

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Questioning Koestner: Male isn't always perpetrator

To the Editor:

I want to compliment you on your professional and sophisticated newspaper. As a Davidson parent, I subscribe to and read the Davidsonian weekly. However, as a father and man, I found the essentially unchallenged, published comments (Sept. 23) of Katie Koestner disturbing in the extreme.

Let me begin by saying sexual harassment, assault and rape, in any form are detestable and are not to be condoned or excused. However, Koestner suggests rewriting the rules in such a way they are highly prejudicial to men and absolve women of practically any responsibility in the matter of sexual activity.

An example: I grew up in a family where we were demonstrative of our love for one another and we routinely touched each other to indicate our affection. This communicating by touching has carried over into my professional life as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon. It is not uncommon for me to place my hand on the arm of a patient, male or female, who is upset at getting a malignancy report following a tissue examination. I leave my hand on the arm of a patient while we talk to let them know I feel their pain and care for and about them.

But Koestner would rewrite the handbook to require me to ask the patient: "Do you mind if I touch your arm when you respond to the bad news of a malignant diagnosis on your tissue specimen?" That seems a little preposterous and it gives no one credit for having any common sense.

We all know what inappropriate touching is. We are all adult enough to tell someone who is touching us we would prefer to not be touched in such manner if we become uncomfortable and feel that the touching is inappropriate. Koestner would have us codify every form of human physical contact. Nonsense.

Her suggestion that coercion and intimidation can be implied because a male is larger than a female leaves a male essentially defenseless. In most cases, a college male will be taller, stronger, and heavier than his female peer. Does that mean whenever what he understands to be consensual sexual activity occurs, he is at risk of being accused of rape simply because he is bigger and stronger than his sexual partner? Apparently. It's pretty hard to defend against a charge that the male is more powerful than the female.

Koestner also wants you to include the definition of "coercion" such vicious verbal assaults as: "If you don't have sex with me, I'll break up with you." Or, "If you don't have sex with me, I'll tell everyone you're HIV positive." One has to wonder just how stupid and helpless Koestner assumes college women to be.

In the former instance, a simple: "Fine, our relationship is terminated as of this moment" would suffice nicely. In the latter, "My lawyer will be in touch with you," would resolve that. Does Koestner really want us to believe it is rape when a woman has sex with a man because he threatens to break up with her if she doesn't? If that be the case, then it is one simple step to: It is rape if the woman *thinks* her boyfriend might break up with her if she doesn't have sex with him. If the woman demands sex or she "will break up" with her boyfriend, then that must be rape, too. See how quickly this goes from the sublime to the ridiculous?

The absence of the words "responsible" or "responsibility" are glaring in Koestner's comments. She avers if Norm and Norma are drunk and Norm starts throwing his clothes off and Norma responds in kind "acting on his invitation," she (Norma) will be held accountable when Norm wakes up in the morning and Norm feels "taken advantage of." If you believe that, I have an ocean-front condo in New Mexico I'd like to sell you.

Let's spin it around. If Norma and Norm are both drunk and Norma starts throwing her clothes off encouraging Norm to do the same, and sexual intercourse follows, then Norm is guilty of rape according to Koestner. If Norma is drunk, she can't give consent says Koestner. For his part in the scenario mentioned, Koestner wants Norm to be making little rocks out of big rocks up at the Big House.

Common sense and English Common Law do not sustain that premise. In fact, Common Law has long held that *silence implies consent*. It also holds that actions while under the "influence" are the responsibility of the perpetrator and intoxication cannot be used as a defense. Koestner's argument makes the male responsible if he is drunk and absolves the female of any responsibility if she is. The courts hold men and women equally responsible for their criminal acts under the influence of drugs or alcohol. When Norma gets drunk and encourages Norm to join her in sexual activity, Koestner wants to hand Norma the *Ego Absolve Te* card and \$200 for passing Go.

Koestner's statistics are absurd. They are undocumented and impossible to believe, though she would have you take them at face value. I have been involved in treating assault patients, including male prisoners and inmates for over 21 years. Her statistic that one in eight males is raped in his lifetime is ludicrous.

My clinical experience is that far less than one percent fall into that category. No statistics from any medical study of hospital diagnostic code reporting will substantiate this claim. She wants you to believe 18.75 million men in America have been raped. And the moon is made out of green cheese. Could you please tell me how it is possible to verify her statistic that only two to five percent of rape "victims" lie about being raped? Think about what she is saying. She is insulting your intelligence with a "statistic" like that.

