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# A Rape on Campus: A Brutal Assault and Struggle for Justice at UVA

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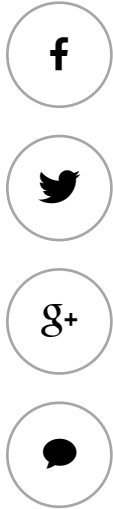
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Photo: Illustration by John Ritter



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


■ By Sabrina Rubin Erdely | November 19, 2014

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*Vinegar Hill, we're gonna get drunk tonight  
The faculty's afraid of us, they know we're in the right  
So fill up your cups, your loving cups, as full as full can be  
As long as love and liquor last, we'll drink to the U of V*  
—**"Rugby Road," traditional University of Virginia fight song**

ipping from a plastic cup, Jackie grimaced, then discreetly spilled her spiked punch onto the sludgy fraternity-house floor. The University of Virginia freshman wasn't a drinker, 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 here. Jackie was sober but giddy with discovery as she looked around the room crammed with rowdy strangers guzzling beer and dancing to loud music. She smiled at her date, whom we'll call Drew, a good-looking junior – or in UVA parlance, a third-year – and he smiled enticingly back.

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Drew shouted into her ear, and Jackie's heart quickened. She took his hand as he threaded them out of the crowded room and up a staircase.

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The Witty Wisdom of Mike Nichols

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Four weeks into UVA's 2012 school year, 18-year-old Jackie was crushing it at college. A chatty, straight-A achiever from a rural Virginia town, she'd initially been intimidated by UVA's aura of preppy success, where throngs of toned, tanned and overwhelmingly blond students fanned across a landscape of neoclassical brick buildings, hurrying to classes, clubs, sports, internships, part-time jobs, volunteer work and parties; Jackie's orientation leader had warned her that UVA students' schedules were so packed that "no one has time to date – people just hook up." But despite her reservations, Jackie had flung herself into campus life, attending events, joining clubs, making friends and, now, being asked on an actual date. She and Drew had met while working lifeguard shifts together at the university pool, and Jackie had been floored by Drew's invitation to dinner, followed by a "date function" at his fraternity, Phi Kappa Psi. The "upper tier" frat had a reputation of tremendous wealth, and its imposingly large house overlooked a vast manicured field, giving "Phi Psi" the undisputed best real estate along UVA's fraternity row known as Rugby Road.

Jackie had  
taken three  
hours getting



Phi Kappa Psi House

ready,  
straightening  
her long, dark,  
wavy hair.  
She'd  
congratulated  
herself on her  
choice of a  
tasteful red

dress with a high neckline. Now, climbing the frat-house stairs with Drew, Jackie felt excited. Drew ushered Jackie into a bedroom, shutting the door behind them. The room was pitch-black inside. Jackie blindly turned toward Drew, uttering his name. At that same moment, she says, she detected movement in the room – and felt someone bump into her. Jackie began to scream.

"Shut *up*," she heard a man's voice say as a body barreled into her, tripping her backward and sending them both crashing through a low glass table. There was a heavy person on top of her, spreading open her thighs, and another person kneeling on her hair, hands pinning down her arms, sharp shards digging into her back, and excited male voices rising all around her. When yet another hand clamped over her mouth, Jackie bit it, and the hand became a fist that punched her in the face. The men surrounding her began to laugh. For a hopeful moment Jackie wondered if this wasn't some collegiate prank. Perhaps at any second someone would flick on the lights and they'd return to the party.

"Grab its motherfucking leg," she heard a voice say. And that's when Jackie knew she was going to be raped.

She remembers every moment of the next three hours of agony, during which, she says, seven men took turns raping her, while two more – her date, Drew, and another man – gave instruction and encouragement. She remembers how the spectators swigged beers, and how they called each other nicknames like Armpit and

Blanket. She remembers the men's heft and their sour reek of alcohol mixed with the pungency of marijuana. Most of all, Jackie remembers the pain and the pounding that went on and on.

As the last man sank onto her, Jackie was startled to recognize him: He attended her tiny anthropology discussion group. He looked like he was going to cry or puke as he told the crowd he couldn't get it up. "Pussy!" the other men jeered. "What, she's not hot enough for you?" Then they egged him on: "Don't you want to be a brother?" "We all had to do it, so you do, too." Someone handed her classmate a beer bottle. Jackie stared at the young man, silently begging him not to go through with it. And as he shoved the bottle into her, Jackie fell into a stupor, mentally untethering from the brutal tableau, her mind leaving behind the bleeding body under assault on the floor.

When Jackie came to, she was alone. It was after 3 a.m. She painfully rose from the floor and ran shoeless from the room. She emerged to discover the Phi Psi party still surreally under way, but if anyone noticed the barefoot, disheveled girl hurrying down a side staircase, face beaten, dress spattered with blood, they said nothing. Disoriented, Jackie burst out a side door, realized she was lost, and dialed a friend, screaming, "Something bad happened. I need you to come and find me!" Minutes later, her three best friends on campus – two boys and a girl (whose names are changed) – arrived to find Jackie on a nearby street corner, shaking. "What did they do to you? What did they make you do?" Jackie recalls her friend Randall demanding. Jackie shook her head and began to cry. The group looked at one another in a panic. They all knew about Jackie's date; the Phi Kappa Psi house loomed behind them. "We have to get her to the hospital," Randall said.

Their other two friends, however, weren't convinced. "Is that such a good idea?" she recalls Cindy asking. "Her

reputation will be *shot* for the next four years." Andy seconded the opinion, adding that since he and Randall both planned to rush fraternities, they ought to think this through. The three friends launched into a heated discussion about the social price of reporting Jackie's rape, while Jackie stood beside them, mute in her bloody dress, wishing only to go back to her dorm room and fall into a deep, forgetful sleep. Detached, Jackie listened as Cindy prevailed over the group: "She's gonna be the girl who cried 'rape,' and we'll never be allowed into any frat party again."

