

Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence
Moving Masculinities

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Project Background

The Regional Coordinating Coalition Against Violence (RCCAV) is a coalition of community groups, government agencies and individuals united through a dedication to end violence in relationships, homes and communities. Our purpose is to increase awareness of the root causes of violence, its impact on people in society, and to advocate for effective services and programs for victims of violence. We carry out our purpose through lobbying and advocacy, public education, and outreach. The RCCAV meets monthly to discuss and take action on current issues relating to violence prevention and services to victims of violence.

In 2000-2001, the RCCAV conducted a study entitled "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak" where young women who frequent the downtown St. John's bar scene stated that they face serious issues regarding their physical and sexual safety. Some of the highlights from the first stage of this study included women's concern with the sexualized environment in bars, sexually explicit contests (wet t-shirt), and the presence of date rape drugs. Women also had concerns about the lack of understanding on the part of bar employees on issues of harassment, and being sexually abused by someone they became acquainted with at a bar.

In 2002, the Eastern Avalon RCCAV received funding from the Government of Canada's National Crime Prevention Strategy to begin stage two of the project. The study is entitled "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities." A researcher/coordinator was hired to explore the downtown bar scene through a gender lens: this time, the gender lens is that of the male experience.

Goals and Objectives

- ⊙ Provide an opportunity for young men to react to the first stage of "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak."
- ⊙ Provide an opportunity for young men to discuss the sexualized environment of the downtown bar scene, sexual abuse and violence against women, and personal safety concerns
- ⊙ Create a safe environment through gender-specific focus groups for young men to explore personal attitudes and gauge awareness on issues of sexual abuse and violence
- ⊙ Provide an opportunity for young men to discuss and challenge one another on factors that contribute to sexual violence including stereotypical attitudes about gender and the sexual objectification of women
- ⊙ Provide an opportunity for men (police, employees at bars, taxi drivers and men who frequent downtown bars) to make recommendations that address violence

Methodology

Thirteen focus groups and four individual interviews were held between November 17, 2002 and February 17, 2003. A total of 103 men participated. The criteria for participation were that men be typically under 30 years of age and have experienced the downtown St. John's bar scene. The focus sessions were held at community centres, a university residence, the RNC Annex, Mount Pearl City Hall, and the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. The project coordinator and a co-facilitator led focus groups that lasted from one to two and a half hours. Throughout the study, an advisory committee of the RCCAV provided direction and input to the coordinator.

Participants

To recruit participants the coordinator distributed information flyers in strategic areas: George street locations, Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic campuses, and media outlets such as Cable Nine. The thirty-plus members of the RCCAV distributed information sheets within their agencies, schools or community groups. The unique nature of this project generated publicity that led to many participants self-referring. The young men, drawn from a wide socio-economic spectrum, included university and senior high school students, blue and white collar workers, as well as unemployed individuals. Other participants in the interview process included individuals from other interest groups. Individual interviews were held with a taxi driver, an ex-bouncer, and an RNC officer.

Process

Using two male facilitators provided for open conversation and discussion that moved the session forward if issues became minimized or the topic saturated. This also ensured that all relevant information was captured. When participants arrived at the site, the coordinator and the co-facilitator greeted them. Pizza and refreshments were provided to create a friendly and inviting atmosphere.

The focus session began with a thorough explanation of the project that included background information from stage one, "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak." Participants were provided with a consent form and notified that the conversations were recorded and confidential. The choice was given to participants to have the recording stopped if there was discomfort with discussing more intimate experiences. The sessions lasted from one to two and a half hours. However, many discussions continued after the formal focus sessions were completed. A \$25 honorarium was given to all focus group participants after the session had ended.

Participants were given a questionnaire to stimulate discussion at the beginning of each focus group. More animated discussion began when a series of five scenarios was presented and the participants shared their point of view. Clearly, the men involved had definite opinions on the subject matter. Participants were encouraged to challenge one another freely and respectfully and many challenges were offered.

The individual interviews were conducted either by both the coordinator and facilitator, or by the coordinator alone. Individual participants were asked questions similar to the group discussion questions. However they were also asked to discuss specific concerns relevant to their area of employment, or to comment on concerns stemming from the focus groups.

Bar Scene

The majority of the project participants reported that they visited downtown bars most often with male friends, generally in a group. Visiting bars with partners was a less frequent activity. The bars most commonly visited included: Junctions, Bender's, Calios, Liquid Ice, Konfusion, Lottie's Place, the Breezeway, O'Reilly's and Club Etomic. Two participants offered their experience of visiting George Street bars and being denied access because they were underage. Participants indicated that reasons for choosing particular bars include cheaper drink "specials" (the Breezeway and Lottie's Place) and the likelihood of encountering women.

The Downtown Environment

Downtown Specials

Focus group participants were clearly aware of various marketing strategies used by bars owners to entice women into their establishments:

*"Stuff like that - Ladies Night or something."
"Down at Turkey Joe's they have the girls drink for free on Sundays."
"Normie's has the same thing during the week."*

These men also recognized that the advertised "specials" were not always related to the price of beer or alcoholic beverages. Instead, certain clubs offer "specials" in the form of sexualized contests to attract men and women:

*"I know Junctions used to have wet t-shirt contest."
"I think about Peddlers and there's always the girl going around with the cowboy hat, who will sit up on the bar and let you lean back between her legs and take the jello shot. You never see the average looking lady going around."
"The underwear competition...with the shooters."
"Budweiser girls."
"But I've been at one of the bars downtown where they give...free beer and stuff if women take off their bras and stuff."
"Benders."*

Participants realized that bars do not have drinking specials for men because women would be discouraged from attending. The men felt that women would not enjoy an environment with high numbers of intoxicated men. Jake and Peter recognized this, and believe that the bars recognize this as well:

*"You will never see a deal for men. Like, 'Men drink free.'"
"They wouldn't get any women in because they'd notice all these big beer drinking men and women are not going to go for that."*

The Sexualized Nature of Downtown

Participants were asked to express their thoughts about the entire bar scene and the overall nature of downtown. Generally, there was a recognition and acceptance regarding the extent of the sexualized nature of the bar scene:

*"The first part of the night the girls are over here, the guys over here . . . Later the girls are just going home with the guys just so everybody can get laid . . . That's all it is."
". . . Downtown you can expect to see a lot of drunk men that probably aren't using their brain . . . You can't go home and get offended . . . you're in a place where if you're dressed a certain way, you can expect to be whistled at."
"I've seen people almost having sex on the dance floor. Like you see guys, their hands up girl's skirts..."*

"This is the hidden truth about downtown: it's not about selling alcohol, it's about selling sex and the alcohol just brings in the revenue."

Participants noted that specific bars have more of a reputation for having a sexualized environment than others:

"Bars have different reputations. You go to a bar, and you know girls get dragged off at that bar."

"Speaking of Benders I saw a girl give a guy a blowjob. In the middle of the dance floor . . . And buddy got thrown out and not her . . . And the next thing you see the bouncer . . . and the bartender flying over the bar and they took buddy and flicked him out and she stood up and walked away."

"Liquid Ice. That's another meat market."

Damon believes that at the downtown bar scene, three different sets of people attend:

"I think you got three major groups of people that go downtown. People go downtown for a good time. People that go downtown to hook up. People that go downtown to cause controversy and start fights . . . the major group are people going down to have a good time."

The Physical Nature Of Downtown

Men stressed the potential for physical violence at the downtown bar scene as their main concern. This contrasts with the women interviewed in phase one of "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak", who emphasized their major concern being the sexualized environment of bars that threatens their personal safety:

"Especially if they have a few beers in them, and an ego trip – that's it...the place is going up! They don't care who they starts it with; 'Oh jeez, buddy slying at me over in the corner. I'm going to go give him a poke in the head.'"

"For me, right now I have no desire to go downtown simply because, being honest, I'm afraid to go downtown."

"But if you're a big guy downtown you're a target because most guys will look at you and think 'I can fucking take him!' I go to the Sundance a lot and I don't know how many guys the bouncers threw out for coming after me."

"Men are naturally aggressive like that and there are just some people, if you look at them the wrong way..."

Some participants believe that physical violence against men is more prevalent than sexual violence against women. Participants also believe that women are equally capable of physical violence:

"You got a way better chance as a guy getting in a fight than as a girl getting assaulted."

"I've seen more situations where girls have slapped guys in the face than I've seen a guy touch a girl downtown."

"Them women down there, buddy, they can take your head off just as well."

Participants were of the opinion that physical violence downtown is due to the concentration of bars and high population of intoxicated people in one area:

"I think that the demographics of downtown, of George Street itself. We've all been out at bars when fights break out – we don't see that so much more in other parts of Canada because you don't have such a concentration of people in one place."

"A lot of times I feel, if I'm there by myself and you got a sports team in from somewhere. I mean they are there as a group of guys and that's a lot of times when I feel unsafe in a bar."

"I think it's hard to avoid with such a big street like George Street promoting all this drinking." Participants noticed that much of the violence occurring downtown starts in the bars and continues outside:

"...The situations I can recall are the situations after the bars are closed."

"Or after they've left the bar."

"The streets are the worst spot..."

"The festivals. When a lot of people are crowding the streets, leaving the bars late at night is a bad spot."

Participants discussed the responsibility of individuals to intervene in incidents of violence and harassment at the downtown bar scene:

"To be honest with you in a club when a fight breaks out especially with two people, unless you're working there you stand there and watch. Unless it's your best friend, why the hell would you get involved in something you don't know what's going on? You're going to get involved, their friends are going to get involved and you're going to end up getting hurt." A related issue deals with the structure and physical layout of many downtown bars and George Street itself. Several bars, and in fact George Street itself, have secluded areas such as entrances to washrooms or alleyways leading to the street. The potential for violence in these secluded areas is menacing for bar patrons. Barry describes this concern:

"But how many bars downtown can you go into and you go up some narrow stairway to some door to get to another bar. And there's never anyone standing around that doorway. It's a pretty enclosed spot...where somebody could just do whatever they wanted to somebody else and nobody is going to see it."

Secluded areas are noted as being a safety concern for both men and women. It is apparent from this next quote that there is a general lack of understanding about why women feel intimidated. Men recognize that women may feel uneasy but fail to see that women fear the potential for violence to occur as well as the act of violence:

"People have said that before. Like the stairwell at Konfusion. Going upstairs . . . Just groups of guys on both sides and a female walks up."

"Of course she's gonna be nervous . . . But at the same time . . . what does she think they are going to stand there and beat the crap out of her?"

Craig expressed how he feels other men view him. Craig believes that some men look to frighten other men who do not appear intimidating:

"I've been downtown with my partner and I don't look that intimidating. And a lot of people, they scope that out...For the type that go down there, with the expectations going into the sexual environment, some people go down with a girlfriend, some people go down with a couple of buddies and check it out...And mild mannered people like myself, I feel unsafe because what goes in my mind is that are there any predators looking at my partner? Are they thinking this is an easy target because the man she is with isn't physically intimidating? Some men don't give a shit, regardless if she is with a guy friend, especially they are there with a couple buddies, and I would like to have the opportunity not to be disturbed by these types of people but I feel I can't do that downtown. Both the safety of my partner and myself are at potential risk."

Kirk, an aboriginal male, described how the physical nature of downtown affects him differently as a visible minority. He has to deal with racist attitudes from bar patrons, as well as police:

"In extreme cases men who are older and drunk say something of a racist nature to me. If I go, I never stay in bars till closing time because the street is kind of louder. It is not uncommon for police to think because I am visually aboriginal that I will be drunk, they look at me to see if I am. I never get bothered that it will upset me. I am stronger than that. I don't have a problem with how George Street is because I don't let it bother me. Downtown is the central part of town, so we should expect it to be a little dirty. If we are talking about dark alleys I brave that, I don't believe I am going to be maimed or suddenly attacked...I have to be cautious. But I'm not afraid."

