

Last week, motivated by a sense of duty, I took my nine-year old granddaughter to the film *Despicable Me 3*, my first exposure to this popular series. It turned out to be no chore at all; I laughed with a child's abandon throughout.

Except, that is, for one sobering moment, at the hero Gru's reunion with his long-unseen, toxic mother. She had pushed him into a life of crime (from which he had reformed with the advent of fatherhood) by constantly demeaning him as a child and calling him a loser. In her presence, Gru's hard-won confidence reflexively collapses. Proving he isn't despicable is basically his life's work.

Gru succeeds in transcending his mother's terrible parenting, because any other outcome in a kids' film is unthinkable. In real life, such a scenario can end quite otherwise. Mothers who hack away at their children's self-esteem are by no means rare, but there aren't many like freelance Seattle writer Jody Allard, who actually boasts in respectable publications about her methods for producing *Despicable Me*'s.

There's a problem with our confessional culture when a newspaper facilitates a mother's invasion of her son's privacy

Allard, a thrice-divorced single mother of seven children, and a rape survivor, has written several such incendiary articles. One, for the *Washington Post* in September, 2016, was a shaming indictment of her two "strong and compassionate" sons, then 16 and 18, for their failure to take up her zealous brand of activism against rape culture. The problem, as Allard framed it, was that even though her sons "are good boys and who know all about consent, (they) do not speak out about consent." Her sons, that is, "understand" her experience, but decline to take up political activism against the larger problem she claims her experience represents. It is not enough for Allard that her sons are personally "good." For Allard, goodness must be "an action." In her eyes, her sons' "passivity perpetuates the same broken system."

In another article on this subject, two weeks ago, she goes further: "I'm done pretending men are safe (even my sons)," she writes, observing that her good sons "are not safe boys." Because they are male. In this article, Allard tells us that one of her sons was (duhh) "hurt by my words, although he's never told me so." Perhaps he is the one that Allard outed as suicidal in her Feb. 2016 article, "I have to learn to care for my suicidal teen with limits but without fear." In it, Allard agonizes over her own potential implication in her son's situation (described in detail), but concludes that her son's depression "doesn't belong to me. I didn't create it and I am not responsible for it." How nice for her. Not so very nice for her son, whose troubled inner life has been put on display to the world. Allard was grossly irresponsible in writing the piece for publication. But look how far we have come in our therapeutic, confessional culture, when a mainstream newspaper considers it ethically admissible to facilitate a mother's disgraceful invasion of her son's privacy on this most sensitive topic.

Outrage has erupted over Allard. In response to one of her pieces in *Good Housekeeping* entitled, "I'm a single mom of 7 kids and never want a husband," John Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary Magazine*, tweeted last year: "This is Jody Allard,

who has said her sons are rapists manque. She is very, very ill. If you know her, do something.”

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Ill or not, Allard is at least as thick as a brick, and fixated on her vendetta against men. You have to read these articles in their entirety to grasp the full measure of the ugly symbiosis erupting from this woman’s massive ego and obsessive misandry, whose effect, unless these boys are extremely resilient, could turn one or both into Despicable Me’s on a grand scale.

In Allard’s latest article, she identifies one of her sons — the suicidal one? — as a boy “who is sensitive and thoughtful and who listens instead of reacts.” Nevertheless, she indicts him for his refusal to take up robust activism against rape culture. (“He doesn’t understand that even quiet misogyny is misogyny.”) This understanding of human relationships is deeply disturbing. Here we have the ideological slogan “the personal is the political” taken to the absurd conclusion that if sympathy for a parent’s bad experience does not lead to political action, the child’s compassion, however genuinely felt, is worthless.

Reading Allard’s articles, I could not help thinking about a friend who is an incest survivor. She told her three children her story when they were safely-launched adults and could cope with her staggering revelations about an adored, still-living grandfather. Then, comforted in the embrace of her family (which is all she wanted or expected from her children), she went on with her life. That is maturity. That is a mother who loves and respects her children. Not a woman/child who judges her children’s value according to their performance as her personal victimhood valets.

Jody Allard, Despicable You.

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