

THE KNIGHT COMMISSION ON INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS PRESENTS
A SUMMIT ON THE COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC EXPERIENCE

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6) Presentation by Joanne Belknap, Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies, University of Colorado

JOANNE BELKNAP: Thank you very much, thank you. Thank you for inviting me here and I also feel like I'm going to work really hard to cram this into ten minutes and hope that it doesn't move too quickly.

The main thing that I wanted to communicate today is that climate matters, and looking at sexual abuse in college athletics, that it's really important to look at. If we look across different universities we can see some differences, even within the same university, some of my own research and some other research that just looked at the Greek system, not the athletic system, but even on one campus there can be, and is, huge variation across the fraternities about whether there's a low minimal to no risk of rape to medium risk of rape to very high risk of rape. And in some of my research with police departments on domestic violence it's the same thing. Within the same large metro police department the districts varied on how much victim blaming there was in domestic violence cases.

So if we look at just the idea of, for example, fraternities that two studies have found, one of them mine, that you can have fraternities where literally there are no rapes ever reported, and ones where they seem to be routinely every weekend or so.

That suggests that climate matters, that what a particular institution within an institution values, expects, can make a huge difference. And the good news to me about that is we can change climate and the administration and athletic departments and all sorts of people at colleges can do that.

I'm at the University of Colorado, which I'm sure everybody knows has had an extremely high profile of reports of rape and sexual abuses starting in 1997 with a high school student that was at a football recruiting party, that a woman, a high school student reported being raped and then Lisa Simpson in December of 2001. The criminal charges against the individual football players were dropped in 2002 but then in December, 2002 Simpson filed a Title IX lawsuit and two more women joined her in December, 2003 and in January, 2004, Katie Hnida, who was the only woman ever on the football team reported being raped by a fellow player in 2004. The Title IX suit was dismissed in 2005 but it's under appeal. So that's an abbreviated version.

The thing that I am most interested in both as a member, a faculty member at the University of Colorado, but somebody whose passion of stopping violence against women, is that I want to focus beyond what an individual athlete's responsibility is and what the Title IX lawsuit is about.

What are college campuses doing, whether it's the president, chancellor, the athletic director, the coach? What are they doing to create the correct climate to prevent the rapes and sexual abuses in the first place? And to have things prepared, strategies for once if they are reported, and hopefully they won't be but what are they doing to do that? Because I think the University of Colorado dismally failed at

all of these things and that's why it ended up in the situation it did with the Title IX lawsuit.

And here one of the things I've talked about is, what is the responsibility of the university? Not only to keep women safe on campus, but what is their responsibility to the athletes? What does it mean when you have recruit parties where you have seventeen and eighteen year old young men come, they're with fellow team members that are—and saying we're going to go to this party and look, we're having group sex with all these women here. What is that saying to football players about what the expectation about them is? And I just think this is so vitally important if we clearly want to address sexual abuse and other kinds of intimate partner abuse and violence against women. We cannot escape what the university's responsibility is in promoting a responsible atmosphere and what their responsibility is, again, not only to potential victims, which is everybody, but to potential offenders, which is also everybody. We can all sexually abuse and we can all be victims of sexual abuse.

I put together this grid and it's not perfect, but one of the things that I was really struck with what's been going on with the University of Colorado is that once a sexual assault is reported, that there's all these different members of a community that are going to be affected and have different roles.

And I have these arrows here, and again this isn't perfect, the size of this or the arrows, but I was just thinking about who have access to whom? Who has information? Who can go and say this thing or that thing? To me one of the biggest problems with all of this is just isolated and insular the athletics departments often are. That a lot of times the faculty and staff and the non-athlete students feel like they are really excluded from that and that it makes it very difficult to have what should be a community of people responding to whatever the issues are. And so who has a voice and who doesn't have a voice becomes extremely important here about who then defines what it means.

So there's all these different things going on here.