Two years later, Jackie, now a third-year, is worried about what might happen to her once this article comes out. Greek life is huge at UVA, with nearly one-third of undergrads belonging to a fraternity or sorority, so Jackie fears the backlash could be big – a "shitshow" predicted by her now-former friend Randall, who, citing his loyalty to his own frat, declined to be interviewed. But her concerns go beyond taking on her alleged assailants and their fraternity. Lots of people have discouraged her from sharing her story, Jackie tells me with a pained look, including the trusted UVA dean to whom Jackie reported her gang-rape allegations more than a year ago. On this deeply loyal campus, even some of Jackie's closest friends see her going public as tantamount to betrayal.

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"One of my  
roommates  
said, 'Do you  
want to be  
responsible

for something that's gonna paint UVA in a bad light?' " says Jackie, poking at a vegan burger at a restaurant on the Corner, UVA's popular retail strip. "But I said, 'UVA has flown under the radar for so long, *someone* has to say something about it, or else it's gonna be this system



that keeps perpetuating!" Jackie frowns. "My friend just said, 'You have to remember where your loyalty lies.'"

From reading headlines today, one might think colleges have suddenly become hotbeds of protest by celebrated anti-rape activists. But like most colleges across America, genteel University of Virginia has no radical feminist culture seeking to upend the patriarchy. There are no red-tape-wearing protests like at Harvard, no "sex-positive" clubs promoting the female orgasm like at Yale, no mattress-hauling performance artists like at Columbia, and certainly no SlutWalks. UVA isn't an edgy or progressive campus by any stretch. The pinnacle of its polite activism is its annual Take Back the Night vigil, which on this campus of 21,000 students attracts an audience of less than 500 souls. But the dearth of attention isn't because rape doesn't happen in Charlottesville. It's because at UVA, rapes are kept quiet, both by students – who brush off sexual assaults as regrettable but inevitable casualties of their cherished party culture – and by an administration that critics say is less concerned with protecting students than it is with protecting its own reputation from scandal. Some UVA women, so sickened by the university's culture of hidden sexual violence, have taken to calling it "UVrApe."

"University of Virginia thinks they're above the law," says UVA grad and victims-rights advocate Liz Seccuro. "They go to such lengths to protect themselves. There's a national conversation about sexual assault, but nothing at UVA is changing."



Liz Seccuro with her husband, Mike in front of the Charlottesville District Court in Charlottesville, Va., Thursday, March 15th, 2007. (Photo: Steve Helber/AP)

S. Daniel Carter, who as former director of public policy for the advocacy group Clery Center for Security on Campus is a national expert on college safety, points out that UVA's sexual assault problems are not much worse than other schools; if anything, he says, the depressing reality is that UVA's situation is likely the norm. Decades of awareness programming haven't budged the prevalence of campus rape: One in five women is sexually assaulted in college, though only about 12 percent report it to police. Spurred by a wave of activism, the Obama administration has stepped up pressure on colleges, announcing Title IX investigations of 86 schools suspected of denying students their equal right to education by inadequately handling sexual-violence complaints; if found in violation, each school runs the risk of financial penalties, including the nuclear option (which has never been deployed) of having its federal funding revoked.

The University of Virginia is one of the 86 schools now under federal investigation, but it has more reason to worry than most of its peers. Because, unlike most schools under scrutiny, where complaints are at issue, UVA is one of only 12 schools under a sweeping investigation known as "compliance review": a proactive probe launched by the Department of Education's

Office of Civil Rights itself, triggered by concerns about deep-rooted issues. "They are targeted efforts to go after very serious concerns," says Office of Civil Rights assistant secretary Catherine Lhamon. "We don't open compliance reviews unless we have something that we think merits it."

UVA says it has been complying fully with the investigation. But Carter notes that UVA and other elite schools tend not to respond well to criticism and sanctify tradition above all else. "That's common to more prestigious institutions," Carter says.

Prestige is at the core of UVA's identity. Although a public school, its grounds of red-brick, white-columned buildings designed by founder Thomas Jefferson radiate old-money privilege, footnoted by the graffiti of UVA's many secret societies, whose insignias are neatly painted everywhere. At \$10,000 a year, in-state tuition is a quarter the cost of the Ivies, but UVA tends to attract affluent students, and through aggressive fundraising boasts an endowment of \$5 billion, on par with Cornell. "Wealthy parents are the norm," says former UVA dean John Foubert. On top of all that, UVA enjoys a reputation as one of the best schools in the country, not to mention a campus so brimming with fun that in 2012 – the year of Jackie's rape – *Playboy* crowned it the nation's number-one party school. Students hold themselves up to that standard: studious by day, wild by night. "The most impressive person at UVA is the person who gets straight A's *and* goes to all the parties," explains fourth-year student Brian Head. Partying traditions fuse the decorum of the Southern aristocracy with binge drinking: At Cavalier football tailgates, the dress code is "girls in pearls, guys in ties" while students guzzle handles of vodka. Not for nothing is a UVA student nicknamed a Wahoo, as undergrads like to explain; though derived from a long-ago yell from Cavalier fans, a wahoo is also a fish that can drink twice

its own body weight.



University of Virginia campus (Photo: Lance King/Getty)

Wahoos are enthralled to be at UVA and can't wait to tell you the reasons why, beginning, surprisingly, with Thomas Jefferson, whose lore is so powerfully woven into everyday UVA life that you practically expect to glimpse the man still walking the grounds in his waistcoat and pantaloons. Nearly every student I interviewed found a way to mention "TJ," speaking with zeal about their founding father's vision for an "academical village" in the idyllic setting of the Blue Ridge Mountains. They burble about UVA's honor code, a solemn pledge not to lie, cheat or steal; students are expected to snitch on violators, who are expelled. UVA's emphasis on honor is so pronounced that since 1998, 183 people have been expelled for honor-code violations such as cheating on exams. And yet paradoxically, not a single student at UVA has ever been expelled for sexual assault.

