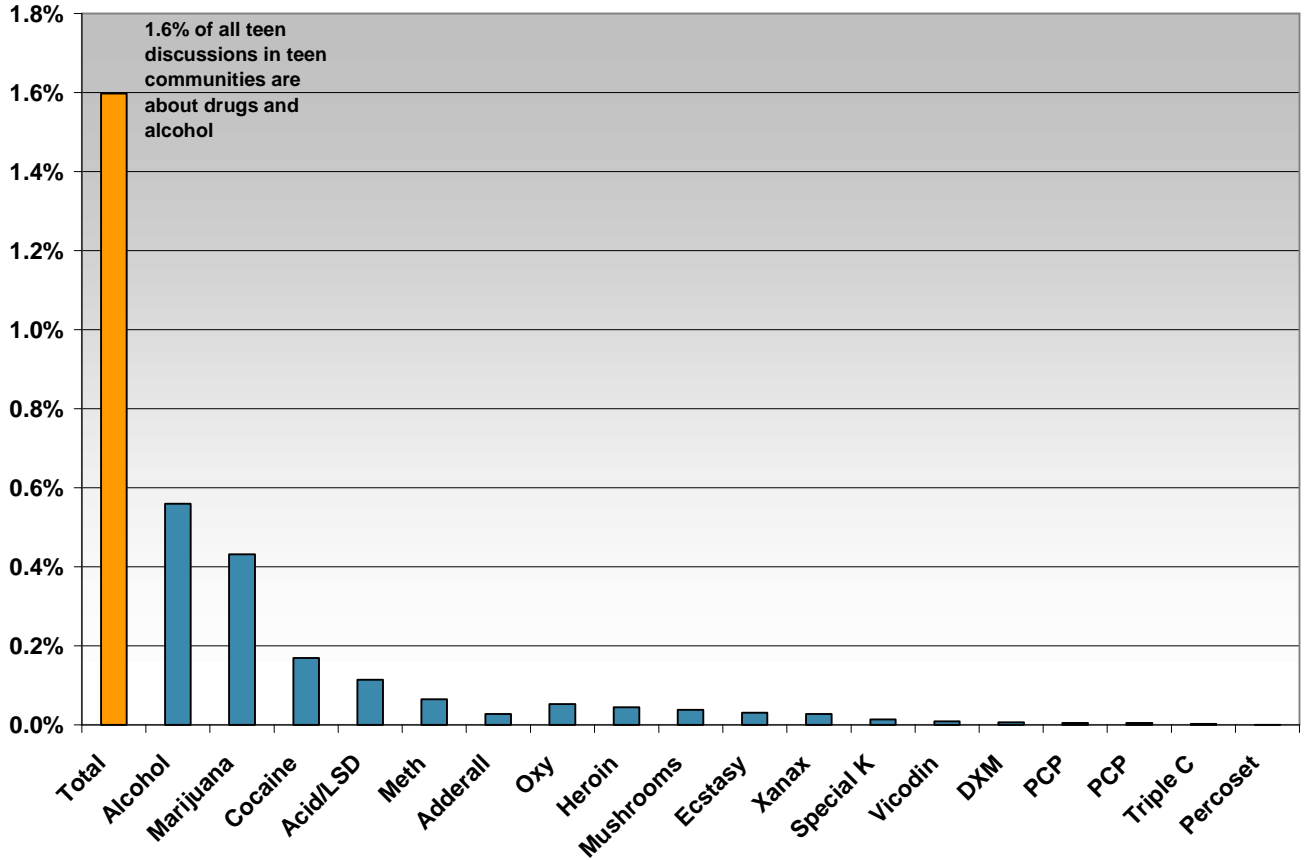
Of the recreational drugs discussed, Ecstasy, DXM, Shrooms, Acid/LSD, and heroin are mentioned the most frequently. Drugs such as cocaine, Triple C’s, Oxycontin, Vicodin, Special K and PCP are touched upon, but not discussed regularly.

Figure 4: Breakdown of drugs discussed; presented a buzz share in total data set of teen communities.



Note: n= 164,358 messages about alcohol and drugs, between April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Figure 5: Percent of discussion in the teen community data set that is about drugs and alcohol.



