



Responsible Writing and Editing About Sexual Violence

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Introduction



Some statistics

- Nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men have had someone rape them at some time in their lives
- Approximately 1 in 20 women and men experienced types of sexual violence other than rape *in the last 12 months*
- The vast majority of rapists know their victims
- Only 34.8% of rape cases each year are reported to the police
- Only 5.6% of rape cases in a year (16.1% of cases reported to police) result in arrest

(Sources: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 2012, [U.S. Department of Justice](#), 2014, FBI's [Crime Victimization](#), 2014, FBI [Crime in the United States](#), 2013)

Some statistics

Lifetime prevalence of attempted or completed rape for adult women

American Indian	26.9%
Black	22%
White	18.8%
Hispanic	14.6%
Multiple races	35.5%

Lifetime prevalence of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner

Lesbian	44%	Gay	26%
Bisexual women	61%	Bisexual men	37%
Heterosexual women	35%	Heterosexual men	29%

Source: [The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011

Sexual assault in the news

Experimental research has shown that newspaper coverage of sexual assault has a direct influence on readers' attitudes on rape and their proclivity to accept cultural "rape myths"

- Husbands can't rape their wives
- Women enjoy rape
- Women are somehow "asking for it"
- Women lie about being raped

The good news...

Sexual Assault on Campus

Sexual assault on campus shrouded in secrecy

High rates of rape, closed hearings, and confusing laws

By Kristen Lombardi [email](#) 12:01 am, December 1, 2009 Updated: 5:21 pm, March 26, 2015

AN
UNBELIEVABLE
STORY
OF
RAPE



An 18-year-old said she was attacked at knifepoint.
Then she said she made it up. That's where our
story begins.

"We are in a golden age of reporting on sexual assault."

-Bruce Shapiro, executive
director of the Dart Center for
Journalism and Trauma

Upon Further Review: Inside the Police Failure to Stop Darren Sharper's Rape Spree

by T. Christian Miller and Ryan Gabrielson, ProPublica, and Ramon Antonio Vargas and John Simerman, The New Orleans Advocate, April 8, 2015, 8 a.m.



Darren Sharper in action against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2009. (Heinz Klutmeier/Sports Illustrated)

A Star Player Accused, and a Flawed Rape Investigation

By WALT BOGDANICH
April 16, 2014



A RAPE ON CAMPUS

Jackie was just starting her freshman year at the University of Virginia when she was brutally assaulted by seven men at a frat party. When she tried to hold them accountable, a whole new kind of abuse began

*From Raging Road to Vassar Hill, we've gonna get drunk tonight
The faculty is afraid of us, they know we're in the right
As hell up your eyes, your living eyes, as full as full can be
As long as live and liquor last, we'll drink to the U of V*
—"RAGING ROAD," TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA STUDENT SONG

SIPPING FROM A PLASTIC CUP, JACKIE GRIMACED, TEARS
discreetly spilled her spiked punch onto the sledge fraternity's
house floor. The University of Virginia freshman wasn't a
drunkard, but she didn't want to seem like a goody-goody at her
very first frat party — and she especially wanted to impress her
date, the handsome Phi Kappa Psi brother who'd brought her home.
Jackie was sober but giddy with discovery as she looked around the
room crisscrossed with rowdy strangers guzzling beer and dancing to

BY SABRINA RUBIN ERDELY ILLUSTRATIONS
BY JOHN RITTER



"Of





Language Problems Copy Editors Should Watch Out For



Passive voice: erasing the perpetrator

- A 1995 study found that after reading sexual assault stories written in the passive voice, **“readers showed increased acceptance of rape and battering of women”** compared to stories written in the active voice
- Same study found a 2:1 ratio of passive:active voice in published sexual assault stories in the Boston Globe
- A 2009 study found journalists used the passive voice **less** in domestic violence cases where the **woman** was the perpetrator against a man

16-year-old girl reports that she was raped at Hopkins fraternity house +

By **Justin Fenton and Joe Burris**
The Baltimore Sun

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16-year-old reports being raped at Hopkins frat party, according to law enforcement sources

NOVEMBER 5, 2014, 4:21 PM

A 16-year-old girl reported that she was raped at a Johns Hopkins University fraternity over the weekend, according to law enforcement sources. University officials ordered the fraternity to cease activities as Baltimore police investigate.

The university notified students at 4 a.m. Sunday of the alleged sexual assault, which occurred about 1:30 that morning at the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity house in the 2900 block of St. Paul St. A female told police she was assaulted by two men; neither is believed to be affiliated with the school.

- "16-year-old girl" is the subject

- First sentence says "she was raped," doesn't have an actor

- Don't find out anything about the perpetrators until the second paragraph

- Suggested revision: "Police are investigating reports that two men raped a teenager in a Hopkins frat house, law enforcement officials say."

Johns Hopkins student sexually assaulted in Charles Village

By **Peter Hermann, The Baltimore Sun**

OCTOBER 3, 2011, 7:41 PM

A man who said he was armed with a gun sexually assaulted and tried to rape a **Johns Hopkins University** student early Saturday, an attack that city police said occurred in an alley two blocks from the North Baltimore campus.

