

Republican Perspective

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by John Littig

Presumed Guilty---The Sequel

In my January 10 column, I wrote of the injustice of presuming guilt of all men accused of sexual harassment or worse. This continues that train of thought.

As described on the website constitution.com, feminist columnist Emily Lindin says "it's OK if, in the interest of the greater good, the lives of some innocent men are destroyed by false accusations of sexual harassment."

Well, if that seems a bit harsh, other notable feminists have expressed similar if slightly less extreme views in favor of accepting sexual harassment and rape accusations as gospel. Examples include Obama administration spokesperson and current CNN political commentator Jen Psaki; former Bernie Sanders press secretary, Democratic strategist and current CNN political commentator Symone Sanders; and (ironically) Hillary Clinton herself.

Let's look at some situations which cast doubt on the wisdom of rushing to the judgment that sexual harassment or rape accusations should be accepted as true.

Of course the highest profile non-rape in recent memory is the 2006 case in which three Duke University lacrosse players were accused of rape by Crystal Gail Mangum. She was a student at another college and worked as a stripper and dancer.

In response to the accusation, the Duke lacrosse coach was forced to resign and the school president cancelled the remainder of the lacrosse season. The Duke faculty condemned the three accused students. Their pictures were displayed on accusatory posters which appeared on campus.

Eventually Mangum's fake story fell apart. The North Carolina Attorney General declared the three students were victims of a "tragic rush to accuse." The Duke president apologized for "causing the families to feel abandoned when they most needed support." But the damage had already been done. The falsely accused students' reputations were destroyed. And, to go along with their conviction in the court of public opinion, the three now had arrest records which will require a lifetime of explanations.

A second notorious case began in 2014, when writer Sabrina Erdely's story "A Rape on Campus" appeared in *Rolling Stone*. According to the article, a University of Virginia student named Jackie had been taken to a party at Phi Kappa Psi fraternity. There, she claimed to have been gang-raped.

UVA suspended the fraternity, and then followed up by suspending all Greek organizations. The Charlottesville police department investigated and determined the story to be a hoax. Nevertheless, the student newspaper *The Cavalier* said the incident, true or not, pointed to UVA's inadequate handling of sexual assault complaints.

Rolling Stone retracted the false story, but not before the Phi Kappa Psi house had been heavily vandalized, students demanded that UVA implement harsher consequences in sexual assault cases, and hundreds of students participated in faculty-organized marches.

In dailycaller.com, Eric Owens wrote “Here Are Eight Campus Rape Hoaxes Eerily Like the UVA Rape Story.” In condensed form, these are some highlights from each of the eight:

Morgan visited the University of California, Santa Cruz for a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender conference. While there she called 911 and claimed to have been raped on campus in broad daylight. It turned out her story was a hoax.

Desiree, a student at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla. told police that two men raped her in a bathroom on campus. Desiree was the president of the local chapter of the National Organization for Women and it was during Sexual Assault Awareness Week. She eventually recanted her fake rape allegations. Police suggested that Desiree could have been attempting to “make a statement” about sexual assault and charged her for making a false report to police. Her husband said cops targeted her not because of her lies but because “she is a women’s rights activist.”

Princeton University student Mindy accused a fellow Princeton student of raping her. She slandered the student by spreading the story through conversations around campus. She also repeated the smear at a campus “take back the night” rally. But she did not pursue criminal charges. Once Mindy’s claim fell apart, she wrote an apology in the Daily Princetonian newspaper. She explained that her deceitful claim was intended to “raise awareness for the plight of the campus rape victims.”

University of Wyoming student Meg anonymously posted a rape threat directed at herself on a Facebook page called UW Crushes. A ruckus followed, and there was a big feminist rally. A school official denounced “rape culture.” Police investigated the incident, quickly determining that Meg posted the message on her own computer while it was in her possession. She pled no contest to a charge of interfering with a peace officer and paid a small fine.

At Hofstra University Danmell voluntarily had sex with no fewer than five men in a dormitory bathroom. Her boyfriend found her understandably disheveled. Possibly to deceive the boyfriend, Danmell accused the men of gang rape. As a result of her lies, four innocent men were arrested and jailed. (A fifth remained at large.) The four men were only saved because someone had filmed the orgy on a mobile phone. Danmell’s story crumbled because the video showed that the sex was consensual. The father of one of the falsely accused said “Unfortunately, everything doesn’t stop because the DA says go home and drops the charges.”

Former University of Florida student Tanya lied to police about getting bound and gagged in a Gainesville apartment complex parking lot. Tanya said a man tied her hands and gagged her while she was getting out of her car and tried to rape her. Implausibly, she claimed she escaped, bound and gagged, by kicking him in the tenders. Tanya initially defended her fabricated story by saying that she was trying to teach “a lesson to women in the area that an attack could happen to them.” Police charged her with filing a false police report.

At Oberlin College, a “take back the night” group posted a number of signs on campus labeling an apparently randomly-chosen, innocent freshman as “Rapist of the Month.” “My initial reaction was complete shock, complete disbelief,” the accused student said. He had to deny the allegation to his friends. Another student at Oberlin, sophomore Emily, suggested that critics of the incredible falsehood were missing the “take back the night” group’s larger point. “So many women get their lives totally ruined by being assaulted and not saying anything,” Emily explained. “So if one guy gets his life ruined, maybe it balances out.”

Mariam, then a sophomore at George Washington University, weaved a racist fiction about a campus rape. Mariam, who was a rape counselor and worked for a rape crisis hotline, told the school newspaper about a white caller who was raped by two black men on campus. When her story crumbled, Mariam said she was really sorry and insisted that she “had hoped the story, as reported, would highlight the problems of safety for women.”

These examples of false rape reports are not intended to trivialize rape. In fact, like the women who claim an unwelcome proposition or a wolf whistle constitute sexual assault, those who fabricate imaginary rapes are the ones who trivialize the crime. They cause actual rape reports to be taken less seriously and they undermine the attention and credibility owed real rape victims.

A presumption of guilt seems now to be in vogue. What these and other examples of false reports demonstrate is that both real victims and the accused would be better served by a presumption of innocence.