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Case 8 : “I Know You Want It”: Preventing Sexual Aggression in Bars

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CASE 8

“I Know You Want It”: Preventing Sexual Aggression in Bars

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Brian Patterson is the owner of The Judge & Jester Tavern in London, Ontario. His father bought the business in 1999, and Brian assumed ownership 15 years later in 2014. Under his management, The Judge & Jester grew its customer base with students from Western University, who have nicknamed the bar “JJ’s”. The Patterson family has dealt with all manner of economic and legal challenges over their ownership, including a recession shortly after Brian took over, and JJ’s has stood strong through it all. It has rapidly become a nightlife hotspot on “Richmond Row”, downtown London’s core shopping and entertainment district along Richmond Street.

However, JJ’s has come under scrutiny on social media regarding sexual assault cases reported at the venue, coinciding with the beginning of the 2016 fall semester as students flooded back into the city for the school year. Some groups have called for a boycott of the bar. Brian’s father had dealt with negative publicity and threats of closure before, and Brian was confident that he could withstand this latest hurdle, just as he had done earlier in his tenure. Still, JJ’s would not have survived without prudent and adaptive management, and Brian recognized that he would need to make some important decisions soon before the issue became worse.

“HERE’S OUR BEGINNING”¹: FALL SEMESTER, 2016

Western University has a reputation of being a “party school”, with a vibrant and raucous collegiate culture that extends to the nightlife entertainment in downtown London. JJ’s has become a popular destination for students, benefitting from its proximity to Western’s campus and the substantial influx of student patrons during the school year.

To generate business during the winter months, JJ’s started offering extended happy hours on Mondays to Wednesdays with specials for \$2.50 shots. Brian had been thinking about offering themed cocktail specials for each day of the week as well, but he planned to see how sales went for the first couple weeks of December before making any other changes. So far business had been modest.

On Wednesday, December 7th, Brian was finishing a quick lunch before a scheduled meeting with his accountant when his phone buzzed. It was a Facebook message from Greg Boyadjian, his head of security.

¹ Headings are quoted lyrics from the song “Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke, a wink to the “Blurred Lines” paper published by Samantha Wells, PhD, and Kathryn Graham, PhD at CAMH.

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In the message, Greg asked “Did you see this?” and included a link to a Facebook post by Erinn Tee, dated December 6, with a photo of an arm that had a faint brown bruise across the wrist. The text read:

TW: SEXUAL ASSAULT

On Friday, December 2nd, I was sexually/physically/verbally assaulted at JJ’s.

When I was leaving the washroom, a man grabbed my wrist as I was walking past and yanked me towards him while his other hand reached around my waist and pulled my body against his groin. He said, “WANNA F*** ME?” It was a dim corridor and he was behind me and I was terrified. He yelled, “I KNOW YOU WANT IT”.

I twisted around and pushed him in the chest with my free hand to get out of his grip. My wrist was in pain and my head was spinning. Some people around noticed us and were about to intervene. He shouted, “F*** YOU” as I ran back to my table.

I told my friends what happened and we went to the bouncer, a large man with a tanned complexion dressed in black (I didn’t get his name).

His response was DISGUSTING:

“That area’s missed by our cameras so I can’t confirm your story.”

I’M SORRY I MADE IT ALL UP SINCE YOU DON’T HAVE IT ON F***ING VIDEO.

“Why don’t you find the guy and confront him, if it’s that much of a problem?”

HOW DARE YOU ask a victim of assault to go back and face their attacker? HOW DARE YOU question my experience??!

My friends and I left, and I was shaking, crying, tired, and in disbelief. I found the bruises on my arm when I got home, and I took photos so they can’t question my evidence this time. I intend to email the manager to inform him of how badly his security staff handled this situation.

I’m writing this post because:

- 1) A sexual assault took place at JJ’s and people should know it is unsafe.
- 2) The bouncer and probably all staff at JJ’s need to have proper sensitivity training to deal with such situations appropriately in the future.