"Think about it," says Susan Russell, whose UVA daughter's sexual-assault report helped trigger a previous federal investigation. "In what world do you get kicked out for cheating, but if you rape someone, you can stay?"

Attorney Wendy Murphy, who has filed Title IX complaints and lawsuits against schools including UVA,



argues that in matters of sexual violence, Ivy League and Division I schools' fixation with prestige is their downfall. "These schools love to pretend they protect the children as if they were their own, but that's not true: They're interested in money," Murphy says. "In these situations, the one who gets the most protection is either a wealthy kid, a legacy kid or an athlete. The more privileged he is, the more likely the woman has to die before he's held accountable." Indeed, UVA is the same campus where the volatile relationship of lacrosse star George Huguey V and his girlfriend Yeardeley Love was seen as unremarkable – his jealous rages, fanned by over-the-top drinking – until the 2010 day he kicked open her door and beat her to death.

UVA president Teresa Sullivan denies the administration sweeps sexual assault under the rug. "If we're trying to hide the issue, we're not doing a very good job of it," she says, noting that this past February UVA hosted the first-ever sexual-assault summit for college administrators. It's true that recently, while under close government scrutiny, the school has made some encouraging changes, including designating most UVA authority figures as mandatory reporters of sexual assault and teaming up with student activists to create a bystander-intervention campaign. Students praise UVA's deans as caring folks who answer late-night calls from victims and even make emergency-room visits.



And yet the UVA public-relations team seemed unenthused about this article, canceling my interview with the head of UVA's Sexual Misconduct Board, and forbidding other administrators from cooperating; even students seemed infected by their anxiety about how members of the administration might appear. And when President Sullivan was at last made available for an interview, her most frequently invoked answer to my specific questions about sexual-assault handling at UVA – while two other UVA staffers sat in on the recorded call – was "I don't know."

*All you girls from Mary Washington  
and RMWC, never let a Cavalier an inch above your  
knee.  
He'll take you to his fraternity house and fill you full of  
beer.  
And soon you'll be the mother of a bastard Cavalier!*

**"Rugby Road"**

Two weeks after Jackie's rape, she ran into Drew during her lifeguard shift at the UVA pool. "Hey, Jackie," Drew said, startling her. "Are you ignoring me?" She'd switched her shift in the hopes of never seeing him again. Since the Phi Kappa Psi party, she'd barely left her dorm room, fearful of glimpsing one of her attackers. Jackie stared at Drew, unable to speak. "I wanted to thank you for the other night," Drew said. "I had a great time."

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Jackie left her shift early, saying she wasn't feeling

well. Then she walked back to her dorm and crawled under the covers. She didn't go to classes for the rest of the week, and soon quit her lifeguarding job – the first time she could remember quitting anything. She would

never again return to the Anthropology course she shared with one of her assailants. She was constantly on the edge of panic, plagued by flashbacks – and disgusted by her own naiveté. She obsessed over what easy prey she'd been, as the attention-starved freshman who for weeks drank up Drew's flirtations. "I still grapple with 'Did I do something that could have been construed as that's what I wanted?' " she says.

Before Jackie left for college, her parents – a Vietnam vet and retired military contractor, and a stay-at-home mom – had lectured her about avoiding the perils of the social scene, stressing the importance of her studies, since Jackie hoped to get into medical school. Jackie had a strained relationship with her father, in whose eyes she'd never felt good enough, and always responded by exceeding expectations – honor roll, swim team, first-chair violin – becoming the role model for her two younger brothers. Jackie had been looking forward to college as an escape – a place to, even, defy her parents' wishes and go to a frat party. "And I guess they were right," she says bitterly.

She was having an especially difficult time figuring out how to process that awful night, because her small social circle seemed so underwhelmed. For the first month of school, Jackie had latched onto a crew of lighthearted social strivers, and her pals were now impatient for Jackie to rejoin the merriment. "You're still upset about that?" Andy asked one Friday night when Jackie was crying. Cindy, a self-declared hookup queen, said she didn't see why Jackie was so bent out of shape. "Why didn't you have fun with it?" Cindy asked. "A bunch of hot Phi Psi guys?" One of Jackie's friends told her, unconcerned, "Andy said you had a bad experience at a frat, and you've been a baby ever since."

That reaction of dismissal, downgrading and doubt is a common theme UVA rape survivors hear, including from women. "Some of my hallmates were skeptical,"

recalls recent grad Emily Renda, who says that weeks into her first year she was raped after a party. "They

“

"SOME OF MY  
HALLMATES WERE  
SKEPTICAL," SAYS ONE  
SURVIVOR OF RAPE.  
"THEY WERE SILENT  
AND AVOIDED ME  
AFTERWARDS. IT MADE  
ME DOUBT MYSELF."

—

were silent and avoided me afterwards. It made me doubt myself." Other students encounter more overt hostility, as when a first-year student confided her assault to a friend. "She said she thought I was just looking for attention," says the undergrad. Shrugging off a rape or pointing fingers at the victim can be a self-protective maneuver for women, a form of wishful thinking to reassure themselves *they* could never be so vulnerable to violence. For men, skepticism is a form of self-protection too. For much of their lives, they've looked forward to the hedonistic fun of college, bearing every expectation of booze and no-strings sex. A rape heralds the uncomfortable idea that all that harmless mayhem may not be so harmless after all. Easier, then,



to assume the girl is lying, even though studies indicate that false rape reports account for, at most, eight percent of reports.



