A Nail Polish Can Detect Date Rape Drugs, but Will It Stop Assaults?

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Four college students say they've come up with a nail polish that changes color in the presence of date rape drugs. The anti-rape accessory is designed for women to quickly and discreetly test their drinks for these shady substances with a dip of a lacquered finger. But some questioned whether this new invention is really a move forward in preventing sexual assault or simply a perpetuation of a victim-blaming rape culture. A new report from The Washington Post checks out both sides of the argument.

The nail polish is called "Undercover Colors" and changes its shade in the presence of Rohypnol, Xanax and GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyric acid), common date rape drugs. The inventors, all male undergrads at North Carolina State University, created a big buzz with their discovery and won first place and $11,250 at NC State's LuLu eGames, an event that challenges students to design solutions to real-world problems.

What's more, their victory was quickly followed by a $100,000 investment bestowed by a backer interested in developing the polish as a means for women to arm and empower themselves against would-be attackers.

But many critics believe the polish is doing little more than perpetuating the idea that women are responsible for stopping men from raping them.

Jenny Kutner, writing for Salon, acknowledges that the nail polish might be inventive but questions: "Is this really the market we should continue to applaud entrepreneurs' (notably male ones) tapping into? Or might these resources be better allocated trying to teach people not to rape?"

In addition, critics say date rape drugs aren't actually the most common substances men use to facilitate sexual assault. The winner of that title, hands down, is still plain old alcohol.

Also, let's not forget that about one in four rapes are actually committed by someone close to the victim, such as a boyfriend or husband, rather than a stranger slipping drugs into women's drinks at a club. Click here for more information.

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