Two other women have reported being drugged and/or assaulted at JJ’s with stories similar to mine, and management/staff have been known to be irresponsible, dismissive and rude.

F*** JJ’s Ladies, be careful. You deserve to be safe and you deserve a bar that cares about your safety!

The post had 203 “reactions” expressing anger, support, and sadness. People commented below with sympathetic messages and called for a boycott of JJ’s.

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After Brian finished reading the post and comments, he replied to Boyadjian, “S***. This is really bad. Were you there that night? Do you know who was working?”

“I was there but didn’t hear about this till now,” Boyadjian replied. After a short pause, Boyadjian sent another message, “I think it was Alex or Edwin.”

Brian checked his watch. He had fifteen minutes before he had to head to his meeting. “You at work? We should talk,” Brian stated.

“Yeah where are you?”

“Wendy’s. Be there in 5.”

At JJ’s, Brian found Boyadjian in the security office, reviewing camera footage.

“Find anything there?” Brian asked.

“Nothin’. I don’t doubt that it happened, but it probably was in the blind spot.” Boyadjian skipped ahead in the recording. “But here’s Alex talking to three girls who’ve brought him over by the washrooms.”

Brian watched with interest. “They seem pretty animated. Listen, I have an appointment, but I wanted to talk about how we’re handling this.”

“Okay, so Alex—or whoever it was—seriously f***ed up and we’ll have to deal with that.”

“Right. Our first step has gotta be damage control, if that post is going viral. I haven’t received an email or anything from her yet, but I can contact her myself and pre-empt it. I expect my phone to be blowing up if the media gets hold of this.”

“Yeah. You deal with the press and communications, I’ll deal with our staff internally—getting the story from Alex and whoever else worked that night.” Boyadjian crossed his arms and looked out the doorway at the empty dance floor. “And also security. That’s on me.”

“It’s on all of us. Is this a big issue? Have girls been coming to you with complaints?”

“Nope. No more than usual, anyway. I mean, it happens—we’re talking students and alcohol here—but this one’s just a really loud, public complaint.”

“She has a point, though.”

“Sure. Look, don’t get me wrong—I *am* responsible for looking after patron safety, and I take it personal when s*** goes down in here. There can’t be no blind spots, anywhere. I’ll put in a camera, and in the meantime, post someone there to keep an eye out.”

Brian walked to the doorway and looked out towards the washrooms. “Maybe some better lighting too. But regardless, it happened, and our staff handled it in the worst possible way.”

“Oh, no doubt.” Boyadjian paused for a couple seconds. “And I’m not defending Alex’s response at all, but there are other times when it’s not so clear. Am I supposed to kick out any douche

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who catcalls a girl? What if she was grinding up on him on the dancefloor earlier? It’s impossible for us to see everything, and we’re asked to make judgments without seeing the context.”

Brian nodded. “It’s tough. Alright, I gotta run—I’ll order the camera tonight and we’ll talk later.”

“CAN’T LET IT GET PAST ME”: EMAIL, NEWS MEDIA, AND PHONE REQUESTS

That evening, Brian arrived home and finally had a chance to check his emails. There was one from a woman named Erin Theriault. It described the same situation from the Facebook post with a couple new pictures of the bruise on her arm but using less colourful language. He wrote a reply, apologizing for her experience and expressing concern for how his staff handled the situation. He asked if she would be willing to meet to tell him more about what happened and discuss how to address the issue.

An email from Western University caught his attention.

Subject: Concerns About Sexual Assault at JJ’s

Good afternoon,

We are writing as part of Western’s Sexual Violence Prevention team, and we are responsible for reviewing and responding to incidents of sexual violence experienced by our students, staff and faculty. We strive to create a safe environment for everyone, on campus and beyond.

