

The Message Spreads

ANALYZING INFORMATION IN THE MODERN AGE

A solid orange horizontal bar at the bottom of the slide.

It began on Jan. 17, 2015

You likely don't know that, or at least the date doesn't compute for you.

You, as a media consumer, didn't know then. You couldn't have. The incident that took place wasn't public record.

No charges had been filed yet. Police were investigating.

No one was making Facebook posts about the crime. Not yet.

r dinner? · Who made dinner? · Did you drink with di
When did you drink? · How much did you drink? · What
f? · Who gave you the drink? · How much do you usual
f at this party? · At what time? · But where exactly? ·
y were you going to this party? · What' d you do when
you did that? · But what time did you do that? · What
were you texting? · When did you urinate? · Where d
id you urinate outside? · Was your phone on silent w
u remember silencing it? · Really because on page 53
id it was set to ring. · Did you drink in college? · You
How many times did you black out? · Did you party at
ur boyfriend? · Are you sexually active with him? · Wh
d you ever cheat? · Do you have a history of cheating?

No, it wasn't until June 3, 2016

That's when you knew. Or at least as a media professor, that's when I hope you caught wind of this story.

That's when BuzzFeed News, a respectable (more on that later) news organization, published the multi-page letter a rape victim read aloud during a court sentencing hearing to her attacker.

The attacker had been found guilty on three counts of sexual assault against the unnamed 23-year old.

Here Is The Powerful Letter The Stanford Victim Read Aloud To Her Attacker

A former Stanford swimmer who sexually assaulted an unconscious woman was sentenced to six months in jail because a longer sentence would have "a severe impact on him," according to a judge. At his sentencing Thursday, his victim read him a letter describing the "severe impact" the assault had on her.



Katie J.M. Baker
BuzzFeed News Reporter

posted on Jun. 3, 2016, at 1:17 p.m.

TRENDING

16,022,473 VIEWS



One night in January 2015, two Stanford University graduate students biking across campus spotted a freshman thrusting his body on top of an unconscious, half-naked woman behind a dumpster. This March, a California jury found the former student, 20-year-old Brock Allen Turner, guilty of three counts of sexual assault. Turner faced a

In her words ...

“You don’t know me, but you’ve been inside me, and that’s why we’re here today.”

...

“The next thing I remember I was in a gurney in a hallway. I had dried blood and bandages on the backs of my hands and elbow. I thought maybe I had fallen and was in an admin office on campus. I was very calm and wondering where my sister was. A deputy explained I had been assaulted. I still remained calm, assured he was speaking to the wrong person. I knew no one at this party. When I was finally allowed to use the restroom, I pulled down the hospital pants they had given me, went to pull down my underwear, and felt nothing. I still remember the feeling of my hands touching my skin and grabbing nothing. I looked down and there was nothing.”

In her words ...

“I was pummeled with narrowed, pointed questions that dissected my personal life, love life, past life, family life, inane questions, accumulating trivial details to try and find an excuse for this guy who had me half naked before even bothering to ask for my name. After a physical assault, I was assaulted with questions designed to attack me, to say see, her facts don't line up, she's out of her mind, she's practically an alcoholic, she probably wanted to hook up, he's like an athlete right, they were both drunk, whatever, the hospital stuff she remembers is after the fact, why take it into account, Brock has a lot at stake so he's having a really hard time right now.

And then it came time for him to testify and I learned what it meant to be revictimized. I want to remind you, the night after it happened he said he never planned to take me back to his dorm. He said he didn't know why we were behind a dumpster. He got up to leave because he wasn't feeling well when he was suddenly chased and attacked. Then he learned I could not remember.”

Message #1: Victim statement

- Does this serve as a warning to women?
- Is it a message that will prevent sexual assaults?
- Does it make a difference if the victim is anonymous?
- Why did BuzzFeed decide to publish the letter?
- Is BuzzFeed really a legitimate source for news?

This is the convicted rapist



His name is Brock Allen Turner.

