



Doctor Gentry's Blog

Doctor Gentry's Blog covers a variety of topics related to student affairs and the fraternity/sorority industry, including hazing prevention, brother/sisterhood, Title IX, student development and more. Follow Dr. Gentry McCreary on twitter @doctorgentry

Wednesday, June 28, 2017

The Drunk Sex Problem, Revisited



Take a look at the photo above, and imagine the following scenario:

Each of these young women, depicted here pre-gaming before their date party (photo courtesy of TSM), go out tonight and have similar experiences. They consume alcohol to the point of incapacitation, and each go home with their respective dates and engage in sexual intercourse. Each of them wakes up the following morning with only a vague recollection of what happened the night before.

Woman A laughs about what happened. She had a blast the night before, remembers being really into her date and wanted to have sex with him. The fact that she was too drunk to remember what happened doesn't bother her. She knew they guy, was comfortable with him, and wanted to sleep with him. In her mind, it was a great ending to a great night.

Woman B wakes up confused, and attempts to replay what happened but can't seem to remember details. She liked her date and was into him, but hadn't really planned on having sex with him. She isn't necessarily bothered by the fact that they had sex, but feels really bad that she was too drunk to remember it. She tells herself that she needs to be more careful and probably watch her alcohol consumption in the future to make sure she doesn't put herself in this situation again.

Woman C wakes up, horrified. She has no recollection of what happened and is scared. She didn't really know her date very well - it was a guy she'd met at a party the week before. She had no intention of having sex with him. Upon getting dressed, she immediately goes to the hospital, tells the nurses that she thinks she may have been raped the night before and asks for a rape kit examination.

Three women with three identical experiences, each of them defining what happened to them in a completely different way.

My question for you is this:

Which one of them is correct?

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About Me



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Consultant, speaker, researcher and author Dr. Gentry McCreary is the CEO and managing partner of Dyad Strategies, LLC, an

assessment and applied research firm specializing in working with fraternity and sorority communities. Gentry is also an affiliated consultant with the NCHERM Group LLC, a higher education risk management firm, where we works with college campuses on hazing prevention, investigation and adjudication. Gentry worked for over 10 years in higher education, most recently serving as the Associate Dean of Students/Deputy Title IX Coordinator at the University of West Florida. Previously, he served as the Director of Greek Affairs at the University of Alabama, during a time in which that fraternity/sorority community became the largest in the United States. He speaks and writes on topics related to higher education, hazing, fraternities and sororities and student development. In his spare time, he is an avid outdoorsman who enjoys golf, canoeing, backpacking and upland bird hunting with his German Shorthaired Pointer, Ellie.

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Alcohol and Minimization

Two years ago, I wrote an article entitled “The Drunk Sex Problem” for AFA’s Perspectives magazine. In that article, I pointed to the fact that in the study from which the “one in five” statistic comes, only a third of the women who reported incapacitated sexual activity defined those experiences as sexual assault. I went on in that article to critique some of the popular prevention messaging related to alcohol and consent.

Unfortunately, we continue to see confusing messages around this topic. At a national prevention conference last year, a keynote speaker praised campus prevention campaigns using messages such as “Drunk sex is rape” and “a person under the influence of alcohol cannot consent to sexual activity.” The problem with these statements is two-fold. First, the legal standard, as well as the standard articulated in guidance related to Title IX, is “Incapacitated,” which is a higher threshold than just “drunk.” These messages are often inconsistent with law and university policy. Secondly, if we use prevention messages such as “drunk sex is rape” and “someone under the influence of alcohol cannot consent to sexual activity” then we are, in essence, calling a vast majority of college students rapists and/or rape victims. We are also telling two of the three women depicted in the scenario above that they are incorrectly interpreting their own experiences. We are telling them that they are wrong.

All of this is a big problem.

One of the assessment instruments we have developed at [Dyad Strategies](#) (manuscript under review) examines the various ways that members of a sorority might respond when a chapter member discloses that she has been sexually assaulted. There are four general responses that sorority members may have in this situation. First, they could support the survivor and do everything we would hope that they would do in order to support their sister. On the other hand, they may blame her for what happened, asking her things like “why did you go home with him if you didn’t want to have sex” or “why did you have so much to drink.” Thirdly, they may minimize her experience, trying to deescalate her interpretation of what happened by asking her questions like “are you sure you’re not just regretting what happened” or making statements like “I’m not sure that’s rape - it was really just a drunk hookup.” Lastly, a sorority may place social pressure on a member to NOT report what happened for fear of the sorority becoming a social pariah on campus (i.e. if the alleged party is a member of a popular campus fraternity).