Last night, a Facebook post came to our attention. It describes a sexual assault that occurred at The Judge & Jester Tavern last weekend, and concerning, the inappropriate and disappointing response by your security staff. In the past three months we have received reports from our students of similar cases at JJ’s, among other establishments.

We are planning a prevention initiative against sexual violence and saw this as an opportunity to start a conversation with you and other stakeholders around preventing sexual harassment, aggression and violence in bars and nightclubs. We believe you have a key role to play in promoting a safe nightlife environment for our students.

This is a community issue you ought to be alerted to, and we hope you will be interested in working together to address it.

--

Christine Bellis, MSSc
Sexual Violence Prevention Education Coordinator

Maria Lopez, M.Ed
Judicial Affairs Coordinator

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Another email caught his attention. It appeared to be from the media.

Subject: Request for comment re: sexual assault reported at JJ's

Mr. Patterson,

I am a reporter for the London Free Press, and I'm writing a story about an alleged sexual assault reported to have taken place at JJ's on Friday, December 2nd. A young woman described in a Facebook post her experience of being accosted outside the washroom, and how the security staff was callous and dismissive in handling her complaints. Here is her post:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/uwoadviceforum/permalink/1364299210298789/>

Can you comment on the alleged assault, the way your staff dealt with the situation, and any response to address future incidents at your bar?

My deadline is 23:00 tonight, and the story will be published online at www.lfpress.com early tomorrow morning. I value your time and comments on the matter.

Regards,
Stephanie McCullough
Digital Reporter
The London Free Press

Brian began writing a statement to send back to the reporter. As he wrote on measures he would take moving forward, he thought of a blog post he had read a few months ago on *Tales of the Cocktail*, a website for bar owners and bartenders. The article had gained attention on social media, and he remembered that it offered some suggestions for tackling sexual violence in bar settings.

He looked it up, “7 Ways Bartenders Can Prevent Sexual Harassment and Assault” by T. Cole Newton, a bar owner in Louisiana (Newton, 2016). As he read it again, Brian recalled being amenable to many of the tips and intending to spur some changes at JJ's. However, as the school year went on, the issue became less of a priority, and the motivation fizzled out. One line stood out: “Alcohol does not cause rape, but it's often involved, and if bar owners do not actively work to mitigate the role that we inadvertently play as purveyors, then we become part of the problem” (Newton, 2016). Now was the time for him to be part of the solution.

He sent an email reply to Stephanie McCullough.

We at The Judge & Jester Tavern have proudly served the London community for twenty years, and we take reports of sexual assault, violence, and harassment very seriously. We are proud to be one of London's premiere establishments, and, as an industry leader, we are responsible for creating an enjoyable and safe environment for everyone.

Ms. Theriault's experience was an alarming incident that is being investigated by our management. The aggressive patron's behaviour last weekend was unacceptable and had no place in our venue, or anywhere. Regrettably, the situation was not handled appropriately by our staff. We have been in contact with Ms. Theriault and will assist her in any way we can.

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We want to reiterate that we have a zero tolerance policy for any kind of harassment and we do train our staff to address situations like this. An internal review is being conducted to ensure that any mistakes are not repeated. We will be working with an advisory team to ensure that our community is free from sexual violence.

Sincerely,

Brian Patterson, Proprietor
The Judge & Jester Tavern

As Brian was preparing to sleep, he continued to dwell on his statement about working with a team to combat sexual violence. He reached for his phone on his nightstand and fired off a quick reply to Christine Bellis and Maria Lopez, asking them to give him a call.

The following day, his phone rang.

“Hello? Brian Patterson speaking.”

“Hi, Brian—it’s Christine Bellis calling from Western Student Experience. Is this a good time for you?”

“Absolutely. Glad you called.”

“We received your email and we’re happy you’ve been so receptive. This is an important issue.”

“Thanks for reaching out. It’s honestly been something I’ve considered since September, but the incident last weekend made it top of mind,” Brian sighed.

