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Attitudes about women take bad path

By Verna Wyatt

In August, two Steubenville, Ohio, high-school football players were convicted of raping an intoxicated, unconscious 16-year-old girl at a party. The star football players videotaped the rape, and later disseminated it, bragging about their conquest in hundreds of texts, which is how the victim learned she had been raped.

The investigation uncovered disturbing facts. Numerous students witnessed the rape, and their attitude was “no big deal.” One boy at the party offered \$3 for anyone to urinate on the victim. (Just a joke, he said on the witness stand.) Another boy, concerned that a friend might drive drunk, actually confiscated his car keys, yet later walked by the rape in progress like it was perfectly normal.

Boys who received the video laughed about how the “dead girl” was “so raped.” When the victim reported the rape, female students sent her threatening texts. She was vilified, and the boys were somehow the victims.

We would like to believe that this is just an isolated case, or that it would never happen in our community. But the truth is, we are living in a culture that is regressing in our attitudes about women. Tennessee is no exception. The recent indictment of four Vanderbilt football players on charges of raping an unconscious student eerily mirrors the Steubenville rape.

Another sad fact: Tennessee holds the distinction of being the third-most-likely state a woman will be killed by a man.

Saturated by media portrayals of women that are lies, we are being desensitized to the truth. We listen to music that demeans women, and we reward the artist with platinum sales. Kanye West’s and Jay-Z’s lyrics in “Monster” actually say “they rape women and children.” Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines” is about how women *really* mean “yes,” when they say “no,” and some of the lyrics are about anal rape. He wants us to believe this is what women want.

I think it’s very telling that the social media networks were outraged to see Miley Cyrus “twerking” onstage while Thicke sang this very popular song at the Video Music Awards, but with no negative fallout about *his* role in the performance. He planned exactly what was going to unfold on that stage, and MTV knew what the song was about. Even Thicke’s mother reportedly was upset, saying “I was not expecting her (Miley) to be putting her butt that close to my son.” Mother must have missed her son’s music video that features topless women prancing around to his song while he is fully dressed.

I keep thinking about another song lyric by Toby Mac. It says “how do I sense the tide that’s rising, desensitizing me, living in the light of eternity.” It’s time we open our eyes to the distorted thinking about women that is becoming more acceptable. We must refuse to support music and movies that demean women and promote violence. We need to educate our young men *and* women about what healthy relationships really look like.

The Nashville YW is currently rolling out an initiative to engage and empower men to speak up and be a part of the solution to end violence against women. I think it is perfect timing, and we need to join them.