



# Messaging about the Intersections between Alcohol and Violence: *Creating a Shared Approach*



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Written by Missouri Partners in Prevention

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In August 2016, teams from fifteen Missouri higher education campuses met in Columbia, Missouri for a team consultation and training event designed to help campuses learn more about messaging about alcohol and sexual violence on college campuses. Funding for this training was made possible in part by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

The goal of the workshop was to examine the intersections between alcohol and violence in order to create a shared communication approach. The facilitator of the event was public health expert, Dr. Linda Langford of Langford and Associates.

## Participating Campuses

Missouri State University  
State Technical College of Missouri  
University of Missouri Kansas City  
University of Missouri St. Louis  
University of Missouri

Truman State University  
Columbia College  
Maryville University  
Southeast Missouri State University  
University of Central Missouri

Northwest Missouri State University  
Saint Louis University  
Lincoln University  
Missouri University of Science and Technology  
Evangel University

\*The Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence also attended as a non-campus entity.

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a consortium of 21 college and university campuses across Missouri devoted to improving the health and safety of Missouri college students. **Addressing sexual assault and preventing power-based personal violence on college campuses is a primary goal of Missouri college campuses and the PIP consortium.**

In a four month planning process that consisted of regular phone calls with planning committee members, Partners in Prevention staff and Dr. Langford ascertained that despite tremendous work being done on campuses to address power-based personal violence- specifically sexual assault- campuses identified a chief concern: addressing issues of the intersection between alcohol use and sexual assault. Research consistently finds an association between sexual violence and alcohol. However, the nature of that association is complex, so translating these findings into successful prevention efforts can be challenging. In addition, stakeholders often have diverse perspectives on this intersection based on their role(s), professional training, personal experiences, and other factors.

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## Exploring the Complexity: Messaging Matters

Alcohol and violence in general, are associated. In fact, drinkers are often involved in crime and violence acts more often than non-drinkers. Additionally, in an environment where alcohol is more available and less regulated, more crime and violence is found.

The issue of the association of alcohol and sexual violence is incredibly complex **because a victim who has consumed alcohol is not responsible for the sexual assault occurring.** However,

in much of our messaging, we tell women to “watch your drink” “be careful what you are drinking” as if victims are solely responsible for preventing crimes against them. Rather, it is the perpetrators that are responsible for these actions. While this association should be clear, when alcohol is present, “victim blaming” seems to cloud the conversation.

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Alcohol does affect social and cultural expectations and it is clear that alcohol has direct effects on inhibitions, impairment, and information processing. It is often these social expectations and disinhibiting effects that attract perpetrators to areas where alcohol is more present. Perpetrators often count on the decreased monitoring of bars or parties and the lessened inhibitions of the drinkers at these locations. (Langford, 2016)

Additionally, this is not a problem with a “one size fits all” solution. Informational interventions, such as peer education presentations, are not effective as stand-alone programs. In order to create real change in behavior, campuses must combine individually-focused change of potential predators and bystanders with efforts to change environmental contributors, such as alcohol availability.

## About the Event

The training event, “Messaging about the Intersections between Alcohol and Violence: Creating a Shared Approach” provided a unique opportunity for multi-disciplinary campus-based teams to explore the unique intersection. The session included both process and content elements for the campuses to explore. Participants learned and practiced an approach to openly and honestly discussing issues with multiple perspectives that focuses on dialogue, respectful listening, finding common ground, and collaborative problem-solving. At the end of the training session, each campus created a list of “do’s” and “don’t’s” for messaging about alcohol and sexual violence on campus.

In preparation for the event, campuses were asked to bring together people that would be either responsible for providing education or marketing about alcohol and sexual assault or those who would be leading staff with those responsibilities.



Campuses brought teams of professionals, ranging in professions from campus police, campus minister, student affairs professionals, conduct/Title IX staff, and campus health professionals. The scope of the professionals' knowledge of the subject was vast and their level of position at the university (ranging from entry-level positions to senior student affairs officers) was equally differentiating.

