



SANTA BARBARA RAPE CRISIS CENTER
CENTRO CONTRA LA VIOLACION SEXUAL

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RAPE CULTURE AND THE KOBE CASE

ARTICLE BY ALENA DONOVAN, COMMUNITY EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Who was really on trial in the fourteen months leading up to the dismissal of the criminal case against Kobe Bryant? The close of the high-profile case provides a unique opportunity to examine our attitudes about sexual violence. The treatment of the woman in the case, who I refer to here as Jane Doe, illustrates the extent to which myths about rape are still entrenched in our culture. While Bryant fans insist that the defendant is innocent until proven guilty, this case exemplifies the way that women who report rape are often considered “guilty until proven innocent.”

The public is left knowing little about the Bryant case beyond speculation. Let’s imagine for a moment that Bryant did commit a felony sexual assault. From this perspective, Jane did exactly what the public often urges women to do if they are raped: she reported the crime committed against her to authorities. As a result of coming forward, she was confronted by societal attitudes that focus debate on the integrity and character of survivors, rather than holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Let’s look at how victim-blaming myths contributed to the fierce undermining of Jane’s credibility in the court of public opinion. First, commentators on the case coined a new and worrisome label—the “accuser”—instead of using “alleged victim” or “victim-witness,” as she should be recognized in a court of law. The “accuser” label repositions the victim as the aggressor in the case, where the alleged perpetrator becomes the “victim” of an accusation. This label subtly supports the accusation that the woman is a “golddigger” who lied about being raped to extort money from a professional athlete.

Evidence and common sense refute the idea that women frequently lie about rape. The FBI confirms that false reports of sexual assault are no higher than for any other felony crime. In addition to the statistical scarcity of false reports, it’s difficult to imagine that anyone would endure the treatment Jane received in exchange for any amount of money. Some also claim she lied to attract attention, but the kind of attention she received is hardly desirable. Remember that Jane endured public humiliation and grave invasions of her privacy for over a year. As a result, she has received threats against her life, left college, moved to five states, and experienced emotional turmoil and physical illness.

In addition to the assertion that Jane simply made up her story, the Bryant defense and its allies used rumors about Jane’s sexual behavior to undermine her claim and attack her character. Some opined that Jane’s admissions of flirting with and kissing Bryant implied that she consented to sex, or that this behavior constituted “asking for it.” Team Bryant’s speculation about Jane’s sexual “promiscuity” exploited the societal double standard that denigrates sexually active women—without similarly judging sexually experienced men. In spite of rape shield laws meant to protect rape survivors from such attacks, Judge Terry Ruckriegle ruled that evidence of her sexual history could be made public at the trial.

We must remember that no matter what took place before an assault—including entering someone’s hotel room, consensual kissing, or even a prior sexual relationship—each of us retains the right to refuse sexual activity at any time. This also means each of us has a responsibility to ascertain clear, explicit consent from our partners before engaging in sexual activity. Furthermore, a person’s sexual history is irrelevant as to whether or not they were assaulted, and rape shield laws were passed to keep this inappropriate information out of the courtroom. I suggest that the survivor’s sexual history became so central to the case not because it affected the evidence, but

because on some level we still believe that sexually active women are impure and thus immune to further violation. If the defense could convince us that Jane was a whore, then who cares if she was raped?

The public response to Bryant in the pre-trial period has been markedly different than the debate over Jane Doe. In a Pasadena Star article, potential juror William Scank said, "Whether she was right or wrong, she can't show her face around here. Kobe, I don't think it hurt him at all. He came out smelling like a rose." This quote demonstrates that society often blames survivors while excusing the behavior of alleged perpetrators. Damage to Bryant's reputation has been minimal compared to the humiliation experienced by Jane. Let's not forget that during this period Bryant signed a \$136.4 million contract, and received the unwavering support of his basketball team and many fans. While the public debates the impact of the case on Bryant's stardom, we should take a moment to reflect on the way Jane's life has been changed forever.

