

## Brain Stimulation 2018: The Perfect Storm of Attention, Emotion, & Expectancies during Rape

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Sex offenders and violent offenders in general that were intoxicated at the time of their offense often claim that they were too intoxicated to know 1) what they were doing at the time of the offense and 2) therefore unable to recall the details of the offense situation the next day. What the literature has to say contradicts the claims of sex offenders or violent offenders who claim they were “out of control” and that they do not recall what they did in the offense situation. Alcohol use (mild to moderate consumption) appears to result in 1) alcohol myopia; 2) increased attentional focus on the more salient emotions (whether negative or positive); 3) improved creative thinking and improved attention to the activity at hand; 4) decreased frontal lobe activity (e.g., lack of concern about consequences or morals); 5) is impacted by alcohol expectancies; and 6) does not prevent an individual from being able to recall activity that occurred while intoxicated when provided cues.

**KEY WORDS:** Sex offenders, sexual abusers, forensic assessment, alcohol and rape

**INTRODUCTION:** Because sex offenders and violent offenders often claim that they were intoxicated at the time of a crime they plead for mercy. And then many also claim that they did not know what they were doing during the offense situation and that they would never rape. In addition they claim that they are unable to recall what they did during the offense situation. Despite the reality that they were well aware of the choices they made during the offense situation and that they can indeed recall most if not all of the offense details, sometimes public opinion and the Courts play into their naïve belief and allow a sex offender or violent offender to receive little if any appropriate consequence. The idea that a person does not know what he or she is doing

while intoxicated is not supported by current data. Drunk drivers know enough and are aware enough to know where to turn, how to avoid police detection, what the road speeds are, and respond to other cars. In fact, they often make it home, even though they may park their care in the neighbor’s yard! He/she demonstrate decreased motor skills but are able to navigate the environment with some degree of accuracy. I would argue that it would be impossible to drive home if you were not aware of what you were doing despite being intoxicated. Sexual activity involves a significant physiological and emotional arousal. This arousal involves increased heart rate and breathing, increased blood flow to the genitals, and intense positive emotions. To believe that somehow a person would not be aware of this arousal experience is impossible. While intoxicated, the physiological sexual arousal (e.g., erection) would likely be impaired to some degree due to the depressing effect of alcohol. However, the pleasurable feelings and pleasurable physiological arousal would likely be increased due to the effects of alcohol. On the other hand, if a person was experiencing negative emotions prior to becoming intoxicated, these negative emotions (e.g., anger, disappointment, frustration, jealousy) would likely be increased due to the effect of alcohol. To not know what he/she was doing while intoxicated is another issue. If he/she was not aware of what they were doing at the time, they would likely be passed out. Even with the impairment resulting from intoxication, if they are conscious, they are aware of the decisions they make. How else would he/she be able to engage in the activity (e.g., sex), leave the situation, and then return to a state of normalcy? The purpose of this review is to examine the effects of alcohol on the decision making process of behavior, focusing on rape. In addition, to examine

how memory is impacted by intoxication in regards to not being able to remember a specific act committed while intoxicated. The terms sexual assault, rape, date rape, and child molestation as referring to the same- that is, pressured or forced sex and therefore may be used in this article interchangeably. Perpetrator and offender will refer to someone who has committed a sexual offense or violent offense.

**Alcohol And Drugs & Rape:** Despite recent discussion about the use of date rape drugs to facilitate a sexual assault or rape, research supports that alcohol, not drugs, is by far the most significant substance used by sex offenders in the commission of their crimes (Hindmarch et al., 2001; Grubin & Gunn, 1990; Horvath, 2006; Koss, 1985; Koss & Dinero, 1989; LeBeau et al., 1998; Scott-Ham & Burton, 2005; Seifert, 1999; Slaughter, 2000; Walby & Allen, 2004). In fact many rapists not only admitted that they had used alcohol before and/or during the commission of their sex offense but many even blamed their alcohol use for their offense behavior (e.g., Abbey et al., 2001; Kanin, 1984). Alcohol was related to the commission of physical aggression among women abusers and cocaine was found to be associated with coerced sexual activities (Stuart, Moore, Elkins, et al., 2013). However, by far more men than women appear more likely to engage in forced sexual activity when intoxicated.

**Subjective Versus Objective Intoxication:** Often sexual offenders and violent offenders in general claim that they were intoxicated at the time they commit an offense. However, because most offenders are not arrested within an hour of the crime, actual blood

alcohol measurements are not possible. Therefore it is difficult to prove how many offenders were in fact intoxicated at the time of their crime and even so impossible to determine to what degree of intoxication they were (Johnson, 2007, pp. 149-150). Regardless, the degree to which an individual believes they are "intoxicated" (subjective intoxication) and the degree to which they actually are intoxicated (objective intoxication) may not matter in the decision making process of committing a violent crime. At least one study found that men who were intoxicated (objective intoxication) or believed that they were intoxicated (but had not consumed alcohol-subjective intoxication) were more likely to become aggressive when exposed to a high provocation situation (Giancola & Zeichner, 1995). Quinn & Fromme (2011) found in a college student sample that men who reported greater subjective intoxication were more likely to respond aggressively. College students reported aggression on drinking days in which they reported a higher subjective intoxication and they were in fact more likely to engage in aggression on subjective intoxication days (Quinn, Stappenbeck, & Fromme, 2013). This means that regardless of how many drinks were consumed, believing that they were in fact intoxicated, and reporting a high intoxication (subjective intoxication), resulted in more aggressive behavior. In essence, this supports alcohol expectancy theory that if the individual believes that when intoxicated it is appropriate to respond to negative situations with aggression, they are more likely to justify and respond more aggressively or violently when objectively or subjectively intoxicated.