Focus Group Sessions

Introduction to Scenario One

Stage one of "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak" highlighted the marketing strategies used by downtown bars. One in particular, the wet t-shirt contest, provoked a great deal of discussion. This contest appears to be the most well known and explicitly sexual of the strategies used to entice male patrons into particular bars. In 2001 and 2002, the NTV News produced a two-part series about one such contest. Phase one clearly identified this competition as a mechanism for attracting heterosexual males to particular drinking establishments. The "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" coordinator used a scenario of a wet t-shirt contest to gauge the attitude and behavior of young St. John's men toward this particular marketing strategy.

Scenario One

A local bar holds wet t-shirt contests once a week. The prize for the winner is a \$30 bar tab. Angela, a 21-year-old university student, is extremely intoxicated and decides to participate in the contest despite the objections of her girlfriends. The bar staff provides her with a t-shirt and, to the cheers of the crowd, she places second. A week later she is at school and is recognized by a group of males as the "wet t-shirt girl", Angela is called this as she walks through the halls with her professor. She later learns about everything she did the night of the contest. She regrets everything.

Tyrone describes one such contest he attended:

"I've seen them down there before when all this first started. Five or six women walk in, and the one with the biggest set of jugs – 'Come on. Let's go there's a \$25 bar tab.'"

Men participating in the focus group were asked to comment on this scenario and the contests that occur in downtown bars where women participants are highly intoxicated. There was no demonstrated understanding that women enticed to participate in these sexualized contests were being exploited by the bars hosting the activities:

"Ultimately the responsibility is definitely on the girl. If she's going to do it – suffer it. She knows where she lives, what kind of town she's in, what she's actually doing. So if someone says that to her I'm sure it hurts her, or she regrets it but definitely responsibility falls on the girl. People are notified of what is going to happen if they decide to go into the contest."

"The bar puts it there, if it was something that was advertised every Wednesday that this place has a wet t-shirt contest...she should have been fully aware of all the factors."

*"You're not required to join the contest. I mean she's completely on her own will."
"It's not like they're forcing girls to go out there."*

Men were clear that the level of intoxication was not the concern of the bar owners hosting these highly sexualized contests. Responsibility for women's participation while drinking or doing drugs was seen as a personal choice and when women regret their choice they have no one to blame but themselves. Most men were of the opinion that women had to take responsibility for their actions just as men and women take responsibility for their actions when they chose to drive while intoxicated:

*"You got yourself drunk and it's your own fault."
"You know what happens when you drink booze. And, like you say, you got rights but you got responsibilities as well. It's your choice."
"If you do things that are out of control when you are drunk and you're walking down the hall and there's all these people saying, 'Wet t-shirt girl.' And you're gonna blame it on everything else but the fact that you can't simmer down on the booze?"*

Dan claimed that men who attend the contest still have control over their actions despite being intoxicated. His view is that women also have control over their actions when choosing to participate in the contest, and therefore hold responsibility:

"If you say that he does have control over his actions why don't the other girls . . . Some of these girls were drunk earlier, right? And they started stripping too. Did anyone push them to strip? It was their choice is what I'm saying."

Other participants agreed with Dan that intoxication does not excuse the character, Angela, for participating in the contest:

*"If she's stupid enough to get loaded out of her trees, that's her own fault."
"We've all done things downtown when we've all been drunk and who's to blame? Do you say, 'God damn that bar!' You say, 'Why did I get so drunk and be such an idiot!' is what you say. You don't blame it on anyone else"
"There are women who are willing to go down there and do that. They're like, 'Yeah, I got a nice set of tits. I'll go down there and show them.' That's the way it is."
"And then they turn around a week later and say 'Oh crap! Who can I blame that one on?' Right?"
"Not only do you have a choice, you pay to get it in!"
"And what's thirty bucks? Thirty bucks, come on!"
"I wouldn't go to the owner of the bar and say 'Man what are you doing?'"*

Brian and Chad recognized that men play a role in the very existence of wet t-shirt contests, as men are the main financial supporters:

*"And the bars wouldn't offer it, if they didn't think the men would come."
"That's right, we're the ones who give them the money."*

Some of the participants challenged the notion that women have the sole responsibility for entering these contests. They questioned whether women's action to enter sexualized contests while intoxicated was simply one of choice. There was some discussion about standards of

beauty and the increasing emphasis on women to display physical beauty. Societal attitudes toward women's physical appearance made it easy for bar owners to exploit these while making it appear a simple matter of choice. John describes this when he commented:

"The beautification part is what I'm talking about. Like making younger girls stave themselves. Trying to make themselves look like these models on T.V. and in magazines."

Participants were asked to comment on the accountability of the bar hosting the contest. Some participants felt that bars are not accountable because they advertise the contests. Participants believe that by advertising, women are aware of the sexualized nature and the potentially risky situations:

"Not at all. Like, if they had this contest once a week, she knows what's going on there, right?"
"I think it should be at the bar's discretion as to who they are having going up and doing it."

Other participants considered the bar owners accountable for holding the contests and exploiting women. They believe that the bars increase the likelihood that women will be intoxicated so they will be more willing to enter the contest:

"The thing is that a lot of these girls didn't go down there with the intentions of getting into that but once they get a few drinks in them..."
"But obviously they want women to get drunk so they will do it without thinking about it."
"They know what they are doing. They just know they can get away with it. They know people are going to do it."
"The right answer is the bar should not be having these frigging contest. Its sexist, its stupid, its wrong!"

Dave questioned whether or not the bars should be holding these events. When Jack challenged him, Dave explained why he considers the contest to be a form of exploitation:

"One question that should be raised though is should the bar be holding wet t-shirt contests once a week?"
"Why not? They do everywhere else. It happens everywhere. Everywhere!"
"They're still exploiting them 'cause they're still giving them the forum to do so. They are! Giving them the opportunity to do it. Women don't just go down and have a wet t-shirt contest in a big group of people."
"I agree. And I think there's something wrong with it. But it is questionable, your right. It does happen everywhere. It's accepted but is it exploiting women? Maybe a little bit."

Another version of the scenario asked the participants to consider how they would react if the contestant in the wet t-shirt contest were a girlfriend or partner:

"Leave the bar and then leave her"
"I think I'd let her do whatever she was doing and if she gets embarrassed over it then that's punishment enough."
"It's not someone you want to be with anyways really."
"Well, personally I wouldn't want my girlfriend doing it. But some people get a kick out of it."

In another version of the scenario participants were asked to consider how they would react if the wet t-shirt contestant was their sister:

"Gross, man!"

"If that's my little sister she would be coming off. She'd be coming off, she'd be going on my back, and she'd be going out. Kicking and screaming and nobody would be stopping me."

"I would be locked up. She'd be going over the shoulder and whoever was in the way would be getting out of the way."

"If I was sober I would still freak out."

"I think we would all freak out."

"Yeah, but look, come on! Reality is, if you go in to see a wet t-shirt contest, you see your girlfriend up there or your sister then your reaction is quite a bit different."

"I know all the girls up there are someone's little sister."

Some of the men took into account other factors that might contribute to a woman's decision to participate in a wet t-shirt contest. For example, Kent said:

"And they're down there and they have no money."

Although participants were in agreement that wet t-shirt and similar contests in downtown bars exploit women in very vulnerable situations, they still felt that women clearly had choices. Alcohol or a state of inebriation was not seen as a valid reason for women who regretted their decision to participate. Many men challenged women to be aware of their drinking limits and compared the choice to participate in an exploitative contest with the decision to drink and drive. Personal accountability belonged to women.

There was a small group of men in nearly every focus group who did say that wet t-shirt contests were exploitative and put women at risk later in the evening. There were men as well who blame bar owners because there was a deliberate action on the part of the bar staff to get women intoxicated to excess, knowing women would be more likely to enter these contests. Monetary gain provided to women who won these contests was cited as an additional reason for women who may be students or have limited finances to engage in the wet t-shirt contests.

Introduction to Scenario Two

The downtown bar scene is described as an atmosphere where young men and women congregate and socialize. In stage one of "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak" young women described the downtown environment as one where men and women meet for the purpose of sexual encounters. Women stated that the community is aware of and accepts this practice. A combination of drinking, drugs and the acceptance of the sexual exploitation of women through bar promotions create a dangerous environment for young women.

An exploratory piece for focus groups in this phase centered on the issue of consensual sexual activity. Men spoke about their knowledge of incidents where intoxicated women were sexually assaulted.

"I've heard of a guy that's done stuff like that. Makes a girl pretty drunk and then takes her home."

Scenario number two was designed to gauge how men understand and define sexual assault and consensual sexual behavior between men and women.

Nick and Alicia meet downtown at a bar. They are both very intoxicated and spend the night dancing and making out. Alicia tells Nick that she wants to go back to his place for "a good time." On the way home in the cab Alicia passes out. She regains consciousness by the time they arrive but Nick has to support her as they stagger into his apartment. Once inside, he removes her clothes and proceeds to have sex with her. She never protests and is not responsive during the sexual encounter.

Many of the participants agreed that Alicia was taken advantage of, since she was unaware and only partly conscious. Some felt this was sexual violence. However, many participants commented that the blame and responsibility for the situation belonged to the woman:

"She consented earlier. Sounds like a case for two good defense attorneys to get into. That's so gray. It's really tangled there."

"There's some responsibility for her too. Like to be that drunk. And to say that to a guy she just met downtown . . . she's a bit out of line too."

"It's like a female going for a walk by herself in Central Park at 12 o'clock at night. Stupid! Ok, you got raped and it's buddy's fault, but maybe you shouldn't be walking by yourself at 12 o'clock at night in Central Park . . . It's not smart behavior."

"She already gave her consent."

"She's accountable to the point where maybe she should be a bit more frugal in her drinking habits so she doesn't leave herself open to these situations. But that doesn't make him right for doing what he did. She should still look out for herself. I mean as a woman I think you should look out for yourself when it comes to that kind of stuff because men are for the most part more . . . stronger than women, and they can overpower them when it comes to that kind of stuff. As a woman you want to make sure you're protecting yourself first. Doesn't make it right. But I think you should protect yourself."

The following quotes indicate that men feel that responsibility for unwanted sexual behavior falls to the woman:

"Smarten up and don't drink so much!"

"She did agree to it before hand, didn't she?"

"...women got no worries of physically getting hurt downtown...Any girl that's stupid enough to go downtown by herself, she's looking for it."

"It's rape, man. He raped her. But the sad part is - he's drunk and doesn't know the difference."

"Oh no!! Is he any less guilty?"

"No."

Participants were asked to consider this situation in reverse where a woman had sex with a man who was unresponsive due to his being intoxicated.

"I know a guy who said he passed out at his table and when he woke up in the middle of the night, she was giving him a blow job. They were supposed to go out that night anyway, right, and he passed out. I wouldn't say he stopped her."

"It won't go the other way. You can't do this the other way. Like you're not gonna see a girl take a guy inside who's out cold . . . It's just not going to happen."

"But similar variations of this do happen."

"You still need to get wind in the pipes."

There was an overall sense of confusion and contradiction regarding men's responsibility in the situation where both individuals were intoxicated. Many men did recognize that having sexual intercourse with a woman when unsure of the consensual nature of the act is abusive and a personal violation of the woman:

"Probably being in that situation its going through your mind, If you can think at all, thinking 'How passed out is she? Is she going to know about this tomorrow?' But if those thoughts go through your mind, then you know you're doing something wrong. And if you know you're doing something wrong, what are you doing wrong? You're assaulting somebody."

"I don't think that's really consent. No, you can give someone consent and then change your mind. But if you're not responsible then you have no way to say that you changed your mind."

"He is responsible because she isn't responsive, she didn't say yes or no."

"But if she's lying there and she doesn't know what's on the go. If she can't say 'No' then she's not saying 'Yes.'"

"Exactly. If you're moving her into positions, you know what you're doing."

A majority of men felt that a woman has to take responsibility for her actions, before sexual activity occurs. A particularly animated group discussion focused on issues of morality and the ethics of drinking and engaging in sexual intercourse with an unresponsive woman:

"The girl shouldn't of been that drunk and the guy shouldn't of done that morally."

This quote is indicative of the opinions of many young men. Clearly, some men shifted responsibility to the woman for her excessive drinking. Contrary to this, participants condemned Nick for having sexual intercourse with a woman who was extremely inebriated, unresponsive and unconscious. Although participants recognized that this was an assault, they still believed that the woman is responsible for the sexual assault because of her drinking.