Emily Renda (Photo: Courtesy of Emily Renda)

And so at UVA, where social status is paramount, outing oneself as a rape victim can be a form of social suicide. "I don't know many people who are engrossed in the party scene and have spoken out about their sexual assaults," says third-year student Sara Surface. After all, no one climbs the social ladder only to cast themselves back down. Emily Renda, for one, quickly figured out that few classmates were sympathetic to her plight, and instead channeled her despair into hard partying. "My drinking didn't stand out," says Renda, who often ended her nights passed out on a bathroom floor. "It does make you wonder how many others are doing what I did: drinking to self-medicate."

By the middle of her first semester, Jackie's alarm would ring and ring in her dorm room until one of her five suitemates would pad down the hall to turn it off. Jackie would barely stir in her bed. "That was when we realized she was even there," remembers suitemate Rachel Soltis. "At the beginning of the year, she seemed like a normal, happy girl, always with friends. Then her door was closed all the time. We just figured she was out." Long since abandoned by her original crew, Jackie had

slept through half a semester's worth of classes and had bought a length of rope with which to hang herself. Instead, as the semester crawled to an end, she called her mother. "Come and get me," Jackie told her, crying. "I need your help."

**T**he first weeks of freshman year are when students are most vulnerable to sexual assault. Spend a Friday night in mid-September walking along Rugby Road at UVA, and you can begin to see why. Hundreds of women in crop tops and men in khaki shorts stagger between handsome fraternity houses, against a call-and-response soundtrack of "Whoo!" and breaking glass. "Do you know where Delta Sig is?" a girl slurs, sloshed. Behind her, one of her dozen or so friends stumbles into the street, sending a beer bottle shattering. ("Whoo!" calls a far-away voice.)

"These are all first-years," narrates one of my small group of upperclasswomen guides. We walk the curving length of tree-lined Rugby Road as they explain the scene. The women rattle off which one is known as the "roofie frat," where supposedly four girls have been drugged and raped, and at which house a friend had a recent "bad experience," the Wahoo euphemism for sexual assault. Studies have shown that fraternity men are three times as likely to commit rape, and a spate of recent high-profile cases illustrates the dangers that can lurk at frat parties, like a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee frat accused of using color-coded hand stamps as a signal to roofie their guests, and this fall's suspension of Brown University's chapter of Phi Kappa Psi – of all fraternities – after a partygoer tested positive for the date-rape drug GHB. Presumably, the UVA freshmen wobbling around us are oblivious to any specific hazards along Rugby Road; having just arrived on campus, they can hardly tell one fraternity from another. As we pass another frat house, one of my

guides offers, "I know a girl who got assaulted there."



Phi Kappa Psi House

"I do too!" says her friend in mock-excitement. "That makes two! Yay!"

Frats are often the sole option for an underage drinker looking to party, since bars are off-limits, sororities are dry and first-year students don't get many invites to apartment soirees. Instead, the kids crowd the walkways of the big, anonymous frat houses, vying for entry. "Hot girls who are drunk always get in – it's a good idea to act drunker than you really are," says third-year Alexandria Pinkleton, expertly clad in the UVA-after-dark uniform of a midriff-baring sleeveless top and shorts. "Also? You have to seem very innocent and vulnerable. That's why they love first-year girls."

Once successfully inside the frat house, women play the role of grateful guests in unfamiliar territory where men control the variables. In dark, loud basements, girls accept drinks, are pulled onto dance floors to be ground and groped and, later, often having lost sight of their friends, led into bathrooms or up the stairs for privacy. Most of that hooking up is consensual. But against that backdrop, as psychologist David Lisak discovered, lurk undetected predators. Lisak's 2002 groundbreaking study of more than 1,800 college men found that roughly nine out of 10 rapes are committed by serial

offenders, who are responsible for an astonishing average of six rapes each. None of the offenders in Lisak's study had ever been reported. Lisak's findings upended general presumptions about campus sexual assault: It implied that most incidents are not bumbling, he-said-she-said miscommunications, but rather deliberate crimes by serial sex offenders.

In his study, Lisak's subjects described the ways in which they used the camouflage of college as fruitful rape-hunting grounds. They told Lisak they target freshmen for being the most naïve and the least-experienced drinkers. One offender described how his party-hearty friends would help incapacitate his victims: "We always had some kind of punch. . . . We'd make it with a real sweet juice. It was really powerful stuff. The girls wouldn't know what hit them." Presumably, the friends mixing the drinks did so without realizing the offender's plot, just as when they probably high-fived him the next morning, they didn't realize the behavior they'd just endorsed. That's because the serial rapist's behavior can look ordinary at college. "They're not acting in a vacuum," observes Lisak of predators. "They're echoing that message and that culture that's around them: the objectification and degradation of women."

One need only glance around at some recent college hijinks to see spectacular examples of the way the abasement of women has broken through to no-holds-barred misogyny: a Dartmouth student's how-to-rape guide posted online this past January; Yale pledges chanting "No means yes! Yes means anal!" And despite its air of mannered civility, UVA has been in on the naughty fun for at least 70 years with its jolly fight song "Rugby Road," which celebrates the sexual triumphs of UVA fraternity men, named for the very same street where my guides and I are now enveloped in a thickening crowd of wasted first-years. Through the



decades, the song has expanded to 35 verses, with the more recent, student-penned stanzas shedding the song's winking tone in favor of something more jarringly explicit:

*A hundred Delta Gammas, a thousand AZDs*

*Ten thousand Pi Phi bitches who get down on their knees*

*But the ones that we hold true, the ones that we hold dear*

*Are the ones who stay up late at night, and take it in the rear.*

In 2010, "Rugby Road" was banned from football games – despite a petition calling it "an integral part" of UVA culture. But Wahoos fearing the loss of tradition can take heart that "Rugby Road" verses are still performed on campus by UVA's oldest a cappella group, the Virginia Gentlemen.

