SATURDAY NIGHT

Volume 7

Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard
NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

Thank you for choosing to read Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard. This year, we launched our inaugural edition in a completely online format. We wanted to make our edition more ‘green’ as well as more interactive from years past. With the new online format, we utilized more images and introduced gifs that just could not have been incorporated into our usual print format. We hope that readers find the format change more engaging and full and energy than in years past.

We have two main goals for this publication. First, we want to address the dynamics of sexual assault by expanding our understanding of what sexual assault means, where it happens, and how it impacts the lives of everyone in our society. Second, we want to make the call to action apparent. We cannot change ‘rape’ culture or the attitudes imbued in it unless we all are actively involved in the process of recognizing it and its components, making the appropriate amendments to our culture, and encouraging a healthy attitude towards sex, not one based on dominance or suppression of any gender.

Our new format will hopefully build upon the success of our past editions. We hope this format encourages you, as the readers, to talk about about rape perception and reactions to ‘rape’ culture. As a publication, we can only present the stories of those affected and the ones who witness the over-bearing machine of misogyny and ignorance in our culture today. As our readers, we invite you to share our edition with others and have open dialogues about your part in the change. Unless we stand up together and inform our friends, families, and communities, we cannot change ‘rape’ culture. So, today, we invite you to become part of the discussion and thank you in advance for any impact you will have.

The Saturday Night at Harvard team,

Parul Agarwal, Francis Cambronero, Christopher Hopper, Jenny Martin, Jonathan Stevens, and Felicia Sun
NOTES TO OUR READERS

- All names in the narratives have been changed.
- If you would like to submit narratives or commentary for future editions, please visit www.osapr.harvard.edu for more information. All submissions are held in strict confidence.
- The individuals in the graphics do not relate to the narratives in which they are featured nor does Saturday Night claim any ownership to these images.
- Saturday Night: Untold Stories of Sexual Assault at Harvard is edited by Harvard undergraduate students. Our advisor is Sarah Rankin, Director of the Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response at Harvard University.
- This publication contains a variety of opinions concerning sexual assault. As editors, we do not endorse one particular view but leave it up to you, the reader, to decide where you stand.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Saturday Night would not have been possible without the help and contributions of a few individuals. Our deepest thanks go to the Saturday Night staff: Parul Agarwal, Francis Cambronero, Christopher Hopper, Jenny Martin, Jonathan Stevens, and Felicia Sun. We also would like to extend a big thanks to Francis Cambronero who spent countless hours on the magazine’s layout design, Parul Agarwal for her creative visual input, and the staff at OSAPR for their guidance and support. Finally, this publication would not have been possible without the submissions themselves. Thank you to all our contributors for your willingness to share your stories and experiences. Your words will touch many people and will be used to raise awareness and dialogue about this important issue.
Who tells us the questions we can’t ask?
Who says when things should be kept secret?

When did I stop asking myself about it?
Where did I hide all the things I wouldn’t ask?

Why did it happen to me?
When will I stop feeling like it’s my fault?

Will I ever forget how it felt?
Will I ever feel like me again?

Why can’t anyone ask me about it?
What would I say if they did?

When do I stop feeling like it was yesterday?
When does it become ok to finally share?

Why won’t I tell you why I hurt?
Why do I fear your response about something I didn’t do?

Would you ever forgive me?
Will I ever forgive me?

Will anyone ever know what really happened?
Would anyone do anything if they did?
This is about the times when I was drunk and I told you I didn’t want to do anything. The times when I, giggly, texted you for a good-night kiss and didn’t want to do anything else, because I was new to this: I was in my first few months or so of having ever drank, and while my bloodstream negotiated relations with this ingratiating diplomat, my mind struggled to ground myself and my newfound identity in this foreign place, so full of peers who seemed to already know exactly where and what and how they were supposed to be.

I’m there and we’re kissing gently, and I have smiles and fireworks in my head. You’re pulling me in the room, begging me for certain sexual favors, certain favors that I like to give because I like to please you, and I say no. And you beg and beg—please, why is it a problem? And I am nervous as I chide you—did you forget? You don’t like when I drink. The first time I was drunk around you, you decided I was trash. You told me I wasn’t good enough for you. That we would never be together because you had standards. You hooked up with that other girl. Already I feel guilty and uncomfortable for speaking out—how will you react? Maybe I shouldn’t have said anything. Maybe I should just go.

And you say, well, you were acting ridiculous then—I can’t even tell you’re drunk now!

Maybe you just didn’t want head then, and now, since you do, you realize it’s against your best interest to voice judgment of me now. Maybe you’re playing a game to see how poorly you can treat me and still get your cock in my mouth. Or maybe you’ve realized you’ve destroyed my self-esteem enough with your criticisms and put-downs and your holier-than-thou attitude, you’ve whittled me down enough that I can’t tell that I’m better than that, that I’m deserve better than how you’re treating me. Maybe you can sense you’ve already won.

