

“She deserved it, she was underage drinking!” is an actual response to the Steubenville case from an actual human being. Disturbingly, that is a rebuttal that many Americans agree with. When did we allow choosing to drink alcohol to be equated with choosing to be sexually assaulted? We need to rid of society’s close-mindedness and realize that no girl, whether intoxicated or not or under or over age 21, deserves to go through the life-long pain of being raped. Because if you ever have been or know someone who has been sexually assaulted and seen the pain it brings in their life every day, you would *never* say a girl “deserves it” and you would do all you can to prevent your brothers, neighbors, and friends from allowing it to happen.

Alcohol and sexual assault. The close relationship between the two is growing stronger every weekend. The usage of alcohol by the survivor and/or the perpetrator has been confirmed in the 75% of cases of sexual assault on college campuses, and that’s just the cases that someone has had enough courage to report.

So, I guess common sense would say that an effective way of reducing sexual violence would be to reduce the level of alcohol consumption, especially among college and high school-age people, a group in which it is estimated that 20 percent of women will experience a sexual assault. Easier said than done. Remember how extremely successful Prohibition was? Whether we like to believe it or not, laws don’t prevent teenagers from drinking underage. It’s a problem we will never be able to completely stop. So if we want to change these statistics, we have to take a different approach.

Parents need to continue to advise their daughters of sexual violence, but must do so much more to end this problem. Turn your focus to the perpetrator. You can start by having conversations with your sons. It is crucial they understand that sex must be consensual, and

alcohol inhibits one's ability to consent. According to Indiana state law, a person who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs cannot give consent to sex. Therefore, if sexual contact occurs, it is sexual assault, that, much like the recent case with the Steubenville boys, can result in severe jail time and the lifelong social consequences of being a registered sex offender.

Those justifying the Steubenville boys actions only because alcohol was involved are really communicating that we shouldn't expect men to control themselves, and if a woman can't defend herself from a man, well tough, because then a man will rape her. We must expect and demand that men will treat women with respect, especially when women are most vulnerable. I don't understand why we would expect anything less?

We need to change society's expectations of men. Yet unfortunately, we are fighting an uphill battle here because so many of our movies, songs and advertisements objectify women as sexual objects. And society has allowed alcohol to be an excuse for unacceptable behavior. When a man sexually assaults an acquaintance, he is seen as less responsible for his actions if he was drunk.

Most men are not rapists and would never purposefully rape a woman. But we've all heard stories of the power of alcohol. And while I am certainly not condoning their actions, it is sad to see people so young ruin their entire future, possibly because they didn't really understand the law or the consequences.

I think it's about time for all of us to step up and change the norm. Yeah, we can encourage everyone to be aware of the impact of alcohol, but let's go a little further. Let's destroy society's ability to use alcohol as a justification for violating women. Let's make it totally unacceptable for anyone to sexually assault someone, no excuses.