“Oh, we’re in the same boat. The Facebook post went viral, but sexual violence has long been a problem we’ve counselled students about. It’s an issue everywhere, not just your bar. We just thought the social media buzz was an opportunity to start the conversation with you.”

“It’s too bad it had to come to this first, but I appreciate the chance to work with you on it. Last night, I was looking at some tips on preventing sexual assault in bars, but I’m sure you have some ideas too. What were you thinking?”

“Have you seen the “Ask for Angela” signs? Someone linked to it in the comments of Erin’s post.”

“Huh?” exclaimed Brian.

“It’s a poster in a bar bathroom, encouraging women who feel unsafe to go to the bar and ask for ‘Angela’, which is a code word to discreetly let the bartender know that they need help.”

“Oh, right. I’ve seen something similar before. It’s a neat idea. Part of me is skeptical that it would really work, but hey, at least they’ve gotten people’s attention.”

“That’s true—I don’t know how many people have ever actually asked for Angela. A lot of these campaigns have not been evaluated, actually,” Bellis admitted.

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“But I suppose the important thing is that patrons know the bartender is looking out for them and letting people know that we don’t tolerate sexual harassment here.”

“Exactly. Of course, it’d have to be coupled with training for bartenders to respond appropriately when someone comes to them. Ryerson is doing it at their campus pub” (Rizza, 2016). Bellis paused. “This was the problem with the incident at JJ’s, right? That the bouncer did not respond appropriately at all? Is there much about sexual assault in your staff training?”

“Honestly, no. Bouncers have enough on their plate with fights and rowdiness. Bartenders, I think they intuitively learn to take care of the customers—it’s a customer service job, after all—but there’s no formal training for sexual harassment, no. It never felt like something we needed to do.”

“There’s an approach called bystander intervention training (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004) that may be worth considering. It started at college campuses, to encourage students not to be passive bystanders to their friends’ lewd behaviour, but it’s also been adapted for bars to help staff intervene when they notice sexual violence. I’ll send you some links after our call.”

Brian hesitated for a second. “I can see the promise, but I’m not sure my staff would agree. I’ll have to talk to them first.”

“Of course. There are many different strategies, and we should come up with a comprehensive plan. We still have a lot of work to do before we get other bars involved.”

“You know what, though? I’d suggest getting the police on board. It would help a lot in reaching out to other bar owners, and they’d have the resources to help coordinate this.”

“Great point. Maria’s in touch with the police, and I’ll ask her to contact them. Would you be able to join us in a preliminary meeting with them?”

“Certainly. Let me know when. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are usually best for me.”

“Great! I’ll be in touch. Thanks, Brian.”

“Thank you for contacting me. Happy to be a part of this. Have a good weekend.”

At home later that evening, Brian had some time to check his email and looked over the resources that Christine Bellis had sent him.

Subject: Training Programs

Hi Brian,

It was great to chat with you today. I’m excited that this is getting started. As promised, here are some links to bystander intervention training programs we could consider modelling our own program after.

Good Night Out: <http://www.goodnightoutcampaign.org/>

A campaign that started in London (the other one!) but has spread to regional organizers around the world. Maybe we could consider starting a London (this one!) chapter?

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Safe Bars: <http://safebars.org/>
Started in Washington DC.

Arizona Safer Bars Alliance: <http://www.azrapeprevention.org/ASBA>
A state-wide program launched in 2012. The site has an excellent YouTube video of a conference workshop on developing this training for campus communities.

Let me know what you think. I look forward to working with you on this.

Christine

Brian was intrigued by the idea of bystander intervention training for his bar staff, but he was unsure if they would be receptive to it. He went out to JJ's the following Saturday afternoon to talk to a couple of his bartenders as they were beginning their shifts.

“BLURRED LINES”: THE ROLE OF BAR STAFF

JJ's was quiet when Brian arrived. There were two men seated separately at the bar, watching a golf tournament on the TVs, and a group at a table farther towards the back.

