

the RED CUP

Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q Why do people sober up faster in serious situations?

A. It may seem as if someone is “snapping out of it” but in reality there’s no quick, easy way to sober up. Not with coffee, not a cold shower, nor food. Not even if the police show up at your party! If you’re really intoxicated, it isn’t possible. So what’s the effect you’re observing?

First, the person may not be as intoxicated as you thought. Not even close. After all, who keeps track of how much someone else is drinking? When in full party mode, you could assume someone was drunk based on their behaviors. But in an emergency (police at the door), the environment demands different behaviors and the person “snaps to attention” to handle the situation.

Second, even those who drink more than a few are responding to the environment. Let’s say you have the same number of drinks when drinking with your parents as you had at Saturday’s party with friends. Two very different environments, and same number of drinks, but we’re betting your behavior wasn’t the same. The research backs up this phenomenon. Many studies on positive alcohol expectancies demonstrate a drinker’s experience is psychological rather than pharmacological and the extent of what you expect when drinking influences your actual experience. In other words, we pick up cues from our environment (party) to “act” drunk (someone feels less inhibited so talks more and louder, says things they later regret, appears more outgoing, more energetic, more sociable). Basically, they are acting in a bigger way than when sober. All these variables together could lead an observer to believe they are drunk.

But change the environment and voila! Drunk behaviors aren’t positively reinforced around parents and the police! So the take-away here is that you can drink less and still have fun!



wildfact

You, too, can do this research by throwing a party offering only non-alcoholic beer (no hard alcohol either) and observe the outcome. The hardest part is keeping the secret that it’s a non-alcohol party.



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

The Red Cup Q&A is written by Lynn Reyes, LCSW, LSAC, David Salafsky, MPH, Lee Ann Hamilton, MA, CHES, and Spencer Gorin, RN, in the Health Promotion and Preventive Services (HPPS) department of the UA Campus Health Service.