**A**t the end of her freshman year, Jackie found herself in the Peabody Hall office of Dean Nicole Eramo, head of UVA's Sexual Misconduct Board. This was a big step for Jackie. She still hadn't even managed to tell her own mother exactly what had happened at Phi Kappa Psi. Upon returning to school for her second semester, Jackie had tried to put on a brave face and simply move forward, but instead continued falling apart. Though a psychiatrist had put Jackie on Wellbutrin, she had remained depressed, couldn't concentrate, and spent the semester so frightened and withdrawn that her academic dean finally called her in to discuss why she'd failed three classes. In his office, with her mother beside her, she'd burst into tears, and her mother explained she'd had a "bad experience" at a party. He'd blanched and given Jackie the e-mail for Dean Eramo.

If Dean Eramo was surprised at Jackie's story of gang rape, it didn't show. A short woman with curly dark hair

and a no-nonsense demeanor, Eramo surely has among the most difficult jobs at UVA. As the intake person on behalf of the university for all sexual-assault complaints since 2006, it's her job to deal with a parade of sobbing students trekking in and out of her office. (UVA declined to make Eramo available for comment.) A UVA alum herself, Eramo is beloved by survivors, who consider her a friend and confidante – even though, as only a few students are aware, her office isn't a confidential space at all. Each time a new complaint comes through Eramo's office, it activates a review by UVA's Title IX officer, is included in UVA's tally of federally mandated Clery Act crime statistics, and Eramo may, at her discretion, reveal details of her conversation with the student to other administrators. (Jackie was mortified to learn later that Eramo had shared her identity with another UVA administrator.) After all, a dean's foremost priority is the overall safety of the campus.

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JACKIE SAYS WHEN  
SHE ASKED WHY UVA'S  
RAPE STATS WERE  
HARD TO FIND, THE  
DEAN SAID, "BECAUSE  
NOBODY WANTS TO  
SEND THEIR DAUGHTER

# TO THE RAPE SCHOOL."

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When Jackie finished talking, Eramo comforted her, then calmly laid out her options. If Jackie wished, she could file a criminal complaint with police. Or, if Jackie preferred to keep the matter within the university, she had two choices. She could file a complaint with the school's Sexual Misconduct Board, to be decided in a "formal resolution" with a jury of students and faculty, and a dean as judge. Or Jackie could choose an "informal resolution," in which Jackie could simply face her attackers in Eramo's presence and tell them how she felt; Eramo could then issue a directive to the men, such as suggesting counseling. Eramo presented each option to Jackie neutrally, giving each equal weight. She assured Jackie there was no pressure – whatever happened next was entirely her choice.

Like many schools, UVA has taken to emphasizing that in matters of sexual assault, it caters to victim choice. "If students feel that we are forcing them into a criminal or disciplinary process that they don't want to be part of, frankly, we'd be concerned that we would get fewer reports," says associate VP for student affairs Susan Davis. Which in theory makes sense: Being forced into an unwanted choice is a sensitive point for the victims. But in practice, that utter lack of guidance can be counterproductive to a 19-year-old so traumatized as Jackie was that she was contemplating suicide. Setting aside for a moment the absurdity of a school offering to handle the investigation and adjudication of a felony sex crime – something Title IX requires, but which *no* university on Earth is equipped to do – the sheer menu of choices, paired with the reassurance that any choice is the right one, often has the end result of coddling the victim into doing nothing.

"This is an alarming trend that I'm seeing on campuses," says Laura Dunn of the advocacy group SurvJustice. "Schools are assigning people to victims who are pretending, or even thinking, they're on the victim's side, when they're actually discouraging and silencing them. Advocates who survivors *love* are part of the system that is failing to address sexual violence."



Phi Kappa Psi House (Photo: Illustration by John Ritter)

Absent much guidance, Jackie would eventually wonder how other student victims handled her situation. But when she clicked around on UVA's website, she found no answers. All she found were the UVA police's crime logs, which the university makes available online, but are mostly a list of bike theft, vandalism and public-drunkenness complaints. That's because only a fraction of UVA students who report sex crimes turn to campus police. The rest go to Dean Eramo's office, to Charlottesville police or the county sheriff's office. Yet when RS asked UVA for its statistics, the press office repeatedly referred us to the UVA police crime logs. UVA parent Susan Russell believes that misdirection is deliberate. "When a parent goes to the campus crime log, and they don't see sexual assault, they think the school is safe," Russell says, adding that her daughter's 2004 sexual assault once appeared in the log mislabeled "Suspicious Circumstances."



Eventually, UVA furnished *Rolling Stone* with some of its most recent tally: In the last academic year, 38 students went to Eramo about a sexual assault, up from about 20 students three years ago. However, of those 38, only nine resulted in "complaints"; the other 29 students evaporated. Of those nine complaints, four resulted in Sexual Misconduct Board hearings. UVA wasn't willing to disclose their outcomes, citing privacy. Like most colleges, sexual-assault proceedings at UVA unfold in total secrecy. Asked why UVA doesn't publish all its data, President Sullivan explains that it might not be in keeping with "best practices" and thus may inadvertently discourage reporting. Jackie got a different explanation when she'd eventually asked Dean Eramo the same question. She says Eramo answered wryly, "Because nobody wants to send their daughter to the rape school."

For now, however, Jackie left her first meeting with Eramo feeling better for having unburdened herself, and with the dean's assurance that nothing would be done without her say-so. Eramo e-mailed a follow-up note thanking Jackie for sharing, saying, "I could tell that was very difficult for you," and restating that while she respected Jackie's wish not to file a report, she'd be happy to assist "if you decide that you would like to hold these men accountable." In the meantime, having presumably judged there to be no threat to public safety, the UVA administration took no action to warn the campus that an allegation of gang rape had been made against an active fraternity.