I keep objecting until finally, you tell me to leave. I’m actually smiling—you’re not serious, right?—signaling my deference as I protest. You say: let me rephrase that—how long until I don’t have to put up with you anymore?

I start crying. Because I don’t want to do it. I’m drunk and I want it to mean something if
we are intimate, like how it used to... or did it ever mean anything? I want to remember it just as well as you do. You start trying to reason with me, ever the pragmatist—obviously I'm not that drunk because we're having this conversation, so it's fine, I should just suck it. I'm telling you about the eight consecutive shots I've had. It's not an exaggeration. And now I'm begging you. I'm begging for your pity, your charity, your grace. Begging you for permission to please not suck your cock.

It wasn't always like this. You told me when we first started seeing each other that I was not just a toy to you. You told me I was special. That I stopped your heart when you saw me standing in my doorway. When I first opened up to you, I thought you were to be my salvation—you seemed strong, secure, opinionated—I liked that you didn't drink, I liked that you were religious, I liked that you said you wanted to marry your next girlfriend. You seemed perfect. But now you know you have power over me. You have admitted to me—was that a note of pride in your voice?—that you use your power just to "mess with me." But it's so much more destructive and sinister than that. You told me I was negative and abnormal and I believed it. I thought I was too fucked up to even be around other people. I was depressed. I was hurt.

You made me think it was me, that I was crazy, that I was always acting unreasonably. I always ended up being the one apologizing. When I first found out not being good enough to earn the title of your official girlfriend meant you were hooking up with other women, I was hurt. I cried. I didn't want to kiss you or give you sexual pleasure. And you got angry, demanding to know why I didn't trust you, asking what issues I had. I ended up the one apologizing and feeling horrible and like I was broken and that yes, you were right, I was too negative, I was emotionally deranged somehow; you were right to not want a relationship with me.

Why was I so needy, why was I so easily hurt? Why did I get so emotional when you told me we could never be together, that I was below you? Why did I cry so much? Why couldn't I trust? And so I was persuaded that something was wrong with me, that I was lucky to get even what I did from you—after all, who would ever want such a vile, loathsome girl like me?

It wasn't until a year later when I was learning about abusive behavior in relationships that I even realized what was going on, what you had done to me. Abusers are narcissistic: they're so damn obsessed with themselves, so steeped in their own grandiose fantasies in which they're utterly infallible, they can't see other people—the people they've wronged. They can't associate their own behavior with others' reactions—all they see is the reaction: a woman acting guarded, depressed, avoiding her significant other or maybe arguing with him. What they don't see: that they're lying and cheating, that they're threatening and suffocating her, that they're controlling her through criticism and judgment. That they hurt her, and that's why she's acting that way. All they see is a woman acting out—and that she needs to be "put her in her place." That's why we'll often hear batterers say "she had it coming."

I get it now: you literally did not understand that I did not trust you because you had broken my trust; that I was crying because you hitted me; that I had low self-esteem because you constantly put me down. Instead, you saw all those things as flaws intrinsic in me. In your mind, I did not merit human treatment. I did not evoke empathy. I was nothing to you. What was causing my actions—rather, my reactions—was of no interest to you. I was a two-dimensional object, a prop in your inner world of self-exaltation, just another means by which you could raise yourself up by putting me down.

Abusers aren't out of control of their emotions; they aren't insecure; they are in no way the simple-minded, barbaric brutes that we might expect: they are masters of control; they're highly socially intelligent; and they're absurdly full of themselves. The combination makes for master manipulators: charming, charismatic, well-camouflaged, but experts at breaking people down behind closed doors. I remember how every bit of information I revealed to you, you used against me, to undercut my emotions, my confidence, my experiences, my hopes and fears. You even managed to convince me that my parents didn't love me. You isolated me. I remember my anger and frustration when I finally tried to break out, to tell our friends what was going on between us, only to have them insist we should all stay friends, that you were a good person, a good friend, even if this romantic thing didn't work out. I'm not going to tell you you are undeserving of friendship. That's probably just my being spiteful that they chose you over me.

In retrospect it's so obvious—you forced me to give you head. You didn't stop fingering me when I started crying. You were abusing me, mentally and sexually. But at the time, I was convinced my reactions were off-base. You said you were doing it for my own good. You said you were doing things you knew would hurt me—to teach me, to drive me away, because I was no good for you—but I was so dumb, why didn't I get it? Why didn't I just learn?

What you were doing is called gaslighting, a term often used by mental health professionals to describe manipulative behavior meant to confuse victims into thinking their reactions are off-base. It's common in abusive relationships, but is terribly widespread—at home, at work, in personal relationships. Every passing comment—"you're overreacting" or "you're too sensitive"—any passing of judgment of how someone should feel can leave the victim feeling unsure of him or herself, wondering if s/he's crazy, and too guilty about being sensitive to flight back. I'm so, so deeply angry at you for doing this to me. But this is more than just a letter to complain about what a villainous fucking dick you are and dramatize my lost innocence. This is more than just a letter to share my revelation, my anguish and triumph when I realized I had been in a bona fide abusive relationship, and I survived.

