

AN ANGRY MOTHER ON STEUBENVILLE AND PARENTING

The Steubenville rape case is so offensive in so many ways I can't even begin to tackle them all.

- CNN and a number of other news outlets cast the rapists as victims;
- Idiots who "don't believe in rape" come out of the woodwork and spew their insanity;
- Society follows the spectacle of the case for entertainment, but fails to take action about the culture of rape perpetuated by their demand for this amusement.

Yet there's a missing component in this mess, just as there was in Columbine, Colorado years ago, just as there was in Central Falls, Rhode Island.

Where are the parents and what the hell was going on BEFORE the rape?

I ask this knowing how very culpable the parents are. I'm guilty of failing my kids, and I learned it the hard way this past year.

How did this happen? I'm the mom who gave her kids books like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives* in middle school, gave demonstrations of condom use (with fruits and vegetables and condoms, get your mind out of the gutter). I've had numerous, lengthy conversations with my kids about sexuality, from first sex to masturbation, to contraception and STDs. We've talked openly about bisexuality, transgender, and homosexuality; they've told their friends my door is open to any kid who has a problem about their sexual identity.

Some of these conversations also included discussions about other kids and their parents' failures. At least one of my kids' closest friends was sexually active as a junior in high

school and her parents had NEVER had any discussion about sex with her, before she became active, and not for the rest of her high school tenure.

What? Are you fucking kidding me? was my initial reaction. How can parents these days trust public OR private schools to do an adequate job teaching their kids about sexuality, let alone contraception? How can parents stick their heads in the sand when there are so many misleading messages offered to kids over the internet as well as traditional media?

Take that "Don't believe in rape" asshole linked above; how can parents not offer their own messages about rape and the nature of consent when that kind of toxic idiocy is being spewed? (And where in the hell did that idiot acquire his ignorant, poisonous attitude about rape? His parents?)

No fucking way should any parent assume that no news is good news, that what they have to say as parents will be ignored or discounted. In the absence of parental messaging on both values and laws, the morons will win.

As I said, I'm guilty of failing my kids. I know EXACTLY how big the hole is that parents should fill, even after very concerted, conscious efforts to fill that gap.

Last year during her first term at college, my daughter came home and dumped, frustrated and scared about events of the previous weekend at a fraternity party. She'd followed all the rules we'd discussed before: don't accept open drinks, bring your own sealed beverages, have a buddy to get your back, don't drive drunk, so on.

The gap, though, was education about dealing with the aftermath of nonconsensual sex. One of their female classmates got shitfaced (read: drank too much alcohol, drugging not ruled out) and was taken advantage of by a male classmate.

The immediate collective concern of a handful of female classmates was finding Plan B – trying to

find it locally on a weekend at a nearby drugstore or major chain store was all they thought about.

I listened, sick to my stomach, disgusted with the perpetrator, with the girls, the fraternity, the school – but mostly with myself.

- Not one of these girls thought about insisting their friend go to the emergency room.
- Not one of these girls thought the victim should get tested for rohypnol or other drugs.
- Not one of these girls thought about testing for STDs.
- Not one of these girls thought this was a crime that should be reported.

I failed my daughter, I failed her classmates, I failed the victim; my daughter should have thought of these things when the crisis presented itself, and she didn't because I had not coached her adequately on these subjects until it was too late.

Believe me, we've had many, MANY conversations here about the incident since then. My son is sick of this subject, but he now understands clearly that no means no, and no response means take the girl home. He won't believe the crap Mr. "Don't believe in rape" spews.

Some parents reading this may think to themselves that their religious beliefs preclude such discussions. Ri-ight. Well, I'm glad that poor drunken Christian girl at her first frat party had her faith to fall back on when her male classmate raped her. Check into reality: your daughter OR your son could be drugged and abused without their consent. How will your religious values help you respond to the possibility of physical or mental injury, STD exposure, reputation assassination via social media, let alone pregnancy?

And – God forbid – the worst case happens, how

will you deal with the bullshit from people like Mr. "Don't believe in rape" who believe your kid had it coming to them?

Does the pressure feel uncomfortable? Let's face it, it's overdue. Parents are too often left off the hook during horrors like Steubenville. Let me point to the Columbine High School Massacre and Crystal Falls' failed high school as examples.

How did the parents of Columbine students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold not know their sons were stockpiling weapons in their homes, or were troubled?

In the case of Crystal Falls, how did the parents not realize that their kids were having problems en masse before they finished a single year of high school?

Why did the media fail to ask about the parents in either case? Note carefully this WaPo piece on Crystal Falls as it was typical of media coverage: the parents are not mentioned at all.

And now Steubenville.

Didn't the convicted rapists ever learn from their parents that lack of consent means no consent? Or did they come to believe in the absence of adequate guidance that Mr. "Don't believe in rape" is right? Weren't these young men ever taught that taking advantage of someone who cannot speak for themselves is the farthest thing from being a man, is utterly reprehensible, and is criminal in the case of nonconsensual sex?

As for Mr. "Don't believe in rape": Blaming a victim – A CHILD who might have been doped – makes you among the lowest of low. Do you not understand that taking something personal without explicit permission is criminal and the victim shouldn't be shamed? I'm pissed off enough about your malignant stupidity to hope someone tests your disgusting premise on you after doping your beverage at a party. You'll have been asking for it, by your own definition.

Some people only learn the truth the hard way,
when it becomes personal.

Don't I know it.

UPDATE – 11:05 pm EDT –

I've been told the website of Mr. "Don't believe in rape" is now down or blank. Huh. Isn't that interesting? I should have trusted my instincts and taken a snapshot of the site because it's not archived, either. If you have a snapshot you can share, please drop a note in comments, thanks!