

Written by Amanda Turner
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Since coming forward in January with her story of acquaintance rape at an international competition, Icelandic gymnast Tinna Óðinsdóttir says she remains hopeful that her painful experience will help educate others and improve safety policies for other gymnasts.

"I really hope I can make a change," she said.

In January, Óðinsdóttir joined thousands of other Icelandic women who shared their experiences as survivors of sexual assault when she said she had been raped by a foreign gymnast at a hotel room in Germany after a competition in November 2016 in Germany. Her goal in coming forward was to try to help reduce the stigma and judgment that many sexual assault survivors feel — the same judgment and stigma that may prevent them from coming forward.



Óðinsdóttir has not identified the name or nationality of her alleged attacker, except that he is not a member of the Icelandic team. The following day, she returned alone to Denmark, where she was training in Aarhus, while the rest of the Icelandic delegation returned home. Increasingly depressed and unable to concentrate, she moved back to Iceland several months later. In 2017, she eventually informed her parents, and the Icelandic Gymnastics Federation.

Though she received tremendous support from her family and the federation, and is still weighing filing a formal police report, Óðinsdóttir did not feel ready to speak up until January. Germany's gymnastics federation, the Deutscher Turner Bund (DTB), pledged its full support.

"We are shocked that this happened on the sidelines of an international tournament in Germany," **Torsten Hartmann**, a spokesman for the DTB, told IG in a statement, "and hope that this case will be completely cleared up and clarified above all in court and that the offender will receive the appropriate penalty. We wish Tinna a lot of strength and we offer our full support

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to investigate the incident."

Óðinsdóttir did not specify the specific competition, but she competed in November 2016 at the Tournament of Masters, an FIG World Cup event in Cottbus, Germany. A spokesperson for the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) stated it learned of her story through media reports, but felt it was appropriate to decline comment on the case until it had spoken with Óðinsdóttir, or been contacted for assistance by the federation.

Just last week, the FIG Executive Committee proposed a new set of guidelines, *Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding and Protecting Participants in Gymnastics*, as part of its pledge to combat sexual abuse and harassment in the sport. The FIG EC also plans to establish an external ethics unit to investigate incidents and potentially issue sanctions in cases of misconduct.

In first telling her story, Óðinsdóttir said she did not immediately go to the police because she was alone and frightened in a foreign country, and did not know where to go or how to contact someone for help. Hartmann told IG that it planned to review its policies to ensure all participants in DTB events have the resources at their disposal to reach help.

"The DTB has been building structures and processes for the prevention and intervention of sexualized violence in sport for several years," Hartmann said. "This must include a security concept at events, which gives the greatest possible protection to all, especially athletes. Information about contact points in emergencies and direct contact to the organizers is already given to the athletes with their accreditation. Nevertheless, we will sit down with our organizers of the competitions and events, develop an action plan, which is especially important for foreign participants and guests in emergency situations, to communicate preventively. It must be clear to all guests and athletes that help or support is available at any time."

Óðinsdóttir said she was pleased with the response from the DTB and the support the federation offered to assist with her case, should she decide to file a police report. She said she has felt pressured by some people to name the male gymnasts involved in her alleged assault, but informs people who ask for a name that she will only do so in a manner she is comfortable with.

"I always say that it is really personal," she said. "I want to [report] it professionally, and I feel like people respect that."

Óðinsdóttir is aware that not all victims of sexual assault have the full support she has experienced since telling her story. She urged anyone who has been pressured to keep quiet instead of reporting any incident must consider what is best and right for them.

"I would tell them that they can't put someone else's interests first," she said. "Not their club, not anyone. You have to let yourself come first, your own interests and your own feelings."

Óðinsdóttir is once again thriving in the gym. Last month, her Dutch-born coach, **Rene Poutsma**

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moved from Denmark to Iceland, and she is thrilled to have his guidance and support again.

"That makes me so happy," she said. "He not only helps me with my gymnastics — he is also a good friend. He has been there for me through everything, and he just knows me so well. He always gets me in a good mood to train and just get better.

Óðinsdóttir is scheduled to compete in two national competitions in the coming months and hopes to qualify for the Nordic championships, taking place in July in Denmark, and the European championships, to be held in August in Glasgow.

"We have so many good girls here in Iceland, so it's gonna be a fight to get on the team," she told IG, "but I'm definitely in that fight!" Óðinsdóttir: In Every Language, No Means No

"It won't happen to me." We all keep saying this to ourselves – but it happens. It happens more than you might think and it can happen to you. You might think that you can fight back or run away, but that's not always the case.

You freeze. You're paralyzed. You can't do anything to prevent what's happening. All you can do is be afraid and hope that you'll live to see another day.

You never know what people are going through or what issues they might be dealing with. We're all vulnerable – no matter how strong a person might seem or pretend to be. It hurts to be reminded of such things, so the next time you feel the need to tell a sexist joke: don't. Just don't.

Where's the respect for women? Where's the respect for a "no"? Sexual assault is not just when a woman is being pinned down in a back alley by a masked man. Seven out of 10 acts of sexual violence are committed by someone you know, and more often than not, it doesn't happen in back alleys – it happens in bedrooms at parties, on sidewalks outside our apartments, and in movie theaters when you don't quite know what to say.

Even if your date isn't kicking and screaming, listen – because they still might be saying no. In every way, in every language, no means no.

Next time you're in the heat of the moment, remember to check for signs of consent. When in doubt, silence means no.

I'm proud of being a woman. But how can we respect ourselves if men constantly think it's OK to disrespect us? We're equals. We need mutual respect.

— *Tina Óðinsdóttir*

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For 24/7 assistance for survivors of sexual assault, visit [RAINN](#) in the United States, [Rape Crisis UK](#)

,
[Rape Crisis Network Europe](#)

, and

[Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia](#)

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