This is a letter to say we live in a society that sets up women to be gaslighted—by establishing this norm that we're irrational, over-emotional, we can't control our feelings or our feelings control us. That stereotype is the reason women are so ready to accept that—yes, we are the ones in the wrong, we are overreacting, we are just being crazy. This is a letter to tell women—you're not being crazy.

And if you're being made to feel that way, you're not alone.
It appears as if I have run through a pricker-bush. 
   my insides and hidden places have fine fault lines about to 
   fall to pieces if you so dare to place one finger on me, 
and I have yet to wash the second-mouth American-Spirit smoke from my 
bitter bleeding lips.

My hands taste of ice cubes and salt licks, 
and a musty nothingness which is hard in my stomach. 
I will rinse away the pained mouthful of air, watch it curl and fall 
in avalanches to the porcelain lake where it will become the greywater. 
I will warm my cold feet, scrub the spring 
and the death of one thousand leaves off the soles.

limp bleeding carcasses held in a retriever’s tender jaw: 
a story from my scalp.

apples bruised from a late-fall storm: 
another tale inside my pores which cup an intensely human smell we try to hide, 

so we can pretend we are more than the flesh 
when we cannot escape our own.

My dear, look in my eyes. 
There are not always reasons for these happenings. 
Storm clouds roll in and break 
   your Hands are still your own 
   your Lips, 
   your Skin 
   Remember you are made of flesh, 
But it cannot will itself to stagger to your feet— 
that is for you to do.
To my ex,

I’ve been doing a lot of thinking about what in our culture makes rape so common and so often overlooked, & I’m really glad we got to talk because I’d only spoken about it to counselors in OSAPR or PCC, or other survivors, who are obviously insiders on the issue. I’ve never really gotten a “mainstream” perspective & I think some of your comments actually gave me some major insight.

First was your initial reaction, asking whether it was legit or if there were just drunken mistakes from the both of us. Clearly I somehow only get raped when I’m sober, but had there been alcohol involved and were I not absurdly educated in what rape is, I probably would have been really discouraged by that response. I had been taught that asking about alcohol / whether it was “legitimate” rape happens extremely often, but since I’d never experienced that myself that was really interesting / eye-opening to me. I was surprised at how jarring it was to have my story doubted—even if years of professional training assured me I was right—especially by a male, especially a male whom I hold in high regard. As a male that probably many people hold in high regard, and given the prevalence of the issue, I think you should really consider how you respond to someone who shares a story like that with you; the reaction of the first person a rape survivor comes out to can really shape his/her whole experience in dealing with the issue. I’m not mad or anything—like I said, I am fortunate enough to know I was raped. But there are a lot
of cases that are a lot less clear than mine—cases where alcohol was involved, or where someone doesn’t verbally say no, or even where no penis is involved at all. It’s something to think about.

The whole idea that a girl might prefer to call regretted sex rape is incredibly common and something that I deal with at OSAPR workshops all the time—I think guys are worried about it just logistically / legally, like no one wants to be falsely accused and convicted of rape, so obviously they worry and can get defensive about it. That can make my job as a workshop leader really tough sometimes, but I get it. I usually give the whole “rape has the same percentage of false reporting as any other crime, when’s the last time you heard of someone falsely reporting arson??” and trying to stress that the vast majority of rapes go unreported (over 50%, estimated 95% on college campuses), an astounding low percentage don’t make it to court, the attrition rate is 6% blah blah blah. But I hadn’t considered the intellectual / cultural implications of the idea that being raped is somehow preferable to some genres of consensual sex until you brought it up. It implies that we live in a world where it’s more socially acceptable for a girl to get raped than to simply have sex that was in some manner insufficiently ladylike (ie, while drunk, or outside of some manner of monogamous relationship, or purely for pleasure, or with someone your friend mentioned she wouldn’t touch with a 10 ft pole, etc).

Regretted sex is a thing. Pretty mediocre sex is a thing. Sex with partners that you’re embarrassed about is a thing. Telling your friends, I only hooked up with him because I was drunk—definitely a thing. Telling your friends I only hooked up with him because he raped me... not a thing. You don’t wake up the morning after a wild night and go “Oohhh, why did I do that...” but then smile and nod to yourself, “well, it’s ok, I was just raped.”

