Yeardley Love case should serve as a wake-up call, says abuse prevention expert

By Paige Cornwell

As the trial of a former University of Virginia college student accused of killing his ex-girlfriend continues this week, a domestic abuse prevention advocate says the victim’s death should serve as a wake-up call that relationship violence happens on all college campuses.

Both the prosecution and defense agree that the two students, George Huguely V’s and the late Yeardley Love, both lacrosse players at the University of Virginia, had a turbulent relationship that turned more violent in the months leading up to her death.

Love’s death serves as an example of a problem that occurs on campuses nationwide, said Majorie Gilberg, executive director of Break the Cycle, an organization that educates and empowers youth to end dating violence.

On average, 24 people per minute are victims of physical violence, rape or stalking, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Women from the ages of 16-24 suffer the highest rates of abuse, Gilberg said.

“Everyone is at risk, but young people may not have the tools to know what’s OK or not OK in a relationship,” Gilberg said.

College students often face problems they hadn’t before dealt with, said Jennifer Latshaw, a junior at DePaul University. As the Love case proves, the results can be tragic.

“It’s a really weird time in your life for so many reasons,” Latshaw said. “There’s stresses from so many different areas of life that sometimes it causes people to react in weird ways, though that doesn’t condone violence within a relationship in any situation or take the blame away from the perpetrator.”

Gilberg offered these tips on what to look for or what to do if college students suspect a friend or classmate may be in an unhealthy relationship:

Watch for behavioral changes

A person in an unhealthy relationship will often stop doing the things they used to enjoy. Eating too much or too little may also be a sign, Gilberg said. Because he or she is being controlled by a partner, they may also start isolating themselves more often.

Continue the support system

An abusive partner will want to cut off the victim from his or her support system or make it seem like that support is gone. Make it clear to the victim that there are more people who care about him or her than just the abusive partner.

“Continue to support them, and don’t be judgmental,” Gilberg said. “Don’t make it you against them.”

Know that resources exist

The Love case is an example of how the system failed, Gilberg said, as a number of people knew about Love and Huguely’s turbulent relationship, but no one knew what to do about it.

The University of Virginia has since started programs to help students and faculty recognize ways they can prevent violence.

“I find it so upsetting that it took the death of a young person to make a change,” Gilberg said.

Websites such as loveisrespect.org have resources for preventing and raising awareness of relationship violence. Students can become activists on their own campuses, Gilberg said.

“Everyone deserves to have a healthy relationship,” Gilberg said.