Note: n = 10,289,945 messages, between April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Gender Findings

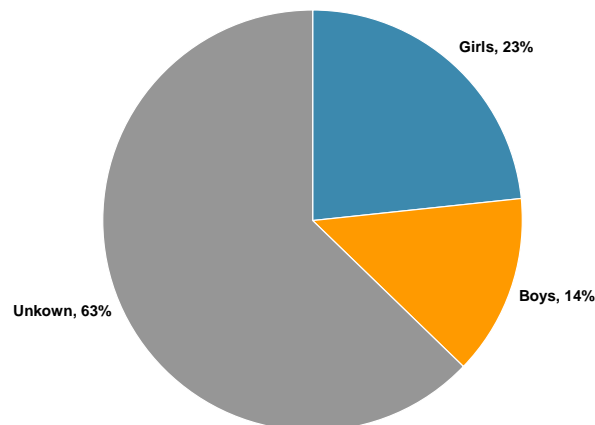
Research Objective and Methodology

Nielsen BuzzMetrics analysts read through 1,100 messages taken from online discussion sources that were related to teens' drug and alcohol use. While these messages were relevant based on keywords, a portion were excluded because the age of the author was unclear. Though the discarded messages were deemed irrelevant for our sample, they helped create a framework for how drugs and alcohol are being discussed online by today's youth. For example, if a blog author discussed getting drunk during Spring Break, we might not be able to tell whether he/she is a teenager, but we do know that they are young and drinking just for fun.

Key Findings – Alcohol

- Out of the messages where gender was identifiable, more teen girls than boys discussed alcohol online (23% vs. 14% respectively).
- Girls, however, were more focused on their romantic relationships and hooking up/having sex. Boys focused their discussion on exchanging information and stories about their drinking experiences.

Figure 6: Breakdown of teen alcohol conversation by gender.

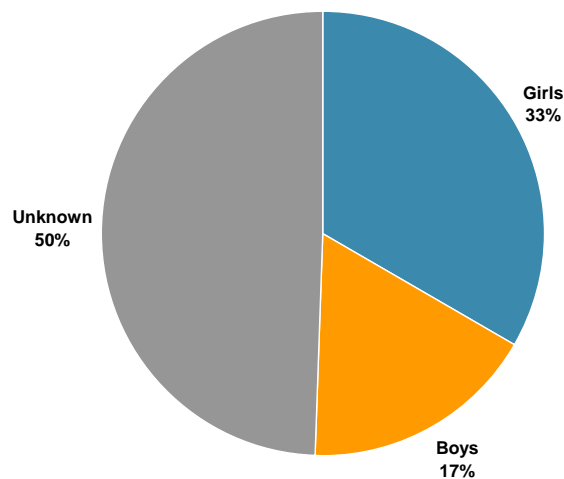


Note: n= 150 messages from boards, blogs and networks, between April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Key Findings – Marijuana

- Out of the messages where gender was identifiable, more teen girls talked about marijuana than boys (33% vs. 17% respectively).
- The topics that girls discussed were very different than those addressed by boys. Girls were more likely to discuss the image associated with smoking, as well as how/if smoking marijuana affected their friendships and romantic relationships. Boys were more likely to share their smoking experiences and engage in debates about marijuana’s legal status and health effects.

Figure 7: Breakdown of teen marijuana conversation by gender.

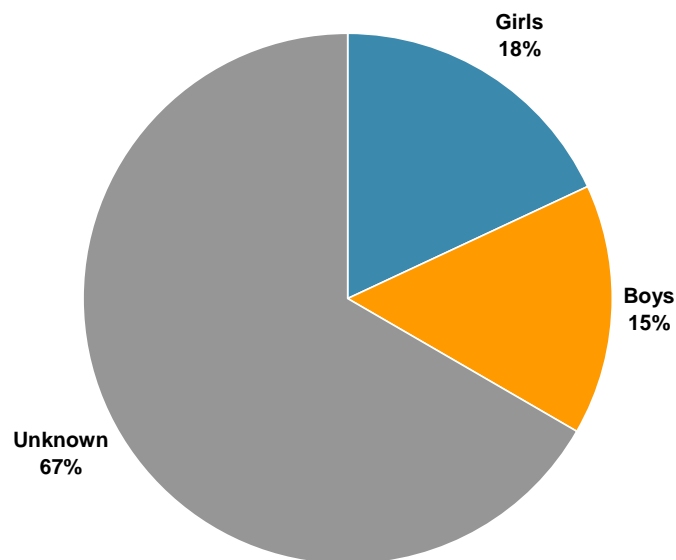


Note: n= 150 messages from boards, blogs and networks, between April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Key Findings – Other Drugs

- Out of the messages where gender was identifiable, more teen boys than girls talked about using drugs other than marijuana (18% vs. 15% respectively).
- Both teen boys and girls discussed the dangers of certain substances and gave advice on how to take them safely. There was not a dominant topic by gender.

Figure 8: Breakdown of teen conversation about other drugs by gender.



Note: n= 150 messages from boards, blogs and networks, between April 1, 2006 to March 31, 2007.

Teens' Questions

In many cases, teens turned to online sources to ask questions about substances and recreational drug use/abuse. They also asked their peers for advice on how best to deal with drugs and alcohol in their personal relationships. Below, are teens' commonly asked questions about drugs and alcohol.

Alcohol

- How does alcohol compare to other drugs? What are the differences between getting drunk and being high from weed?
- What kinds of drinks do other teens prefer? Beer, shots or mixed drinks?
- What do other teens think about drinking while they are still in high school?
- How can I help my boyfriend/girlfriend with their substance abuse problem?