First of all, rape is not a comforting thing. I don’t like being a rape survivor. I was sitting at bible study last Friday and the pastor was giving a speech about how the Holy Spirit literally spoke to him and told him that some girl in his audience was being raped by her father, and so he sought her out and got her help blah blah blah. I hate that I have to hear some gimmicky thespian tear-jerker like that and start crying uncontrollably. I don’t like feeling like a victim and nothing but a victim, feeling fucked up and damaged and completely powerless to help myself. Telling my friends I was raped was horrifying—mustering up the words was hard, looking at their faces while I told them was soul-crushing. Nothing is the same now. I feel like they’re afraid for me, they’re afraid of me. They’re afraid of what I’ll do to myself. They don’t understand me. Everything has changed. When they ask to hang out with me I wonder if it’s just because they pity me. When they ask if I’m okay I wonder if they think I’ve gone off the deep end finally. Rape happened when a boy made the decision not to respect my mind or my body and he fucked me and fucked up my whole life. Rape did not happen in retrospect, when I thought about it a bit and decided it was not consensual and that makes me feel better.

But returning to the idea—that rape is something that makes sex excusable. That, in a way, it’s better to be raped than to be “easy” or a “slut.” This is a crazy idea and I’m starting to think we really do live in a world where this is true—now hear me out... let me see if I can explain how I got here.

You asked if I was mad at him for “playing just the tip.” First, the normalcy of that suggestion threw me off. Like this is just something that guys do, they sneak the tip of their penises in unwilling girls’ vaginas and that’s just their MO. It makes girls mad at them, like in the way like girls get mad at their boyfriends for xyz, but in the end, what can you do? There go those silly boys, “playing just the tip” again.

That’s a funny phrase, “just the tip.” I mean that it gets laughs. I laughed. Then it got me thinking, my rape story could have been funny. It’s probably funny to my rapist. If he told his friends, they probably found it hilarious, and congratulated him on a job well done. I’m imagining he texted his friends about it. It’s comedic gold. This is how my rape story would read as a Text From Last Night, and probably make the Top Texts list:

(956): Promised this chick I wouldn’t have sex with her. Then I slipped her the tip and came right in her pussy. She ran out of the room crying =]

Similar texts include:

(617): Told her I couldn’t ctrl myself bc she was soooo hot. She totally bought it & is even buying her own plan B x)

Or:

(301): Best elective surgery ever. Having a great time ignoring girls’ pleas to pull out and blowing it inside anyway. I like to watch them absolutely freak out and go batshit crazy for 20 mins before I mention the snip-snip surgery. Power trip.

Or:

(732): Told her putting it in her ass was an accident. Classic

One of these is actually a real TFLN. Crazy, isn’t it? I’m sure I could find more that
demonstrate my point but I got pretty depressed reading all these shitty, shitty texts and quit.

In our culture, the stereotypical guy’s goal is pretty clear: to get laid. “Men only want one thing” or whatever. I was pretty clear on that one to begin with, but here’s the kicker: the best way to do it is to dupe the girl. Seriously, men who manage to trick a girl into sex are celebrated, hence ideas like “just the tip” or “surprise butt sex” exist and are somehow funny / normalized (someone I know was recently analetly raped by a long term partner with whom she had consented to vaginal sex, and I think her story from the guy’s perspective could probably make a hit tfn, too—that’s why it’s on the mind. I never got analetly raped).

At first I was thinking, these are just assholes on TFLN who’re making shit up for attention. But there are real live guys out there who definitely think getting their dick wet is best done with deception—or even that it’s the only way there are able to do it.

I experienced it firsthand with a guy last year—I had this guy telling me how I was special, that he missed me, that he planned to make me dinner and take me out to dessert, but how sexually forward he was made me feel like something was off. I eventually got him to admit he was just looking to hook up, which is okay with me and was actually kind of what I was looking for. But here’s the thing: telling me he loved kissing me and I’m beautiful and trying to add that more-than-just-physical shit actually made me more hesitant. Like think about it this way, if even the guy thinks the only plausible way he can get sex is by lying to the girl and establishing the pretense that there is something more there, he’s operating on the assumption that no girl would willingly have just sex—that they have to be duped into doing it. It’s almost like the only acceptable way in which a girl can partake in casual sex is if a guy tricks her into it. I feel like I would have had absolutely 0 moral opposition to hooking up with him had he not embodied that moral judgment in it FOR me—by going to such lengths to hide his true intentions, he implies his true intentions are unacceptable / at the very least, that girls are not supposed to be amenable to that.

While it’s pleasantly ironic that this guy essentially created himself by trying to mask his own promiscuity and thereby perpetuating the idea that promiscuity is shameful, the underlying idea, that men routinely deceive women about their sexual intentions, is still alarming. Maybe this is very trivial / obvious to you, but I feel like I just figured it out and just made the connection to rape culture. The model is that men want sex and women don’t, so they must obtain it through some manner of subterfuge. Thus, men are congratulated for successfully fooling a woman—or better yet, multiple women. You can see how operating under this model, ideas like “just the tip” or “surprise buttsex” become normalized or humorous. Women aren’t supposed to want to have sex. They’re supposed to get tricked into it—that’s what we hear in the media, that’s what men are prepared to do. And what happens if a woman does want to have sex—she’s a slut. If you claim to be raped, you’re just trying to cover up for being a slut. But if you do get raped, that was normal, I mean how could you trust a man, notoriously deceptive and sex-driven as the species is, to NOT have sex with you against your will? Maybe you shouldn’t take such big risks next time, and just never kiss or get naked with a man you’re not prepared to have sex with. That’s called “being a tease” or “leading him on,” and you know the fair punishment for that is rape.

