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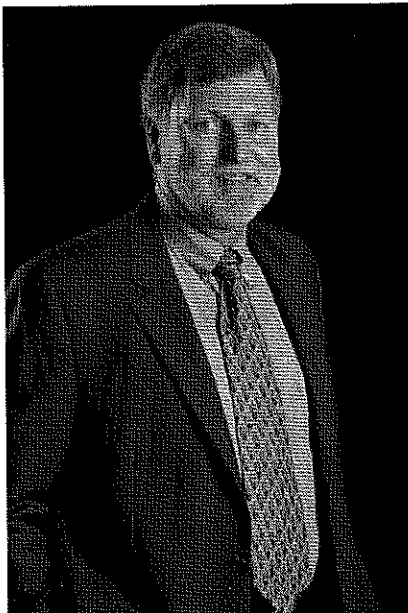
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Stop double standard over rape

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The Tennessean has recently called attention to the association of alcohol and sexual assault. We have known for many years of this close relationship, especially with acquaintance rape. The usage of alcohol by both the survivor and perpetrator has been confirmed in the majority of cases.

So, common sense would say that an effective way of reducing sexual violence would be to reduce the level of alcohol consumption, especially among collage-age people, a group in which it is estimated that 20 percent of college women will experience a sexual assault. Yet when this strategy is proposed many people question if this is blaming the victim of the crime.

I am in a unique position of working in the field of sexual violence for the past 20 years, and I am the proud father of a 21-year-old daughter. I can tell you that, on a personal

level, I have had many conversations with my daughter about precautions that she can take to attempt to keep herself safe. However, I also have seen 20 years of efforts by passionate and dedicated individuals to reduce sexual violence, and I believe that to be more successful we must broaden our focus and message.

I will continue to advise my daughter to take precautions, but we must do so much more to end sexual violence. We must turn our focus to the perpetrator. We can start by having conversations with our sons. They need to grow up participating in regular discussions about respecting women. Our sons must understand that sex must be consensual, and if someone cannot give consent, the law defines this as rape. We are fighting an uphill battle here because so many of our movies, songs and advertisements objectify women. The utilization of porn also contributes to an unreal image of women as sexual objects.

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We need to change our beliefs and expectations of men. I have heard many people pose the question: "What did she expect?" when they hear of a woman who had too much to drink and was raped. What they are really saying is that we don't expect men to control themselves, and if a woman can't defend herself a man will rape her. We must expect and demand that men will treat women with respect, especially when women are most vulnerable. Why would we expect anything less?

Many recent stories in the news have reported women being raped while others, aware that something was wrong, did nothing to stop the rape. Most men are not rapists and would never rape a woman under any circumstance. However, we all have heard the stories of upper-classmen on campus looking forward to the new crop of freshmen women so that they can get them drunk and take advantage of them.

It is time for all of us to step up and change the norm. We can encourage everyone to be aware of the impact of alcohol, but let's go further. Let's make it totally unacceptable for anyone to rape someone regardless of the circumstances. Let's all agree to be more aware and more involved and to take responsibility for ensuring that everyone is treated with respect.

Tim Tohill is the president of the Sexual Assault Center in Nashville.

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