*All the first-year women are morally uptight.*

*They'll never do a single thing unless they know it's right.*

*But then they come to Rugby Road and soon they've seen the light.*

*And you never know how many men they'll bring home every night.*

## "Rugby Road"

**Y**ou can trace UVA's cycle of sexual violence and institutional indifference back at least 30 years – and incredibly, the trail leads back to Phi Psi. In October 1984, Liz Seccuro was a 17-year-old virgin when she went to a party at the frat and was handed a mixed drink. "They called it the house special," she remembers. Things became spotty after Seccuro had a few sips. But etched in pain was a clear memory of a stranger raping her on a bed. She woke up wrapped in a bloody sheet; by rifling through the boy's mail before fleeing, she discovered his name was Will Beebe. Incredibly, 21 years later, Beebe wrote Seccuro a letter, saying he wanted to make amends as part of his 12-step program. Seccuro took the correspondence to Charlottesville police. And in the midst of the 2006 prosecution that followed, where Beebe would eventually plead guilty to aggravated sexual battery, investigators made a startling discovery: That while at Phi Psi that night, Seccuro had been assaulted not by one man, but by three. "I had been gang-raped," says Seccuro, who detailed her ordeal in a 2011 memoir.



William N. Beebe out of the Charlottesville, Va. Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court on Tuesday, Jan. 17th, 2006.  
(Photo: Brady Wolfe/Daily Progress/AP)

That it took two decades for Seccuro to achieve some

justice is even more disgraceful, since she reported her rape to the UVA administration after leaving the Phi Psi house on that 1984 morning. "I went to the dean covered in scabs and with broken ribs," she remembers. "And he said, 'Do you think it was just regrettable sex?' " Seccuro wanted to call police, but she was incorrectly told Charlottesville police lacked jurisdiction over fraternity houses.

If Seccuro's story of administrative cover-up and apathy sounds outrageous, it's actually in keeping with the stories told by other UVA survivors. After one alumna was abducted from a dark, wooded section of campus and raped in 1993, she says she asked a UVA administrator for better lighting. "They told me it would ruin Jefferson's vision of what the university was supposed to look like," the alum says. "As if Thomas Jefferson even knew about electric lights!" In 2002 and 2004, two female students, including Susan Russell's daughter, were unhappy with their sexual-misconduct hearings, which each felt didn't hold their alleged perpetrators accountable – and each was admonished by UVA administrators to never speak publicly about the proceedings or else they could face expulsion for violating the honor code. For issuing that directive, in 2008 UVA was found in violation of the Clery Act.

"UVA is more egregious than most," says John Foubert, a UVA dean from 1998 to 2002, and founder of the national male sex-assault peer education group One in Four. "I've worked for five or six colleges, and the stuff I saw happen during my time there definitely stands out." For example, Foubert recalls, in one rare case in which the university applied a harsh penalty, an undergrad was suspended after stalking five students. Heated discussion ensued over whether the boy should be allowed back after his suspension. Though the counseling center wanted him to stay gone, Foubert says, the then-dean of students argued in favor of his

return, saying, "We can pick our lawsuit from a potential sixth victim, or from him, for denying him access to an education."

The few stories leaking out of UVA's present-day justice system aren't much better. One student, whose Title IX complaint against UVA is currently under investigation by the Office of Civil Rights, said that in December 2011, another student raped her while she was blackout drunk, possibly drugged. As she wrote in a student publication, evidence emerged that the man had previously been accused of drugging others, but the information was rejected as "prejudicial." The Sexual Misconduct Board told the young woman it found her "compelling and believable," but found the man not guilty. "I had never felt so betrayed and let down in my life," wrote the woman. "They said that they believed me. They said that UVA was my home and that it loved me. Yet, how could they believe me and let him go completely unpunished?"

*Rolling Stone* has discovered that this past spring a UVA first-year student, whom we'll call Stacy, filed a report stating that while vomiting up too much whiskey into a male friend's toilet one night, he groped her, plunged his hands down her sweatpants and then, after carrying her semi-conscious to his bed, digitally penetrated her. When the Charlottesville DA's office declined to file charges, she says, Stacy asked for a hearing with the Sexual Misconduct Board, and was surprised when UVA authority figures tried to talk her out of it. "My counselors, members of the Dean of Students office, everyone said the trial process would be way too hard on me," says Stacy. "They were like, 'You need to focus on your healing.' " Stacy insisted upon moving forward anyway, even when the wealthy family of the accused kicked up a fuss. "They threatened to sue deans individually, they threatened to sue me," she recalls. But Stacy remained stalwart, because she had



additional motivation: She'd been shaken to discover two other women with stories of assault by the same man. "One was *days* after mine, at a rush function at his frat house," says Stacy. "So I was like, 'I have to do something before someone else is hurt.' " Her determination redoubled after the Dean of Students office informed her that multiple assaults by a student would be grounds for his expulsion – a mantra that Eramo repeated at a Take Back the Night event in April.

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PSI GANG RAPES.

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Bearing her deans' words in mind, at her nine-hour formal hearing in June, Stacy took pains to present not only her own case, but also the other two allegations, submitting witness statements that were allowed in as "pattern evidence." The board pronounced the man guilty for sexual misconduct against Stacy, making him

only the 14th guilty person in UVA's history. Stacy was relieved at the verdict. "I was like, 'He's gone!' 'Cause he's a multiple assailant, I'd been told so many times that that was grounds for expulsion!" So she was stunned when she learned his actual penalty: a one-year suspension. (Citing privacy laws, UVA would not comment on this or any case.)

Turns out, when UVA personnel speak of expulsion for "multiple assaults," they mean multiple complaints that are filed with the Sexual Misconduct Board, and then adjudicated guilty. Under that more precise definition, the two other cases introduced in Stacy's case didn't count toward his penalty. Stacy feels offended by the outcome and misled by the deans. "After two rapes and an assault, to let him back on grounds is an insult to the honor system that UVA brags about," she says. "UVA doesn't want to expel. They were too afraid of getting negative publicity or the pants sued off them."