Participants were asked to comment on what they thought the character Nick should do in the situation where he was expecting to be sexual with the woman he took home only to discover that she had drank far too much to give consent:

"Carry her in and tuck her in."

"Make sure she doesn't die in her own vomit."

"He should of left her ass in the cab after she passed out."

"If she asked him to bring her home that's probably what she meant – bring her home and go on from there."

"Man, just leave her there and go out and beat it like it owes you money."

Some participants felt that men are more sexually assertive than women and that the heightened state of sexual excitement can lead a man to assault a woman in these circumstances. This appears to be an acceptable excuse with some men who chose to blame the intoxicated woman or the state of sexual arousal for the decision to be sexual without clear consent from the woman:

"It has a lot to do with the woman herself. And most guys are just sleaze anyway. They know that if there's an opening there, they're gone. And they're going to try to push even harder. But it has a lot to do with the woman whether she's going to say anything or not. But some guys persist and then that's it."

"She's responsible for putting it in his mind that he's going to get laid that night."

"At the same time there's some girls who'd be all for it and really not care. So I mean you got to look at it both ways right? If she got in the car and said 'Come on let's go home and nail me.' I mean what are you suppose to say? Really? As an intoxicated male?"

"Depends on how he's feeling – if he's not as drunk as she is and he was at the Cotton Club four hours earlier and he's horny as hell, then he just might do it. And think 'Hey, she did decide to leave the bar with me. Her friends saw us leave together. She said she wanted to go back for a good time.' But it comes down to the situation that night. It may not cross your own mind to think 'Gee, she's not really awake.'"

The first participant in the next set of quotes discusses a fear of false accusation and believes that this is very possible. The second participant feels similarly but also believes that a woman often claims assault because she regrets the sexual encounter. Both of the following statements represent ideas that surfaced frequently in discussions:

"I tell you, it's a hard thing if you meet this woman and she is right into you and she jumps to coming home in a cab with you. And then you get her to come in the house and all of a sudden you're in bed and then, wham, she's gone. Then the next morning you wake up and you're the one fucked. Now, probably, you were just as drunk as her. And there was no agreement to do nothing. I know. I've been there before. You know, wake up and say, 'Who are you and where did you come from?'"
"Then you also have the ones where you hear about it the next day. It comes up. How come she didn't say anything when it was happening? Maybe at the time she really didn't give a shit and the next day realized, 'Hey! I didn't really want that to happen.' If a woman yells, 'Help!' she's going to get help, right? So how come you don't hear about it until the next day? When she's sober and realizes she doesn't know what happened? It's that she wanted it to happen at the time but realized the next day that she didn't want it to happen."

Generally focus group participants lacked a real understanding of a woman's perspective or experiences and how men need to be aware of changing moods and emotions during a night in the downtown bar scene:

"I had a friend of mine who had it happen to her and the only way she knew something happened was how she felt, physically, the next morning. She knew she had been violated. And that was the only way she knew."

Sexual Violence as a Hidden Issue

Phase one of "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak" clearly indicated that women recognized and identified sexual harassment and violence against women as a major concern in the downtown bar scene. Yet many of the men participating in phase two could not identify with women's assessment of downtown bars. Some men simply felt that both women and men experience the sexual violence at downtown bars:

*"When it comes to violence and all that kind of stuff downtown, even sexual harassment...it's way more women doing it than men, I think. From what I've seen."
"The other thing is, too, men don't report it...You call and say 'There's sixteen girls grabbed my ass! I'm really offended!'"
"...For the amount of people that go downtown in the run of a weekend, I mean we should sit back and thank our lucky stars that, for the most part, there's nothing that goes on down there."*

Todd offered the following to explain why sexual violence is not as large a concern in St. John's as in other Canadian cities:

"...Newfoundlanders are more sexual than most people in Canada, that's why you probably have less incidents of sexual harassment...going on downtown than you probably would if women were less willing to have sex."

This quote suggests a decided lack of understanding of any of the dynamics of power, abuse and sexual violence. In the initial "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak" report, women identified the overtly sexualized nature of the downtown bar scene where there was a high tolerance for harassing and abusive behavior. The idea that sexual abuse is less prevalent because men and women in Newfoundland and Labrador engage in more sexual activity seems quite minimizing. In fact, according to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Audit report, "From the Ground Up" our province has the highest rate of reported sexual violence in Canada.

Behavior which would be considered harassing and abusive in other public places is often considered to be normal within the bar scene. In every focus group, men related stories of harassment by women toward men in downtown bars. Yet they did not consider this behavior serious or threatening toward men. Similarly, participants related stories of women being harassed, abused and assaulted yet they also did not consider these as serious concerns.

Responsibility of Other Interest Groups

Participants were asked to comment on the responsibility of other individuals or groups in dealing with the sexual assault in this scenario. One identified group was taxi drivers. In the scenario a taxi driver had driven Nick and Alicia back to Nick's apartment. Many participants felt that the taxi driver did not have any responsibility toward the safety of Alicia who was unconscious:

*"If I'm a cab driver I'm not thinking 'Man, I wonder if that girl's ok.'"
"He's totally desensitized to it. He's used to it."*

"It's none of their business. They're just here to drive and go home."

"Say if every taxi driver started reporting all this stuff. What a complicated racket! I think we should, maybe, but..."

"They're responsible for themselves and their cabs and that's it."

"He got no idea what's going to happen."

"... He's not a police officer."

"If a cab questioned every second guy and girl that was passed out in the back seat . . . he'd be getting a lot of punches in the face."

Some participants felt that the taxi driver should not interfere, because he is not aware of the relationship between Alicia and Nick. Participants believed that in situations where a relationship exists, taxi drivers should not interfere:

"If buddy was in the backseat all over her and she's saying, 'No,' that's probably when the cab driver should say 'Get out of the car.'"

"What if it was his wife? What's the cabbie supposed to say?"

"No, the cabbie doesn't know their relationship or anything like that."

"He didn't know if that was her boyfriend, or husband."

"If it's not someone you know or someone close to you, you're more than likely not going to make that decision, right? Like I mean are you willing to put your ass on the line?"

"It could be a brother seeing his sister half in the bag and he just wants to make sure she gets home alright."

The men in these quotes clearly stated that the taxi driver has no responsibility to prevent a possible sexual violation. Respondents felt that the taxi industry has a job to do which involves driving people to specific locations. They did not feel that drivers should inquire into the state of intoxication of passengers or if the female passenger is actually consenting to go into the residence of the person with whom she is traveling.

Other participants shared similar opinions but suggest that taxi drivers are citizens and should at least act if they felt their female passenger may be in danger:

"We have the law that expects you to be a reasonable person. And if you see somebody getting hurt or somebody being approached in a way that you don't think that a reasonable person would like to be approached then it's your duty to report it. And I think that goes for cab drivers as well."

Rick, the first speaker, was challenged by Luc, another participant, about the notion of taxi drivers as mere chauffeurs:

"They bring drunk people home. That's their job . . . They cater to intoxicated individuals . . . Nine chances out of ten if they're picking them up downtown they're loaded. One of them's probably half-asleep, the other one might be rubbing her back or something . . . What do you do? You can't say 'Are you going to go home and sexually assault her?'"

"But if he's suspicious he should use his own discretion."

"I agree."

Other participants agreed that people in the taxi industry have a duty to be vigilant and to consider the safety of their customer if she is intoxicated:

"If he sees something, report it...If he sees something and there's no cop car, then he should at least call them."

"I believe that once you're in the driver's cab, he or she is responsible for your safety."

"If anything, I think he should have some sort of log in his car, to mark down the situation and the address...in case something came out of it."

"What happens if it's the other situation though, where he's thinking 'Ok, maybe I should of said something.' Yes, it could be his sister but it turns out that he raped her or something."

The taxi industry is one of the major interest groups involved in the downtown bar scene. On any given night, taxicabs line George Street awaiting customers. Often their female customers are in vulnerable positions due to drug use or excessive drinking. The "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" coordinator felt that there may be some interventions that taxi drivers could undertake to be proactive in preventing sexual abuse. Taxi drivers are not specifically trained to be sensitive to the safety needs of female passengers. The project coordinator conducted an interview with a taxi driver with years of experience in the taxi industry. The results from this interview can be found on page 60.

Introduction to Scenario Three

Many of the participants in the "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" project felt that there is not enough attention given to the issues concerning male victims of sexual violence. The coordinator decided to address this issue by discussing it during the focus group sessions. A common argument for men is that sexual abuse of males is underreported, and that the issue of sexual harassment occurs with the same frequency and severity for men and women. One of the scenarios presented to stimulate discussion on this topic was designed to gauge whether men felt threatened in the way women had indicated in similar downtown situations.

Scenario Three

Steve is downtown drinking and realizes his friends have all gone to another bar. He decides to stay for one more drink before heading home. A young woman asks him for a dance which he refuses. She continues to ask him and tell him how badly she wants to "take him home tonight." Each time, he tells her he simply wants to sit there, finish his drink and then leave. Eventually two of her friends join in pursuing him. He leaves the bar and they all follow him outside where they stay and make sexual comments as he waits for a cab. When his taxi arrives one of the women gets in with him.

Participants were asked if anything resembling this situation had ever happened to them or how they would respond if a woman aggressively pursued them in a downtown bar:

"I've had women aggressively pursue me too. But you just brush it off, man...Ignore them."

"This one girl...she tried to kiss me or something. 'No, I got a girlfriend.' But then she took my hand and started dancing, right? The other girl was trying to dance with me. Both of them trying to dance with me. 'Fuck this!' I said. I just walked away."

"At the end of it I would be like, 'Listen, fuck off! Get away from me!' You'd be nice about it from the get go but at the end of it, you know what? 'Just leave!'"

"Pissed off, not threatened...It's getting on my nerves now. More of an aggravation."

"I always say 'I got a girlfriend' if it's someone I don't like."

"Down at Bender's, there were loads of women coming up to me...looking for one thing. And I was like 'No, no, no.' It wasn't 'cause I felt harassed or anything."

No participant in any focus group indicated feeling personally threatened by being pursued aggressively by women in downtown bars. Some men indicated that this action is desirable:

"I can see two women. But three? Oh man! That's a dream!"

"I don't think that men are upset by women anyways in general."

"Guys are a different way. The guy goes downtown, gets his ass grabbed. He laughs at it. He likes it."

These quotes indicate that men were not feeling threatened, but more in control of the situation. The fact that three women pursuing a male is a "...dream," or that a male would laugh at sexual harassment as in the last quote, indicates that men do not feel in danger when women pursue them and are sexually aggressive.

During the discussion of the scenario, participants were asked how a woman might feel if she was being pursued aggressively in a downtown bar. Overall, men understood that women would feel differently. Men identified themselves as benefitting from such an action, while identifying the situations as threatening for women:

"If there was three guys in a club hitting on one woman, nine times out of ten she'd be scared shitless. But if there was one fella and there's three girls hitting on him - he's in his glee."

"I think what it comes down to is in some situations, women can't control"

"But if that was two guys doing that to a woman - they'd be in jail. And that's just sex and society. Just gender relations. It's the way it is."

Participants offered their insights about the reasons men would not feel threatened:

"And women sometimes are the perpetrators."

"And they know they can be the perpetrators without real ramifications."

"You still are in control."

Glen, a former bouncer, explains how men and women experience and interpret sexual harassment and violence differently:

"You gotta look at the difference in sexual harassment from a male to a female. See, a man being, nine times out of ten a little bit more physically domineering can force himself on a woman. But, I mean honestly now, what kind of girls are downtown . . . grabbing a guy saying 'Come home!' Most fellas can say, 'Alright, listen, I really don't want none of this. I got a girlfriend. Just piss off somewhere!' Or 'Listen! You're ugly! I'm not interested!' Whatever. You can't tell me you can't get out of it. But now a guy can physically grab a girl and drag her home . . . That's the scary part. That's why sexual harassment differs in male and female."

Here, Glen is describing the differences in power dynamics between men and women. He would later go on to comment:

"You gotta be honest with yourself here guys...I was a bouncer before and if a fella came up to me and said, 'There's three girls hitting on me. I'm not interested.' Right! Would I say, 'You want me to go beat them up?'

