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Fathers, sons and the culture of violence

By [David Beard](#) on Jun 17, 2016 at 2:34 p.m.



Father's Day usually creates a cold feeling in me. (My father hasn't been in my life since I was four.) This year I am filled with frustration, if not rage. Father's Day has been stained by [Dan Turner's plea for sentencing leniency for his son, Brock Turner](#) (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/07/us/outrage-in-stanford-rape-case-over-dueling-statements-of-victim-and-attackers-father.html>) . Brock Turner was a Stanford student convicted of sexually assaulting an unconscious woman behind a dumpster.

I want to be sympathetic. Dan Turner is in shock. But he cannot understand his role, and the role of all men, in making his son's crime possible. In thinking about the elder Turner, I see the role of my father in my own life.

Turner doesn't recognize his son. He tells the court that his son has lost his "easy-going personality and welcoming smile." Brock has changed physically "in his face, the way he walks, his weakened voice." The family has been traumatized as "these verdicts have broken and shattered him and our family in so many ways."

I feel for this man; I cannot imagine what it would be like to learn that my son has raped. But there my sympathy ends. To Turner, the *verdicts* have broken and shattered his family, not his son's *crimes*.

Parents are not responsible for their adult child's crimes. But in defending his son, Dan Turner reveals the value system that may have made his son's crimes possible.

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Dan Turner claims that his son “has never been violent to anyone including his actions on the night of Jan. 17, 2015,” the night of the assault. The father refuses to see the son’s sexual acts on an unconscious woman’s body as violence.

Instead, Dan Turner suggests that his son can educate students about “the dangers of alcohol consumption and promiscuity.” Neither alcohol nor promiscuity assaulted a woman behind a dumpster. The most dangerous thing that woman did was be alone with Dan Turner’s son. Turner refuses to see that.

I wish that Brock Turner were unique. The [Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2016/06/03/more-than-half-of-college-athletes-surveyed-at-one-university-admit-coercing-a-partner-into-sex/?tid=pm_national_pop_b) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2016/06/03/more-than-half-of-college-athletes-surveyed-at-one-university-admit-coercing-a-partner-into-sex/?tid=pm_national_pop_b) reported on the use of force in sex among college-age men. The research found that 46 percent of men surveyed “reported perpetrating some form of sexual coercion.” These men also scored high in the [Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf/508-assets/conf-2011-herman-irma.pdf) (http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf/508-assets/conf-2011-herman-irma.pdf) and registered very sexist beliefs on the [Attitudes Towards Women Scale](http://www.yorku.ca/rokada/psyctest/attwom2.pdf) (http://www.yorku.ca/rokada/psyctest/attwom2.pdf) . Their actions, as well as their ideas, are toxic. Every number in this research frightens me. These men could have been raised by men like Dan Turner.

Every Father’s Day, [I reflect on being raised without a father](http://www.duluthbudgeteer.com/opinion/columnists/3770179-fathers-are-not-only-male-role-models) (http://www.duluthbudgeteer.com/opinion/columnists/3770179-fathers-are-not-only-male-role-models) . I tell people “my father left” after the divorce, a lie in two ways.

First, it is a lie because it erases the strength required of my mother. In the 1970s in our Catholic family, divorce was unimaginable. My father didn’t leave us. My mother left him because he was violent. (Mom, if you read this, I regret that I have not acknowledged your strength often enough.) My father could have been raised by a man like Dan Turner.

Second, it is a lie because my father was absent the way a knife that creates a wound is absent, but the scar remains. It changed the way my mother related to men, to my sister and to me, and the way I relate to women and children, too.

I count myself lucky. Absent my father, I was denied the toxic ideas that made his violence possible. But “scoring low” myself on the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale is not enough.

So many men spew poisons into the soil where we raise our boys.

Being repulsed is not enough. If you feel a desire to do more, visit the website of [Men as Peacemakers](http://menaspeacemakers.org) (http://menaspeacemakers.org) . Support their work. I am learning, bit by bit, from their members and leadership, how to be a man in ways that repair the soil.

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