
UCF Forum

4-8-2015

It's the Duty of All of Us to Stop Sexual Abuse

Rick Brunson
University of Central Florida



Part of the [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), and the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating. UCF welcomes suggestions on how to improve UCF Today and correct errors. UCF provides no warranty, expressed or implied, as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of furnished data.

STARS Citation

Brunson, Rick (2015). It's the duty of all of us to stop sexual abuse. UCF Today, 2015-04-08. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/duty-us-stop-sexual-abuse/>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.



University of
Central
Florida

STARS
Showcase of Text, Archives, Research & Scholarship



It's the Duty of All of Us to Stop Sexual Abuse

By Rick Brunson
UCF Forum columnist
Wednesday, April 8, 2015

The campus-security video is harrowing.

In the early morning hours of June 23, 2013, four Vanderbilt University football players carry the limp, unconscious body of a 21-year-old female honors student from a car and into a campus dorm building after a night of drinking in downtown Nashville. The men dump her in a hallway and take pictures of her with their smartphones, while laughing and smirking.

Minutes later they haul her into a dorm room of one of the students, where Nashville police and prosecutors say the men sexually assaulted her with their hands and a water bottle, while one of them, her supposed “boyfriend,” videotaped the act and shared it with friends.

Horrifying. Deplorable. Unspeakably cruel.

Two of the men, Brandon Vandenburg and Cory Batey, were convicted of rape in January and are awaiting sentencing. The two other men, Brandon Banks and Jaborian McKenzie, are scheduled to go to trial in June.

But there is a wider indictment here that goes beyond the heinous acts of four individual men. The video, which aired at the trial and later on the ABC News program “20/20,” shows that at least a half-dozen bystanders – fellow students – saw this poor unconscious woman, who appeared lifeless, being dragged through their building like a dead deer during hunting season.

And they did nothing.

Didn't speak up. Didn't call 911 or the police. Nothing.

Dr. Corbi Milligan, who was Juror No. 12 in the trial of Vandenburg and Batey, told ABC News afterward, “I’m curious now that people that we saw in the surveillance video that saw that victim totally unconscious being carried down the hall to that room ... what are they thinking now? We are civilized human beings and the rules and responsibilities of living in society are that you look out for your fellow man.”

Beyond the video, it was clear during the trial through the testimony of a parade of roommates, classmates and teammates that others knew something bad had happened to this young woman. And yet they failed to intervene.

That disturbed Vanderbilt Chancellor Nicholas S. Zeppos, who issued a statement after the trial that read in part: “I am deeply troubled that some students who knew or should have known about the incident that led to this week’s convictions failed to take any positive action. This is not the culture at Vanderbilt, and it must never be repeated.”

But unfortunately looking the other way is the culture on many college campuses, where the apparent First Commandment of College Life is, “Thou shalt never do anything to get a fellow student in trouble.”

That’s a big reason why President Obama last fall launched his “It’s On Us” initiative to raise awareness and help put an end to sexual assault on college campuses.

“An estimated one in five women has been sexually assaulted during her college years – one in five,” the president said in announcing the initiative. “Of those assaults, only 12 percent are reported, and of those reported assaults, only a fraction of the offenders are punished. ... It is on all of us to reject the quiet tolerance of sexual assault and to refuse to accept what’s unacceptable.”

Not long after the president’s announcement, a young UCF student was sitting in my campus office with her father and tearfully sharing how she had been sexually assaulted after having one drink – which turned out to be spiked – at a downtown Orlando bar. She woke up the next morning in a strange room, dazed and confused and panicked, with a man who refused to give her her cellphone so she could call for help. As she talked, her dad was visibly shaken and I, a father of a daughter in her early 20s, empathized with his anger and his grief.

By that time, the student had already reported the crime to authorities and was receiving help and services from both on-campus and off-campus professionals.

The young woman gave me permission to share part of her story because she said it's important, as President Obama said, to raise awareness about this scourge that exists on college campuses.

Her message: "I think a lot of people don't want to talk about it [sexual assault]. But I found relief from talking about it. I'm seeing a therapist, and talking about it has caused me to understand that a lot of people put the blame on themselves when what's happening is that you're singled out as a target and a victim, and it's not your fault."

Today, this young woman is completing her education – as well as her journey to healing – and has not let what happened deter her, derail her or define her.

But sexual assault needs to be an ongoing conversation because it is on us – students, educators and parents – to prevent it.

As part of that effort, students in my Magazine Editing & Production class have joined with journalism students at Apeejay Stya University in Delhi, India, to produce a cross-cultural, multimedia story about campus sexual assault in both countries. The story will post on Centric magazine's website and air on Apeejay Stya's news radio program later this month.

The project's lead reporter at UCF, student Tori Walker, said her eyes have been opened about how much awareness still needs to happen on this issue among her fellow students.

"It's such a taboo topic that people are afraid to talk about it," Walker said. "I think that people blame sexual assault on the 'college experience' – and that's not OK."

It's on us – *all* of us – to change that perception.

Rick Brunson is associate instructor of journalism in UCF's Nicholson School of Communication. He can be reached at richard.brunson@ucf.edu.