Drunk Female Guests Are The Gravest Threat To Fraternities

I realize this headline is click-bait, but I believe it to be true. Let me explain.

I am the president of the alumni house corporation of my MIT fraternity. One of my responsibilities is working with our young brothers to identify and manage risks that could lead to a tragic loss of life, the bankruptcy or loss of our chapter house as a result of a legal judgment, or forced dissolution after serving MIT students for over 125 years.

A recent incident at MIT's Lambda Chi Alpha chapter in which a drunk female student apparently danced her way out of a window has, once again, resulted in a clamp-down on all fraternity parties. Thankfully, she seems to be recovering. And while this may appear to be a freak accident, something like this could happen on any campus, at any dorm or fraternity party, wet or dry. Unless and until we address how student drinking culture has evolved in response to the very regulations designed to control it, incidents like this are not going to go away. As recriminations against fraternities mount and panicked college
administrators search for an easy out, one factor doesn’t seem to be getting sufficient analysis: drunk female guests.

Before feminist web vigilantes call for my defenestration, I single out female guests for one simple reason. Fraternity alumni boards, working with chapter officers, employ a variety of policies designed to guide and police member behavior. Our own risk management manual exceeds 22 pages. The number of rules and procedures that have to be followed to run a party nowadays would astound anyone over 40. We take the rules very seriously, so much so that brothers who flout these policies can, and will, be asked to move out. But we have very little control over women who walk in the door carrying enough pre-gaming booze in their bellies to render them unconscious before the night is through.
Yes, boozed up males also show up at parties, sometimes mobs of them disturbing the peace on the front steps. But few are allowed in, especially if they are strangers. Plus, it remains socially acceptable for bouncers to eject drunk and rowdy males because our society rarely casts them as sympathetic victims, as opposed to the irresponsible jerks that they are. In our age of sexual equality, why drunk female students are almost never characterized as irresponsible jerks is a question I leave to the feminists. But it is precisely those irresponsible women that the brothers must be trained to identify and protect against, because all it takes is one to bring an entire fraternity system down.

Pre-gaming is a serious problem, both for the safety of the young people who practice it and the safety of our institutions in a litigious, nanny-state society. As I wrote in my recent column “Ban Kegs From Fraternity Parties? Require Them Instead!” (http://www.forbes.com/sites/billfrezza/2014/08/19/ban-kegs-from-fraternity-parties-require-them-instead/), the best way to reduce the incentive to furtively chug half a bottle of vodka before going out for a night of fun is by lowering the drinking age to 18 while encouraging the consumption of beer over distilled spirits. Alas, this is not going to happen any time soon. And so, any time a fraternity hosts an open party, wet or dry, brothers must assume that the house will be filled with ticking time bombs.

Here are the things that worry me most. Any of them could result in organizational extinction, even if the fraternity never served the “victim” a single drop of alcohol:

- Alcohol poisoning due to overconsumption before, during, or after an event. Death or grievous injury as a result of falling down the stairs or off a balcony. Death or grievous injury as a result of a pedestrian or traffic accident as the young lady weaves her way home.
- False accusation of rape (http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2014/09/false_rape_accusations_why_must_be_pretend_they_ne_wpsrc=sh all_tab_tw ru) months after the fact triggered by regrets over a drunken hook-up, or anger over a failed relationship. And false 911 calls accusing our members of gang rape during a party in progress. (Yes, this happened, resulting in seven police cars and thirty officers storming the chapter house.)

Here is what I recommend to my young charges:

Identify drunks at the door. I don’t care how pretty or flirtatious a young lady is; if she’s visibly intoxicated, don’t let her in. Although we were once reprimanded for turning away a drunk female student who ultimately required an ambulance when she passed out on our sidewalk, it would have gone a lot worse for us had she collapsed inside.

In addition to the usual bouncers, assign several brothers to monitor female party guests. If any
appear out of control, walk them to the door and put them in a cab heading back to their dorm. You can send me the bill. If they refuse to leave, call for an escort from campus police.

Never, ever take a drunk female guest to your bedroom – even if you have a signed contract indicating sexual consent. Based on new standards being promulgated on campus (http://aei.org/article/education/higher-education/overreaching-on-campus-rape/#mbl), all consent is null and void the minute a woman becomes intoxicated – even if she is your fiancée. And while a rape charge under these circumstances is unlikely to hold up in a court of law, it doesn’t take much for a campus kangaroo court (http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/06/26/students-accused-campus-sexual-assaults-fighting-back/HiierdwFHb3o35w6oZXOJ/story.html) to get you expelled, ruining your life while saddling your fraternity with a reputation for harboring rapists.

And please, look out for each other. Do not let a drunk brother take a drunk female to his bedroom. During parties wet or dry, let the water flow – proper hydration and dilution is the best remedy for over consumption. Make sure there are filled water pitchers everywhere. Press them on intoxicated guests even if they resist.

Pre-gaming can be dangerous, but it becomes especially destructive to others in a world that no longer believes in personal responsibility—when a student, male or female, can blame a friend, a host, even a university, for the unfortunate consequences of guzzling half a bottle of booze before joining a party. No nanny administrators or well-meaning risk-managers can fix the situation after an incident has occurred, and besieged fraternity systems are particularly vulnerable. (When has a dorm ever been permanently shut down as a consequence of the residents’ folly?)

Unless and until the drinking age is reduced to 18, students relearn how to pace themselves while drinking, and individuals are held responsible for the consequences of their own behavior, rather than blaming the institutions that house and educate them, the only defense is extreme vigilance.

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