

## We must help women how to recognize danger

November ,8, 2015, By Daniel J. Bauer

Two years ago, a woman student in her junior year in my department disappeared. A student not at all prone to cutting classes or dropping telephone and social contact with her friends simply dropped out of campus life.

Every person deserves a name, and I'll call this student Sue.

I did not know Sue personally. I knew of her because I'd served as a judge a couple times when she participated in drama contests. I was only acquainted with her through the sharing of her classmates and of colleagues, especially her "daushih," a wonderful counselor who with sorrow and passion threw herself into the search, with other authorities, that was to lead to a sad discovery.

Police found Sue's remains buried in a pile of sand in the countryside of southern Taiwan several months after she had vanished. Her boyfriend led them to the site where he had thrown her body.

Was there anything we might have done that could have prevented this tragedy? What had happened early in her relationship with her "friend" that could have been a sign for Sue about what was to come? This fellow didn't just go bananas one day out the blue, and cut her to pieces like a piece of old, discarded clothing, did he? The violence that took her life in the end must have been visible in "smaller," seemingly innocuous ways on previous occasions.

Had we let Sue down? Should we have trained her somehow, helped her to develop the tools from her first semester on to recognize the potential danger into which she was falling?

Investigators found, for example, that her pursuer took a great interest in Sue's financial life. Her parents were deceased and, over the age of 18, she had access to a comfortable wad of cash which her mom and dad had provided for her and her brother's future. Bank records showed that, for unclear reasons, she had begun to withdraw sizeable amounts of that money in the months that led to her passing.

After her death, stories were afloat about the fast pace of her romance with her boyfriend. Experienced eyes might have cautioned her to go

slowly with intimacy, to tread over the slippery ice of a pre-marital relationship with more care, the better to avoid needless heartbreak, or even harm.

Sue's story is not the only tale of violence with which I am familiar. A few years earlier, another young woman in the same English Department, but a student whom I had already taught, and who was in my "Survey of American Literature" course that very semester, was attacked by her husband. He trapped her in a quiet place one day, and in the midst of an argument, threw a jar of acid over her face and upper body.

At that time as well, many of us wondered what we could have done earlier to enable this student to recognize some of the early, tell-tale signs of "danger ahead" before it was too late.

A headline in a local English newspaper called this troubling topic to mind for me and, I hope, for many others this week. "Women at risk of domestic violence urged to seek help," it said (TT 11-04-15 p. 2). The article that followed briefly detailed horrific acts of violence against women not long ago in the Taipei area. One of the wife-victims was 41 years old, the mother of an 11 year-old daughter. Another was a Vietnamese wife, aged 34, the mother of a teen-ager. Their husbands allegedly murdered both women. The final instance involved the bizarre mutilation an 80 year-old man executed against his lover, 48 years old. He is accused of tying the woman up, and taking a knife to her nose, ears and lips.

What are a few of the signs that may indicate a potential violent turn against a partner in a formerly romantic relationship? Verbal abuse is one. Women may accept verbal abuse as a sign of dark humor, or even of veiled affection, when in fact it could hide serious hostility or cruelty. Extreme manipulation is almost always a bad sign. A boy or man who humiliates a girl or woman, or who "orders" her to tailor herself to his wishes, to change friends or places of work, or to assent to physical intimacy to please him, may harbor seeds of violence that will one day burst out of control.

Are we getting the message out to both women and male students that it is no shame to seek advice from advisers on how to handle uneasy relationships? What can we do to build the trust that students need to turn to us for help? (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## Talking points

- 1) This column speaks directly of horrific acts of violence against Fu da women students that happened in recent years, one as recently as only 3 years ago. Whether we are a male or female student, do we feel shock at such reports, or are we immune to (unconscious of) them?
- 2) The writer lists several signs of danger in a romantic relationship that could turn violent against a girl or woman. Do you agree that these 'signs' are important?
- 3) What can professors and advisers at Fu da do to encourage students to talk with them about their troubles?

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