Then look at the spread — if it's two percent, about 840,000 women are lying when they claim being raped. If it's five percent, we're talking about 2,105,000 women lying. Which is it? That is a significant number to the 2.105 million men who are accused and/or convicted.

Also, why is this "statistic" a variable? She gives a hard, precise number for all of her other statistics. If we can't trust one of her statistics, we can't trust any of them. It's hard to stand up and argue with someone who comes to the campus to "help" prevent rape. Anyone who disagrees appears insensitive. However, the academy is our last bastion of the free market of ideas. We are each entitled to our opinions and allowed to express them. We must respect the other's right to voice an opinion, but we don't have to agree with them no matter how politically correct they may be.

From what I read, Koestner has done little more than come on campus and attempt to absolve mature, intelligent young women of any responsibility when drinking and sexual intercourse occur concomitantly. She would dangerously empower the female at the expense of the civil rights and due process of the male. There is no presumption of innocence for males as required by our Constitution, when both parties are intoxicated. She makes the male responsible for both partner's behavior if they are drunk.

Koestner wants the faculty and student body of Davidson to incorporate the concept of verbal coercion into its definition of one of the elements necessary for rape to occur. She would have us believe Davidson women aren't intelligent enough to refuse sex if a man threatens to break up with or spread lies and rumors about her lest she consent. According to Koestner, women lost their free will when Eve bit into the pear (or apple). She warrants a man's physiognomy is enough to assert coercion. She spews out specious statistics. Where were the intelligent, discerning, inquisitive Davidson students that day?

I hope as Davidson policy concerning sexual misconduct is reviewed and rewritten, some very fundamental concepts are not lost in the excitement of making sure Koestner is happy with the resulting document. Let's not forget adult men and women share equal rights and protections under the law. Also let us not forget women must assume responsibility for their actions, too.

The assumption that the male is *always* the initiator or predator, sexually, is offensive, stereotypical, and wrong. There are plenty of sexually aggressive women around now as always (Cleopatra, Jezebel, e.g.). We all know that is true. If a man or woman drives while he or she is drunk and kills someone, being intoxicated is not a defense. We are held individually responsible, by law, for our actions, no matter how much alcohol we have consumed. Being drunk absolves no one of their personal responsibility.

Finally, I don't know what Koestner's credentials are as a rape prevention "expert." I assume she was raped and has made helping other women avoid the same tragedy her life's work. Assuming that is true, she should be praised for her motivation if not her methods. I've had a heart attack and quadruple bypass surgery. But that doesn't make me an expert on preventing heart disease or how to perform, tolerate and/or avoid bypass surgery. It has, however, given me an intimate look into the pain and suffering of those who almost die from heart disease and live with a time bomb in their chest.

It is my greatest hope that when Davidson rewrites its policy on sexual misconduct, those responsible will not forget the Constitution and Bill of Rights in so doing. Just as we are equally responsible for our actions drunk or sober, so are we equally protected by due process and the Bill of Rights. Davidson has a long history of choosing the correct path. I hope that tradition endures even in the face of such a politically and emotionally charged issue.

Duane F. Hurt
Greenwood, Miss.

Where are all the books?

Davidson's library lacks sufficient volumes

Davidson likes to call itself the Princeton of the South. But while Davidson might measure up to Princeton in many aspects, one area in which it pales in comparison is the size and depth of its library.

Davidson's library contains 400,000 volumes. Princeton's library, on the other hand, contains 11 million. Their library system is 27.5 times the size of ours, while their enrollment is only roughly 3 times our size. And Princeton, unfortunately, is not the only school library that dwarfs ours.

STUDENT COLUMN
Jesse Smallwood

Bowdoin, a liberal arts college with a comparable population and national ranking, has a library system with 835,000 volumes — twice that of ours.

Amherst, another small liberal arts

college with actually less people than Davidson, has a library system with 760,000 volumes.

And Dartmouth's library has 2 million volumes. Need I go on, because I have enough examples to fill a book? The fact of the matter is, our library system is embarrassingly thin compared to that of other schools our caliber. And this should be one of our top renovation priorities.

Despite all of this though, Davidson has consistently ignored this weakness.

The lack of attention is not due to a lack of money; Davidson has recently undertaken several new building projects.

In the last year alone, Davidson began construction on a new biology building, laid out plans for a new union, and most recently (just last week) agreed to

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build a new eight-lane track.