How the media represents it. Who do they call? How do they report it? What does the university do? About, I think it was a year ago, Gordie Bailey, a fraternity member being recruited to a fraternity on campus was hazed and died of alcohol poisoning the next morning and it's interesting to look at it. But the university got mad at the other fraternity members for what they called 'lawyering up' but that's exactly what they did when the sexual assaults were reported at the university. They closed down, they didn't talk to anybody, they didn't—except for lawyers.

So some of the mistakes I think that can be grouped in are not having prevention strategies in place and then a lack of strategies to respond when sexual abuses and rapes are reported. So that whether it's the women reporting the abuses and/or their parents, what do they have in place? One of the things that really irked me about the University of Colorado was all of the faculty are required to take sexual harassment training periodically and the main thing that they pound into us is that, if somebody reports something we are required to report it. Even if we don't think it happened, if we don't believe the person, even if the person asks us not to report it, we are required to report it. So at the same time we were having all of this training, this same did not hold for people in the athletics department or in the key administration at the university which was extremely upsetting to a lot of faculty members about having these different rules depending on who you were at the university, whether or not it was indeed ethical and legal and moral and so on to report it.

The way to deal with the media, the public, the legal parties, also I think universities really need to have things in place about what are we going to do when sexual abuse is reported. When Lisa Simpson first reported being raped in 2001, the very next day, Gary Barnett, the coach of the football team, what he said in the paper was, we're not changing how we're doing anything. It was not, these are

horrible charges, I hope they're not true, we're going to look into them. The response was, we're not changing how we're doing anything. And I think that message just got carried through for a really long time and I really firmly believe, had the University of Colorado responded in a more appropriate way, with a more appropriate investigation and taking responsibility, the Title IX lawsuit never would have happened. Which, even if you, if it is dismissed and doesn't get, it's under appeal, it has had a huge impact on the University of Colorado, on the administration, on the athletics department, on the students, on the athletes.

In addition, these huge changes included four very high up people, the chancellor, the president resigning and the athletic director and then, as I'm sure everybody knows, Gary Barnett being fired most recently in just this past December.

I think the positive responses that CU has made include changing the recruiting guidelines even though they kept saying at the beginning there's nothing wrong with the recruiting guidelines. They changed the unsupervised hours, how many nights the athletes were staying when they were being recruited.

Reconfiguring athletics to respond to central administration like the rest of the campus did and I think that just psychologically as well as just accountability, that the faculty and the athletic department and the students all have the same central responsibility breaks down this wall between athletics and the rest of the university, and makes it more as one community. Changing the athletic and university leadership is key. Having a new athletic director in Mike Bohn, one of the things he did immediately upon coming here was organizing pizza lunches with the faculty saying, hey, we want to work with you, we want to do what's best for the student-athletes, we want to do what's best for you and all the faculty were saying this was so unusual to have this kind of connection and this voice and this communication that had never happened before.

The preventive strategies include implementing training for athletics, coaches, staff and students and establishing consistent expectations with policies and ensuring everyone across campus is aware of the policies and that there are actually consequences. Because without all of these things going on they're not going to work.

One of the things that we did, I did with two other women this past fall was did a training, and we called it Establishing Consensual Sex. We didn't want to say this is an anti-rape or a an anti-sexual abuse program. We wanted to make it more positive but again this was required by everybody and we, one of the things that is very important in this is that the experts on the topic—I actually think it would be really good—we have three women, I think it would be good to have it gender diverse as well, but to have it racially diverse and I feel like I can't do justice to this but it's so important to remember that the whole history of rape legislation and responses to sexual abuse in the United States are very tied up with racism. That even today it is very different to be an African American man versus a white man or a Latino man to be charged with sexual abuse. It is very different depending on what the race of the woman charging the abuse is and that the racial consequences really vary for all of this. And when we were doing this training this was really—and we cannot talk about sexual abuse without talking about the intersection of racism with how all of this gets portrayed, particularly when we look at who's on college campuses and we compare the representation of students of color that are non- athletes and the athletes and what the assumptions and stereotypes people start making are. We have to take that seriously and it makes a lot of people really uncomfortable to talk it but what happens when there aren't very many African American on campus, and the ones who are are largely in athletics departments and what the assumptions about that are because the racism is just a huge key part of how individuals end up getting portrayed. And like I said it's very difficult to talk about but it's very important.