He was a swimmer at Stanford University on a 60-percent scholarship.

He blamed “party culture” for the rape.

He claimed to have never been in trouble before with the law.

He is white.

He comes from an affluent community.

He was sentenced to six months in jail.

His family, friends claim ...



Brock would never do such a thing.

Promiscuity played a role, blaming the victim.

“20 seconds of action” shouldn’t determine a promising young man’s future cut short.

He isn’t a “bad guy.”

He’s misguided. He was led astray by teammates.

He doesn’t deserve this.

The message starts with a mug shot



Message #2: Rapist mug shot

- What is really the face of Brock Turner?
- Why did the story, which originated in Santa Clara County, originally air with the mug shot of Turner in his suit?
- What impact does that first photo have?
- What impact does the second photo have?
- Are you more inclined to see Turner as a rapist from that second photo?
- Who is making these decisions?

The judge and the six-month sentence

Turner was sentenced to six-months in county jail, three years probation and a lifetime of registering as a sex offender.

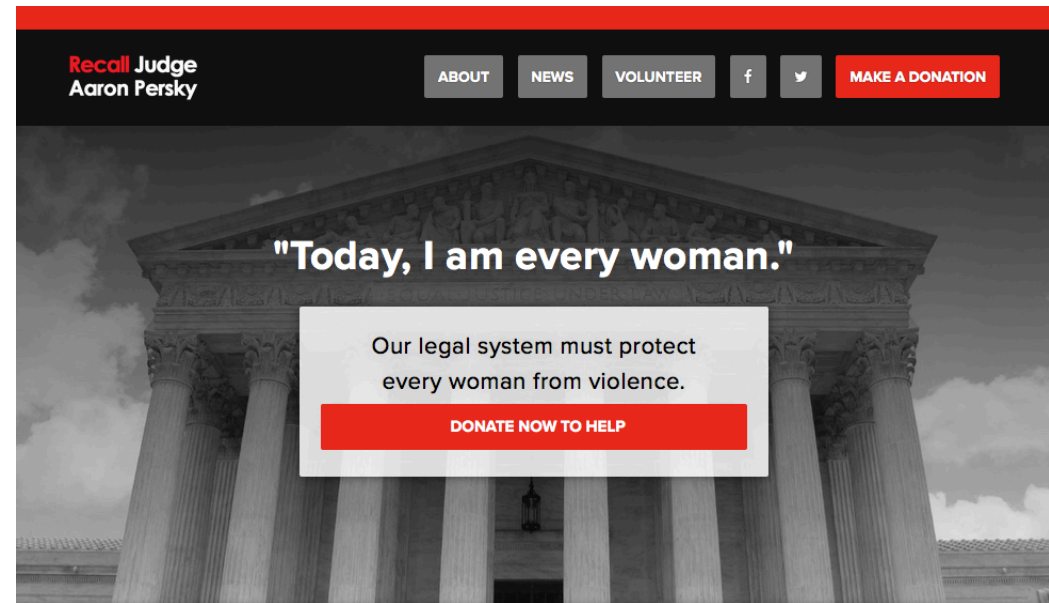
Aaron Persky, a Stanford Alum, was the presiding judge and sentencer.

Persky handed down the light sentence because a prison sentence would have a “severe impact” on Turner.



Since the sentence

- A Stanford law professor started a recall petition for Persky
- Rep. Susan Talamantes Eggman has asked Persky to step down
- Potential jurors in other cases are asking for dismissal from Persky's courtroom, citing what he had done as a miscarriage of justice
- Campaigns to elect a judge in his place have begun (he's up for election)



We are the official campaign to recall Judge Aaron Persky. It's clear we need judges who understand violence against women and take it seriously. It's up to us, the voters, to make a difference.

Message #3: Concerning the judge

- If you're a Stanford alum, another alum has your back?
- If you're white and privileged, you get to slide on a rape charge (even when there are witnesses)?
- If jail will "impact" you in a negative way, you don't have to go?
- A judge can be punished for the misdeeds of a convicted rapist?

