

# Rape vs. Molestation

by Claesa Baggs

In today's environment of self-righteous indignation when it comes to the treatment of animals, our nation should be astonished by the lack of outrage concerning the mistreatment of our most valuable resources. The human animal. Our children.

For years, we have taught our children to be afraid of the dark character in the black coat and hat lurking in the shadows, offering candy and other enticements.

We never took the time to teach our children about the dark hearts of the people we call family, friends, and acquaintances. Oh, we may have whispered, "Tell me if someone 'touches' or 'bothers' you". When told, this information usually falls upon the deaf ears of those responsible for protecting and ensuring the safety of the child. Mostly for the sake of keeping the family together or to smother the supposed shame brought upon the family.

The laws of the land are written as to accommodate this by minimizing the true heinousness of the crimes against children. One way of accomplishing this is to slap the brand of Child Molester on the perpetrator, which can lead one with the misguided perception of a person who simply fondles, or had a casual inappropriate occurrence with a child. Meaning he/she placed some part of his/her body on, or in a child's body.

Maybe it's because there are in most instances no physical bruising to catch the eye.

Maybe it's because children change their stories especially when the perpetrator lives in the home or has easy access to the child. We mistakenly consider that a child can essentially influence whether or not they will be raped.

In recent months, a special has been airing on the television show Dateline. On this show, episodes have aired showing sting operations used to catch and humiliate cyber predators. The fact that the men portrayed on the show are being caught attempting to have sex with a minor does not appall, as one would expect. Instead we shake our heads, and yes sometimes laugh at the absurdity of the sad excuses provided to the host. What really amazes me is the fact that these men are often repeat offenders whose sentences for their crime may last months at most and in some instances, there is no jail time.

Put before you is the idea that if these persons have not been charged with rape, there would be no record of having raped multiple women and being let out on the street with what amounts to a slap on the wrist. Serial rapist would be the brand placed upon this criminal. Have we not reached the point of calling a spade a spade?

**This is our fault.**

Our society has also come to believe that women, especially those deemed by some to be of exceptional beauty, are incapable of committing the crime of rape. How is this possible? Have we made physical appearance criteria for determining the level of depravity of the mind and heart?

A young girl is the eldest of what would eventually become twelve children. In her early years, she and her sisters and brother were raised primarily by their grandmother. Her mother went out, found and brought home the man of her dreams.

This man was quite handsome and gave the appearance of being worldly and all knowing while in fact he was a cruel, divisive and formidable foe. Eventually, this person would rock the very foundation of this young girl's beliefs in all things deemed Godly.

By the time, the little girl was in the third grade she was separated from her siblings with the exception of one sister. This separation came in the form of being placed in a "private" school. Separation is a usual and effective tactic.

This was the beginning of a life filled with hurt, lies, and betrayal. This was a lot to deal with for anyone. Let alone a child. Eventually, the children's only protector was driven out and forbidden to have access to the children sometimes for as long as a year. With grandma essentially out of the picture, it was open season.

In time the child, less than one month after turning 12 years old would give birth to her stepfather's child, without interference from anyone within or outside of the family. Teachers, family nor doctors raised any red flags. There were whispers. People knew. No one came to her aid. Not even her mother.

### **This is our fault.**

In our mind's eye, when a man or woman is raped, it's often a brutal attack such that would leave bruising and physical scarring. In most cases, this attack lasts only for the brief period available to the attacker. Although the victim is hurting both mentally and physically for all intense and purposes, the attack is over save for the aftershock and its lasting affects. In the situation where a child is raped in what should be the comfort of their home, daycare, camp, church or school these rapes are constant, real, and more brutal. This is because the repeated attacks are not on the body alone. The mind, body and spirit are all victims of this savagery. The assailant does not run away. More often than not, he or she merely retreats to the next room until a later date. The rapist, more often than not, greets the victim, over morning breakfast.

This is not an attempt to diminish the damage caused by rape from a stranger or associate on an adult. A child, however, is placed in the situation of having to suffer the continual attacks of the perpetrator. Diminished is the will to fight, the opinion of self-worth and sometimes the will to survive. The crimes of the attacker become the shame they carry in secret places of their hearts.

Not long ago, there was outrage expressed regarding the treatment of prisoners of war at Guantanamo Bay. Where is this same outcry against the brutal attacks on our children?

**This is our fault.**

Even with the overwhelming reports in the news about the kidnapping and rapes of children we, as a society, still live with the false comfort of thinking this could never happen to “my” child. We point fingers and ask where the parents are. We point fingers at our politicians and ask what they will do to protect our children. The question that begs to be asked is what we will do to protect our children. Politicians are not born into office. We vote them into and out of positions. This is accomplished by choosing to either cast or not to cast a vote. Children don’t vote.

We are at an impasse. The continuance of idle discussion about the changes that must be made is of no benefit. There is the blood of cruelty and deceit and hopelessness on the hands of those who choose to look the other way. How can we look into the faces of our children and know within our hearts that we do nothing to protect them? How do we look into the face of the person in the mirror with the knowledge that we cower from the prospect of standing up-sometimes alone, against the masses?

When we do nothing, we are a part of this quiet conspiracy.

When we do nothing, we are co-defendants in these crimes.

An even greater cause for concern surrounds the issue of the statute of limitations. As you may be aware, most assaults begin when a child is of such a young age that when they have reached adulthood, and are supposedly empowered to address the crime, the assailant is protected under this veil of injustice.

These crimes are of such degradation as to kill the spirit, hopes and dreams of children. The time limitation in place renders the victim of these vile crimes as helpless as when the assaults were taking place. The idea that the victim’s youth is being wielded, as a weapon to fend off prosecution is ludicrous.

This crime is responsible for killing and cutting short a childhood that as in physical death cannot be restored. This loophole cannot be made available to these criminals.

The term “molestation” can leave one with the misguided notion that the crime is not as “severe” as a rape. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The severity of repeated rape is incalculable. The devastation is more profound when the rapist is the caregiver or someone of authority.

If we were to strike the label “molester” from the vocabulary of laws, and name the crimes as they truly are: rapes, then perhaps we can begin to deal with this growing epidemic and stunt the cancer that steals our children’s innocence.

I write all of the above to offer that we must begin the healing process somewhere. Remove the binds of the statute of limitations for molestation, to make persons responsible for committing these crimes against children criminally liable for their actions long after the crime is committed.

**If we do nothing to protect our children, then it is our fault.**