*She's a helluva twat from Agnes Scott, she'll fuck for 50 cents.*

*She'll lay her ass upon the grass, her panties on the fence.*

*You supply the liquor, and she'll supply the lay.*

*And if you can't get it up, you sunuva bitch, you're not from UVA.*

### **"Rugby Road"**

**W**hen did it happen to you?" Emily Renda asked Jackie as they sat for coffee at the outdoor Downtown Mall in the fall of 2013.

"September 28th," Jackie whispered.

"October 7th, 2010," Emily responded, not breaking her gaze, and Jackie knew she'd found a friend. As Jackie had begun her second year at UVA, she'd continued struggling. Dean Eramo had connected her with Emily,

a fourth-year who'd become active in One Less, a student-run sexual-assault education organization that doubles as a support group. Sitting with Emily, Jackie poured out her story, wiping her eyes with napkins as she confided to Emily that she felt like a broken person. "You're not broken," Emily told her. "*They're* the ones who are fucked up, and what happened to you wasn't your fault." Jackie was flooded with gratitude, desperate to hear those words at last – and from someone who knew. Emily invited her to a meeting of One Less, thus introducing her to UVA's true secret society.



Photo: Illustration by John Ritter: Photo of Nicole Eramo in Illustration by Jenna Truong/Cavalier Daily

In its weekly meetings, the 45-member group would discuss how to foster dialogue on campus. Afterward they'd splinter off and share stories of sexual assault, each tale different and yet very much the same. Many took place on tipsy nights with men who refused to stop; some were of sex while blackout drunk; rarer stories involved violence, though none so extreme as Jackie's. But no matter the circumstances, their peers' reactions were largely the same: Assaults were brushed off, with attackers defended ("He'd never do anything like that"), the victim questioned ("Are you sure?"). After feeling isolated for more than a year, Jackie was astonished at how much she and this sisterhood had in common, including the fact that a surprising number

hadn't pursued any form of complaint. Although many had contacted Dean Eramo, whom they laud as their best advocate and den mother – Jackie repeatedly calls her "an asset to the community" – few ever filed reports with UVA or with police. Instead, basking in the safety of one another's company, the members of One Less applauded the brave few who chose to take action, but mostly affirmed each other's choices not to report, in an echo of their university's approach. So profound was the students' faith in its administration that although they were appalled by Jackie's story, no one voiced questions about UVA's strategy of doing nothing to warn the campus of gang-rape allegations against a fraternity that still held parties and was rushing a new pledge class.

Some of these women are disturbed by the contradiction. "It's easy to cover up a rape at a university if no one is reporting," admits Jackie's friend Alex Pinkleton. And privately, some of Jackie's confidantes were outraged. "The university ignores the problem to make itself look better," says recent grad Rachel Soltis, Jackie's former roommate. "They should have done something in Jackie's case. Me and several other people know exactly who did this to her. But they want to protect even the people who are doing these horrible things."

But no such doubts shadowed the meetings of One Less, which was fine by Jackie. One Less held seminars for student groups on bystander intervention and how to be supportive of survivors. Jackie dove into her new roles as peer adviser and Take Back the Night committee member and began to discover just how wide her secret UVA survivor network was – because the more she shared her story, the more girls sought her out, waylaying her after presentations or after classes, even calling in the middle of the night with a crisis. Jackie has been approached by so many survivors that she wonders whether the one-in-five statistic may not apply



in Charlottesville. "I feel like it's one in three at UVA," she says.

But payback for being so public on a campus accustomed to silence was swift. This past spring, in separate incidents, both Emily Renda and Jackie were harassed outside bars on the Corner by men who recognized them from presentations and called them "cunt" and "feminazi bitch." One flung a bottle at Jackie that broke on the side of her face, leaving a blood-red bruise around her eye.

She e-mailed Eramo so they could discuss the attack – and discuss another matter, too, which was troubling Jackie a great deal. Through her ever expanding network, Jackie had come across something deeply disturbing: two other young women who, she says, confided that they, too, had recently been Phi Kappa Psi gang-rape victims.

**A** bruise still mottling her face, Jackie sat in Eramo's office in May 2014 and told her about the two others. One, she says, is a 2013 graduate, who'd told Jackie that she'd been gang-raped as a freshman at the Phi Psi house. The other was a first-year whose worried friends had called Jackie after the girl had come home wearing no pants. Jackie said the girl told her she'd been assaulted by four men in a Phi Psi bathroom while a fifth watched. (Neither woman was willing to talk to RS.)

As Jackie wrapped up her story, she was disappointed by Eramo's nonreaction. She'd expected shock, disgust, horror. For months, Jackie had been assuaging her despair by throwing herself into peer education, but there was no denying her helplessness when she thought about Phi Psi, or about her own alleged assailants still walking the grounds. She'd recently been aghast to bump into Drew, who greeted her with friendly

nonchalance. "For a whole year, I thought about how he had ruined my life, and how he is the worst human being ever," Jackie says. "And then I saw him and I couldn't say anything."

"You look different," Drew told Jackie while she stared back at him in fear, and he was right: Since arriving at UVA, Jackie had gained 25 pounds from antidepressants and lack of exercise. That interaction would render her too depressed to leave her room for days. Of all her assailants, Drew was the one she wanted to see held accountable – but with Drew about to graduate, he was going to get away with it. Because, as she miserably reminded Eramo in her office, she didn't feel ready to file a complaint. Eramo, as always, understood.

Given the swirl of gang-rape allegations Eramo had now heard against one of UVA's oldest and most powerful fraternities – founded in 1853, its distinguished chapter members have included President Woodrow Wilson – the school may have wondered about its responsibilities to the rest of the campus. Experts apprised of the situation by RS agreed that despite the absence of an official report, Jackie's passing along two other allegations should compel the school to take action out of regard for campus safety. "The fact that they already had that first victim, they should have been taking action," says SurvJustice's Laura Dunn. "That school could really be sued."