The letters for Brock Turner

Honorable Judge Aaron Persky,

It was with great sadness that I read the news about Brock Turner, and the horrible situation that he was involved in. It came as a huge shock to me.

Brock has been a peer of mine since elementary school, and was a very close friend of mine for a few years in high school. He dated one of my very good friends, Lydia Pociak, around the same time. In those years, he was always very respectful of everyone. Teachers, classmates, friends, and girls, all alike. He is one of those people that no one has a problem with, and is pretty much good at everything. We all knew he'd swim in the olympics one day. His family is a very respectable family in town. I also know his older sister, Caroline. They all seem like such good kids brought up by two very cool and grounded parents. In all honesty, if I had to choose one kid I graduated with to be in the position Brock is, it would have never been him. I could name off 5 others that I wouldn't be surprised about. Brock is such a sweetheart and a very smart kid. I never once caught him harassing anyone, verbally or physically. That would have been so out of his character.

It's pretty frustrating to see the light that people are putting him in now. It used to be "swim star" and now it's like he is the face of rape on campuses. It's such a false way to put it. I cannot believe it. I've thought a lot about it, and from different angles. I tried to accept that maybe he did intend to harm this girl, but I just couldn't imagine that was the case. I know rape is a very sensitive subject, for everyone, and especially women. I am not backing it up or making excuses, but there is absolutely no way Brock went out that night with rape on his mind. I think he went to a party and was drinking, like almost every student at a university does, and was flirting with this girl, like he said. The woman recalls how much alcohol she drank, which was a lot. She was no doubt about to black out if not already. I'm sure she and Brock had been flirting at this party and decided to leave together. Just as they did she passes out, which after that many drinks, anyone would. At the same time, Brock, having a few too many drinks himself, is not completely in control of his emotions. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that alcohol increases emotions and feelings. I think this is all a huge misunderstanding. I think that the bikers who found him did the right thing by keeping him there in case he was attempting rape, but that after the investigation, it should have found Brock to be innocent.

Brock is not a monster. He is the furthest thing from anything like that, and I have known him much longer than the people involved in his case. I don't think it's fair to base the fate of the next ten + years of his life on the decision of a girl who doesn't remember anything but the amount she drank to press charges against him. I am not blaming her directly for this, because that isn't right. But where do we draw the line and stop worrying about being politically correct every second of the day and see that rape on campuses isn't always because people are rapists. It is because these universities market themselves as the biggest party schools in the country. They encourage drinking. I think it is disgusting and I am so sick of hearing that these young men are monsters when really, you are throwing barely 20-somethings into these camp-like university environments, supporting partying, and then your mind is blown when things get out of hand. This is completely different from a woman getting kidnapped and raped as she is walking to her car in a parking lot. That is a rapist. These are not rapists. These are idiot boys and girls having too much to drink and not being aware of their surroundings and having clouded judgement. I'm not saying that is every case because I know there are young men that take advantage of young women and vice versa, but I know for a fact that Brock is not one of those people. He is respectful and caring, talented, and smart enough to know better.

Attached is a photo of Brock I took in high school. He has always had that huge, loving smile on his face. The caption is even "d'awwww" because he was always the sweetest to everyone.

I appreciate you taking your time to hear about my past with Brock and my opinion on the matter, and I hope you consider what I've said when looking into the sentencing. I would not be writing this letter if I had any doubt in my mind that he is innocent.

Thank you again,
Leslie Rasmussen



Two letters asking for leniency for Turner were submitted to the court: one from his father Dan Turner, the other from his childhood friend Leslie Rasmussen.

Both were written in a way that the public has decried as “victim blaming.”

Both are public record and were released by Stanford Law Professor Michele Dauber onto social media (Twitter specifically).

Dan Turner

Letter talked about how his son had issues fitting in at Stanford.

