

Rich kids, emotional poverty

When I learned that the dead body of Brian Peterson's and Amy Grossberg's infant son was found in a dumpster last month, I felt an overwhelming sense of sadness, not only for the baby but for his adolescent parents.

Having experienced the joys as well as frustrations of parenthood, it is difficult to accept any explanation for shaking a helpless infant to death, crushing its skull and disposing of the body in such a merciless way. Anyone who commits such a heinous act must accept the consequences.

At the same time, however, I feel a certain compassion for these particular suspects. Already they are being tried by the press as "two wealthy kids" who grew up in a new-money suburb of New York, drove their own cars and "hoped that their gilded, carefree lives would go on as if nothing had happened." Most likely, there is much more to the story than that.

For more than a decade, I have taught privileged adolescents. Some experience tremendous pressure to meet highly successful parents' sometimes unrealistic expectations. "Doing one's best" may not be good enough.

With that kind of pressure, the quickest and easiest way out of a serious problem often becomes the only solution. For these two, that pressure prevented them from exploring alternatives to parenthood. The fear that a newborn would cost them their privileged lives, disappoint their parents and/or earn their wrath led them to a tragic decision. And even if they are not guilty, the psychological trauma of their experience, as well as the callous scrutiny of the media, will have cost them once-promising futures.

While most of us find it difficult to believe such a savage act could be committed by two well-heeled youths, we should know better. They reflect the poverty of affluence — too many advantages and expectations, too little emotional support from home. But it would be just as wrong to blame this kind of tragedy on a privileged background as a disadvantaged one.



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Adolescence is a highly vulnerable period in anyone's life, regardless of socioeconomic circumstances. Although they are no longer children requiring a high degree of custodial care, adolescents are wrestling with a special set of emotional, physical and psychological needs. Often those needs can be met only by parents who spend quality time with them, keep lines of communication open and accept their children for the God-given interests and abilities with which they have been blessed.

Until our society can provide for those needs and raise children with a sense of compassion for others, with respect for human decency and, above all, with the character to face adversity, we will have learned nothing from this tragic event. ■

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In Opinion



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Lost values

Brian Peterson's and Amy Grossberg's upbringings reflected the poverty of affluence.

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