

DATE RAPE



UNMIXING MESSAGES

A D.I.N. PUBLICATION BY CHRISTINA DYE

Love Hurts

Some words simply seem to go together: *Salt and pepper, high noon, sticks and stones, pumpkin pie.*

Other words fit together less well, but few fit together more imperfectly than the words "date" and "rape."

Perhaps that's why date rape was resisted as a concept for so long. And maybe that's why it's become the urgent national concern it is today.

Public awareness didn't come a moment too soon.

In fact, it was only the media storm surrounding the alleged attack at the Kennedy compound in Palm Beach, Florida in 1991 that brought the topic to serious national attention and kept it there.

It wasn't for lack of trying, or of incidents reported by women who claimed they'd been assaulted on dates.

Just consider some recent numbers:

- ▶ More than 100,000 rape cases were reported nationwide in 1990. About half were date rapes.
- ▶ 20 percent of women questioned in a study at Cornell University claimed they'd had sex forced on them.
- ▶ One in seven college women nationally has been raped. Four of five knew their attackers.

The figures are alarming. But they only hint at the deeper issues involved—and the pain a woman can go through when she is sexually assaulted by someone she knows.

That's why we've put together this pamphlet.

Because date rape *is* a violation of trust and a breach of intimacy. And the emotional bruises it causes *are* real. But with support and understanding, the pain it causes doesn't have to last a lifetime.

And by increasing our sensitivity to its causes and prevention, we may be able to help it not happen at all.



Blurred view. Anger and impaired self-esteem are common emotions among victims of date rape.

Drugs or drinking commonly figure into the date-rape equation, usually involving both partners.

What is date rape?

Date rape is the act of forcing sex on a date.

The key word in the definition is *force*, since it's the legal line that separates rape from romance.

We all have pictures of who crosses that line—the raincoat-clad flasher or the stranger on a dimly-lit street.

But more often than not, experts tell us, when the line does get crossed, it's by someone the victim knows and knows well—even dates.

Acquaintance rape is a little broader, and can involve a sexual assault by a friend, co-worker, or the boy next door. In most cases, victim and attacker have known each other for a year or longer.

Both types can take many forms—from a surprise attack by a trusted family friend to a date who expects sex as payment for a night on the town.

Unlike rapes involving strangers, date and acquaintance rapists typically use psychological pressure or physical strength to press for sex, rather than weapons or threats of violence.

Date rape is different than stranger rape in other ways, too.

Assaults by unknown rapists occur at any time, day or night, and most often in the victim's home. Date rapes usually take place in late-night hours on weekends, and an estimated 80 percent happen in the man's home.

Drugs or drinking also commonly figure into the date-rape equation, usually involving both partners.

How common is date rape?

Estimates vary.

Researchers say date and acquaintance rape may account for 70 percent of all sexual assaults.

The problem is most visible on college campuses, where

as many as one in five women may experience some type of physical or psychological sexual coercion.

But while date rape isn't limited to campuses, it is primarily a problem involving young women between 15 and 24.

Still, gauging its actual incidence is difficult since date rapes go largely unreported.

Only an estimated 10 percent of all rapes reach police headquarters; fewer still make it to court.

Why isn't it reported more often?

Fear and shame play a major role in keeping victims quiet.

Like any painful experience, most women who've suffered a sexual assault prefer to put the incident behind them as quickly and with as little attention as possible.

Guilt also feeds the process of downplaying date rape.

It's easy to blame an unknown attacker, more difficult to accuse a romantic partner or an acquaintance of years.

CRISIS CONTROL

Date rape can often be stopped if women assert their right to say no. And that right still stands no matter how long or how deeply you may be involved.

Rape counselors offer a range of suggestions for getting that message across—and for dealing with a date who doesn't stop.

► **Before:** Don't put yourself in problem situations by drinking too much or spending time in his home. Talk honestly about your feelings on sex and set your personal limits. Then stick to them.

► **During:** A loud, forceful "no" can be all it takes to defuse an explosive situation. If you don't want to have sex, say so. If he presses, get away—fast.

► **After:** If you can't prevent a rape, get help as soon as possible. Call a rape crisis center or a supportive friend. They can help you sort through your options and begin the process of repairing your battered self-esteem. ■



Getting to 'no.' Plain talk and sober thinking can stop trouble.

And many young women are unskilled in sexual relationships and uncertain of their own right to say "no" to an aggressive date.

What causes date rape?

Most commonly, it's a mix of misread signals and misplaced expectations, fueled by alcohol and drug use.

The crossed communications can start with basic differences in male-female sexual conditioning, according to researchers.

In a study at Kent State University, men who forced sex were found to be more likely to see a certain amount of aggression as normal in sexual relationships.