"But if a girl came up to you and said, 'yeah, there's three guys hitting on me.'"

"You'd go over and tell them to give it up."

Another focus group participant held a similar point of view:

"It comes down to being physically capable . . . I don't think any girls would be able to overpower any of they guys here."

These last three quotes highlight the different experiences between men and women with regards to sexual harassment and violence. This is not meant to convey that men are not sexually harassed at downtown bars or that men should not be validated for feelings of personal violation when this does happen. Rather, it portrays the general sentiment of men that they are the physically stronger gender and do not feel threatened or at risk of rape when pursued aggressively by women at bars. Men continued to articulate that they have the ultimate power and feel no loss of control in situations with women. Although Glen, the bouncer, indicated that he did not take the comments of men being pursued by women very seriously, men felt they had choices. These choices ranged from a vocal reaction, to calling on male friends or complaining to police. Although men spoke about harassment, they saw this as emotional or verbal abuse and not harassment or abuse that evoked fear, as is the case with women experiencing sexual violence.

Introduction to Scenario Four

Many events and contests used to promote particular drinking establishments are explicitly sexual and the advertisements reflect this. Throughout the course of this research the coordinator has discussed these advertisements with the project participants. One particular ad at a local strip club brought out strong feelings. Many noted that sexual objectification of women and how the sexualizing of women's bodies is one aspect that contributes to normalizing harassment and violence. A particular sign advertising activities at the Cotton Club drew much attention. The sign was positioned to face New Gower Street where thousands of cars passed everyday. Most signs of this nature would be placed in the window or door of a drinking establishment. Because a number of individuals complained that the sign was quite sexual and derogatory our focus group sessions opened with a general discussion of this sign.

Scenario Four

A recent sign on a downtown bar stated: "Six lovely dancers from Montreal and one ugly one." Some people who lived and worked nearby complained about this.

A picture of the sign was distributed to the focus group participants and range of responses from laughter to disbelief ensued:

"It's a strip club damn it! That's what they're doing!"
"I find it funny...Who was the ugly one?"
"That's horrible for a child to see."
"There's no explicit language or anything like that."
"As long as they're not showing nudity...I mean so what's the big deal?"
"I thought it was funny."

Most of the participants believed that the reason for the sign and for advertising it in a public area was to generate business:

"I'd say they got pretty good business from it."
"That's how they make money. Its just part of a business."
"It's all about marketing. It worked. It got the attention."
"Good advertising."

While the majority of participants did not have a problem with the ad, some men did recognize that it might offend certain groups. Participants were asked which groups of people would have issues with this advertisement. The answers that were received varied but there were a few commonalities. For example, participants said that women would be the main group to take offense and most men would not be offended by the ad:

"There's gonna be people complaining. But the people complaining are women. Guaranteed! There's no men complaining about this."
"For the most part . . . I say you might find maybe five percent of men find it offensive."
"Most of them are on a short leash."
"People who don't have any sense of humor."
"Probably women...Sorry, unattractive women."
"Feminist."
"Oh yeah!"
"I'd say it's mostly the older generation."
"In the female gender bracket."
"And in the older."
"And maybe in the lesbian bracket."

A pattern can be seen when assessing whom the men feel are offended by the ad. Women and feminist groups were identified most often, followed by older people. There were also several participants who offered that lesbians would be offended as well. When participants identified men as being offended, some felt their objections were on behalf of women. For example, comments such as men are "on a short leash" indicate that men object not because they are offended but due to their female partner taking offense. There appears to be agreement that only women or certain groups of women find sexual objectification offensive. Despite the fact that men may share this view, most dismissed this notion and assumed that men could not be offended. According to the interviews, men are understood to be homogeneous in their thought process and opinions. Men taking offense to this ad would contradict society's stereotypical view of what constitutes masculinity. Therefore, any notion that men think differently is dismissed, minimized and attributed to outside influences.

Many participants failed to recognize why people would take offence to the ad:

"I don't really understand why anybody would complain about it. Are they complaining about the dancers or about the ugly one?"

"Might be a little disrespectful but other than that it's nothing too serious."

"I mean the people who complain about this kind of stuff they have too much time on their hands. Way too much time. I mean really! For you to look at something on a sign and say 'I'm gonna make a big deal out of this and phone people and write up letters. My god, what are you doing with your life? You got something wrong with you or what?'"

"If it was in a different area or something. Like the Avalon Mall. It's a strip club downtown, come on!"

Overall, there was a difference of opinion among the focus group members regarding the offensive nature of this sign. While some men did not take issue with the ad, others understood how the ad was distasteful.

To the following participants, it was not as simple as an advertisement that was taken out of context. Instead, they considered other issues such as the messages being portrayed by such an ad. Participants questioned the type of message children would receive from the sign and noted that they would not want to expose them to it. Many men realized that the sign also served in the objectification of women:

"I can see where the issue would come from. Fine...if it says 'Six lovely dancers from Montreal.' Fine, no big deal. But then they're saying they can put a girl up on stage and call her ugly."

"I don't think gender applies here. I wouldn't want my five-year-old kid saying 'Daddy, what's that all about?' It's poorly placed."

"Two-thirds of the population is going to take it as a joke and then you're going to offend people. That's the bottom line. I can easily see how you're going to offend people."

"I can see if you take it the wrong way. If you take it literally for what it says it's pretty much looking at it as the whole female as an object kind of thing."

Sam understood why the sign was considered offensive and explains why he thinks it should have been removed:

"To be honest with you in a public place it's probably not appropriate for the club to be advertising. Because for one it eliminates a choice...A lot of women really don't want to see signs like this. And there's probably men who don't either. But there's kids. The elderly. There's a lot of people who really have no interest in seeing that. So maybe they could put it in an area where people who want to know about this have no problem."

Participants were asked whether they thought that the sign should be removed. Although answers varied, many took other factors into consideration. Others expressed the difficulties of regulating this type of signage:

"I think it's in bad taste. Do I think they should be asked to change it? No."

"They could be asked to change the location a little...Maybe turn it toward George Street."

"But then you are looking at legislation, advertising laws and freedom of speech and there's a whole bunch of stuff that would come in there."

"As long as there's no laws, all the complaining in the world is not going to change it."

"I think it should be at the discretion of the owner of the business."

Complaints about the advertisement came through media outlets from many individuals and groups. In the focus groups, some participants believed that the ad was offensive while others did not. Some men considered it to be humorous and not insulting and believed it fulfilled its purpose of bringing in revenue. The men believed that groups who would find the sign offensive were mainly women or specific groups of women such as feminists. Males in general agreed that the sign was humorous to the public and effective as a marketing strategy. Others did not consider humor and money as factors in determining whether the sign was insulting. Instead, they contemplated other issues such as the sexual objectification of women and the message this ad sends to impressionable children.

There are many factors to consider when using advertising of this nature for downtown events. Advertisements like this are commonplace for the downtown bar scene, as are events themselves. Some ads are strategically placed for target audiences such as the university campus. Meanwhile, others are geared for the general public such as the ad facing busy New Gower Street.

Nonetheless, the ads promote sexual contests and sexualized events that objectify women. This sexual objectification creates acceptance of sexual harassment and violence. Dismissive humor also contributes to the approval of violence as it trivializes the issue. To laugh at advertisements like this, or to excuse them as merely smart business promotion is to dismiss sexual objectification of women and how this creates an environment where sexual violence and harassment will occur.

Introduction to Scenario Five

In an effort to create realistic scenarios, the project coordinator considered actual incidents that occurred downtown. This scenario is closely based on an actual event experienced by a local freelance reporter. The scenario was then used to investigate men's tolerance and acceptance of both sexual violence and the exploitation of women.

Scenario Five

Susan went to a dance bar for her birthday, out having a good time with her female friends - drinking, dancing and meeting people. Suddenly, women begin removing their clothing on the dance floor and the DJ announces that these women are from a local strip club and for everyone to "enjoy." Many people are standing around watching the dancers when Susan complains to the bar owner that she came to have a good time and not to watch strippers. A male customer overhears her complaint, grabs her buttock and pushes her towards the dance floor saying: "Shut-up and show us what you got!"

Prior to informing them that this incident was based on a true story, one participant commented:

"I can believe that. I figured it was a real story because I've been to Liquid Ice and seen things like this."

We asked participants to comment on whether or not this was a case of sexual assault. Generally, participants considered this to be sexual assault and do not accept intoxication as a valid excuse for the actions of the male offender:

"Legally, it is assault."

"The thing is too...how people define sexual assault. Grabbing her ass – that's nothing now."

"Whether you report it or not, whether she's offended or not, that doesn't constitute whether it's harassment or not. Just because some guy grabbed your ass and you laugh it off, even if you don't care. He still assaulted you."

"Any unwanted touching to me is sexual assault. But people that say 'No that's not a serious one, so I won't do nothing about it.' But it's all sexual assault and should all be taken seriously."

"That's like walking through the park, and getting jumped. It's not like you asked for it, you just wanted to go for a walk in the park."

"That's sexual harassment! I don't care if he's had how ever many drinks. There's no excuse. A bouncer sees that then he should toss the guy out of the bar right there."

Many of the participants who noted that this was a sexual assault were aware of other factors that contributed to the explicitly sexualized environment. These factors create an atmosphere that excuses sexual assault:

"There shouldn't be strippers there in the first place."

"The part where the strippers were brought out initially, that was stupid of the bar owner."

Many participants recognized the existence of sexual assault. However they still placed the blame on the woman:

"But it's in the bar where women think 'It's all fun. Let's do what I want now.' And then they don't think about where they are. She knew the event that was going on that night."

"Yeah I mean we talk about girls like all of them are going to be completely offended by it. Some of them are just down there getting cock, right?"

"I think that the people accountable is the one who gets her ass grabbed because you know what goes on downtown anyway."

Participants failed to recognize the factors that contribute to the sexualized environment, such as the responsibility of the male offender over his own actions, and the duty of the bar staff to ensure the safety of their patrons. These men felt that Susan, and women in general, are responsible when an event like this occurs. They did not feel that the organizers of the event or the offender were accountable for what happened.

Several participants challenged their group by reversing the situation. Instead of female strippers at a bar, the group was asked how they would react should male dancers arrived:

"If a guy came in and started stripping you would be freaking out. You'd be like 'What is going on here?'"

"I'm not going to like it but 'I'll leave.'"

"Exactly! You're not going to like it...But you shouldn't have to leave."

"I mean I wouldn't want to go into a bar and see a bunch of fellas stripping down after paying cover. I'd be like 'I'm getting out of here!' It's the same thing and that's the way you got to look at it I think."

"I'd be pretty pissed off if I was at a bar and guys started stripping."

"Imagine some guy dancing around with a big old dick flopping up and down your leg? What are you going to do? Are you going to stay there and be like 'What a fucking time I'm having!'"

Many participants felt that Susan should take action either by complaining to the man who assaulted her or to the bar staff. This once again places responsibility on the woman:

"She should make a complaint."

"She should of left on the spot, wrote an article listing the name of the club, the owner of the club some of the staff at the club...Give them full names and full details."

"Say something back to the guy first...Definitely talk to the bar owner if it really got her that much."

"But look on a bigger scale though...What would actually be done about that if she said that. And to me, I bet you nothing would be done."

"She should watch the strippers."

When asked about what should happen to the male offender the most common answer was that he should be punished through physical violence:

"Drag him in the back, beat the piss out of him. Then throw him out of the club. He should of took a beating first though to be honest with you."

"Definitely get kicked out of the bar."

"Smack him in the face."

"I'd just punch him in the face. You grabbed her ass, I'll punch you in the face. That's it, man."

"Maybe next time he'll think twice."

Another participant, however, believed that even though an offense had been committed nothing would actually be done to the male customer:

"The most he's gonna get is a warning or a tap on the wrist anyway. 'Do it again and you're out!'"
Participants discussed the responsibility of the bar staff to intervene in this type of situation. This led to a discussion about the overall responsibility and effectiveness of bar staff on safety issues:

"The owner should definitely be aware of what is going on in his bar."

"The events that goes on in that bar, the owner is definitely responsible for."