Don't apply “alleged” too liberally

- An overreliance on “alleged” creates too much hedging in the article
- Try to attribute information to a source in lieu of using alleged
- Don't use “alleges” or “claims”; in most cases, “says” will work just fine
- **Blacklist the phrase “alleged victim”**
 - Alternatives: “the victim,” “the complainant,” “the 16-year-old girl,” “the woman/man”

Abingdon boy accused in alleged rape of girl, 14

By **BRYNA ZUMER AND KIRSTEN DIZE**, bzumer@theaegis.com; kdize@theaegis.com

SEPTEMBER 27, 2011, 3:30 PM

A 16-year-old Patterson Mill High School football star has been charged as an adult in connection with the alleged rape of a 14-year-old girl in her home in Harford County last weekend.

Kyle Burnett Reddish, of the 200 block of Kensington Parkway in Abingdon, was charged last Wednesday with second-degree rape, second-degree and third-degree sex offense, second-degree assault and sodomy.

The victim said she then remembered Reddish entering her room and allegedly raping her.

“In connection with the alleged rape”— why not just make it: “has been charged as an adult with raping a 14-year-old girl”

Call it what it is.

Rape isn't a "sex scandal," or "womanizing," or a "misunderstanding." It's rape, and it needs to be labeled as such.

Call it what it is.

NATION/WORLD 07/20/2015, 06:15am

Bill Cosby detailed his womanizing, secrecy efforts a decade ago

Associated Press

WJZ | CBS Baltimore @cbsbaltimore

#BREAKING: A Baltimore City School teacher has been charged with having sex with a 15-year-old girl in his Parkville home.

Baltimore Fishbowl

YOUR WORLD. BENEATH THE SURFACE

Shattuckfreude: Rumor Mill in Overdrive on Molly Shattuck Sex Scandal Story

Posted by [Susan Dunn](#)



via mollyshattuck.com



Tweet



Pittsburgh PG 
@PittsburghPG

Married couple commits murder-suicide in Baldwin Borough



Baldwin Borough couple dead in murder...
Post-Gazette.com - The bodies of a wo...
post-gazette.com

10/5/15, 11:05 PM

Reply to Pittsburgh PG



Pittsburgh PG @PittsburghPG 11m

Police: Baldwin Borough couple dead in murder-suicide bit.ly/1LfaxzQ (headline corrected)



Baldwin Borough couple dead i...
Post-Gazette.com - The bodies...
post-gazette.com



↻ 3



Pittsburgh PG @PittsburghPG 4m

To our followers: This tweet corrects an earlier tweet that has since been deleted that had an erroneous headline.



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Things That Should Set Off Red Flags (Or at Least be Cause for Discussion)



Graphic details

Questions to ask:

- Do graphic descriptions of an assault actually further the purpose of the story?
- Do they do more harm than good?

(Warning, graphic
descriptions of child sexual
abuse ahead...)

CP Photographer Accused of Raping His Daughter

Jones' statement of charges detail the daughter's accusations, based on an interview with BCAC. She "went to Mr. Stevenson's house" to "visit him for Christmas," the document states, and "was in Mr. Stevenson's room located in the basement of the house laying on the bed" and "watching television when she fell asleep." She then "felt him touching her around her waist," after which he "took her pants off and put his penis inside of her." She "felt him put 'it' in her private part and her private part was hurting," and "she didn't say anything to him because she just felt confused and wondering why he was raping her," the document states.

When Stevenson "was done," the document continues, "he got up and walked across the room," then "walked upstairs to the first floor." After he "walked back down to the basement," he told her "to get off the bed and go upstairs to sleep on the couch," which she did. "They never talked about what happened," the document states, and "were the only two in the house because [Stevenson's] girlfriend had left the house to go to the store."

“He said, she said”

It's important to give the alleged perpetrator a chance to respond to accusations

...But that doesn't mean you let factually inaccurate or harmful statements go unchallenged just because they're a quote from a source

CP Photographer Accused of Raping His Daughter

Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office spokesperson Mark Cheshire declined to comment about the case against Stevenson, who did not respond to an email asking for comment. Stevenson's attorney, John Markus of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender, issued a written statement on his behalf: "Mr. Stevenson has pled not guilty in court, and will continue to assert his innocence. I am in the early stages of investigating this case, so any other comments would be premature, but certainly the public should be mindful that false allegations in cases such as this are not unusual."

"Studies of false allegations of child sexual abuse show that such allegations are relatively rare...the rate of false allegations is low (below 10% of all allegations), and that a false allegation arising solely from a child is even less common."

- *True and False Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse*, edited by Tara Ney, Ph.D.

Pay attention to the framing

- Who is getting more sympathy in the story, the victim, the accused rapist, or uninvolved third parties (“the community,” a sports team, etc.)?
- There’s an important distinction between writing a piece that says “This man is going to jail and his life is ruined because he was accused of rape” and one that says “This man is going to jail because he raped someone”
- “When you write a piece about an athlete who is convicted of violence, and you center their athletic ability, you erase the victim.” -sports journalist Jessica Luther



Sources and Further Reading





Questions?