We have studied each of these responses to sexual assault in connection to a variety of the constructs we study, including sisterhood and various measures of chapter social culture. Of all the relationships we have observed (and will soon be publishing), one stands out above all others - the strong relationship between alcohol use and the minimization mindset. Of the four mindsets, alcohol use has the strongest relationship with minimization among sorority women, and in a regression model, alcohol use is the single greatest predictor of a minimization mindset. The more frequently a sorority member reports binge drinking, the more likely she is to minimize the experiences of her peers when it comes to potential sexual assaults. She is increasingly likely to be the one asking “are you sure you’re not just regretting what happened” or “are you sure that wasn’t just a drunk hookup.”

After we analyzed the data and uncovered the strong relationship between alcohol use and the minimization mindset, I spent several hours over a period of weeks trying to make sense of the relationship between the two. And then one day it dawned on me - binge drinking predicts minimization because frequent binge drinkers and their close friends are themselves more likely to have had incapacitated sexual experiences that they did NOT define as sexual assault. In other words, they are Woman A in the scenario depicted above. They, and their close friends, are increasingly likely, based on their alcohol use, to have had incapacitated sexual experiences. And, if they did not identify those experiences as sexual assaults, then they are likely to use their own lens for defining potential sexual assault when discussing similar experiences with their peers. If what happened to them was just a fun, drunk hookup, then how can it be a sexual assault when someone else has a similar experience?

Message Matters

If, like me, you believe that the three women depicted in the scenario at the beginning of this article are ALL correct - that each person is free to define their experiences in their own way - and if, like me, you care about preventing sexual assault, then we need to revisit the problems associated with the “drunk sex is rape” prevention messages.

The fact of the matter is that reducing this complex issue down to simple slogans like “drunk sex is rape” or “a drunk person cannot consent to sex” is not helpful, and it may even be counterproductive. We’ve tried to create a dumbed-down, black and white, dualistic message for our students, but the reality is that sexual assault is not a black and white,

easy, simple issue. There is a great deal of relativism involved - different people respond to similar scenarios in drastically different ways. Our prevention messaging needs to reflect both the complexity of the issue as well as the lived experience of the students we are trying to educate.

The goal of prevention programming should be to have students walk away from a program saying "I should be much more careful about my sexual choices when alcohol is involved." We should also seek to create dissonance in some people about their past sexual behavior, causing them to consider that, perhaps, some of their previous sexual experiences COULD have been considered sexual assaults. Male students who frequently mix sex and alcohol should walk away from a prevention program saying to themselves "I'm very fortunate that I have not been accused of sexual assault - I really need to be more careful." If the goal of prevention programming is to change student thinking in a way that might change their behavior at some point in the future, then having students critically reflect on their past sexual experiences is an important and effective step.

Calling the vast majority of our students rapists and/or rape victims, I would argue, is not an effective strategy for achieving the desired changes in thought and behavior. As my friend Aaron Boe frequently points out, being reckless with messaging can have serious unintended consequences for those you're trying to help. The *implication* of "drunk sex is rape" is that if students have had sex while intoxicated then they should see themselves as having experienced sexual assault, either as a victim or a perpetrator. If they don't reject the message outright as absurd (adults have responsible, healthy sexual experiences involving alcohol all the time) then a person may take on an emotional burden that was not there before by contemplating an entirely different kind of label for their experience. Or, a person's friends may start insisting that their drunken hook up should be considered "sexual assault," resulting in emotional pain and potential pressuring of one kind or another about what to do next (as appeared to be the case in the [now famous incident at Occidental College](#)).

Having students be more thoughtful about drunk sex is an important goal. Telling students that "drunk sex is rape" is an incredibly ineffective strategy for achieving that goal, because instead of having students reflect on their own experiences, it puts students on the defensive, causing them to tune out our messages and serving to confuse rather than to clarify, wasting their time and ours. Having students understand that their drunken sexual experiences could potentially be sexual assault is an erstwhile goal, but telling them that drunk sex is ALWAYS rape is a poor strategy for achieving that outcome, because that statement ignores the complexity of the issue and is so inconsistent with their own experiences (remember, 2/3 of women who have an incapacitated sexual experience do NOT identify it as sexual assault). In my original "Drunk Sex" article, I cited [Brett Sokolow's insightful whitepaper](#) on incapacitation and the need for clarity related to conversations about alcohol and consent. That whitepaper was written in 2005! Twelve years later, and we are still struggling with this issue. We need to evolve quickly and become more sophisticated in our prevention messaging in order to connect with students in a way that will change their thinking and, subsequently, their behaviors.

