

# Case Study 3: “Steubenville, Ohio: A Community’s Reckoning of Responsibility”

## Discussion Guide

2017

### Overview

This discussion guide accompanies the teaching case, “[Steubenville, Ohio: A Community’s Reckoning of Responsibility](#).” The case explores the role of social media in bringing a sexual assault incident to national attention and to trial. Two popular high school athletes sexually assaulted a teenage girl at a party. Despite evidence of their guilt based on their own boasts and eyewitnesses, many in the community refused to hold the boys accountable for their actions because of their status as star athletes on the local football team. The case was publicly exposed through social media and by hackers. “Steubenville, Ohio: A Community’s Reckoning of Responsibility” is part of a case series on violence against women that illustrates the critical role of leadership through an examination of how social factors influence women’s health. Students analyze the situations described by considering the circumstances, including the effects of media, which placed each protagonist in vulnerable positions. They then examine the commonalities and differences of these situations in an effort to understand the circumstances that affect women’s well-being. Using the cases as a framework, students analyze the connections between collective outrage, public reactions, and leadership responses. The other cases in this series are: “[India’s Daughter: The Rape that Galvanized a Nation](#)” and “[Malala Yousafzai: A Young Female Activist](#).”

### A Note to the Teacher

This case study deals with trauma and sexual assault. The prevalence of sexual and domestic violence in modern society suggests that one or several of your students may be survivors of such trauma and may, as a result, have difficulty engaging with this subject matter. For tips on how to effectively teach sensitive topics in the classroom, access the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning’s “[Equitable & Inclusive Teaching](#)” resources, as well as the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching’s “[Guidelines for Discussing Difficult or High-Stakes Topics](#).”

### Pedagogical Approach: Case Study Method

A case offers an informational narrative describing a real-life situation, with the goal of stimulating classroom discussion. This creates an active learning opportunity, where students can apply critical thinking skills and share professional experience to analyze complex, interdisciplinary scenarios. For students to maximize their learning from the case, they must immerse themselves in a case prior to class, craft their own opinion about the material, and participate actively in class discussion. During the class discussion, the instructor plays the role of the moderator, facilitating the conversation so that it illuminates different aspects of the problem described. Alternatively, instructors might divide the class into small groups, with each group discussing

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among themselves the questions included in each discussion guide. Each group might then represent their group's perspective in a class-wide discussion of the whole.

### Discussion Questions

1. Examine the [United States country profile](#) (p. 212) about violence prevention policies. Although laws exist to protect survivors of sexual assault, legal prosecution of cases is not straightforward in the U.S. Discuss the cultural and political factors that shaped the Steubenville case. What was the culture of the community?
2. How did media effects (social media, press, hacking) inform the proceedings of Steubenville case and the response following the verdict? More broadly, how should (or shouldn't) gender-based violence be addressed in this new confluence of media?
3. How were the victim, or survivor, and perpetrators represented in court, and in the various media, and by different parties?
4. While the status of social media as evidence is being addressed by the courts, how seriously do you think legal systems should consider evidence from social media?
5. Debate whether Anonymous, the "hacktivist group," should have accessed and published files of individuals they believed involved in the crime or whether there is a more important right to privacy.
6. What are some of the challenges for survivors in legal and institutional settings when reporting they have been raped?
7. How is this case similar or different than the India case, "[India's Daughter: The Rape that Galvanized a Nation](#)"?
8. What are potentially contradictory messages about sex in our society that are sent by the Steubenville case, its coverage, and media expressions?
9. Discuss the potential health consequences of the rape case at different levels: What might be the consequences for the individual across a lifetime? For the community? For the nation?
10. You're hired as an advisor to the school in which preventing sexual assault is one of your main goals. What strategies or approaches would you include in a prevention program? How might you reform student attitudes towards sexual assault? Based on the history of Steubenville thus far, what should be the relationship between the high school and local law enforcement at the level of prevention and beyond?

## Select Bibliography

### Learn about health in the United States:

United States of America Country Profile. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/countries/usa>.

### Learn about gender demographics in the United States:

United States Country Profile. Population Reference Bureau. <https://www.prb.org/international/geography/united-states>.

### Read about human rights in the United States:

United States: Events of 2022. World Report 2023. Human Rights Watch 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/united-states>.

### Explore country-specific data on gender:

Little Data Book on Gender 2019. The World Bank Group 2019. <http://data.worldbank.org/products/data-books/little-data-book-on-gender>.

### Access gender-specific data on development:

Gender Data Portal. The World Bank Group. <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender>.