Marijuana

- Can teens who smoke marijuana tell me more about it?
- How do you feel when you get high?
- Compared to cigarettes, is marijuana better or worse for your lungs?
- How long does it take for marijuana to clear your system? When can I pass a drug test?
- Would someone smoking weed from a hookah need charcoals? What is the metal tray on hookahs used for?

Other Drugs

- Is there a way that Ecstasy could be modified to be legal?
- What are the most addictive drugs?
- What kinds of drugs have you taken?

Dictionary

420: 420 stands for April 20 or the time 4:20. Years ago 4:20 pm was deemed the time of day to get high and April 20 became "National Pot Smoking Day."

"It's 420! Let's get high!"

Bud: The dried and cured, unpolinated flowering portion of the marijuana plant. Bud contains the D9-trans-tetrahydrocannabinol, Cannabidiol, and Cannabinol.

"I've got some bud. Pack the bowl."

Buzz(ed): The pleasant feeling you get when you're drunk or high.

"I had a few beers but I didn't get wasted. I was buzzed."

Candy flipping: A high that's achieved by combining LSD or acid with MDMA or Ecstasy.

"Let's go candy flipping tonight!"

Crank: Slang for low quality crystallized Methamphetamine. A stimulant with a high that lasts between 8 and 24 hours.

"The crank made him extremely hyper, but he crashed the next day."

Crunk(ed): To get high and drunk at the same time.

"Yo - we've got beer and weed. Let's get crunked."

Dank: sticky, hairy, and especially strong type of marijuana.

"This is some strong dank!"

Dime bag: \$10 worth of any drug.

"I've got \$10...let's go get a dime bag."

Druggie: A person who heavily abuses illegal drugs. They are associated with a negative, dirty image.

"He's such a disgusting druggie."

DXM: Dextromorphan Hydrobromide (DXM HBr). A drug contained in OTC cough suppressants. After 900mg, becomes a hallucinogen.

"I'm out of weed, let's trip on DXM."

Hash: The resin from the flowers of the marijuana plant.

"I've got some hash. Let's make brownies!"

Hooking up: To engage in romantic/sexual activity with another with little to no emotional attachment. Both parties are usually under the influence of alcohol or some other drug.

"Jessica was so drunk last night that she hooked up with Mike!"

Hotboxed: Smoking marijuana in a confined space so that the area fills with smoke.

"Hey – let's hotbox the car!"

PCP: A horse tranquilizer. Has hallucinogenic properties and can make users violent.

"He was using PCP and didn't even realize he broke his hand after he punched the wall."

Syn: angel dust.

Pre-game: To drink before going to a party.

"We should pre-game before we go out tonight."

Roach clip: a metal holder used to hold a small joint to avoid burning your fingers.

"Don't burn yourself. Here – use the roach clip to hold that joint."

Rollin: Term used to describe an Ecstasy high.

"They all took X before the rave and were rollin' by the time they got there."

Salvia: Short for Salvia Divinorum a plant native to Southern Mexico. It has a hallucinogenic effect.

"Salvia highs make you see some scary stuff."

Sextasy: Sex on Ecstasy.

"Sex on Ecstasy. For girls. (Apparently it makes it harder for a guy to get an erection on e) I've heard that rumour that if you are a chick and you have sex on e, it'll ruin your sex live forever. (Cause you will have the best orgasm of your life, but it'll never come back unless you are high) But I read all over the Net that having sex on e is awesome because your sense of touch is maximized and amazing and such."

Shake: The end bits of a bag of weed.

"All I've got left from my stash is some shake."

Shitfaced: The state of being exceptionally drunk.

"He got so shitfaced last night he couldn't find his way home."

Syn: wasted, plastered, hammered.

Shrooms: Mushrooms that contain psilocybin, psilocin, and baeocystin. They have a hallucinogenic effect.

"I ate some shrooms last night and saw the craziest things!"

Skunk: A type of marijuana. It is a cross breed of Cannabis sativa and Cannabis indica.
"Wow – that skunk is strong! Where can I get some?"

Special K: Slang for the drug Ketamine – an animal tranquilizer.
"We scored some Special K tonight. I hear it's better than X."
Syn: K

Stoner: A term used to describe someone who smokes marijuana often.
"He is such a stoner. He smokes like twice a day."

Toke: To inhale marijuana smoke or take a hit or turn.
"Take another toke off the joint."

Triple C's: Stands for coricidan HBP cough and cold. Taking more than the recommended does of OTC cough medicine can have a hallucinogenic effect.
Syn: skittles, robo trip, poor mans X.
"I'm out of X but I've got Triple C's. I'm going to robo trip."

X: slang for the drug Ecstasy.
"They were rolling on X at the rave."