## Program Outcomes

Campuses created a shared list of messaging rules for each other during the session. These messaging rules are to serve as a guidepost for Partners in Prevention campuses as they continue to work on these issues on campus. Campuses were asked to share these rules with their coalitions, administrators, and student groups in order to gain a shared definition of messaging about this important issue.

After the session completed, Partners in Prevention facilitated an interview process with nine campuses to determine the outcomes of the training session for each campus and track progress which had been made on their campus as a result of the session.

Campuses created the following shared list of messaging rules for each other during the session:

### What is Good Messaging?

- Short
- Includes images students recognize
- Incorporates principles of universal design
- Recognizable
- Sufficient dosage
- Engaging, fun, and fashionable
- Includes resources
- Simple, easy to follow instructions
- Action Oriented (give person something to do)
- Vetted
- Prevention PIE (Positive, Inclusive, Empowering)

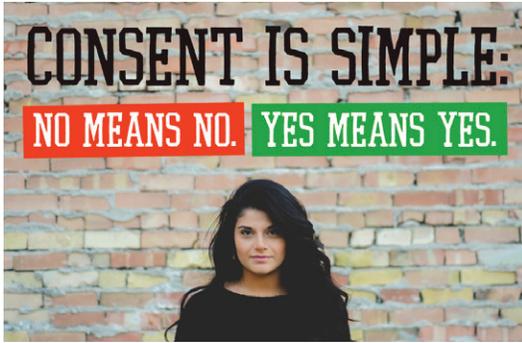
### Problematic Messaging

- Blaming and Shaming Messaging
- Scare tactics
- Lecturing
- Mass communication messaging - trying to reach too many people at once
- Shock factor
- Inaccurate messaging
- Ignores current culture and terms

### Messaging about Alcohol and Sexual Violence: Avoiding Victim Blaming

- Avoid using posters or social media to address this complex topic
- Discuss the intersection of alcohol and sexual violence in small group discussions
- Make it clear that alcohol use **does not cause or welcome sexual violence and that alcohol use does not equal consent**
- Educate all members of the community educating about alcohol and sexual violence about how to facilitate these small group discussions, including information about consent
- Avoid mixed messages about alcohol and sexual violence
- Educate all students and community members
- Outreach to potential perpetrators
- Provide sexual health information about consent and how alcohol use may affect consent
- Educate bystanders in social situations involving alcohol
- Collaborate with law enforcement and Title IX staff members to align messaging about sexual violence cases involving alcohol

## Do's and Don'ts Illustrated



### Do

This advertisement provides simple directions and gives the audience clues about the message. The "No Means No" in the red format further emphasizes the suggestion that "No" means stop and "Yes" means that consent has been given. The message is not lost in other words or graphics and the message is meant to be simple and direct.



### Don't

This example may seem far-fetched, but some campuses still use scare tactics in their primary prevention with students. Health communication and health education research has found consistently that scare tactics are not an effective method to create behavior change for college students. Additionally, this media message contains no resources for the audience nor does it give a call to action.



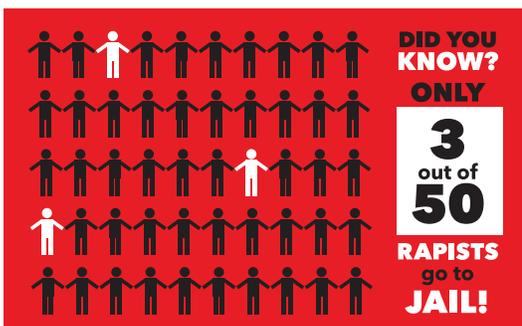
### Don't

In its attempt to be direct to its audience, this message is confusing. While messaging to potential perpetrators may seem to be helpful, this message, portraying a female as weak and unable to look up at the camera, does not provide the intended message. Additionally, this message assumes that all audience members are potential perpetrators, rather than a smaller portion of the population.



### Don't

This message attempts to empower women to no longer be silent about rape and sexual violence, but the simple act of putting the red X over the female's mouth, sends the opposite message. The red X and the "speak up" message are in direct conflict with each other.



### Don't

While this message may intend to empower survivors or bystanders to report acts of violence or rape more often, it sends the opposite message. This message says to the audience that rapists are not convicted and therefore, reporting would be futile.