We need to address responsible sexuality. What does it mean when we talk about these trainings if you're having anonymous sex with people? What is that saying about you, about how you relate to women? What does that mean about having sex with women who are drug or on drugs? Legally as well as ethically? And then another really important part is the bystander part.

What is your responsibility if you see other team members behaving in ways with women that are inappropriate? So part of this comes into the student-athlete's status as both a privilege and a burden. The privilege that it's a testimony to your athletic abilities, it's a testimony to your intellectual abilities and there are perks on campus. But also to remember, like it or not, student-athletes represent their teams at university and colleges in ways that non-student-athletes do not. That the burden is, if a student who is not an athlete rapes or sexually abuses or is charged with, even if he didn't rape in a dorm, it's not going to have the same consequences and profile as somebody who's a member of a team. That the team members have this burden that the other students do not. The misinformed assumptions, and I think with what Mr. McKenzie said, it's very important to talk about that, a lot of assumptions that people have about athletes of, oh, they're just here because they can play this sport and, you know, and I think we just really need to look at what are these burdens that athletes have and this resentment that other students may have about athletes in their classes or other faculty may have of assuming, oh, you really weren't smart enough to get, you just got here, or you're not really making the grade in this class. What are the assumptions there, that is a huge burden to have assumptions made about somebody's intellectual ability, that are not based on reality.

And finally, and this is another thing I think is really hard to talk about as sexual abuse. Alcohol and drugs do not cause sexual abuse and that's probably one of the most controversial things I feel like I have said in all of this. People's basic values don't change when they're high or drunk. That I may drink and sing karaoke in a bar, but I don't drink and hit my child, I don't drink and kick my dog. That I may do some things that I don't have the courage to do such as, you know, singing karaoke, that I don't otherwise, but I'm not going to go out and roll down my window and yell racial epithets when I'm drunk. To say that people suddenly have a completely different value system on what is right or wrong, we have to be really careful about that. And again I don't have the time to do justice to this but I do think it's extremely important to talk about this.

Most of us have a pretty clear idea of what's right and wrong when we are in some kind of altered state, so we have to really be careful about that. At the same time it's very important to remember that individuals are at higher risk of sexual abuse and other kinds of victimization, including males when they are drunk or using drugs, and research plays that out.

Alcohol and drugs are often used as an excuse for abusing. In this way when somebody sexually abuses, a lot of times when it's an excuse they'll deny responsibility for it and they'll say, well, I wouldn't have done this if I weren't using alcohol and drugs or it wasn't in this situation. The other way is that they'll use it as a justification and here they deny the wrongness of it. They say, well, I was drunk, the victim was drunk, so there's nothing really wrong with it. So these are the ways that alcohol increases the likelihood but we have to look at how that gets played out and how much of it is the alcohol and how much it is the socialization we have about what people think when people are using drugs or alcohol.

And then there's a social cultural sexist no win. The men who sexually abuse when they are using drugs or drinking are often seen as less responsible or culpable by society, whereas the victims are seen as more responsible for their rape so it turns into this sexist double whammy there.

And again, I would just like to end with climate matters and this is good news. We can change our climates if we have the right, we are committed to having the right values in place and we are committed to bringing athletes to the university that we want to have the right values, that we want to have get good educations. We can do this. And the athletics leadership and the university leadership need to work together and make this, and do this, and do right by their athletes and their athletes' safety as well as everybody else on campus. Thank you very much.