They're also more inclined to believe that women don't *really* mean it when they say "no."

And in a culture where women are taught to be passive, coy, or seductive, it's probably not surprising that men may assume that "no" means "yes."

In the survey of college-aged men, one in 13 admitted using force for sex at least once. Only a few considered the act rape or saw themselves as rapists.

Responses from women were no less surprising.

Of those who claimed they'd been forced into sex at least once, more than half said the episodes involved their dates or boyfriends. But 73 percent did not consider the incident rape.

Conclusion? Traditional stereotypes of pushy males and passive females are still alive and kicking in America today.

Then again, so are the problems created by stereotyped sexual behavior and crossed communications.

How can men and women tell what's too far?

Sex is tricky territory. Most of us have precious little training in figuring out our own sexual feelings, let alone those of others. And talking about our feelings—particularly on a date with a new partner—can be difficult.



Sign of the times. Pi Kappa Phi poster warns: That was then, this is now.

In one survey, two-thirds of the women polled said men often misinterpreted how intimate they wanted to be.

Still, it's important to try, because it's this issue—communicating our sexual intentions and limits—which lies at the heart of the date rape dilemma and offers the clearest means of ending the confusion.

Because when we aren't clear about how close we'd like to get, our partner can only guess about our intentions—or pretend to know.

It's not as uncommon as you might think. In fact, researchers say that most couples misread sexual signals at least part of the time.

In the Kent State survey, two-thirds of the women polled said men often misinterpreted how intimate they wanted to be.

A full 25 percent reported they gave in to their dates'

demands because of verbal pressure, while 13 percent said they were physically forced into sex.

Maybe what's worth remembering is that some men *are* too aggressive and some women *do* send mixed signals.

But most incidents of sexual pressure on dates—from kissing to intercourse—involve ordinary men and women doing what ordinary men and women have always done.

And while that doesn't begin to excuse date rape, it does suggest a solution: If we speak honestly about what we want—and what we don't want—and if we respect our partner's right to feel differently, our relationships may never be put to the test over sex.

And that way, when questions about how far is too far *do* come up, we'll have an easier time finding an honest answer.

SEXUAL SIGNALS: UNMIXING THE MESSAGE

At the heart of questions about date rape lie basic differences in the ways in which males and females interpret behavioral signals by the other sex.

For their part, men can be misled by teasing, coquette-ish rejections by their dates. Many perceive such reactions as sexual come-ons, rather than turn-downs. And, ironically, sometimes they're right.

In a study at Texas A&M University, 39 percent of the 610 college women polled admitted that they'd said no to sex they really wanted. Reasons cited centered around not wanting to seem promiscuous, but included such motives as "I was angry with him" and "I wanted him to beg."

In another study by the same researchers, sexual aggressiveness was found to be more likely when a man initiates, pays for, and drives to and from a date—particularly when both partners get drunk and park or end up in his dorm or apartment.

Other factors that can lead to mixed messages: Body language and behavior by a woman that can be sexually misconstrued, including dress, posture, physical closeness, touching, etc.

Experts suggest that women can reduce the risk by being clear about their sexual limits early on and communicating them directly, rather than waiting until a painful moment of truth—or consequences.

Men can help by getting used to the idea that most women today mean what they say when they say "no" to sex. ■



Silent signals. Men and women can draw different conclusions from the same body language and gestures.

Sexual assault, in any form, violates the spirit as much as the body. And when a date turns into a rape, our ability to trust gets shattered—and fear and bitterness can take its place.

It doesn't have to be that way. Women can often stop a date rape—or keep one from starting—if they know how to draw the line sexually, so that it gets noticed in no uncertain terms.

If you're a woman, start by being clear about your sexual feelings and expectations, and be certain about the men you choose to share those feelings with. Realize that some men misinterpret body language, gestures, or conversation as sexual come-ons and respond accordingly. Don't drink too much or use drugs on a date.

If you're a man, realize that “no” means “no.” Respect a woman's right to turn you down, and don't confuse your feelings of self-worth with whether you score or not sexually. And don't drink too much or do drugs on a date, either.

The fact is that resolving the problem of date rape will require more than merely learning to say “when” or “no.” For many of us, it'll take nothing less than a transformation of our fondest illusions about love and love-making.

It will mean straight talk and honest self-examination. It will also mean taking responsibility for our partner's feelings and expectations as well as our own.

It might take some getting used to, but it *is* going to be worth it. After all, sharing ourselves the way we really are is what dating is supposed to be about.

And it sure beats the alternative. ■

This is one in a series of publications on behavior and health from Do It Now Foundation. Please write or call for a complete list of available titles.



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