This is, of course, totally absurd. But this is exactly what C said to me when I told her what happened to me—that I should never get naked with men. She made a great analogy about how getting naked with a guy who promises not to have sex with you is like opening up your city walls to orcs who promise not to sack your village. She said she wasn’t blaming me or anything—she just said I should never do it again, you know, for my own safety. Because she cares about me, she wants me to stop doing things that put me at risk of getting hurt.

But I don’t want to live in a world where men are orcs. I tried to explain to her that I trusted him because nothing about him was remotely untrustworthy or orclike. We had been hooking up for ages and he never made me feel weird about not wanting to have sex. We communicated about it A LOT. Like, it got to the point where I had taken some other guy home, and he was getting kind of aggressive about taking my clothes off and I freaked out and had to leave—and I went to his room. Because I trusted him and he made me feel safe and he was so kind and understanding about my issues with sex. My rapist was literally the last person I expected to rape me. But this did not compute for C. It was so easy for her to believe that that was his plan all along and that I just didn’t see it, because I’m a silly dupable girl. Because that’s how we’re trained to think—that men are designed to dispense semblances of respect for their fellow human beings before they attack, but what’s more, they can’t help it. They’re just orcs.

That’s fucked up. The world we live in is really fucked up. But I’m learning a lot from people’s responses to my rape story about what in this culture primes reactions to rape and doing a lot of thinking about what I can do to change the culture. I hope you find this message helpful / interesting and also start to be more percceptive about aspects of our culture that normalize rape. I also just wanted to say I think you’re a stand-up guy and you taught me that I can have good sexual experiences and that sometimes trusting people is worth it.

Love, a Survivor

*hooking up for ages and he never made me feel weird about not wanting to have sex. We communicated about it A LOT. Like, it got to
I am afraid of parties,  
Of finals clubs,  
Of drinking.  
I am afraid to go out  
And have the stereotypical college good time.  
I am afraid to talk to new people  
Who aren’t friends of friends  
Who haven’t been vetted as cool and trustworthy.  
Because my friends are all great;  
They never do anything I don’t want to do.  
And if we go too far,  
Well, that’s my fault  
For not knowing my limits before going in.  
And I can’t even imagine how awful that would be  
With people who aren’t my friends,  
Who I may never see again,  
Who don’t care about me,  
And who won’t be criticized if I run home crying.  
But the truth is,  
I want to meet new people,  
Make new friends,  
Maybe even find someone special.  
My friends are great,  
But more would be even better, right?  
More perspectives, more voices, more insights,  
More people.  
But I am afraid of meeting people,  
Of them dismissing me as nothing more than female  
Because I wear skirts and dresses and low cut shirts  
Because I have breasts and hips and a waist and long hair  
Because I enjoy being adorable outside of the classroom.  
Because, you see, I am more than female.  
I am a person, full of thoughts and fears and love.  
Who needs to be treated as a person  
Or she breaks.  
And so I am afraid of parties  
Where no one knows my name,  
Let alone me.
You can’t be friends with a rapist, they said,
You’d never let a rapist hang out in your crowd.
You don’t go to crazy raves or sleep around,
That kind of friend just wouldn’t be allowed.

It’s easy to avoid rapists- they all look the same,
They feed people drinks and act super sleazy,
You wouldn’t meet that kind of person, so just relax,
Avoiding that kind of friend is far too easy.

But he can’t be a rapist, he’s got too many friends.
A rapist can’t be handsome, funny, or charming,
They don’t do well in school or plan nice dates.
You’d know if a person’s behavior was harming.

A rapist doesn’t dress so well or smell so nice,
They don’t cheer you up and make people laugh.
They aren’t the leaders of their organizations,
Or deal with added frustrations on your behalf.

Rapists don’t comfort you when you’re upset,
Or offer to help you with your homework.
He’s not a rapist; he doesn’t fit that description.
At worst, a few times he’s acted like a jerk!

You can’t go on trips with a rapist,
And you wouldn’t go out to bars with one.
You wouldn’t hang out every weekend,
A rapist would definitely not be so fun.

You wouldn’t have great memories with a rapist,
You couldn’t possible care about that kind of person.
You wouldn’t have great conversations,
So drop these accusations before opinions of you worsen.

But most of all you go to heavenly Harvard,
There aren’t any rapists here.
Going to a great place like this takes care of that,
You couldn’t even know a rapist, have no fear.

Rapists aren’t our peers or our classmates,
They don’t live in our houses or dorms.
They don’t eat in our d-halls or share common spaces,
Anyone who says otherwise, surely misinforms.

Rapists don’t go to Harvard.
Trust us. You can’t be friends with a rapist.