Strategies for Educating Men

I was discussing these issues at a recent conference presentation, and was talking about the need for a more nuanced approach to our education regarding alcohol, capacity and consent, urging participants to help students understand where the line between "drunk sex" and "incapacitation" is drawn. One of the participants came up to me after the session, and while very complimentary of the session, asked me a question that was very consistent with my own experience.

"I understand that we need to help men understand where the line between drunk sex and rape is drawn, but how do we do that without the conversation turning into a Q&A about 'how far can I push the envelope without getting in trouble?'" In other words, how do we keep our prevention programs with men from turning into a "how to not get accused of rape" session.

On this question, I will shine a light on some of the work that my friend and colleague Aaron Boe at [Prevention Culture](#) is doing. His work in this area has greatly influenced my own, and I think his approach to sexual assault prevention with fraternity and sorority members is the most enlightened, well-researched approach that I have personally seen.

As Aaron and I have discussed on many occasions, when we are educating men (whether in a group or a 1-on-1 conversation), the sequence of topics in a prevention conversation is very important. Conversations on capacity are more relevant after men understand the critical concept of, as Aaron puts it, "It doesn't take what people might imagine to be 'violence' for a person to be violated and experience serious emotional harm." When you

start with simplified messaging like “drunk sex is rape” or over-simplified slogans on consent, there is an implicit threat involved—you are naturally implying threats of very serious punishment. Why wouldn't a young man hearing this message be concerned and defensive? And when you make a misstep and say something unrealistic or untrue (because adults impaired by alcohol have mutual, ethical, and even healthy physical intimacy all the time) you are just daring them to discredit you and dismiss your message. Too often, people skip the part that matters, which is the harm that can be caused. Virtually all non-sociopathic people care about not causing serious harm to another person, and not having any guest or person around them experience serious harm. Most men, however immature they might be, at least care about not causing serious emotional harm to another. And we need people to care and be engaged (rather than defensive or dismissive) to have meaningful discussions about sexual assault.

I would suggest based on my own observations and my conversations with Aaron that the sequence of topics should be in the following order:

1. Help men understand the realities of trauma - Aaron has a really neat way of getting this point across. He puts pictures of two men on the screen - one a haggard, unshaven, scary-looking guy who you wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley at night, and the other of a bright-eyed, handsome, baby-faced college man. He will ask students to identify the convicted rapist. This is a trick question, because both men in the photographs are convicted rapists. Aaron will then make the point that most men understand how someone being sexually assaulted by the first guy might be traumatic, but don't really understand how being assaulted by the second guy might be traumatic. He'll then ask the men to identify the reasons that being assaulted by the young, baby-faced guy may actually be MORE traumatic than being assaulted by the unshaven, scary guy. The men will immediately be able to identify the issues (perhaps it was someone she trusted, maybe it is someone she has to see on campus every day, etc.). By helping men understand how being assaulted by a peer (i.e. someone just like them) could be a traumatic experience, Aaron is able to help them understand the realities of trauma in a way that really causes them to reflect on their own choices. For the non-sociopaths in the room, the natural response to this realization is “I wouldn't want to traumatize or hurt someone. Maybe I need to be more careful.”

2. Help men understand THEIR responsibility in preventing sexual assault - Most college men operate in a sexual world with the following rule - “I'll keep going until my partner makes me stop.” After we have helped students understand the reality of trauma, then we can help them buy into reframing the conversation about responsibility. If they are not sexual predators or sociopaths, then most men are going to say “If I don't want to traumatize someone, then it is MY responsibility to make sure that I'm only doing something that my partner wants me doing.” Again, the sequence of lessons here is important. Talking about this responsibility shift BEFORE we help men understand the realities of trauma would not work. But when men understand the potential trauma that they could cause, then helping them take responsibility for NOT causing trauma is much easier.

3. Help men understand capacity and consent - Once men understand the reality of trauma AND their responsibility in ensuring that they don't traumatize someone, we are now ready to have the conversation about capacity and consent. When we wait to have the conversation about capacity and consent until the end, we are able to keep the conversation from turning into “how do I avoid getting accused of rape” and instead make it about “How can I make sure I respect my partner and never do anything that would hurt or traumatize someone.” And with that as the focus of our conversation, we can explore the grey area between “drunk sex” and incapacitation, helping men come to terms with the fact that perhaps they are lucky that they haven't previously been accused of sexual assault - that perhaps they are just fortunate that their previous sexual partners did not identify those experiences as sexual assault.