"I think that the root of the problem came right from the start. When the manager of the bar says 'Yeah ok, you can do that here in my establishment.'"

As these quotes demonstrate many of the men believed that the responsibility for activities and safety of customers belongs to the bar owners and the bar staff. However, not everybody agreed:

"It's easy to say that the bar should be responsible, but at the same time by saying that you're almost putting a restriction on downtown altogether. I think there would be so many incidents that occur it would almost deter people from going down there."

What should be considered here in terms of customers' safety is that a process must be in place to address incidents that could endanger bar patrons. This applies equally to both physical and sexual violence and harassment. Implementing guidelines or "restrictions" improves the safety of bar patrons. Participants obviously recognize that harmful incidents do occur downtown, but would prefer non-supervision instead of a violence-free environment.

A former bouncer commented on bar owners' high level of awareness of activities within their clubs:

"I worked at a bar for two years and I know that the manager knows things that ninety percent of the staff don't know."

Another participant addressed the accountability and responsibility of bouncers for preventing sexual violence:

"For the most part when someone acts up they usually kick them out of the bar...they're pretty quick in doing it. They don't put up with no shit."

Jeff feels that the bouncers do not have a responsibility to monitor incidents of sexual violence. Instead he feels that their role is to deal with more important issues. Clearly, sexual violence is not considered an issue of importance for this particular participant:

"Bouncers can't be held accountable for the actions on the dance floor. They are there to sort things out if anything really does go wrong."

Participants considered inadequate salary and the dangerous situations faced by bouncers as poor incentives that impact performance and accountability:

"If you're getting paid seven bucks an hour how far does accountability go? You only do what you have to do."

"Most places won't want to do anything because their paying bouncers under the table anyways, they're just paying cash."

"Yeah, bouncers are busboys. Six bucks, straight cash."

"When you're having beer bottles thrown at you and knives pulled on you, you wonder if it's all worth it."

The majority of participants believe that bouncers do have a responsibility to ensure safety in the downtown bar scene. However, they also believe that the incentive for bouncers is lacking due to low pay and unsafe working conditions. Bouncers have a duty to police the inside of bars, yet they do not have the ability and motivation to carry out this task.

Bouncers provide vigilance inside the bar scene, monitoring a number of safety issues such as sexual and physical violence. The "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" project recognizes the important role that bouncers play and interviewed a former bouncer who worked in a club for two years. From this interview it is apparent that bouncers face many challenges and often witness illegal activities that transpire at the bar scene. Highlights of this discussion can be found on page 70.

Bar Owners' and Bar Staff's Responsibility

In the first report "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak," women identified the sexualized nature of downtown as a problem. In this second stage, "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities", many men have recognized sexual violence as a concern for women and have acknowledged physical violence as a concern for themselves. In keeping with the theme of accountability, we asked participants who they think has the overall responsibility to ensure safety downtown. The bar owners and staff were two groups identified during this discussion. Participants felt that they should be responsible for the safety of customers but oftentimes were not due to factors such as small numbers of staff and the use of alcohol:

"Bar owners can be responsible. But again they're gonna try to crowd in as many people as they can. But if there is more regulations and more awareness...If they can get away with it they'll do it. But if they can't, they won't."

"They need to be responsible. Something really serious could happen at a bar...There needs to be people there that are responsible and not drinking and able to deal..."

"A lot of people working downtown are drunk too."

"And some of the bars don't have many people working... You go into a bar and there's only a few fellas there."

"Definitely, the bar staff. It's their responsibility."

"This is what is wrong with bouncers and bar staff today – they are on power trips...By throwing people out of clubs, they're not solving the issue, they're just moving it out on the street."

"The owners of the bar should look out for the safety of the public in general."

"We have to find a few bouncers and bar owners who actually care."

Individual Responsibility

Men felt that individuals must be held accountable for their actions:

"You know what happens when you drink booze. And you have rights but you have responsibilities as well...It's your choice."

"I just think that...people are going downtown they got to be accountable for themselves. And unless you're getting date rape pills popped in your drink you can't blame anyone for anything."

Kevin agrees with the notion of individual responsibility but notes that societal factors reinforce a lack of accountability:

"Who has the responsibility? I mean obviously bar owners are responsible to a certain degree. Problems maybe occur in these things like the wet t-shirt contest. But who's responsible comes back to individuals taking responsibility for themselves. And a lot of this is cultural...One of the things up to this point...parents have never even taught kids to be responsible men. And that's a thing we never have done. The girl has to be responsible for things, but they don't teach kids these days to be responsible enough."

Many of the participants noted that it is the woman's responsibility to deal with sexual violence and harassment directed towards her. They believed that if a woman requires assistance, she should ask for it:

"If the girl's in no physical danger of any kind, if she's not being physically in danger – I think it's up to her, to her discretion to do something or not."

"If she didn't say nothing about it, I wouldn't do anything"

"But in a case of that situation I think you should let the woman decide what her feelings are on that. Maybe it's wanted; maybe it's something that she desires. I mean there are cases like that."

"To me, that's a lot to do with a woman herself though, if you are going to say anything."

Participants went on to discuss reasons why women may not always seek assistance when they may require it. Young women in phase one of "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence. Young St. John's Women Speak" stated that women feel pressured not to complain about violence and harassment experienced in downtown bars. There are many reasons for this including fear of not being believed, self-blame, and embarrassment and unwanted attention:

"I've heard women say 'Well we were all there together and I didn't want to embarrass him, and I didn't want to make a scene.' So I hear this kind of stuff, even though I don't always see it. It seems like a real phenomena."

Not many men appreciate the type of situations women face downtown because men are not faced with these experiences. Some men tend to take offense when women talk about their fear of sexual violence from men. Vince describes how he overcame this kind of thinking:

"The minute they start saying it about one guy, for me sometimes you almost think they are saying it about every guy. And as a male there's probably lots of things you don't want to hear. Well, I try to not be like those guys...But it doesn't matter though because the guy she was with was like that. And that's what sticks in her mind."

Ted also understood that women can be uncomfortable at the bar scene and he described a tactic he has used when a woman appeared uneasy:

"I just kind of go over and befriend her. And you just kind of whisper to her 'Look, I know I don't know you but it seems like this guy is giving you a really hard time. If you want me to stand here and just chat it up, maybe he'll go away.' And that's happened. And that's worked."

Nevertheless, most of the participants felt that women have responsibility to deal with their concerns of sexual violence and harassment. When asked "Who has the responsibility to make the bar environment safer for women?" one participant answered:

"Women should account for their own actions."

Yet, when asked "Who has the responsibility to make the bar environment safer for men?" the same participant answered:

"For men? I think the owners of the bar."

Men's Contradictory Notion of Power

Many of the men participating in the focus groups felt that incidents of violence and harassment directed at women in bars was not a serious issue and could easily be resolved by women themselves. These men who minimized the abuse and violence that women experience were quick to offer that if men witnessed women in danger of physical violence or sexual violence involving physical force at a downtown bar, they would intervene to protect women. However, participants identified violence directed by men toward men as serious and felt that others should become involved immediately.

The attitudes portrayed by men are quite contradictory. Participants admitted that they would provide protection in incidents of physical or violent sexual assault, but did not deem protection necessary in the all too common cases of sexual harassment that occur downtown. On the one hand men could see themselves rescuing women who they perceive to be victims of violence but would not challenge sexist jokes or intervene in cases of sexual harassment. The "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" coordinator labeled this contradiction: "Hero Syndrome." This refers to men being able to relate to the rescuing of a woman who is physically or violently sexually assaulted when in fact the likelihood of men witnessing this is minuscule at best. Yet, possible intervention by men in the everyday reality of sexist and derogatory comments, verbal and emotional harassment directed toward women was negated.

"I got more respect for all women and even if I did have a sister and same thing if it's my woman and her best friend or what ever. When they go to a club - we go together. I look out for all of them. If I go with ten women I watch out for all of them. And I make sure they're safe."

"Good for you!"

"Last week a girl got dragged into one of the alleyways down there. And some guy tried to do some shit and one of my friends beat the hell out of him."

"If I seen a guy touch a girl and she was...crying and everything else, yes I would help. I wouldn't be able to sit there and watch it."

"...I've seen it twice where a guy slapped a girl and within two seconds there were people who were not even involved with the situation turned around and say 'Buddy you better let her go or you're gonna get it!' It's alleviated by the other fellas in the bar. Not even the bouncers."

"There's no man that's gonna let another man hurt a woman."

"I don't know any guys who would stand by and watch..."

"Probably most of us here at this table if we saw some guy beating up a girl, or trying to rape a girl, you're gonna step in."

"Oh my god yeah!"

"I think guys would be quick to jump in to protect a woman."

"They have more protection then men would."

"Its just an unwritten rule. You don't do that to a woman."

Participants seemed to have differing levels of acceptance when it comes to dealing with violence and harassment. While they felt quite justified intervening in an obviously violent act, their resolve to do so wavered in less overt incidents of abuse:

"Hooting and hollering is a bit different then grabbing some girl's ass. You can't compare a verbal assault to a physical. A passing comment is not like grabbing some girl."

"I saw it Friday night when I was walking up behind Mile One. I guess it was his wife or girlfriend, and he was screaming at her. I didn't think nothing of it...If it would of gone any further than that I definitely would have said something."

Participants were asked how they would respond if they heard a sexist joke or comment, and if they felt sexual comments constituted sexual harassment:

"I'd laugh at them."

"Yeah, laugh along with them."

"It depends on the guys. How well you know them."

"I saw this missus, she was fairly large chested. And I saw a guy come over and plant two huge pints of Guinness down in front of her and said 'Here you go my darling. Here's another pair.' That's assault, right? Because it made her feel uncomfortable about her physical appearance. But yet he said nothing sexual. But it's the inclination of how he said it and just basically his gesture about it."

Mason noted that in university residences, sexist comments are more likely to be challenged or to not occur because the close quarters allow word of mouth to travel quickly. Individuals who find comments offensive are more likely to hear about them:

"In a residence, if you say it and eight people know it by the end of the day. I think it's less likely to come up because people are obviously going to do something about it...because everybody is going to find out."

Any intervention men would take to deal with sexism, harassment, abuse and violence is considered based upon their perception of the severity of the situation. The severity was determined by whether or not physical violence was involved. If a case of harassment of a woman was blatantly violent men felt intervention was required. Meanwhile, men felt intervention was not important in a case of sexist jokes or comments.

Date Rape Drugs

Date rape drugs were identified in the first report "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak" as a threat to young women's safety. Most male participants were aware of date rape drugs but had not witnessed their use firsthand. The focus group discussions addressed the prevalence of date rape drugs at the downtown bar scene:

"Last girl I was going out with she was downtown and these older guys that were hanging around there dropping pills in girls drinks. And drag them off home then. And those fellas tried to get her. They were like 'Come here. Come here.' And at that point she just stayed away from them."

"My girlfriend's friend thought she was slipped one, one night. Because she was really messed up."

"It's getting more and more everyday now. And it's gonna get worse too. I don't think it's ever gonna be rectified to the point where everyone's safe now. But there's always more things you can try to implement..."

"It's easy to get downtown. So easy it's not funny."

The use of date rape drugs generally involves sexual intercourse with an unconscious woman. Participants were asked why they thought an individual would want to have intercourse with a woman who was unresponsive:

"I think that is weird! What in the hell!"

"You know what the funny thing is? If you go downtown, it ain't that hard to pick up a woman...so why do you got to use date rape drugs?"

"It goes pretty deep to the point of somebody's inner psyche as to why they want to be that empowering over a completely disabled woman."

"Deep inside their head, man."

"Sex is a conscience act between two people. The fact that you got someone laying on your bed and they're half dead or conked out...you know that's just about power. Wanting something you can't have. It's like rape. Rape is not an act of sex it's all about power and abuse. It's all a power trip."

"It's gotta be thought out before hand. I mean its not something you're slipping a quarter into a bubble gum machine, all of a sudden you got a date rape drug, 'Oh might as well use that tonight.' You really got to think about it. You got to track down to where it is...It's obviously premeditated and I think it goes beyond the idea of sex."