If the UVA administration was roiled by such concerns, however, it wasn't apparent this past September, as it hosted a trustees meeting. Two full hours had been set aside to discuss campus sexual assault, an amount of time that, as many around the conference table pointed out, underscored the depth of UVA's commitment. Those two hours, however, were devoted entirely to upbeat explanations of UVA's new prevention and response strategies, and to self-congratulations to UVA

for being a "model" among schools in this arena. Only once did the room darken with concern, when a trustee in UVA colors – blue sport coat, orange bow tie – interrupted to ask, "Are we under any federal investigation with regard to sexual assault?"

Dean of students Allen Groves, in a blue suit and orange necktie of his own, swooped in with a smooth answer. He affirmed that while like many of its peers UVA was under investigation, it was merely a "standard compliance review." He mentioned that a student's complaint from the 2010-11 academic year had been folded into that "routine compliance review." Having downplayed the significance of a Title IX compliance review – which is neither routine nor standard – he then elaborated upon the lengths to which UVA has cooperated with the Office of Civil Rights' investigation, his tone and manner so reassuring that the room relaxed.

Told of the meeting, Office of Civil Rights' Catherine Lhamon calls Groves' mischaracterization "deliberate and irresponsible." "Nothing annoys me more than a school not taking seriously their review from the federal government about their civil rights obligations," she says.

Within days of the board meeting, having learned of Rolling Stone's probe into Jackie's story, UVA at last placed Phi Kappa Psi under investigation. Or rather, as President Sullivan carefully answered my question about allegations of gang rape at Phi Psi, "We do have a fraternity under investigation." Phi Kappa Psi national executive director Shawn Collinsworth says that UVA indeed notified him of sexual assault allegations; he immediately dispatched a representative to meet with the chapter. UVA chapter president Stephen Scipione recalls being only told of a vague, anonymous "fourth-hand" allegation of a sexual assault during a party. "We were not told that it was rape, but rather that something

of a sexual nature took place," he wrote to RS in an e-mail. Either way, Collinsworth says, given the paucity of information, "we have no evidence to substantiate the alleged assaults."

*"Under investigation,"* President Sullivan insists when I ask her to elaborate on how the university is handling the case. "I don't know how else to spell that out for you." But Jackie may have gotten a glimpse into the extent of the investigation when, in the days following my visit to campus, she was called into Eramo's office, bringing along her friend Alex for moral support. According to both women, Eramo revealed that she'd learned "through the grapevine" that "all the boys involved have graduated." Both girls were mystified. Not only had Jackie just seen one of the boys riding his bike on grounds but, as Alex pointed out, "Doesn't that mean they're admitting something happened?" No warning has yet been issued to the campus.

**W**ith a pocketknife and pepper spray tucked into her handbag, and a rape whistle hanging from her key chain, Jackie is prepared for a Friday night at UVA. In a restaurant on the Corner, Jackie sips water through a straw as the first of the night's "Whoo!"s reverberate from the sidewalk outside. "It makes me really depressed, almost," says Jackie with a sad chuckle. "There's always gonna be another Friday night, and another fraternity party, and another girl."

Across the table, Alex sighs. "I know," she says. Bartenders and bouncers all along the Corner are wearing T-shirts advertising the new "Hoos Got Your Back" bystander-intervention campaign, which all seems very hopeful. But this week, the third week of September, has been a difficult one. Charlottesville police received their first sexual-assault report of the academic year; Jackie and Alex were also each approached by someone seeking help about an assault.



And as this weekend progresses, things will get far worse at UVA: Two more sexual assaults will be reported to police, and, in every parent's worst fears come true, an 18-year-old student on her way to a party will vanish; her body will be discovered five weeks later.

Suspect Jesse Matthew Jr., a 32-year-old UVA hospital worker, will be charged with Hannah Graham's "abduction with intent to defile," and a chilling portrait will emerge of an alleged predator who got his start, a decade ago, as a campus rapist. Back in 2002, and again in 2003, Matthew was accused of sexual assault at two different Virginia colleges where he was enrolled, but was never prosecuted. In 2005, according to the new police indictment, Matthew sexually assaulted a 26-year-old and tried to kill her. DNA has also reportedly linked Matthew to the 2009 death of Virginia Tech student Morgan Harrington, who disappeared after a Metallica concert in Charlottesville. The grisly dossier of which Matthew has been accused underscores the premise that campus rape should be seen not through the schema of a dubious party foul, but as a violent crime – and that victims should be encouraged to come forward as an act of civic good that could potentially spare future victims.

Jackie is hoping she will get there someday. She badly wants to muster the courage to file criminal charges or even a civil case. But she's paralyzed. "It's like I'm in my own personal prison," she says. "I'm so terrified this is going to be the rest of my life." She still cries a lot, and she has been more frightened than usual to be alone or to walk in the dark. When Jackie talks about her assault, she fixates on the moment before Drew picked her up for their date: "I remember looking at the mirror and putting on mascara and being like, 'I feel really pretty,' " Jackie recalls. "I didn't know it would be the last time I wouldn't see an empty shell of a person."

Jackie tells me of a recurring nightmare she's been

having, in which she's watching herself climb those Phi Kappa Psi stairs. She frantically calls to herself to stop, but knows it's too late: That in real life, she's already gone up those stairs and into that terrible room, and things will never be the same. It bothers Jackie to know that Drew and the rest get to walk away as if nothing happened, but that she still walks toward that room every night – and blames herself for it during the day.

"Everything bad in my life now is built around that one bad decision that I made," she says. "All because I went to that stupid party."

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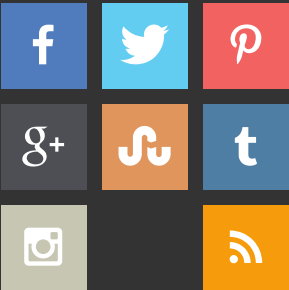


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