So many people still call him friend,
It may be so clear but they keep on denying.
It’s not easy to see someone for who they are,
It took me a long time to finally stop rationalizing.

You can’t be Friends with a rapist
12 April 2013
I'm wearing a skirt and scarf and my favorite pair of brown flats.
I could wear this stuff to church,
I don't go to church,
but I could wear it there
if I wanted to.

At the frat, we play flip cup.
Our team wins
I'm a winner

win (v): Get something for defeating others

Music on, pulsing
heads bob
up
down
up
down
up

I'm drunk, I feel it. The room is moving a little. This feeling, it's not unpleasant. I move upstairs with him.

Him.
What's his family like? Does he have a mother? A sister?
A sister who drinks and smokes and wears her favorite pair of brown flats to a frat?
He packs the bowl and I hold the smoke in my lungs.
He pushes me down on the bed.
I'm not a virgin. I've done this before.
But not like this.
No.

I don’t remember that word
I forget how to say it.
The smoke and alcohol and fear has made me mute.
No.

I’ve said that word so many times before. In so many stupid trivial instances
“Want me to grab you a cookie?”
“Have you done the problem set?”
“Going home for Thanksgiving?”
No.

And now, I can’t say it. What are the letters? The sound?
My tongue feels thick, unresponsive. There’s another one in my mouth.
Get out.

I hold my skirt down.
My skirt that could be in church I hold it down
But he is stronger.
He wins.

win (v): Get something for defeating others

Music on, pulsing
Out
In
Out
In
Out

In
Out
He leaves me and I can't find my shoes.
My favorite brown flats.

I walk outside barefoot and my friend sees me and walks me back to her room because my room is too far away and I realize I'm not wearing any underwear but I don’t tell her anything not one thing because I am ashamed so ashamed and her roommates have already moved out so she puts me in the room next door where there’s no pillows or sheets on the bed but there are other bodies in the room too tired to walk home other people from the party I do not recognize but I fall asleep anyways because I am so tired and so numb and my feet hurt from walking home barefoot.

I wake up, and someone is on top of me.
His fingers are inside of me
Sleeping beauty
Is that supposed to be a fairy tale?
Don’t touch her! She’s sleeping! Let her have peace!

He notices I’m awake and stops after a while.
When he is ready.
Was that rape? If it was fingers and not a penis?
If he got off when I woke up?
But it feels worse than the first time a few hours earlier

Because, who gets raped twice on a Friday night?

I do.

I work Friday nights now, 9-2.
There is a wooden bar between me and the customers, so they can’t touch me.
I work and try to forget.

I tell myself that I shouldn’t be defined by rape.
But I am.
They will always have a piece of me because they held my soul in their hands.
I’m defined by something I don’t tell anyone
Not even my best friend.

I might tell you someday, Please.
Please don’t try to fix me when I tell you.
Listen and understand.
I'm fixing myself.

But don’t look away from me either.
Love me. ■
Your room was mine. I spend my nights there sleeping next to you. I spent my days there studying with you. I had a key. Your space was mine. Everything about me was yours.

I never noticed the way you’d slide into an empty seat next to me and everyone else would leave. I thought they were just being respectful of our bubble, the bubble of new love and lust. That clungly sweet phase of pet names and sideways glances at all times of day. You told me that you would be my secret keeper, and I believed you. We fought and I cried and you kissed me. We made love day after day. Sometimes, though, it was too much. Too fast, too rough, too all those other things... but I had you and that’s what counted.

My father had problems with alcohol, that you knew. But when I pushed you away, the smell of shots on your breath and your hands grabbing me too tightly, it became an argument. We fought until dawn because you didn’t understand the way it made me feel. You thought I should be made to feel guilty—but I wasn’t trying to make you the villain; it just made me uncomfortable, that rough grab and the way you tried to rip my clothes off, don’t you see? You already had me earlier today! Tomorrow would be better. I know you’re a good guy.

I didn’t get to disagree.

So in that room, our room, the room where I felt safe and told you all my secrets... in that room, you violated me. You had no clothes on and, soon, neither did I.

You tried to throw me into the common room where your roommates were talking and laughing. You wanted to humiliate me. You said that rejection embarrassed you, so you wanted me to feel the same way. I didn’t understand what you meant by that and I still don’t. I cried and begged. You pushed me back onto the bed and turned me over. I felt you thrust against me, pulling by my shoulders. I winced. I went silent.

Did I want this? No.

I closed my eyes and whispered your name. Please don’t, I said. Not like this. Calm down, you said. And I was calm when you didn’t stop. And just like you always wanted, I didn’t drink and I didn’t see my friends and I didn’t fight with you. I told you that what you did was wrong... you don’t see why. Now I won’t talk to you, and you wonder why.

So, sometimes, I think about it or write about it, and, rarely, tell anyone about it. When I write I see how many words in my story are you. But I can’t cut them out. I can’t cut you out of the story. This story, that is. But, I write about other things, about love and adventure and fantasy. And my diary entries from the past few weeks don’t even mention you. No one asks about you anymore. But some things will always stay the same.