“Hey Brian, good to see you,” said Clarisse Cavanagh as she handed a customer a beer bottle. “Dealing with a lot lately, huh? Need a drink?”

Brian sighed. “You know it. We'll make things right, though.”

“Really, this isn't news. This is the business we're in. I've experienced it myself and it's pretty rampant.”

“Do you think it's a particular problem here?”

“Well, yes and no. There's always going to be, like, bad behaviour—I mean, we're serving alcohol, for Christ's sake. I was at Sandalwood House before I came here, and that was a bit of an older crowd, so you definitely notice a difference with the students. That's a big part of what makes JJ's, *JJ's*, y'know?”

“Yeah. What do you think about training staff to be more responsible for looking out for this sort of thing?”

“What, like SmartServe? Nah. It's not like the bartenders don't know or don't care. Our 'training' is just plain common sense. Like, just look out for people. I'm not here to play judge—and jester,” she smiled, before continuing, “but I do care about my customers. A lot of times, the lines are blurred and, like, it isn't our place to step in.” (Fileborn, 2017.)

“Do you think training could help staff recognize risky situations?”

“Okay, so there was like one time a guy was pushing a girl into the bathroom so I separated them, and they *flipped*. Boyfriend and girlfriend, apparently, and she's like, ‘He didn't mean it’. I'm like, now I just look like an idiot.” (Powers & Leili, 2016.)

“Yeah, it's a tough judgment call. I can't say whether these programs work, but I'm thinking the training could teach staff ways of stepping in without sticking their necks out too much.”

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“I think it’s experience and reading people more than anything. Like, I’d be open to it. Things need to change in our industry, that’s for sure. I just dunno if it’d make a difference, y’know?”

“Yeah. There are a bunch of options I’ve seen: staff training, posters (Exhibits 1 and 2), beer coasters (Exhibits 3 and 4). We need to figure out what makes sense for us and our bar—but it starts with me, and it starts with the staff.”

Brian left JJ’s and drove home, thinking about what they had discussed, and how he could use it to inform the meeting next week.

“EVERYBODY GET UP”: THE COMMUNITY MEETING

Maria Lopez held the door open and offered a bottle of water. “Hi Brian, I’m so glad you could make it. This is Superintendent Nate Isaacs from the London Police Service.”

Isaacs extended his hand. “Good to meet you, Brian.”

“Glad to be a part of this. How big is the problem?” Brian asked.

“See, it’s hard to say. We’ve had an increase in sexual assaults in 2016—with 233 reports compared to 186 in 2015. But there are no overall trends, and it varies from year to year.” (London Police Service a, n.d.)

“But sexual assault is highly under-reported,” remarked Lopez.

“That’s right. It’s one of the most under-reported violent crimes, and estimates are that less than ten percent of sexual assaults in Canada are reported to police,” said Isaacs. (Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2015.)

Brian ran his hands through his hair. “I think another part of this is that sometimes it isn’t clear what ‘sexual assault’ is. The lines are blurry—for both victims and perpetrators.”

Lopez was curious. “Do you mean women don’t report because they’re not sure if what happened to them would be considered sexual assault or taken seriously as a crime? And men don’t know where the line is between flirting and harassment?”

“Yeah, more or less. That’s the impression I get. Oh, and it’s also blurry for the bar staff you’re asking to help out. I was talking to one of my bartenders a couple days ago, and she said asking staff to step in puts them in a tough spot, where they have to make a judgment call on situations where it’s unclear whether there’s a real problem or not,” Brian said.

Isaacs nodded. “We appreciate that they have a tough job, but we also see them as a key part of our team in preventing sexual violence. In my view, I’d rather be wrong and slightly embarrassed nine times out of ten than to sit back passively and allow that one situation to escalate where someone ends up being taken advantage of and assaulted later that night.”

“The training could be designed to help bar staff recognize situations of sexual aggression and give them strategies to intervene appropriately,” added Christine Bellis.

