

Shades of gray

As a young girl I always liked playing with the boys.

And I still do. Lucky for us, matronly women no longer lock up college girls in dorms at night. Today, women can drink and

Against the Current

by *Neomi Rao*

run around with the wildest of the boys. But with freedom from social constraints comes new responsibilities—responsibilities which are all too easy to ignore.

Not a year passes without the confusing, bitter, and problematic question of date rape arising on campus. Incidents involving the "DKE rapist" and David Bialsky have shown how the battle between the sexes has no easy answers.

In the most recent case, a woman accused a brother of Sigma Alpha Epsilon (ΣAE) fraternity of rape, and filed a complaint with the Yale Executive Committee. After drinking at ΣAE's Kamikaze party, the woman willingly returned with the male student to his residential college room where he allegedly sexually assaulted her. The woman claims that she was deliberately served more alcohol than she asked for, and wants all fraternities to take part in awareness-raising sessions on date rape.

Just the mention of such a case should set off warning bells for the campus crisis to come. Clearly, if the male student forced the woman to have sex against her will, then he should be held responsible. Yet the role of alcohol severely complicates the scenario. People often drink precisely so that they may limit their responsibility. They want to forget about their papers and their problems. They want to have fun, and not think so hard.

So when two drunken students return to a room and have sex, did the man force the woman against her will? Did the woman have regrets the morning after and deny giving consent? After a beer-tinted night can anyone really remember what happened? Since the case rests only upon the testimony of the students who were involved, who decides the truth? A woman makes an accusation, a man denies it. At Yale, this gives the Executive Committee another opportunity to exercise their particular brand of judgment. (Yes, that's right—the same people who allowed a student to be brutally beaten on campus will now judge whether a woman was raped.)

No one will ever really know what happened that night between the two drunken students. Some will quickly jump to the defense of the woman, supporting the protec-

tion of her body against the allegedly forcible male intrusion. In order to exonerate the man involved, others will similarly point to her willing return to his room, or her decision to drink excessively as an indication of consent.

It's easy to take sides based on gender politics, but when considering questions of responsibility and consent, an investigation rarely yields a black and white solution. Students usually begin wearing different colored ribbons because they start to find truth in the shades of gray.

I've been to a lot of fraternity parties on this campus. It has always seemed self-evident to me that even if I drank a lot, I would still be responsible for my actions. A man who rapes a drunk girl should be prosecuted. At the same time, a good way to avoid a potential date rape is to stay reasonably sober.

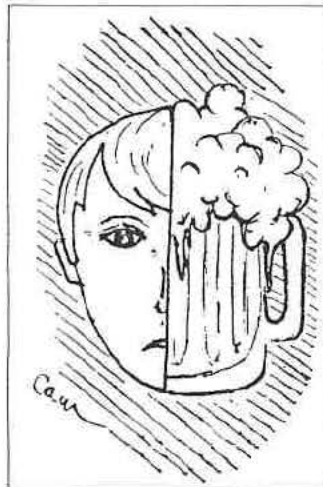
It seems that this female student acknowledges the role of alcohol in the alleged rape, because she attributes her overconsumption to the fraternity. Can the liberated '90s woman freely choose whether to drink or not? Unless someone made her drinks undetectably strong or forced them down her throat, a woman, like a man, decides when and how much to drink. And if she drinks to the point where she can no longer choose, well, getting to that point was part of her choice.

Implying that a drunk woman has no control of her actions, but that a drunk man does, strips women of all moral responsibility. It creates a culture of victimization in which men are prowling and uncontrollable, and women are weak and helpless. Any self-respecting person should be troubled and offended by such ideas.

Battles over date rape reinforce the antagonistic gender stereotypes which justified the old systems of oppression. It was argued that women needed protection from male desire. For example, in most Islamic countries, women are kept in the home, and appear publicly only under dark veils. Each careful demarcation serves as a constant reminder of the temptation of the female body, and the need to keep man's appetite for sex and violence at bay.

Few women or men would want to implement such measures in America, yet protective norms are based on the very thinking contained in the hysteria over date rape. I hope that we can ask for something more than suspicion and resentment in relations between the sexes. Being treated like a lady is not something to be laughed at. We are all better off living with social structures which encourage mutual respect.

But I still like playing with the boys.



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