



### Believing the Victim

Sexual abuse is nothing to take lightly, as a single non-consensual interaction with another person has the ability to leave trauma in a victim for decades. The perpetrators of sexual abuse, or more easily defined rapists, are people that prey on others, and seek only to fulfill their own pleasures without taking into consideration the well being of others. In no way should their actions ever be excused or even seen as remotely justifiable, as they literally hold the capability to destroy the psyche of the person they've harassed. The victim, rather, the survivor, should never be blamed for asking for it or being told they deserved what happened to them. They should never be belittled for what happened to them, and judged in any negative way relating to the disgusting abuse they faced.

These seem like the morally obvious answers to an issue such as sexual abuse, but why are the responses to claims of sexual abuse so varied? So often do I hear, in cases of sexual assault, that the person was not only asking for it, but that they enjoyed it. Some even go so far as to deny the sexual abuse happening entirely, arguing that the rapist is the victim in the situation. Shifts of blame such as that one are so harmful not only because they completely devalue the pain a sexual abuse survivor has felt but also because they give rapists positive platforms. People should never be given the ability to sympathize with a rapist, and when a rapist is given a positive platform as someone who was lied about or as someone who was "in a really dark place," it directly attacks the pain of the survivor. As previously stated, it literally devalues

the pain of survivors and turns them into the antagonist for simply speaking out about the pain that's been inflicted on them.

It's also important to know that rapists aren't just creeps who wear trench coats and lure people into back alleys. They can be that charismatic guy at the bar who likes to slip pills in drinks, that girl that sees nothing wrong with making love with someone fast asleep, and that person who waits until someone is far too intoxicated to consent. A rapist can be someone you least expect, someone you thought you knew, and someone you thought you could trust. It's important to realize these things about rapists because we should always believe the victim.

It's not rare to see claims of sexual abuse in the media, and, especially with the current US government, it's become worryingly common. When people hear about serial rapists or people they've never known to be rapists, they react nonchalantly, oftentimes stating that the rapists should go behind bars where they belong. However, when the rapist comes home, or when the rapist is revealed to be a well-known name, some people become defensive. They belittle the survivor and do everything in their power to prove a rapist's innocence, and those people are complacent. A person that sides with a rapist is complacent, and ignorant. Even if claims are just claims, we should choose to believe the victim. Would you rather accidentally support a liar, or a rapist? It takes so much strength for someone to tell their story, whether they reveal their identity or not. The amount of backlash that they receive, especially if they were abused by someone well known, is unfairly intense. Reaching out a supportive and understanding hand is one of the most helpful things we can do, other than fighting for justice.

A rapist is a rapist, and I, personally, refuse to see them as anything but. They might have their own personality, their own unique strand of DNA that makes them them, but once they take advantage of someone sexually in order to fuel their own sick desire, they become nothing more than a rapist to me. I have no desire to hear their side, I don't care for any excuses, and I only hope for their future to be behind bars. I hope that, while I could only briefly mention it, you choose to believe the survivor, no matter how well you thought you knew their rapist. I hope that you choose not to sympathize with the rapist, no matter what they pander to you. I hope that you become an empowering voice, and not a complacent or demeaning one.

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