“As it stands now, Brock’s life has been deeply altered forever by the events of Jan 17th and 18th. He will never be his happy go lucky self with that easy going personality and welcoming smile. His every waking minute is consumed with worry, anxiety, fear and depression. You can see this in his face, the way he walks, his weakened voice, his lack of appetite ...”

AND ... Brock Turner won’t eat steak anymore.



Leslie Rasmussen

Childhood friend of Turner, penned letter:

“Brock is not a monster. ... I don’t think it’s fair to base the fate of the next ten + years of his life on decisions of a girl who doesn’t remember anything but the amount she drank to press charges against him. I am not blaming her directly ... But where do we draw the line and stop worrying about being politically correct every second of the day and see that rape on campuses isn’t always because people are rapists ...”



Consequences

FOR DAN TURNER:

- Notion of “white privilege” abound
- Called “ignorant” by press
- Entire Turner family being attacked

FOR LESLIE RASMUSSEN

- She claimed social media is “overreacting”
- Her band, Good English, has had nearly every booked gig cancelled
- Gone into a sort of hiding

In the news



[Drummer Defends Stanford Student Convicted in Rape Case. Her Band Pays a Price.](#)

[New York Times](#) - 3 days ago

Good English had been set to play at several locations in Brooklyn until the release ... a judge a few months ago by one of the sisters, [Leslie Rasmussen](#), involving the case of ...

[Friend Who Wrote Letter Defending Brock Turner Is Being Dropped From All Upcoming Gigs](#)

[Cosmopolitan.com](#) - 3 days ago

[Musician who defended Brock Turner feels backlash](#)

[CNN](#) - 1 day ago

[More news for leslie rasmussen good english](#)

[Leslie Rasmussen & Good English: 5 Fast Facts | Heavy.com](#)

[heavy.com/.../leslie-rasmussen-good-english-band-brock-turner-stanford-rapist-full-le...](#) ▼

4 days ago - [Leslie Rasmussen & Good English: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know.](#) ... A childhood friend of former Stanford swimmer Brock Turner has come under fire after a letter she wrote supporting Turner was made public, with many blasting her for being an apologist for a rapist.

[Friend Who Wrote Letter Defending Brock Turner Is Being Dropped ...](#)

[www.cosmopolitan.com/.../brock-turner-friend-leslie-rasmussen-band-d...](#) ▼ [Cosmopolitan](#) ▼

3 days ago - After her band [Good English](#) was dropped from several upcoming music festivals, [Leslie Rasmussen](#), the childhood friend of Stanford rapist ...

[Good English blacklisted after drummer DEFENDS Brock Turner ...](#)

[www.dailymail.co.uk/.../Indie-band-Good-English-blacklisted-drummer-write...](#) [Daily Mail](#) ▼

4 days ago - Female drummer who wrote a character letter for 'sweet' Stanford rapist faces outrage and cancelled gigs - after issuing a second statement blaming 'American drinking culture' for her friend's crime. ... An indie band have been branded 'rape apologists' and had shows cancelled ...

Message #4: Pro-Turner letters

- Can you be guilty by association?
- Is nothing private? Was there an expectation that those letters be private?
- Can you defend a convicted criminal and still be a good person?