## Specific Campus Experiences

Additionally, many campuses created Do's and Don'ts for their own individual campuses. Missouri University of Science and Technology created a list of do's and don'ts. Additionally, their campus coalition has started creating talking-points and key data about populations on campus. They have shared this data with key stakeholders and feel that this new initiative has helped to bring consistency to their messaging and improved overall collaboration.

### Missouri University of Science and Technology Do's and Don'ts

Do have a Call to Action

Do have a dosage plan/matrix

Do collaborate

Don't just do posters and flyers

Do create messaging to share among stakeholders

Do incorporate faculty

Missouri Partners in Prevention campuses learned a great deal during this one day workshop. In follow up interviews, campuses noted that they are in the process of implementing other strategies to address issues related to messaging and sexual violence, but there is still a great deal of work to be done.

**Based on the recommendations of this training session, Partners in Prevention campuses plan to implement the following strategies in the coming fiscal year:**

**Campus teams will discuss this issue with campus stakeholders such as law enforcement and Title IX officers.** This is a critical next step in order to make sure that the language about alcohol, consent, and sexual violence is streamlined from prevention messaging, to the messaging during intervention after an assault.

**Campuses will strengthen or implement Good Samaritan and Medical Amnesty policies for campus for individuals who have been using alcohol.** This step will allow students who have been drinking alcohol to report crimes without fear of being arrested, ticketed, or fined for their drinking behavior. This may encourage survivors to come forward after an assault without fear of feeling blamed for their drinking.

**Campuses will review data from the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors to determine the scope of the problem on their campus.** Questions on the 2016 and 2017 MACHB survey will help to give campuses a broader picture of the scope of Interpersonal and Sexual Violence on Campus.

**Campuses will be doing a review of all current messaging about alcohol, sexual violence, and alcohol and sexual violence.** This will include messaging in social media, print media, and in person. This review will be critical to determine where messaging is most problematic and how we can message about sexual assault and alcohol without victim blaming. Examples include:

- Cross-training peer educators, residence life staff, or Greek life staff who provide presentations about alcohol how to talk about sexual assault and how to answer questions about providing consent while drinking.
- Cross-training peer educators or staff who provide messaging about sexual assault to validate that alcohol is often a part of the social fabric of college life. Teach these peer educators to talk about responsible alcohol use while feeling comfortable to discuss alcohol and consent simultaneously.
- Providing education for staff in trauma-informed approaches. Trauma-informed staff often help victims and survivors feel safer and more comfortable to discuss an incident and receive support services.

**Campuses will use information from their review of current messaging to create a messaging matrix to share with all campus partners.**

## Benefits of the Training Experience

Overall campuses found it to be a beneficial experience and were thankful for the experience to talk about these two issues in a safe, non-judgmental format with fellow colleagues. During the training session, campuses were able to challenge each other using a conversation format that helped determine next steps, rather than perpetuate disagreement.



## Next Steps

In the three months following the training session, campuses reported increased collaboration regarding alcohol and violence on campus. Northwest Missouri State University indicated that the experience allowed the campus representatives to see each other's perspectives on the issues discussed and therefore, they returned to campus with a greater interest in collaborating.

Several campuses identified that this training session was the first time they were able to talk to their campus colleagues about the issue of alcohol and sexual violence. Maryville University indicated that staff members who attended the training along with their senior student affairs officer felt that this training provided them with an important opportunity to share their work with a senior level administrator as well as learn from their leader about policies and procedures on campus.

During the session, Dr. Langford spent time discussing how marketing might affect the messages that campuses send about alcohol and sexual assault. She cautioned campuses that some messages might result in victim blaming if done in a problematic way.

Although each campus found value in the training and discussion, all campuses felt that this was the beginning of important conversation about this topic and suggested several next steps.

- Further training is needed about how to have discussions with students about the role alcohol plays in sexual assault without engaging in victim blaming.
- Campuses are in need of further information about how to have discussions about the issue of consent and alcohol use.
- Campuses are interested in having future team trainings on issues of alcohol and/or sexual violence as they felt that the time to collaborate and get to know their colleagues was invaluable.

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