

# Hookups where one partner is drunker more likely to be seen as assault, says study

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A [new study](#) by Dr. Veronica Lamarche, from the University of Essex Department of Psychology, has discovered that equal consumption is more important than levels of drunkenness. This was the case even when

couples had drunk to excess and was the same across sexualities and genders.

The work is published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

Dr. Lamarche discovered that romantic rendezvous were seen most positively when couples drank the same low level of alcohol. Encounters where one partner was drunk and the other was sober were more likely to be seen as non-consensual, coercive, and dangerous.

Dr. Lamarche said, "I am interested in understanding the consequences of existing in a sexual world where our lived experiences with sex don't always match legal definitions. We're finding that people rely heavily on contextual information to decide whether they believe non-violent sexual experiences are consensual or not. People understand alcohol is a risk factor for non-consensual sex, but both partners being similarly drunk seems to challenge their assumptions about [assault](#)."

More than 500 British people participated in the research that unfolded across four studies. They were presented with a variety of scenarios and given details of how many shots had been consumed before sex. They were then asked to judge levels of coercion, [sexual assault](#), perceived responsibility and if the encounter was likely sexual assault.

It is hoped that the study will help shine a light on perceptions of sexual assault and show how alcohol influences how people support victims of assault by reducing barriers to reporting and prosecution.

Dr. Lamarche added, "People not only rely on how much [alcohol](#) someone consumed prior to a [sexual encounter](#), but more importantly whether partners were equally drunk. We want victims to feel empowered to come forward, and this research can help us identify important barriers and biases that keep victims of sexual assault from

getting the support they need."

Dr. Lamarche worked with two [undergraduates](#) on the study Ellen Laughlin, Molly Pettitt and Dr. Laurie James-Hawkins from the Department of Sociology.

**More information:** Ellen Laughlin et al, Just One Shot? The Contextual Effects of Matched and Unmatched Intoxication on Perceptions of Consent in Ambiguous Alcohol-fueled Sexual Encounters, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/08862605231182378](#)

Provided by University of Essex

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