The Social Media Storm

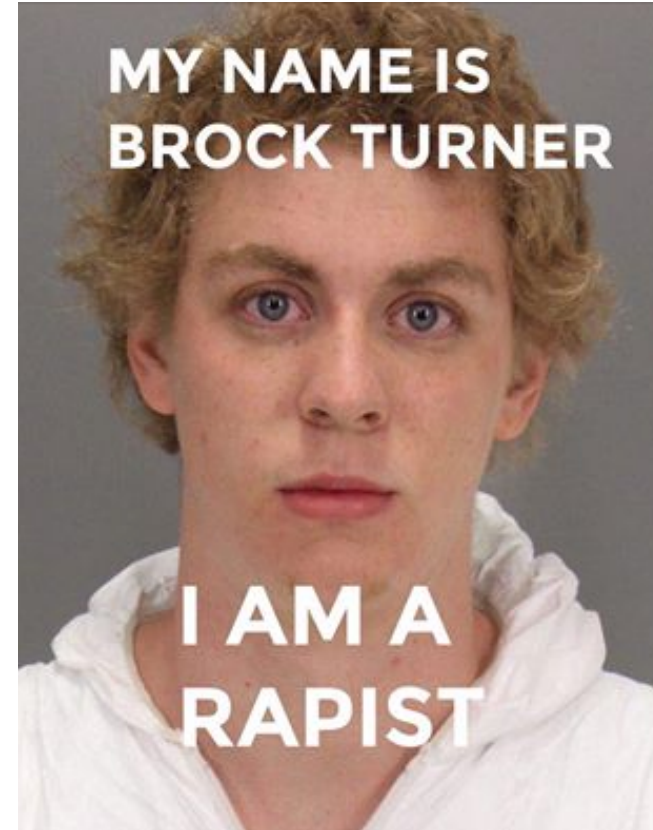
Reaction to the case was immediate.

Mememes were made immediately (on side) and posted to Facebook.

Of my 372 friends, 62 posted responses.

Social media meant that news outlets that weren't covering it, suddenly had to.

Suddenly it couldn't be ignored.




Stanford University's statement



Stanford | News

Home Find Stories For Journalists Contact

JUNE 6, 2016

Stanford University statement regarding Brock Turner case

 Stanford University did everything within its power to assure that justice was served in this case, including an immediate police investigation and referral to the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office for a successful prosecution.

Stanford urges its students to do the right thing and intervene and we are proud of our students for stopping this incident. Many other student witnesses cooperated in the investigation. Once Stanford learned the identity of the young woman involved, the university reached out confidentially to offer her support and to tell her the steps we were taking. In less than two weeks after the incident, Stanford had conducted an investigation and banned Turner from setting foot on campus – as a student or otherwise. This is the harshest sanction that a university can impose on a student.

There has been a significant amount of misinformation circulating about Stanford's role. In this case, Stanford University, its students, its police and its staff members did everything they could. Stanford University takes the issue of sexual assault extremely seriously and has been a national leader in taking concrete steps to implement prevention programs, to train students on the importance of bystander intervention, to provide support to students who may experience sexual assault and to assure that cases are handled fairly and justly.

This was a horrible incident, and we understand the anger and deep emotion it has generated. There is still much work to be done, not just here, but everywhere, to create a culture that does not tolerate sexual violence in any form and a judicial system that deals appropriately with sexual assault cases.

Media Contacts

Lisa Lapin, University Communications, (650) 725-8396, lapin@stanford.edu

“This was a horrible incident, and we understand the anger and deep emotion it has generated. There is still much work to be done, not just here, but everywhere, to create a culture that does not tolerate sexual violence in any form and a judicial system that deals appropriately with sexual assault cases.”

USA Swimming

Turner's status with USA Swimming expired in Dec. 2014, a month before rape.

The organization that allows for national competition and moves forward Olympic teams, has banned Turner as a swimmer for competition for life.

"USA Swimming condemns the crime and actions committed by Brock Turner, and all acts of sexual misconduct," USA Swimming spokesman Scott Leightman said in a statement emailed to *Newsweek*.



Message #5: Damage control and spin

- Should you be proactive?
- Does every person who ever had dealings with Brock Turner have to step away?
- Should the media storm ever die down?
- Is it human nature to be outraged over a six-month sentence for rape when the person was clearly caught in the act?

How do you navigate all these messages?

Better yet, can we? As media consumers, as students, as people, can you peel back the layers and find the real story here?

What message did you get from all this?

Does the message get diluted in the vitriol of the anger?

Why it matters for MCOM 1

My goal is that you walk out of this classroom better for the conversations we have about these topics.

We don't have to agree. We should have an understanding that there are many messages in media.

Not all of them are nice. Not all of them are bad.

Media literacy is key: You need to know how to get through the noise of everything being thrown at you (specifically on social media) and get to the heart of the content presented.