With this realization in mind, we can then help them understand how to recognize an incapacitated person, help them understand blackouts, and help them draw a line in the sand WELL before someone is incapacitated. In doing so, we are recognizing that perhaps their previous sexual encounters may very well NOT have been sexual assault, but perhaps they are fortunate that this is the case. This requires us to acknowledge the ambiguity of drunk sex/sexual assault, and to acknowledge that different people may respond to things in different ways. In doing so, I will share the picture and scenario depicted at the beginning of the article and walk them through the fact that different people respond to things in different ways. Equipped with this understanding, they are now prepared to take responsibility for their actions in order to ensure that they do not engage in ANY sexual activity that could possibly even be CONSIDERED as sexual assault. In other words, we've helped them understand that drunk sex might well be sexual assault if a person is

incapacitated, and why that matters (emotional trauma), without making the oversimplified and inaccurate statement “drunk sex is rape.”

Strategies for Educating Women

Equipped with the knowledge that binge drinking is the leading predictor of both sexual assault minimization and victim blaming among sorority members, our prevention strategies with women must include conversations around alcohol and social culture. Unfortunately, this has become very unpopular in many prevention circles.

At a recent prevention conference, I heard an industry expert, a renowned researcher on the topic, stand before a room and say “alcohol does not cause sexual assault, because we know that those who use alcohol to rape would find other ways to rape in the absence of alcohol.” While I agree with the first part of the statement, that alcohol does not cause sexual assault, I vehemently disagree with the second part of that statement. There is a new wave of thought within some circles of the prevention field that basically assumes that there are no “accidental rapists.” This way of thinking assumes that all men who are involved in sexual assault are, by definition, sexual predators. I bit my tongue during the session, but was very tempted to stand up and ask “if all men who rape are sexual predators and incapable of being helped, then sexual assault cannot possibly be prevented. If that is the case, then why are we all wasting our time here at a prevention conference?”

I operate from an assumption that the vast majority of sexual assaults CAN be prevented, that many college men who find themselves involved in situations where alcohol is involved and capacity and consent are in question are NOT intentional predators or sociopathic serial rapists but instead are caught up in a culture where binge drinking and “drunk hookups” are not only normalized, but glorified. Don’t believe me? Go check out the [TSM](#) website and get back to me. If I am correct, then I think it is wholly appropriate to talk with sorority women about the social culture of their chapters while acknowledging that alcohol DOES NOT cause rape, a survivor is NEVER AT FAULT because she drank too much, and that the top priority in prevention is and always will be to educate men NOT TO RAPE. We can do all of those things while still acknowledging that the social culture of a chapter creates conditions in which sorority members may be more or less likely to be assaulted, and also creates environmental conditions that can help or hinder women from feeling supported by their sisters if they experience sexual violence. It is appropriate to help sorority members understand that it is everyone’s responsibility - men and women - to work to create environments where sexual assaults are less likely to occur. We cannot have an honest conversation about preventing sexual assault if we are not willing to consider the role that alcohol plays in the environments in which those assaults are taking place. Our goal should not be ideological purity around issues of consent and sex - our goal should be preventing sexual assaults from happening. And if that is our goal, then we need to be willing to have honest conversations about social culture and its role in sexual assault. (And, to give credit where credit is due, I think the “ideological purists” bring much needed clarity to our dialogue and are generally spot-on in the things they say, but being “right” and being an effective educator are not always the same thing).

In addition, when we are talking with sorority members about these issues, we need to revisit the three young women in the scenario depicted earlier. After explaining the scenario, ask sorority members the same question I asked you at the beginning of the article - which one of these women is correct? Eventually, I promise, someone will give you the right answer - all three of the women are correct. Each of those three women are free to define what happened to them in their own way. It is not our job to define their experiences for them. Just because I interpreted something that happened to me differently than my friend interpreted her similar experience does not mean I am right and she is wrong. Or vice versa. And whether or not a university policy or any laws were broken will be subject to an investigation and a review of the facts of the case applied to the appropriate laws/policies.

