

# *Women's eNews*

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## **Columnist Dishes Dangerous Logic About Rape**

**By Jennifer L. Pozner, WeNews Commentator**

*Editor's Note: The following is a commentary. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily the views of Women's Enews.*

(WOMENSENEWS) – Fresh from the media's trusty "feminism is responsible for every evil thing in American culture" files, a new one: feminists cause rape. At least, that's the premise of an April 14 Wall Street Journal opinion piece headlined, "Ladies, You Should Know Better: How feminism wages war on common sense."

In the piece, Naomi Schaefer Riley declares women "moronic" for "engaging in behavior" that makes them rape-magnets and feminists responsible for turning women into morons in the first place. She bashes rape and murder victims as too stupid to prevent their attacks and paints an entirely false picture of campus feminist education and advocacy programs.

Learning that DNA evidence links Darryl Littlejohn – the bouncer charged in the high-profile rape and murder of New York graduate student Imette St. Guillen – to a prior sexual assault, Schaefer Riley concludes not that serial rapists must be stopped, but that women should "use a little more common sense" lest they get themselves attacked.

"Ms. St. Guillen was last seen in a bar, alone and drinking at 3 a.m. on the Lower East Side of Manhattan," Shaefer Riley writes, and "more than a few of us have been thinking that a 24-year-old woman should know better."

It's hard to imagine that many intelligent adults would look at that brutal rape and homicide and think, "Wow, what a stupid dead girl." But that's the company she keeps. Schaefer Riley's early writing on religion was subsidized by the John M. Olin Foundation, which – before it closed in 2005 – gave hundreds of thousands to help female writers such as Christina Hoff Sommers, author of "Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women," produce highly inaccurate polemics and media programs foment the idea that feminists whine too much about rape, that date rape is a "myth" and that the Violence Against Women Act is unnecessary.

### ***Dismisses the Duke Controversy***

The author also dismisses the controversy surrounding the 27-year-old African American student and exotic dancer who alleges she was raped by white Duke University lacrosse players as simply "much hand-wringing about the alleged rape of a stripper."

“A stripper with street smarts is apparently a Hollywood myth,” Schaefer Riley sniffs, since the woman didn’t anticipate the possibility of assault.

With her penchant for victim blaming Schaefer Riley promotes dangerous misperceptions about the nature of rape in America.

While it’s certainly important for women (and men) to evaluate our social behavior with an eye toward safety, staying sober and staying home does not inoculate women against sexual violence.

But keeping women safe wasn’t Schafer Riley’s real goal. Nor were St. Guillen and the alleged Duke U. victim her ultimate targets. She reserved her harshest scorn for feminists, the easy whipping girls of contemporary culture.

Schafer Riley claims feminists have created a culture of female irresponsibility. Feminists, she claims, tell college students that “if a woman is forced against her will to have sex, it is ‘not her fault’ and that women always have the right to ‘control their own bodies.’” Feminists, she says, don’t tell women how to avoid particularly threatening situations. Feminists, she says, “rarely discuss what to do to reduce the likelihood of a rape. Short of re-educating men, that is.”

### ***The Picture Is Distorted***

Problem is, the picture she paints doesn’t resemble today’s campuses. Contrary to decades of concerted attacks on college feminism, anti-rape education and organizing is very rarely limited to what Schaefer Riley describes as radical feminist warnings “that men are evil and dangerous.”

In fact, self-defense classes have become very popular on college campuses, and most schools offer awareness-raising programs on the role alcohol plays in a large percentage of sexual assaults.

Despite Schaefer Riley’s suggestion that feminists have promoted hard drinking as a gender equality issue, many women’s centers and women’s studies programs conduct campaigns to help women avoid potentially high-risk situations, advising students to avoid binge drinking, decline drinks poured by others to avoid date-rape drugs, and to attend parties with one or more friends rather than solo.

The most effective, ethical programs – certainly those that are feminist-led – note that while minimizing risk is a worthy goal, it is impossible for women to prevent sexual assault, since the majority of rape cases are perpetrated by victims’ boyfriends, husbands, relatives, friends or acquaintances, not bouncers who accost strangers in dark alleys or a gang of drunken lacrosse players.

### ***Ignoring Feminist Efforts***

Since such efforts poke a hole in Schaefer Riley’s premise, she simply ignores them.

“Whatever the problem is, it won’t be fixed this year or possibly ever, even with the best sorts of attitude adjustment,” Schaefer Riley writes. “Perhaps the law of averages says that, with 14 million men in U.S. colleges today, a few of them will be rapists. What to do? For starters: Be wary of drunken house parties.”

The moral of her story: Women who go out to bars in the city ask for rape. Strippers who work bachelor parties ask for rape. College students who get plastered ask for rape. And men who rape? It’s not worth holding them accountable for their behavior.

The contention that men are essentially violent and women just have to learn to deal is a useless strategy for sexual assault prevention. In fact, it’s downright dangerous, perpetuating the regressive idea that men can commit abusive, criminal acts with impunity and the only thing women can do to cope is to avoid alcohol, parties and miniskirts. It’s a depressing view of the world that offers women no hope of societal change, only fear and disempowerment.

The “common sense” that Schaefer Riley says feminists have trained out of women is sorely missing from her commentary, as it is from most attempts to shift responsibility away from perpetrators and onto victims.

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### ***For More Information***

Women In Media and News (WIMN): <http://www.wimnonline.org/>

Wall Street Journal – “Ladies, You Should Know Better”:  
<http://www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110008237>

Feminist Majority Foundation – Sexual Assault Resources:  
<http://www.feminist.org/911/assaultlinks.html>

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