"It's not about sex. It's about power."

Participants were then asked if they would confront or report a distributor of date rape drugs:

"Yeah definitely. Go find the bouncer, for sure."

"And sure if they see you go to a cop and walk down the street any further, he could have like ten or fifteen people waiting."

"That could get you killed."

"I would walk away from that. That guy could be packing all kinds of hardware underneath his coat."

"You could say 'No you're an asshole.' and turn your back and all of a sudden you got ten guys on your ass."

These quotes indicate an interesting pattern. Participants would intervene in an instance where violence is apparent and where the offence is actually witnessed. However, when the intention to assault is evident but the incident has not yet happened, such as with date rape drugs, participants shied away from taking responsibility. The reason given is that a notion exists that individuals who distribute and sell date rape drugs are linked to a broader drug network.

Individual Interviews

The Taxi Industry and Downtown

It may appear unusual to talk about sexual abuse, the downtown bar scene and include the taxi industry in the discussion. Yet, when the focus groups discussed responsibility and prevention, taxi drivers figured prominently. Many participants simply stated that taxi drivers had no responsibility beyond chauffeuring passengers to the destination indicated. It is considered to be a safe, precautions and responsible act for men and women who have been using drugs and alcohol to take a taxi ride home. In this regard the taxi driver provides a safe alternative, lessening the likelihood of a car accident should a bar patron drive while impaired. Yet in the case of an intoxicated, partly conscious woman being transported to a destination that she is unable to articulate, the taxi driver has, in fact, contributed to the possibility of her sexual assault.

Recognizing the vulnerable position of intoxicated women leaving downtown led many participants to wonder about the taxi industry's role in the prevention or early intervention of sexual violence.

"Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" seeks to make recommendations that will prevent sexual abuse and violence. Safety guidelines and hiring practices for taxi drivers are regulated by the taxi industry. These and other related concerns were discussed with Brad, a local St. John's taxi driver with more than a decade of experience in the taxi industry:

"There was a requirement, that in order to be a taxi driver, you had to register with the city. You had to complete a very basic test and obtain a certificate of good conduct from the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary...And in the year of, I believe, 2000 the city of St. John's...have walked away from it's enforcement and have delegated the responsibility for ensuring that drivers have obtained the certificate of good conduct over to the company owners. But the city of St. John's has walked away from that. Without consultation with the industry itself. The responsibility is gone to the owners who lobbied intensely and a couple of multi-vehicle owners who wanted to get a supply of warm bodies to drive."

De-regulation allows taxi companies to make their own decisions regarding the hiring or dismissal of taxi drivers. At no point in "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" did focus group participants condemn the type of driver working at the downtown scene. Yet, in the interview with a driver, the lack of standards involving, for example, criminal record checks was acknowledged as problematic:

"Predators don't work in groups, right? People who prey on vulnerable people, take advantage of situations that arise when you're vulnerable and when you're alone. Don't get me wrong – we got some people that I know who would do this, prey on people. But the vast majority of people that I know are hard working men and women who do good jobs."

Brad offered that the taxi drivers are in a position of trust at the downtown bar scene. He felt that women in various states of intoxication place themselves in the hands of a taxi driver blindly trusting that they will be taken to their destination. This certainly indicates that taxi companies would require the very best safety precautions for individuals hired as drivers, and the very best training for drivers to be proactive in preventing sexual violence:

"You can't go to work in some candy stores now without a certificate about your behavior. You certainly can't go to work in somebody's home. So why should you be able to work in a situation where you have control over very vulnerable people who a lot of times are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs?"

Brad undoubtedly recognizes the position of trust he holds as a taxi driver. He did not believe, however, that others share his concern for vulnerable passengers or the responsibility to be proactive in the prevention of sexual violence. Participants recognized that the distinctiveness of George Street and the downtown bar scene, which has numerous drinking establishments in close proximity, makes this the preferred place to relax and drink. Brad felt that this unique cluster of bars and the small population of the city mean that many drivers know their customers.

He offered that simply observing the behavior of his passengers gave him opportunities to be proactive. Some of Brad's actions included inquiring if the individual was in need of assistance, noting the address where he drove the passenger, and contacting the authorities in necessary situations. Brad was adamant that he and a small number of other drivers went above and beyond the call of what was required of them by the taxi industry:

"I've seen the person on a couple of occasions before because they were a regular user of the company...I knew the customer and I knew the address. I was downtown and this person was leaving and I didn't know who her gentleman was. Just from the conversation it was somebody she met a little while ago. And her actions were surprising to me...I'm not a doctor and I'm not a judge of who's under what drug or anything else like that, but I was deeply concerned in this instance that she had been drugged because her actions, wanting to have sex in the backseat."

Brad believed that both drivers and staff have a mutual responsibility and should work together to address the needs of vulnerable and intoxicated women:

"They are pouring the drinks into them all night long and then all of a sudden they are stripping off their clothes...you're seeing them become extremely vulnerable...I've had to go into clubs and physically lift people out. And there should be an onus on the owners of the club to say 'Look, we're giving you this body.' And then the onus is on you...but we don't have it and we need to develop that kind of working relationship."

With recent events regarding the sexual assault of a young woman by a taxi driver, women may feel even more vulnerable. Perhaps women would feel safer being transported by a female driver. Unfortunately, the taxi industry is not conducive to the employment of women taxi drivers:

"Women have raised the issue with me in the past. Fewer than 2% of the estimated 600 to 700 jobs as taxi drivers in the city are women. This means that females on George Street have virtually no meaningful opportunity to choose a female driver for the ride home if they want to."

"Taxi companies usually pay only lip or token service to the issue. They frequently deflect to the fact that the jobs are open to both men and women but they do not deal with the barriers unique to women obtaining work as taxi drivers. One of the most significant obstacles is fear of assault from passengers. While the other is lack of an entry-level training program to familiarize them with the City streets. These can be overcome by training and installation of proper safety features in the taxis."

Background checks will not ensure that all taxi drivers will take a proactive approach to preventing sexual violence. This practice would assure the general public that the taxi companies have a minimum standard for their hiring practices. Brad insisted that de-regulation prevents taxi drivers from appropriately dealing with situations where drivers feel a woman's safety is being compromised, and therefore taxi companies must develop guidelines. Brad ended the interview with the "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" coordinator with recommendations for the taxi industry:

"I believe that a kind of awareness training should be developed and applied. We should take the leadership like partnering with stakeholder groups. There has been some – WITTI, Women in the Taxi Industry. We've met with some stakeholders like the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Women's Studies section at Memorial... This issue of the "Masculinities Project" I believe in that and I would like to see it flow from this that an effort evolves. But there needs to be more... I believe that collectively, the George Street area in particular, it might be a good idea if lounge owners themselves come together for training of their staff. I think that could be done as a group... They could work with the breweries as the liquor industry would have a prime responsibility, work with the industry because George Street is a phenomenon, George Street is unique. But then George Street has a lot of responsibilities."

Police Presence

Every focus group discussed whether the presence of police officers was effective in reducing incidents of violence at the downtown bar scene. Participants endorsed the fact that policing is critical and necessary at the downtown bar scene. Some men offered that the number of police officers was adequate; others felt that the concentration of so many bars was limiting the work of police. A minority had a love-hate relationship with police, where they respect the police presence but disrespect the use of power and authority.

"And the other thing is the police presence on George Street. I don't walk down George Street without seeing the police. And the odd time I've seen a fight which is broke up almost immediately."

"We're talking about George Street. There's cops everywhere."

"If a girl went up to a police officer and said 'He's following me and wants me to come home with him.' Do you think the police would do anything?"

"On George Street? He definitely would."

One the other hand, some participants have a different outlook about the policing on George Street:

"They didn't get out of the car. One of the girls was up beating on the window, probably just thought she was drunk or whatever, I don't know. But they would not move...out of the car. They called the cops the next day and complained."

"Number one the cops are too lazy. If buddy is down by Trapper John's and he's getting busted up, and the cops are there by Pizza Supreme, the cop will not get out of his car."

Other participants noted that the police cannot respond to every situation because of the size of George Street:

"You might notice a cop patrolling the street, going up and down the street. But when he's at one end of the street and there's something going on at the other end and then by the time he gets down to where the event is going on, something dangerous could of happened."

The police presence, or lack thereof, is an important factor when dealing with sexual violence. Yet, the majority of the participants felt that the main responsibility of police was to prevent or respond to acts of physical violence. As previously identified in phase one of "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak," sexual harassment and violence is the main concern of young women at the downtown bar scene. While visiting the bar scene one night, the project coordinator counted nine patrol cars passing the bar in a two-hour period. Through discussions with RNC officers and in conversations with the participants of the "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" project it was determined that the number of police officers patrolling downtown is actually quite low considering the number of people who frequent the area.

The Royal Newfoundland Constabulary Sexual Offence Unit handles cases of sexual assault and deals with many cases pertaining to downtown. Meanwhile, the police presence itself serves as a deterrent for physical violence. The presence of police and the issues of physical and sexual violence were discussed in an interview with a veteran police officer. The resource needs of the RNC have been highlighted in the media lately and both the police officers and the public at large are becoming increasingly concerned that the safety of people and the deterring presence of police at the downtown bar scene have been compromised. The interview with Constable Griffin highlights this:

"There's a lot of issues with regards to what goes on downtown. Right now one of the biggest ones I think is a lack of policing on the bar scene, like George Street, Water Street area. On busy nights, which are generally Fridays and Saturday nights, usually the bars are closing around three, you should see a couple of police cars cruising through...but these are one man units. So you might see two or three cars going through, but generally it's probably two police officers. If you get a big racket going on at George Street, there's just not the manpower there to handle it."

The night that the project coordinator was at the bar on George Street, the police presence was not nine individual patrol cars. Instead, there were merely two vehicles, each operated by a single police officer. While safety is a concern for downtown customers, it is also a concern for police officers themselves. Some focus group participants claimed that they had been involved, or had seen physical altercations involving several individuals where the police have been present but have not interfered. Participants believed that the police were not doing their job, but Constable Griffin explains how lack of staffing causes concern for police safety:

"But I mean if you get a racket with four or five people and it's a hard racket and you're after telling them, 'Look, boys, give it up and leave!' They obviously know you're there trying to diffuse the situation so if you get out and you try and start manhandling people by yourself, you got that many people there and they didn't respect the law. There's a good chance that they may not respect you...So you're just going to have to wait till you get the resources there and the situation diffuses. I don't think anybody would be able to come back on you and say 'You had six fellows fighting. You were there. Why didn't you jump in to break it up?'"

The RNC attempts to fulfill all of its policing duties at the downtown bar scene, but this is made increasingly difficult with resource shortages. Constable Griffin notes that the resource crisis facing the RNC has changed the nature of their duties at the downtown scene:

"It was pretty routine for us to go down and do checks in clubs because you had a lot of bodies working, a lot of police officers working, but now like I say with the shortage of manpower you can't do that. You can't go down in order to check a club. You take a club with, say a thousand people for instance, you got to start trying to do head counts or checking IDs and stuff, you can't go in there with one or two officers."

Constable Griffin believes that the bar staff have a responsibility to take a more active role in ensuring safety of their patrons, particularly their female customers:

"I think there should be a bigger responsibility on the bars. There should be a cut off point when they see people getting over intoxicated. There should be a cut off point that these people shouldn't be serving any more... There has to be more education with the bar owners to educate their staff as to signs of somebody that should probably be cut off. Especially if they see young females there that are by themselves, intoxicated, then they should probably make the police aware. Because this person leaves and they got intoxicated, they're vulnerable, and who's going to come along, right? Maybe they should ensure that they do have somebody there that's sober that's going to be able to look after these people."

The police officers interviewed informally during the project stated that bar owners and bar staff could take a more active role to ensure the safety of patrons, and prevent the possibility of sexual violence and harassment. Constable Griffin also addressed the role of taxi drivers in preventing sexual violence:

"If you're bringing somebody home and all of a sudden you're getting the impression that this girl doesn't know this guy, it wouldn't hurt to give the police a call and maybe the police could go to the address and check it out."