You were my best friend. You raped me.
There is a marked difference in guys’ and girls’ sense of how it is permissible for them to behave in bed...

I made this revelation first when I asked my boyfriend at the time if he had only had sex with me this one night, when we were in the midst of a very passive aggressive fight, if he only did it because he felt like I wanted or expected him to. I had asked because the sex that night had felt very different—I had felt very distant from him, I had been in a lot more pain, and it had almost felt like he had been trying to hurt me. I thought maybe it was because his heart wasn’t in it or he hadn’t really wanted to. He said no. He said he would never have sex with someone if he didn’t want to.

On the one hand I was relieved that this was something I’d never have to worry about with him, but then I realized that if I lived by the same mantra, perhaps we wouldn’t have had sex that night. Or perhaps we would have, because I still would have wanted it in the beginning, but perhaps I would have stopped it when I realized something was off, and that the experience was actually destructive / frightening / would color the entire rest of our relationship in my mind. Instead I just tried to convince myself I was imagining things and waited for things to get better.

Then there was the time we were talking about having sex while I was on my period. We ultimately agreed to do it, and on one point I was sitting on his lap and pulled my underwear aside and made direct shaft-vulva contact, he told me to stop. Because that grossed him out. I’m pretty sure he made a disgusted face. He wasn’t worried about hurting my feelings, he wasn’t worried about ruining the moment, he wasn’t worried about not coming across as sexy studly cinematic perfection. He knew he didn’t want bloody pussy on his bare cock and he wasn’t afraid to make that clear. I’m thinking back to all the times when guys have smeared their oozing cock-tips on my breasts or buttckoks and felt completely disgusted, but did absolutely nothing about it but hide my revulsion or maybe try to convince myself this was sexy.

Because deference is ingrained in me. Docility is expected of me. To such an extent that I didn’t even realize, until these interactions with my boyfriend, that it didn’t have to be that way.

It’s really not that hard to be against rape—it’s pretty intuitively bad, you know, the whole violation of the body, subjugation of will, destruction of personal autonomy thing. It is only marginally tougher, I feel, to be against rape jokes or anything that perpetuates rape culture by trivializing and normalizing rape. The point of OSAPR, the point of these publications, etc, isn’t to teach people that rape is bad. If I met someone who didn’t understand that, there’s really nothing I could do.

Sometimes that’s a really discouraging thought. It’s like, what difference do I, do my words make? People who get it are obviously against rape; people who don’t get it, won’t get it. I can either sow my seeds on the path, the rocky ground, among thorns, or there’s already a load of crop growing there. Honestly, that’s how it feels sometimes.

But recently I’ve figured out that there are more nuanced issues. That there’s still a lot of pondering to be done about the gender norms underlying rape culture. That even I had room for more seeds. Here are some things that fall somewhere on the scale of normal-douchey to really dickish in our culture that I didn’t realize are actually completely unacceptable in terms of consent:

—Telling your sexual partner to slow down / stop going so hard, and being ignored.

—Consenting to one kind of sex and having your partner begin another kind of sex without asking.

—Consenting to being penetrated by one thing, and having your partner put in something else without asking.

—Not being fully penetrated, but you didn’t consent to any penetration.

—Consenting to sex but not to being come in; being come in anyway (consider: if he says he’ll pull out but doesn’t; if he can tell the condom broke but doesn’t stop).

—Being come on without consent.

Etc.

Why has it taken me this long to learn that these things are rape-y in quality? Because that’s not what I’ve been taught. I have actually had more than one friend that I’ve told about my terrible sexual experiences admonish me with, “have you learned your lesson?” The lesson they wanted me to learn was not “speak up when you’re uncomfortable during sex—because you matter, too.” It wasn’t “you can stop sex that is happening to you, with a loving partner, if you aren’t enjoying it anymore. That’s actually an option.”

“And what’s more, if you ask your loving partner to stop and he doesn’t, he is in the wrong.”

If a girl consents to sex but tells the guy he’s hurting her, to slow down / be gentler, and he doesn’t listen, he doesn’t have her consent to have sex with her in that manner. It’s absurd that I didn’t realize that. I just saw it as kind of an occupational hazard of sex—that sometimes it might not go the way you want, you might not enjoy it, you might be uncomfortable or in pain sometimes.
scared. And that's still somewhat true—like, not every time is going to be mind-blowing and perfect. But I'm realizing more and more every day that there are ways you can try to prevent it from going horribly awry that I didn't even realize were within my right to try. I'm writing this now because it's taken me ages—ages and ages—of passively trying to stick out sex that I felt I had gotten myself into, trying to convince myself it would get better if I just waited it out, because I just didn't realize I could opt out. Or maybe I didn't know how. Or maybe I was afraid to.

