

What About Shaming the Guy Who Got Teenage Chelsea Handler Pregnant—Twice?

In response to penning a personal essay in which she talks about getting unintentionally pregnant and having abortion — twice — when she was 16 years old, Chelsea Handler has been unsurprisingly raked over the coals in social media, being called everything from a “whore” to a “murderer.” The boyfriend who impregnated her, meanwhile, has gotten nary a mention — something comic Laurie Kilmartin pointed out with a tweet on Tuesday.

“I’m waiting for the guy who got Chelsea Handler pregnant twice to be trashed by the Internet,” she wrote. “Men, it’s your choice until your sperm jumps into her vagina, then it’s her choice. She can’t abort anything until you make her pregnant.”

Similarly themed reactions — along with a lot more bile directed at the Netflix star — surfaced in the comments section of a People story about Handler’s Playboy essay, in which she talks about her lack of judgment as a youth, and how “getting unintentionally pregnant more than once is irresponsible, but it’s still necessary to make a thoughtful decision.” She noted, “I’m 41 now. I don’t ever look back and think, God, I wish I’d had that baby.”

As one People commenter pointed out, “If only men could get pregnant, there would be a lot fewer restrictions on abortion.”

One person wrote that while her “stupidity at 16” may be one thing, “defending it at 41 goes beyond stupidity.” Another claimed that Handler’s essay was “legitimizing immoral actions.”

So why the double standard? Why do these situations — those regarding sex, reproduction, and abortion — always inspire so much ire toward the woman involved and not the man? It is, at its most basic level, yet another sexist standard of “sluts” vs. “studs.” But it goes deeper, and has roots that extend into parenting norms, mass media, and educational systems, according to spokespeople from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

“Biology is part of it: Women are the ones who get pregnant and have to deal with the situation, whatever the situation may be,” Amy Kramer, senior director of media, tells Yahoo Beauty. “Chelsea Handler, in her essay, more or less lets the guy off the hook as well, saying, ‘He was not someone I should’ve been having sex with in the first place.’” She adds, “Culturally, we don’t do a whole lot with men and boys around the issue of prevention. Most education programs are not specific to boys, nor are the conversations we’re having.”

Spokesperson Jessica Sheets Pika adds, “We talk a lot to young women about their responsibility, but not about how to involve the guys if they do get pregnant.” And that idea of not involving the men, Kramer says, is a message they themselves are apparently getting “loud and clear.”

As evidence, she points in part to a recent survey of men ages 20 to 39, done by the National Campaign along with Cosmopolitan. When asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “Women should be in charge of birth control,” 57 percent of the men agreed (with the number rising to 61 percent for men between 20 and 29). And 72 percent agreed with the statement “If a woman wants a man’s opinion on birth control, she’ll ask.” Notes Kramer, “Whether it’s laziness or female-empowerment-based, dudes are trying to back off from this conversation.”

She also points out that a positive path to adulthood for girls is paved with messaging about sex and reproduction, through gynecologist visits, health classes, and women’s magazines — a health-focused culture that, for the most part, excludes growing boys.

“In the world of teen pregnancy prevention programs,” she says, “involving boys and men is something people in the field talk about all the time — and there’s no clear path forward.”

Attempts have been made to bring boys into the conversation through Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funds, and through campaigns such as the headline-grabbing 2013 ads featuring photos of “pregnant” boys, which ran in cities including Chicago and New York.

Still, notes Kramer, “Programming is important, but this is something you fight more on a cultural front,” whether through reality shows and articles that can get people talking, or at home, with families. Because it’s parents, Pika adds, who are the biggest influencers, even if it seems like teens could care less what they have to say. “Being an ‘askable’ parent is crucial in raising a good kid,” she says — boys included.