Conclusion

Preventing sexual assault is important work. It is work that we need to get right. It is a complicated topic, and it requires expertise and great skill to do this work in a meaningful and effective way. I regularly see well-intentioned prevention educators completely botch their conversations with fraternity and sorority members because their messages ignore the complexity of the issue, ignore the lived experiences of the students they are trying to educate, and ignore the realities of the social culture in which sexual assaults are occurring. If we are going to be good at this work - and by good, I mean we actually change student thinking in a way that might change their choices and behavior - then we need to be clear and precise about our messages. This will require some people to set their own ideological purity aside and be willing to engage in conversations that acknowledge the complexity of the issue, clarifies where the lines are actually drawn, and ultimately prevents harm. The topic of drunk sex and incapacitation is complicated enough; we don't

need to further complicate it by being careless about how we communicate these messages. Doing this requires us to acknowledge that different people define things in different ways, but ultimately it is everyone's responsibility to both make our social environments safer and to know where to draw the line in order to ensure that we are not traumatizing or harming other people by violating their most basic human right - choosing what to do, and not do, with their bodies.

**Author's Note - I acknowledge that this article is written from a heteronormative perspective. Not all sexual assaults are perpetrated by men, and not all victims of sexual assault are women. The unique issues involving sexual assault falling outside of the heteronormative "male-on-female" gender binary merit a more thorough examination than this blog post would allow, and demand more expertise than I purport to have regarding those issues. I offer this explanation while fully acknowledging the very serious issues involving sexual assault that happens beyond the heteronormative examples used in this article.*

Posted by Gentry McCreary at 12:57 PM



8 comments:



Modamari Com August 9, 2017 at 11:00 AM

We've all met [Hill Climb Racing](#) on Android and OS Phone apps, but now you have a chance to play Hill Climb Racing for free on our poolofgame site! You will start with a red car in Hill Climb Racing first, then you can get different cars with the scores you earn, and you can strengthen the cars against the challenging parts. But remember, you should get the gasoline tanks that will come out before your petrol is finished! Have fun...

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amira reda September 1, 2017 at 5:10 AM

شركة كشف تسربات المياه بالرياض
شركة عزل اسطح بالرياض

شركة كشف تسربات المياه بسيهات
شركة عزل اسطح بسيهات

شركة كشف تسربات المياه بصفوى
شركة عزل اسطح بصفوى

شركة كشف تسربات المياه بحائل

شركة كشف تسربات المياه بالاحساء

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olakunle adeniya September 6, 2017 at 6:59 AM

Lol.

This is lovely. keep it up. Meanwhilie read entertaining [top News stories](#), [entertainment news](#) and [school news](#)

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kala jadu November 10, 2017 at 2:21 AM

Booze is a cruel mistress because it makes you want to have sex and then makes it incredibly difficult to have sex, because you both turn into clumsy assholes. We're not all Beyoncé. Here's what happens when we're drunk in lust.

[get love back by vashikaran](#)

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Cure To Weak Erection. November 12, 2017 at 12:57 AM



I Thank God, the erection problem (premature ejaculation and weak erection) which make my wife leave me is finally solved, I never knew that my sex drive can come back to normal until I met a Doctor,(Dr Johnson) I have earlier saw a testimony of man named Bush, then I gave a try since I have contacted many but all to no avail just for my erection to be normal, I got a permanent cure to weak erection and Premature Ejaculation. If you are having related problem do not hesitate to contact him with his email: on drjohnson958@gmail.com or text him through whats-app on +1(518) 675-6082

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Modamari Com December 8, 2017 at 10:59 AM

One Piece VS Naruto 4.0 As in previous versions, choose your favorite among the characters of [One Piece VS Naruto 4.0](#) (Luffy, Zorro or Sandy) and enter the arena. In One Piece VS Naruto 4.0 you can explore other characters. The important thing is to prepare your team in the best possible way. Choose Naruto, Sasuke, Jiraiya, Minato, Zoro, Luffy, Sanji and others as characters ... Good fun.

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Hashmi Dawakhana February 24, 2018 at 11:39 PM

Thanks for sharing your problem with us. Drinking causes male sex problem. Decreased sexual interest and sex power haunts everybody at one or the other point of time. So, it is very important to use techniques to keep your sexual life, pleasurable and enjoyable. Visit <http://www.pxxl.in/>

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P k Gupta March 20, 2018 at 5:30 AM

Dr. P. K Gupta. He is the [Best Sexologist in Delhi](#) and provides the effective sexual treatment and enhance your sexual life. Consulting him is very beneficial to you, so, don't wait more approach the best sex specialist doctor in Delhi and have a romantic sexual life.

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