Constable Griffin was asked to discuss the training that RNC officers receive to enable them to respond to victims of sexual abuse and violence. The interview also inquired into gender concerns regarding how male police officers assist female victims, and how knowledgeable police are in general about the dynamics of sexual violence:

"We do have some training with sexual assaults... It's usually males sexually assaulting females. We don't get a whole lot of the other way around... And unfortunately the population of police officers... I don't know what the ratio is now but you'd probably be talking 80% of the police officers are male, so I think that they do need to be a little better trained as to what women are thinking and how they feel... It would be nice if some of the front line officers would get a little more training in how to deal with victims of sexual assault because they are the ones that initially respond... Sometimes a little bit of sensitivity training would be nice... but as front line officers, there's not a whole lot at all."

Police officers may not have the necessary tools to properly deal with women who have been sexually assaulted because of a lack of proper training. This is not a reflection on the capabilities of the RNC workforce, but speaks more to the need for sexual violence training. Constable Griffin

believes that his co-workers are quite able to handle these situations but require the proper guidance:

"And a lot of guys are pretty sensitive anyway but the rare guys that, and again it's not because they don't believe this person, a lot of it is just the situation that the police officer might not want to deal with somebody that's after going through something like that. Then they just react the wrong way, say the wrong thing. So yeah I think it would be nice if, especially getting women's groups, maybe some training... These people can feed a bit of information to police officers as to how most of their victims feel and probably ways and suggestions to deal with people. Informal type of setting."

As equally important as training in dealing with sexual violence and harassment is the experience gained from talking to victims of sexual violence. This practice has helped Constable Griffin understand the dynamics of sexual assault:

"Very seldom do we get these sexual assaults whereby it's a stranger. I would say 99% of the time the perpetrator and victim know each other in some way. And I've spoken to wives that have been assaulted, sexually assaulted by their husbands..."

One of the most pertinent issues faced by police is the lack of personnel. Due to this the RNC cannot fulfill some of its important duties which prevent physical and sexual violence at the downtown bar scene. Constable Griffin feels that other groups such as bar staff must also take responsibility. As well, Constable Griffin feels that the taxi industry must use sound judgment in reporting concerns of sexual violence. Additionally, he feels that while many police are well intentioned, they lack key analysis of the dynamics of sexual violence. Outside interest groups should be part of an outgoing process to train and educate police officers about sexual violence and harassment.

"The way I look at it is that the bars are the ones making the money downtown when it comes to serving the alcohol, getting their door fees...and I know they do pay taxes and they should expect a reasonable amount of police on George Street. But I think it should be more the responsibility if all the bar owners on George Street got together and said, 'Look guys, we need to do something here.' And for their own safety too... Their door staff get assaulted, and damage is done to their clubs. "
"I know Halifax for instance . . . They have their little street that has most of the bars on it. They have foot patrols there that it's paid for by bars. And if it means a few extra dollars coming out of their pocket, it might save them money in the long run. I mean it'll make our patrons feel safer and it could curb a lot of problems just by seeing police officers down there on foot. So I think a lot of it goes back on the bar owners... I think that time probably is coming because right now there's just fewer and fewer police officers...and St. John's is getting bigger all the time."

In Halifax, bars singly or collectively contribute funding for off duty police officers to patrol a certain area of the bar scene. The bars contribute funding through administration, who then assigns police officers to a particular bar or a region of the bar area. The application of this program would ease the funding crisis facing the RNC and place responsibility on bars to help resolve issues of violence. The presence of police would serve as a deterrent for sexual violence and police officers would be more readily available to react to urgent situations.

Bouncers and the Bar Scene

Bouncers have a number of responsibilities on the downtown bar scene. They provide vigilance to ensure that regulations are adhered to, that the bar itself is safe, and that customers are not in any danger. While participants have differing opinions about the responsibilities of bouncers, all participants agree that bouncers play an important role. They also have concerns about training, incentives, and extension of duties for bouncers. The "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" coordinator discussed these issues with a bouncer. The ex-bouncer we interviewed, Curtis, described how he became employed as a bouncer:

"I walked in, I knew the manager, and I said 'Are you hiring?' He said, 'Yeah, we're looking for a bouncer.' I said 'I'm available.' He asked me if I had any experience in handling myself, like if a fight broke out could I handle myself. I told him that I had three or four years of martial arts and three years of boxing. He said 'You'll do... Sure, start Friday night.'"

For this particular bar there were not many requirements for employment and the salary was low. However, there were other fringe benefits:

"I got six bucks and all you can drink. And a guest list for five of your friends."

The ability to handle violent situations is the main, if not the only, requirement to become a bouncer. The physical incidents that bouncers face in the course of their work can be very dangerous. For Curtis, some situations were potentially life threatening, as with one involving a knife. Other situations are equally as dangerous, even without the presence of a weapon. Not all downtown patrons respect the authority of the bouncers. Bouncers handle many violent situations and often must rely on personal training, improvisation and teamwork:

"I can remember standing at one side of the club and having beer bottles thrown at me from the top rail. I can remember when a fight broke out and I grabbed buddy and had a utility knife pulled on me. He was going savage waving it around...I grabbed a beer bottle and spun it and hit his wrist and knocked the knife out of his hand. Then I stepped on it, and the other bouncer came over and tackled him...I even seen so much as a gun. I don't know if it was real, but it looked pretty real. That's why I say clubs should have metal detectors when you go in through the door."

Bouncers often deal with physical altercations by beating up the assailant, particularly in cases of violence against staff members:

"If they got in a smack at us...I was down there one night and this guy hit me, I split him open. One smack, cold out on the floor. For six bucks an hour I wasn't taking a beating and not giving one back. You cover your own ass."

The club itself often contributes to unsafe conditions. For instance, Curtis notes that often his club was overcrowded which could lead to dangerous situations in the event of an emergency:

"My clubs regulation was, I think, four hundred and eighty people. Sometimes we would have seven hundred. The cops would shut her down."

Women's safety is very much at risk at the downtown bar scene:

"There are a lot of concerns for women. Most women go downtown and think that they are going to have a safe time, good time. But in reality, they are going downtown and they are never going to have a safe time. Just for themselves they got to watching their p's and q's. If anything happens to a woman in a club, it's the club's responsibility."

When asked about women's safety Curtis explains that bouncers were not expected to deal with violence or harassment of a sexual nature:

"Nope. Go upstairs and look for a fight... No one ever cared about the women. Just watch the fellers."

In fact, at the bar where Curtis worked, many times, staff sexually exploited women. For example, some women are manipulated into performing sexual favors in return for free admission:

"Regarding females, if a girl came to the door and there was a big long lineup, she knocked on the door. As long as she looked good, had on skimpy clothes and big breasts – she was in through the door and that's it. Then you see the manager, couple of staff buying her drinks all-night and hanging out with her. Then she'd be going back to the party at the end of the night."

Curtis explains that underage women may become involved with bouncers in order to receive free admission, skip lineups and get invited to after hour parties, among other perceived benefits. This can lead to potentially dangerous situations for younger women:

*"If you got a staff shirt on, then you're getting hit on by every second woman in the club. Because most of the women that are at the clubs, if they are not loaded hitting on you then they are underage hitting on you. Hoping that they can get back to the parties with you so they can get in the club every weekend. And then that's they're set club every weekend because they know they can get in."
"The after-hour parties, women stick around and they'd be given drinks and there'd be all kinds of stuff. Like sex on pool tables...It would be thirty or forty people left in the club, all the staff, two or three fellows that the manager know and the rest were women...They would party until 7:00 in the morning."*

The following quotes indicate how staff deliberately create situations to take advantage of younger women:

"I remember a couple incidents where the bouncers come up and say 'Missus there is not bad, b'y!' I'd say 'She got a boyfriend.' They'd say 'Oh no, he's gone.' They would throw him out and she'd stay."

"I know of one girl that was maybe 17 at the time...One of the bouncers took her up by the DJ's spot after hours. She seemed pretty consenting, like she wanted to go do it. But just the fact that he was 26 and she was 17 and shouldn't of been in the club."

Women were also in danger from the threat of drugs being slipped into their drinks:

"There has been a few girls that were there that I thought was fine and the next minute they are passed out on the floor. They were drunk in the matter of a few minutes. So it was quite

possible...that it was dropped in people's drinks. Acid – I've seen that dropped in people's drinks...make you hallucinate."

It is difficult for bouncers to monitor violence and harassment, particularly if other factors like alcohol and drugs are present. Curtis explains that drinking or taking drugs are common practices among bouncers, which affects job performance:

"You're not supposed to. When you come to work as a bouncer you're supposed to be in a perfect state of mind. No alcohol, no drugs – fully alert. At the club I worked at we could drink all we want when we were working, anyone who smoked dope could get as stoned as they want to. Nothing to see us go behind the bar, open the cooler, crack a beer open and go stand out on the rail and watch the crowd and drink your beer."

"Meanwhile a fight would break out and there would be six or seven bouncers over in the corner huddled together having a beer. Worry about that later."

If bouncers are not monitoring bars for sexual assault, overcrowding and underage drinking, then who is? When Curtis first began working, he noticed that the police would often "raid" the club, checking for drugs and under aged patrons. In uncontrollable situations, the bouncers would call on the police:

"They used to be at my club all the time. Every third weekend. You would just be working and then ten or twelve cops would come in. Six would take upstairs and six downstairs and they go around with the flashlight and check ids. If there was fellers there totally loaded, they'd take them to the drunk tank... We had a good relationship with the police. When they came to the door we were both the best kind. We'd let them in and let them go."

Many bar staff participating in this project are caring individuals who have concerns about women and men's safety. Nonetheless, they also identify the need for many changes. Curtis would like to see the downtown area improve, but notes that is difficult when the unsafe conditions within the status quo are maintained:

"You'd make a joke with them first and say to them something like 'B'ys leave her alone. She's only a youngster.' There was only myself and two other bouncers that were seriously there to work and not messing around with other women. If I did interfere I would say I'd be fired right on the spot or they would of laid a beating on me. All of them... If you had me speaking against seven or eight of them that are doing this, that's just the one."

Curtis made recommendations for the downtown bar scene ranging from a police presence to training for bar staff:

"They could put more police down there. Have the scattered raid and check for ids and drugs. If they made their presence down there more known people would be afraid 'I can't do that. The cops might show up.'"

"Put a drinking restriction for starters. The bartenders should say 'Enough is enough.'"

"Bouncers should take more responsibility. I think bouncers should watch out for women more than what they do. If they see a feller picking at a woman and she's saying 'Get out of my face!' Bouncers should actually go up and say 'Buddy, here's your first warning. We see it again and your gone.' Rather than brush it off."

"There should be classes. How to handle situations. What to watch out for. There should be checks done on bouncers. Criminal record checks."

"Bar owners could pay a bit more. Six bucks an hour is not worth much. If you go downtown and someone paid you...say 12 bucks an hour, at least that's a bit of incentive to get involved with stuff."

Finally, Curtis has some advice for men at the downtown bar scene:

"Speaking as a man we should know our limits. And respect women."

"For men. Men should have their own responsibilities. You don't hear tell of women going down and abusing men and taking advantage of men. But you hear a lot of fellows picking on women. So men should have the responsibility to know their boundaries."

Conclusion

Stage two, "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities," completes a gender inclusive view about concerns regarding the downtown bar scene. It was somewhat disheartening to see the amount of victim blaming and the overemphasis on women's personal behavior as the cause of sexual violence. Participants rarely suggested that sexual, physical, and emotional harassment and abuse are issues to be addressed by all groups involved if the downtown bar scene is to be safer for women and men. The idea that women are safe in the downtown bar scene is simply not true given the results of "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak." This second stage highlights the need for further action. Men cannot expect women alone to solve concerns about their safety, since women are not the cause of the problems they face downtown.

Many participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity the project presented to discuss some very serious issues. Everyone had concerns regarding personal safety and the safety of women. Throughout this project are comments, observations and suggestions for an all encompassing approach to ending violence in the downtown bar scene. Many attitudes expressed in this report are encouraging as they represent a gender sensitive approach to ending violence and the acceptance of violence. A minority of participants who understand the concerns of women recognize that only a holistic approach involving everyone – the taxi industry, police, bar employees, women and men – can prevent sexual violence in downtown bars.