“Maybe there could also be something in there to get women—or everyone—to be more aware of how to avoid risky situations themselves,” said Brian.

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Bellis furrowed her brow. “Well, we want to avoid placing the onus on women for avoiding sexual assault.”

Brian looked mildly agitated. “Sure. But I still think personal responsibility’s gotta play a small part, right? Nobody blames you for flaunting your wealth if you get mugged, but you still make an effort to stay alert when you walk home late at night, don’t you?”

Isaacs glanced at the two coordinators from Western. “We actually have some tips posted online on how people can stay safe when they go partying and drinking, and I believe you have similar resources on the Western site. We can still do better at spreading that message, though.” (London Police Service b, n.d.)

Lopez nodded. “Brian, you do bring up a good point about bringing more focus to the victims of sexual violence. We also need to do better at providing support and encouraging reporting.”

Brian looked at Superintendent Isaacs. “If you can get me a list of hotlines and support centres, I’d be happy to provide my staff with these resources to pass on to customers. Or posters? We did the same with your drunk driving signs. I dunno if a drunk student would read them, to be honest, but I guess it was something.”

Isaacs shrugged. “When you’re in the business of serving alcohol, there are going to be occasional problems—there’s no avoiding that. What we want is to be proactive and realize that we all have responsibilities to keep our community safe.”

“Oh, don’t get me wrong. I think this is a fantastic idea and really important. I want to work with you. I’m just playing devil’s advocate here and giving you things to think about so we do this right,” said Brian. “Believe me—I know my bar, I know my staff, and I know my customers.”

Isaacs nodded. “We respect that. It isn’t our place to come in and tell you how to do your jobs. But if your staff recognize that they have a vital role to play in preventing sexual violence, we want to offer the resources to help them achieve these goals.”

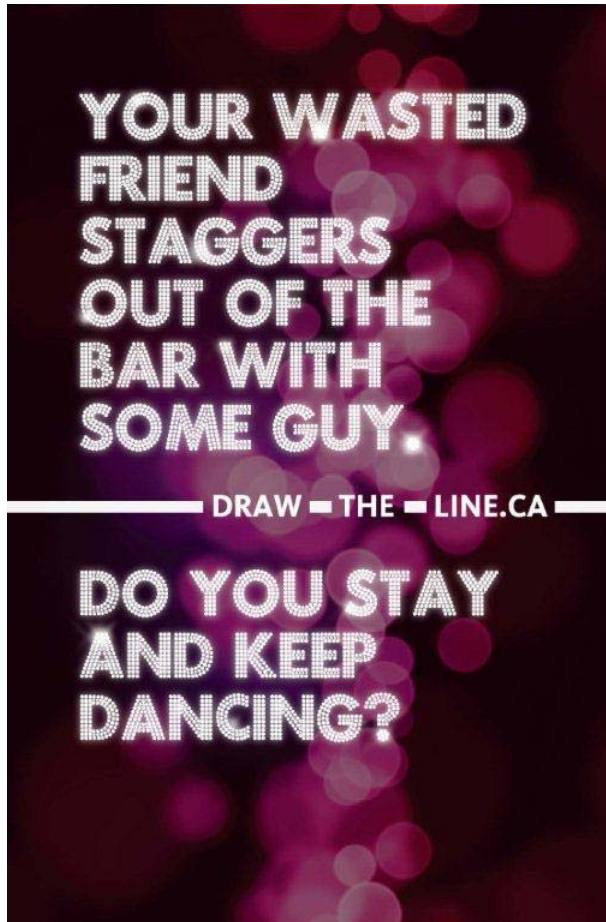
“I’m on board with you there. I’m excited to get this started.”

Superintendent Isaacs extended his hand to Brian and they shook. “Thanks, Brian. We appreciate how willing you’ve been to help us. I’m looking forward to working with you.”