The new track is the most incomprehensible of all to me. While the new biology and union both seem to be necessary renovations, the need for a new track is not even comparable to the need for additions to the library's resources. While only a limited number of Davidson students will ever truly need a track larger than the two-lane track we currently have, every single Davidson student is effected by the lack of depth of our library.

Every single student, at one point in his or her Davidson career, will have to use the library for research.

And, from personal experience, it is extremely frustrating to find that our library

does not have the book or periodical that you need.

Davidson's recent expansion decisions reflect a worrisome pattern of habitual neglect of the library.

If Davidson wants to consider itself among the upper elite of American colleges and universities, as well it should, it must improve its research facilities.

Seeing that Davidson demands so much from its students intellectually, it should at least give us the books with which to work.

As a tour guide, one of the jokes I like to tell on my tours is that Woodrow Wilson attended Davidson for a year, but transferred to Princeton because the work load was too heavy here.

Perhaps the real reason he transferred was that Princeton's library had the books he needed and ours did not.

Urban Plunge: a step in right direction

For Plunger, homelessness now has a face

I consider myself privileged to be friends with several of the people who just returned from a trip called the Urban Plunge, on which nine Davidson students spent 48 hours on the streets of Washington, D.C.

Last Tuesday afternoon, I saw one of these friends and he was very upset. I asked him what was wrong, and my question was met with blazing eyes as he pulled out from underneath his books the Oct. 28 edition of the Davidsonian, pre-folded to page 10, and pointed to an article titled "Urban Plunge: Sympathy isn't a cure."

Something about the article had bothered him immensely, so I went back to my room to read it for myself. Frankly, I was shocked by what I read and I encourage everyone to read the article for themselves. Basically, Matthew Elkins, the author, said:

1. The Urban Plunge was nothing but a bunch of rich kids going to Washington for the weekend in order to "salve" their consciences for the rest of the year and that their weekend should have been spent directly serving the homeless by working in a shelter or food kitchen.

2. The Plungers have become "revolutionaries" who desire only to "challenge the institutions in our society which they feel are 'responsible' for the problems" of the homeless rather than helping solve the problems in a constructive manner.

I didn't go on the Plunge, but I still felt outraged and "disgusted" after reading Elkins' article.

For starters, it seems Elkins was misinformed about the goals of the Urban Plunge.

He insinuates in his first point that the Plungers went to avoid feeling the need to do other service work later in the year.

I've found quite the opposite to be true. Many of the Plungers have been involved in serving the homeless for several years. Others felt a strong conviction after returning from Washington, and have since begun to volunteer.

As a matter of fact, five of the people who went on the Urban Plunge recently returned to Washington to attend a national conference on homelessness. For all these people, these trips were *not* looked upon as acts of direct service "on behalf of the homeless," but

as ways to better know the people whom they serve.

Another problem I find with Elkins' article is the narrowness of the solution he proposes for the problem of homelessness.

He states: "one should be a volunteer, not a revolutionary." And therein implies that the only answer to the problem is for people to volunteer, to donate their time and "ever-so-burdensome money" to organizations that offer direct services to the homeless.

To a degree, I agree with Elkins on this point. It is not only admirable, but necessary for Davidson students to volunteer at soup kitchens and shelters,

and to donate money to charities. But I believe to be a volunteer is not enough. If one expects to see change, he has to be a volunteer and a revolutionary.

People have been feeding and clothing the homeless for decades. Yet, the problem is not getting better — in fact, it's getting worse.

Soup kitchens and clothing drives are important, but they're just putting band-aids on a cut that needs stitches. It is time for a "revolutionary" new approach to an age old problem.

What is that approach? I do not pretend to know, and neither do the individuals who went on the Urban Plunge. They do not claim and have never claimed that their spending a weekend on the street is the answer to the problem of homelessness.

The Urban Plunge was just a step in the long process of learning what circumstances cause homelessness and how to effectively combat those circumstances.

Rather than criticizing a program and people, we — the 99.99% of the Davidson campus who didn't participate in the Urban Plunge — should learn from those who did participate. To most of us, homelessness is just an epidemic.

To the Plungers, however, homelessness now has a face. It involves real people, each with a different story and different circumstances.

I encourage everyone to take the time to speak to at least one person who went about their experience.

Together, we can all work to better understand the problem of homelessness and the challenges of trying to find a solution.

STUDENT OPINION
Lydia Wilson