Recommendations

Participants' Recommendations

The "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities" coordinator ended each focus session with an opportunity for participants to put forward recommendations to assist in addressing issues of violence at the downtown bar scene.

Security Recommendations

"There probably needs to be more security or cops out on the street... You will probably notice a cop patrolling the street, but when he's down at one end and there's something going on at the other end and by the time he gets to where the event is going on something dangerous could of happened."

"I think violence is hard to avoid with such a big street like George Street, promoting all this drinking. I think it's hard for someone to keep watch on the entire street."

A few participants thought of innovative ideas for making George Street safe:

"If you had cops doing even random checks, walking into a bar. People aren't going to go because they feel intimidated. But perhaps if they had a plain clothes guards and make it known that they are out there."

"Maybe even if they paid a group of fellas just at night. Three or four guys to each side of the street. Just to walk around and patrol the area."

"Like George Street bouncers."

The issue of intervention in incidents downtown was addressed. One participant felt it was necessary to have people with the ability to effectively resolve potentially threatening incidents:

"When you see a guy and a girl yelling at each other and he's pulling on her, you don't think of 'Man he's trying to rape her.' You think that there's a couple getting into a fight. But there should be somebody with the authority to ask that."

Recommendations For Bar Staff

Participants felt that changes in the bar environment, such as eliminating sexualized contests and providing training for bar staff, were necessary:

"For both men and women, we need better bar staff, better bouncers who know what they are doing. Staff who know their job."

"We need certified bouncers that know what they're doing."

"Throw out the wet t-shirt competitions. Maybe that will get you somewhere."

"The bouncers with the huge egos aren't there for any reason other than themselves. They have no interest in helping others and the bar owners need to recognize these people and then they should be gone."

"I think there has to be government regulations so that bar staff have to be trained. There should be security checks."

"They should have a two or three day training course, that preps on things you expect downtown, this is what could happen to you, this is how you handle it."

Tony and Bruce stated that they believed that a general laissez-faire attitude exists regarding downtown, but that everyone should become involved in a solution:

"There's just this mentality, you get a lot of people that are just going to look at it and say 'Well somebody else can do it.'"

"Yeah the best way to do it, if you get everybody involved. Because even we all have a reason to be involved."

Tom feels that more open communication would be a good policy:

"Downtown, none of this stuff is ever talked about. The truth is, it's a lot about hooking up, getting drunk, getting rid of some frustration. Let's talk and be honest."

Regional Coordinating Coalition Against Violence Recommendations

Following a review of phase one, "Bars Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak," and a full discussion on "Bars Booze and Sexual Violence: Moving Masculinities," the Regional Coordinating Coalition Against Violence makes the following recommendations to address sexual harassment, abuse and violence in the downtown St. John's bar scene:

To the Taxi Industry:

- ❑ Taxi companies should conduct a criminal record check on anyone who applies to work as cab driver.
- ❑ During the interview for drivers, taxi companies should explore the driver's attitude on issues of gender stereotyping and violence against women.
- ❑ Taxi companies should approach women's equality organizations such as Iris Kirby House, Women's Centre, Sexual Assault Centre, Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Regional Coordinating Coalition Against Violence to request annual educational/awareness sessions on the dynamics of sexual violence against women.
- ❑ Taxi companies and drivers should take a proactive/early intervention approach to dealing with issues of sexual violence against women in the downtown bar scene. A driver noticing the state of complete intoxication of a female passenger unable to provide an address could tell the police of his concerns for the woman's safety.
- ❑ Taxi companies should develop and adopt guidelines for drivers who may be dealing with a potential sexual abuse situation.

To the City of St. John's:

- ❑ Regulate the taxi industry, and within those regulations include guidelines and conditions for companies and drivers who work in the downtown area.

To the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador :

Department of Education:

- ❑ Develop education programs which include sex role stereotyping and the dynamics of abuse from stereotyping to violence, and make these programs mandatory throughout the school system.

Department of Justice:

- ❑ Provide additional police officers targeted at community based work including the downtown bar community. Ensure that the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary takes a proactive approach to dealing with sexual abuse and violence in the downtown bar scene.

To the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary:

- ❑ Train all officers in a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of sexual abuse and violence against women.
- ❑ Increase the actual police presence in downtown bars and streets.

- ❑ Conduct periodic checks of downtown bars. Officers should become proactive in checking for the age of patrons, inquiring into the state of inebriation, and observing the behaviours of women whose level of intoxication may be placing them at risk of sexual abuse.
- ❑ Provide two officers per vehicle for support and back up should an active intervention become necessary.

To Bar Owners, Managers and Staff:

- ❑ The bar owners in downtown St. John's should begin thinking of their establishment as a unit, and collaboratively find ways to promote the safety of patrons and prevent the sexual harassment and abuse of women.
- ❑ All bar staff should be provided training in how to become proactive in preventing the possible sexual assault of an intoxicated female.
- ❑ Bar managers and staff should monitor secluded areas throughout the parameter of their establishment.
- ❑ Bar owners should adhere to safety regulations, noting that overcrowded conditions increase the likelihood of sexual harassment and abuse of women.
- ❑ Bar owners should pay decent salaries to bartenders and bouncers to validate the important services these individuals provide. This will act as an incentive to all staff to be proactive in providing a safe harassment free environment.
- ❑ All marketing strategies designed to exploit women and to create a heightened sexualized environment should be discontinued.
- ❑ Bars should post guidelines as to the acceptable behaviour for patrons and the establishment's intolerance for sexual harassment and abuse.

To Men:

- ❑ Acknowledge that male violence against women is the concern of every man.
- ❑ Avoid taking offense when men's violence against women is highlighted.
- ❑ Avoid minimizing or trivializing the issue of harassment / violence against women.
- ❑ Begin challenging one another on stereotyping and the objectification of women.
- ❑ Find safe ways to intervene when women are being harassed and abused in downtown bars.
- ❑ Support one another in our mutual quest to end violence against women in all of its manifestations.
- ❑ Educate ourselves as to the dynamics of power and abuse in relationships and the continuum of violence from stereotyping to outright violence.

Collaborative Approach:

The Regional Coordinating Coalition Against Violence recommends a collaborative approach to preventing sexual violence against women. This includes individual bar patrons, bar owners and staff, taxi companies, drivers and Royal Newfoundland Constabulary officers. For example, individual men noting an intoxicated woman could alert bar staff. These staff could call a taxi and the police, who should already be trained and alert to this preventative process, would assist in completing a plan to escort the woman to a safe destination.

Project Reflections

The findings from this report are both insightful and profound, but just as often they are shocking and terrifying. Many of the issues that were discussed during the focus groups such as sexual violence, date rape drugs, and consent of sexual activities had a reoccurring phenomenon: almost all of the issues encountered by young men occurred in a tangible form on almost a weekly basis. This did not include simply one type of group or individual but ranged across a variation of demographics to include all participants in different ways.

Violence, harassment and abuse are all entrenched factors in the life of a young club goer with women most often being the victims and men either participating or ignoring violence. Being subjected to these factors so frequently has desensitized or built up such a tolerance that most young men seem oblivious to the many safety concerns that women experience downtown. That is, until they are confronted with it, as the focus group discussions clearly did. The fact is that these issues are not discussed as they should be by those who are the key stakeholders, which includes young men.

Personally, I believe that there is an inherent problem with this need to place blame on individuals or individual groups. There are a number of combining factors downtown that make it unsafe for women. This report outlines much of them, but a shift in attitude of young men is needed to truly make a difference. I've often made the comparison that a woman in the downtown St. John's bar scene on any given night is like surrounding her with dozens of razor sharp knives. If she cuts herself while moving about...is she to blame? If she stabs herself...is she to blame? The knives are a metaphor for the factors downtown that create an unsafe environment for women. These factors include the pressure to drink booze, a sexualized atmosphere, sexist song lyrics and a general misconception that women are safe and, if not, men are there to save them.

There are obvious preventative measures that must be implemented to help prevent sexual violence (more police supervision, background checks, specialized training), but I believe that my metaphor gets to the root of the problem. The reason that young men can so easily hold women accountable for feeling unsafe is because they do not seem to realize that the bar scene in general is a reflection of sexist attitudes, gender inequality and a combination of factors that inhibit many women from seeing the truth of this reflection. There is little in our educational system or even the way our children are raised to truly drive this point home. A shift in attitude or a solution to this issue means that first we must find a way to allow young people to recognize that the problem exists all around them and does not start and end with the female gender.

The "Moving Masculinities" report is a tool complimented by the first phase of the project "Bars, Booze and Sexual Violence: Young St. John's Women Speak." It is not the be all and end all of violence downtown but it does clearly state many problems and offers the opportunity for action. Men need to work together as a group to ensure that we do not minimize such concerns as sexual violence, sexual biases, and objectification of women. Instead, we need to eliminate them.

Josh Mansfield, Focus Sessions Co-Facilitator

Project Reflections

As a researcher, I attempted to conduct this study in an unbiased fashion and to bring to each focus session an inviting, and non-judgmental attitude. Often I heard many comments that I wanted to challenge, and other times I wanted to applaud. Unfortunately, this is not the role of a researcher. When I began to write the final report, many interesting patterns began to emerge regarding participant's attitudes.

Sadly, I have recognized the uniformity of masculine attitudes from the quotes in this report. Many participants expressed all too similar ideas and views regarding the issue of accountability for sexual violence in our city's bars. Too often the responsibility was placed squarely on the shoulders of women; the same women who become the victims of the sexual violence. The majority of participants recognized that the overtly sexualized nature of downtown places women in vulnerable positions, but failed to identify their own or other's responsibility for the safety of women. Further classic biases existed: A man's state of sexual arousal was used to legitimize sexual violence; a woman's approval for sexual activity at one point in an evening was taken as absolute consent for sexual activity whether or not she changed her mind later. These attitudes were present consistently throughout the focus groups, which included individuals of various ages, employment status and levels of education.

This is not to suggest that all men fit perfectly the definition of a dominant, aggressive masculinity. Rather, it suggests that because of our privilege as mainly white, heterosexual males we have much power when it comes to sexual abuse and violence. We all carry biases inherent in our masculine gender and culture. It is in how we accept or reject this power that separates men who offend against women from men who challenge these stereotypical notions of power over women and children. The downtown bar environment, with its over-sexualized climate is the place where men harm women by buying into the environment and placing women's safety at risk. Men are in turn harmed by their inaction or acceptance of the sexual objectification of women which lends itself to the acceptance of emotional, physical and sexual harassment and abuse of women.

To struggle against the power and privilege of maleness is to risk ridicule and ostracizing by our peers. Yet it is through our redefining masculinity and challenging notions of what it means to be male that we can take leadership in ending violence against women, in our relationships, social settings and community.

There were many encouraging moments within every focus group. Men openly challenged one another, were tolerant of differing opinions, and all enjoyed the opportunity to be heard. In several focus groups, the participants remained long after the session had ended. They stayed to discuss concerns and promote ideas for change. There were many participants who recognized that the approach to ending sexual violence needs to be a holistic one. They saw that the safety of women - our partners, sisters, mothers and friends - could only be secured through cooperation. This cooperation and leadership must come from all interest groups - bar staff, the taxi industry, the liquor corporation, police, women and men. The "blame-game" that I heard so often throughout this report has to stop if we are to put an end to violence against women and move closer to creating violence-free communities. I consider this report to be an opportunity for individual men and men's groups to understand our role, our responsibility and then to make it our collective goal to end violence and the fear of violence.

Finally, this work has provoked and challenged me personally. I have never seen the issue more clearly than I do now following my role as coordinator/researcher of the Masculinities Project. I have had the privilege of working with the wonderful committee of the RCCAV. Unfortunately, this organization despite years of work, is 99 per cent women. Women have busy workplaces and home commitments, but they are women who care enough about ending violence that they take the time to become involved. In all of my connections through the course of this project with the anti-violence and feminist community, I have yet to encounter any anti-male sentiment. The challenge I and other men must accept is the challenge to become involved: with women in organizations like the RCCAV as well as men's organizations with a common agenda to end violence and bring about equality and peace.

Jay Goulding, Coordinator