



FOX NEWS

False Rape Claim Hurts Real Victims

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On April 8, the president of the Brevard, Fla., chapter of the National Organization for Women was charged by the Florida state attorney's office with filing a false rape report and making a false official statement.

She could be imprisoned for one year on each count and forced to pay for the police investigation she incurred. The case has far-reaching implications for gender politics and for women who report sexual assault in the future.

The facts are as follows. On Nov. 17, 2004, part-time Rollins College student Desiree Nall reported being raped in a campus bathroom by two men. The Winter Park Police Department put Rollins on 'high alert,' advising students to remain indoors when possible.

The dean immediately dispatched a campus-wide email to assure students that extra security measures were being taken.

In a Sandspur article entitled *A Rape Hoax is No Way to Get Attention*, Jean Bernard Chery relates how the incident impacted campus life.

"It was a nightmare for every female student and faculty/staff at Rollins. They were afraid to go to the bathroom or walk on campus alone after dusk....The incident prompted a candlelight vigil on campus in support of the alleged victim [then unnamed]," Chery wrote.

The police had reason for skepticism. Nall could not assist with composite sketches, offered inconsistent details and did not wish to press charges. An examination at a sexual assault treatment center after the alleged attack produced no evidence of foreign DNA.

Due to publicity and campus panic, however, a police investigation continued at a final estimated cost of more than \$50,000. The report of rape was judged a hoax.

According to police, on Nov. 19, Nall phoned and asked to have the case dropped. When Detective Jon Askins questioned her original report, Nall reportedly

confessed that she was "not a victim of a sexual batter." The police speculate that Nall, a vocal feminist, may have been trying to "make a statement" about violence against women. The alleged rape occurred during Sexual Assault Awareness Week, which was intended to highlight the issue of sexual violence against women.

Jeff Nall, Desiree's husband, has been speaking publicly on her behalf. He claims the charges will be appealed on the grounds that an attempted assault did occur. He denies that she confessed to lying. He claims she has been targeted by police because "she is a women's-rights activist."

He also distances NOW from the unfolding fiasco by pointing out that his wife became a chapter president only recently, prior to the incident. Moreover, according to one article in the Sandspur, he argues "that sexual assault cases such as this are not one of the platforms of NOW."

NOW apparently wishes to maintain distance as well. As of Monday, searching its website for the term "Nall" returns no results. After all, NOW has argued that women do not lie about rape. Catharine MacKinnon--a founding mother of the gender feminism that NOW promotes -- stated in her book, *Feminism Unmodified*, "The reason feminism uncovered this reality [of male oppression], its methodological secret, is that feminism is built on believing women's accounts of sexual use and abuse by men."

If this methodology is debunked, if women are viewed as no more or less likely to lie than men, then the foundation of gender politics collapses.

It is premature and grandiose, however, to see the collapse of gender feminism within the Nall news story. A false account of rape in a bathroom is a much smaller and more tawdry tale: a tempest in a toilet.

Assuming that Nall lied, she has achieved the opposite of what I believe she intended. By "crying rape" she has made every woman who is a victim less credible and less likely to receive justice from the police or the public. She has made women less safe.

Rollins student Elizabeth Humphrey states the point simply: "Lying about that story is absolutely horrible because women are victimized every day. And if we get the reputation of lying, then people won't start to believe us if it does happen."

Instead of publicizing sexual violence against women, Nall has spotlighted the problem of false accusations against men. Her case also raises the question of whether NOW-style feminists encourage false accusations when they flatly insist that women must be believed.

In the '60s, feminists fought to have rape taken seriously. But taking an accusation seriously is not the same as granting it automatic validity. Rather, it means investigating the facts and weighing them in an unbiased manner that favors no one and nothing but the truth.

A lot of ugly truth may surface in the coming months. The state of Florida seems determined to pursue its case against Nall, who seems determined to fight back.

Winter Park Sgt. Pam Marcum explained to the Orlando Sentinel that bringing charges against Nall had taken so long because the police department sought a second opinion from the State Attorney's office. It is rare for those who file false reports of sexual abuse to be prosecuted. In short, the prosecution is carefully constructing a case; the defense is loudly crying 'political persecution!' In the process, the definition and legal status of rape within our society continues to evolve.

Where it comes to rest depends largely upon the honesty-- not the NOW-like silence -- with which women confront the problem of false accusations.

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<http://www.foxnews.com/story/2005/04/20/false-rape-claim-hurts-real-victims.html>