What messages does the treatment of Jane Doe in this high-profile case send to the hundreds of thousands of women raped in the U.S. each year? Already, rape is the most underreported violent crime in the nation, where only one in nine rapes are reported to the police. This silence feeds on survivors' fear of being blamed or disbelieved. Many never disclose to anyone at all and do not seek support services. When survivors delay mental health, medical, and legal assistance, they are more likely to experience severe depression, suicidal thoughts, and long-term post-traumatic stress. Unless we change our attitudes about rape, sexual assault will continue to be a silent epidemic that brings violence, fear, and injury into our communities.

Let's transform the current attention on sexual assault into a positive step towards ending sexual violence. The first step involves educating ourselves and reflecting on our deeply rooted attitudes about the issue. As a society, we must choose to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions and respond compassionately to survivors of sexual assault. Instead of blaming women for "asking to be raped" and immediately attacking their credibility, it's time to commend the tremendous courage exhibited by survivors who speak out against the violence perpetrated against them.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

JOIN US FOR THE NEXT ADVOCATE MEETING: OCTOBER 12TH FROM 6PM – 8PM

As always, this mandatory in-service training will be a great opportunity to learn new information, meet other advocates, gain support, and process any client work. This month, we will be joined by members of the Glendon Association to provide us with important information about suicide intervention. Hope you can join us on October 12th!

JOIN SBRCC'S TEAM FOR THE 14TH ANNUAL HEART & SOLE AIDS WALK/RUN '04! SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2004 AT LEADBETTER BEACH, SANTA BARBARA

Be a part of SBRCC's team of volunteers and staff at the Annual Heart and Sole AIDS Walk/Run on Saturday, October 2, 2004. The walk is a benefit for Pacific Pride Foundation's (PPF) HIV/AIDS programs and services. SBRCC will walk to show our support for PPF and the members of our community affected by HIV/AIDS. Together, we will raise at least \$200 for PPF's crucial community services. The Walk route is 10-kilometers (6.2 miles) and leads walkers along the beach on Cabrillo Boulevard. The Walk ends with a beachside celebration with complimentary snacks, live music, free massages, and an awards ceremony. For more information about the Walk, see www.aidswalksb.com. To join our team, contact Alena at 963-6832x. 29 or alena@sbrcc.net

POSITIONS AVAILABLE AT SBRCC

Executive Assistant (Part-time position, 15 hours per week): Maintain files, provide correspondence, assist with submission of grant applications/reports and with fundraising record keeping, and assist with special executive projects. **If you or anyone you know may be interested in these positions, please submit a resume and three references as soon as possible.**

SBRCC NEEDS MORE ADVOCATES – HELP SPREAD THE WORD!

- The next **English Crisis Intervention Training** is scheduled for **October 19th – December 9th**. Classes will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 p.m. – 10 p.m. and one Saturday from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. If you know individuals who may be interested, please have them call Heather at 963-6832 or send an email to heather@sbrc.net
- The next **Spanish Crisis Intervention Training** is scheduled for **January 17, 2005 – March 9, 2005**. Classes will meet on Mondays and Wednesdays from 6 p.m. – 10 p.m. and one Saturday from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. If you know individuals who may be interested, please have them call Maria at 963-6832 or send an email to maria@sbrc.net

WE ESPECIALLY NEED VOLUNTEERS WHO ARE SPANISH/ENGLISH BILINGUAL!

LONG-TERM COUNSELING TRAINING

If you have completed SBRCC's 60-hour Crisis Intervention Training, have been active as an advocate for six months, and are interested in becoming a Long-term Counselor, you can register for the next Long-term Counseling Training. As a Long-term Counselor, you will provide face-to-face, long-term individual, couples or family counseling to sexual assault survivors and/or their significant others. In addition, you can co-facilitate support groups for adult or teen sexual assault survivors. The next 20-hour Long-term Counseling Training, facilitated by SBRCC's Counseling Supervisor Marilyn Goldman, will begin in mid to late October upon completion of the current Crisis Intervention Training. An orientation meeting will occur in late September to provide an overview of the training and to determine specific training dates. **If you are interested, please call Alana at 963-6832, ext 23.**

CELL PHONE COLLECTION

We are collecting used cell phones. If you have any cell phones to donate, please call Ofelia at 963-6832 or just bring them to the office. Thank you!



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:



- Violeta M. on October 11th
- Suzie H. on October 12th
- Margarito R. on October 17th