“NO MORE PRETENDING”: MAKING A DECISION

The meeting left Brian energized and eager to move forward. It was time to take action—the question was how? What would be needed to address sexual violence in bars and clubs in London’s nightlife economy? Should they adapt an existing bar bystander training program, put up “Ask for Angela”-type posters, launch a social marketing campaign to Western students, or develop some other approach? What would they need to do first to ensure that the intervention is sustainable and effective? What do they need to know in order to proceed?

EXHIBIT 1



Over half of all sexual assaults involve alcohol – and it’s the number one drug used by perpetrators.  ALCOHOL RELATED ASSAULT

WHY DRAW THE LINE

When we look away from sexual violence we make it easier for the perpetrator to continue – and the violence. Every choice we make and every action we take – no matter how small – has the power to make a difference.

WHEN TO DRAW THE LINE

Consent matters. Only yes means yes. A friend who is wasted can’t consent.

HOW TO DRAW THE LINE

There’s always more than one option for a bystander. Take a stand safely and do something that you feel comfortable with. You could:

- **Check in with your friend:** “Are you ok?”
- **Make up an excuse to get him/her out the situation:** “Hey, our cab’s here.”
- **Call her phone:** Distract her and the potential perpetrator.
- **Tell the bartender or bouncer:** “I think my friend’s in trouble.”

IT HAPPENED TO ME

Remember, it’s never your fault. You’re not alone. Tell someone you trust. Help is available: draw-the-line.ca ←

Sexual violence is everyone’s problem. Break the silence. Make it stop. Spread the word. Find out more at draw-the-line.ca

 Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

 Action ontarienne contre la violence contre les femmes

Funded by:  Ontario

Source: Draw the Line, n.d.

EXHIBIT 2



DOESN'T MEAN YOU GET TO HELP YOURSELF.

sex without consent = sexual assault

DON'T BE *THAT* GUY.



SAVEdmonton.com

Source: Sexual Assault Voices of Edmonton, n.d.

EXHIBIT 3



Source: Aisle 4, n.d.

EXHIBIT 4



Source: Voices of Hope, 2016.

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INSTRUCTOR GUIDANCE

“I Know You Want It”: Preventing Sexual Aggression in Bars

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BACKGROUND

Brian Patterson is the owner of The Judge & Jester Tavern (JJ's), a fictitious bar in London's downtown entertainment district. JJ's is popular with students from Western University, but a viral Facebook post describing an experience of assault at the bar has generated negative publicity. Coordinators at Western University, Christine Bellis and Maria Lopez, reached out to ask Patterson if he would be interested in partnering with them and the London Police Service to develop a strategy to prevent sexual violence in London's bars and clubs.

Patterson has a deep sense of ownership over JJ's and is interested in making his bar safer but is also concerned about the response from his bar staff and the success of his business. He begins to brainstorm a list of ideas, drawing from programs that have been implemented around the world. How should they approach this problem within the London community? What will their intervention look like? What resources do they have? What do they need to know in order to proceed?

OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the social ecological factors contributing to men's sexual aggression against women in bars and clubs.
2. Critically appraise the literature on existing approaches in sexual violence prevention.
3. Identify ways to mobilize communities in sexual violence prevention.
4. Apply methods, strategies, and theories of behavioural change and health promotion.
5. Advocate for sexual violence prevention as an important public health issue.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is sexual violence a public health problem?
2. What are the social determinants of health contributing to sexual violence perpetration in bars? How would you frame them in a Social Ecological model?
3. Who are potential partners on campus and in the community who you would want to help develop a sexual violence prevention program?
4. What is the campus climate? What is the community climate? How could this help or hinder the implementation or impact of a sexual violence prevention program?
5. What are components that should go into a sexual violence prevention initiative?
6. What are some challenges in developing a new intervention without a substantial body of evidence to support it? Is program theory enough to drive your intervention?

KEYWORDS

Sexual violence; sexual assault; sexual harassment; alcohol; nightlife; prevention; health promotion; stakeholder engagement; needs assessment; program planning.