



Responding to Rape Apologism in Women

This week we have seen a number of high-profile women supporting convicted rapist Ched Evans by suggesting the rape he committed was not violent (Judy Finnigan) and that we need nuance (Sarah Vine). We have also a large number of women using social media to defend Evans. We understand the temptation to respond to these women in anger, particularly since these women show no concern whatsoever for the victim. However, we must remember that with figures like 1 in 4 women have experienced rape (Rape Crisis) and 1 in 3 experienced sexual assault (EU study on VAWG), a proportion of these women will be victims of sexual violence themselves and their reactions will be trauma-informed.

Responding in anger does not require using abusive language and we note that a number of MREs have taken the public discussions of Evans' release and potential return to play for Sheffield United as another excuse to harass and abuse women. Finnigan's daughter has received rape threats herself as a way of "teaching" her mother what rape really is - this in no way helps the victim of Ched Evans or other victim/survivors of sexual violence.

As @incurablehippie said in a discussion with us and @PoppyCocktails yesterday, "sometimes (women) really need to protect (them)selves from the realisation of what happened". Many women do need time to process and, as @PoppyCocktails made clear, for many women these public discussions of rape are the first time they have thought about their own experiences of rape and sexual violence within these paradigms. It is the first time many women have thought about their experiences as crimes.

We need to challenge rape myths and victim blaming every time we see it but there are occasions when we need to be careful how we challenge. Rape apologism in women difficult to respond too because it makes us reflect on our own experiences but equally forces women into "caring for others" mode which makes us feel responsible for the emotional health of other women. We should not feel obligated to restrain ourselves from responding in anger, nor should women be required to prioritise the emotional needs of others over themselves. A victim-centred approach does require understanding just how many women have experienced sexual and domestic violence and abuse. We try but we don't always get this balance right.