I didn't realize that I could stop not just sex, but touching—touching that I didn't want, but felt I had invited by inviting a guy into my bed—and after time after time of first saying "no, stop, I really don't want to," then trying to ignore it, then physically removing offending hands and having the guy stop only to start up again, and thinking, "I've already done everything, I can only lie here as unresponsively as possible until he loses interest"—after all that, I finally realized, I can yell. I can slap him. I can punch him. I can throw him out. I can do all the things that I'm afraid of him doing. Does this sound incredibly obvious? Probably. Probably, because this is what we're told to do all the time—"why didn't you fight back? Why didn't you kick him in the balls? If it was this tricky piece of writing because no matter what, I want to stress that being violated is never a victim's fault. And telling women to value themselves and stand up for themselves, while empowering in some way, can be counter-productive and even diminish a woman's value of her own body, because it operates on the assumption that a man owns it by default—assumes that a man has the right to do as he wishes with a woman's body, without asking, unless that right is expressed / violently denied him. The assumed default course of action is "man, proceed with what you're doing"—hence this clamor from victim-blamers and rape apologists that he must have a strong message in order to stop. Why is that? The default should be "man, have respect for woman's body and her wishes for her body,"

"I didn't know it was worth it to fight back, that my body was worth it, that I was worth it. I know I'm not the only person who didn't know. It's absurd that I live in a world where we don't know."

This is a tricky piece to write because no matter what, I want to stress that being violated is never a victim's fault. And telling women to value themselves and stand up for themselves, while empowering in some way, can be counter-productive and even diminish a woman's value of her own body, because it operates on the assumption that a man owns it by default—assumes that a man has the right to do as he wishes with a woman's body, without asking, unless that right is expressed / violently denied him. The assumed default course of action is "man, proceed with what you're doing"—hence this clamor from victim-blamers and rape apologists that he must have a strong message in order to stop. Why is that? The default should be "man, have respect for woman's body and her wishes for her body,"

sword. It can be used to empower women, but also to put women down. I assume to make sure it comes across as just empowering: I don't ascribe to a belief system where someone must fight tooth and nail for his or her own body. But I'm also now unfettering myself from a belief system where a woman can't—because she'd rather lie there and be violated. Because her body exists for male sexual gratification, because she has no conception of her own needs or desires let alone the will to assert them, because she's willing to not enjoy sex because it's not hers to enjoy—because it's not about her pleasure. It's hard to shift my mentality in such a way because that's exactly not what society has been teaching me. Indeed, what was it that my friends have expected me to learn? It was always something more like "be more careful," which means, "don't get naked with someone you're not prepared to have sex with." But this is preposterous. Whether you're in a monogamous relationship or a one-night stand, you can't always tell if you want to have sex before partaking in some of the thing leading up to sex, which may or may not involve getting naked. Society's lesson has been, "crossing X border signifies that you have signed over all rights to your body." And this threshold, society tells us, could conceivably be anywhere: penetration, oral, nudity, kissing, being alone with someone late at night, having shown up to a party, letting him pay for dinner. And that's why it took me so long to learn that's not the case at all. That's why I honestly didn't know I even had the option to speak up—in my relationship, or in my hookups. I didn't know it was a legitimate thing to put stock in how I was feeling Viss-a-vis coitus, because I thought I had forfeited myself entirely, I thought consenting to sex was the greatest martyrdom I could perform for my partner.

I finally did "take a stand" last night, and only just barely. I was tired of pulling this man's fingers out of me over and over again and saying "I just want to sleep. Let's go to sleep.
I want to go to sleep,”” and so I got out of bed and took my blanket and slept in the common room. I had a really hard time kicking him out in the morning, and even though I went out of my way to be the least confrontational I could— I had my phone alarm go off and pretended like I had somewhere to be, insisted that I had to make my bed in a ploy to get him out of it—still, it felt like I was being too pushy and doing everything against my nature. It didn’t help that he kept telling me to relax and acting like I was being unreasonable as I became more and more distressed. Finally I broke down crying and told him what he had done last night, for which he apologized profusely. He didn’t remember any of it; he had been completely blackout. He told me I should have slapped him and forced him to leave. It doesn’t feel great to be told You Should Have Just __. I pointed out that I had tried to get him to do a number of things and he had simply ignored me—not jumped on my very structurally unsound bed, for example, and not made my covers dirty and not slept underneath my sheets. I can’t say that slapping him would have helped or that I would have been able to kick him out that night. But I’m finally, finally starting to see standing up for myself as less of an admonition and actually as an option. Because I’m worth fighting for. So, even if violence isn’t always the best option, nor will it always work, I feel like I’m finally realizing, yeah, I can and I “should” take action, and that’s a step in the right direction. So yeah, maybe even I have some lessons I have left to learn. ■
RESOURCES AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Saturday Night exists to provide a voice to primary and secondary survivors of sexual violence, and to promote awareness of this violence on campus. Our hope is that reading these stories will galvanize our community into changing the culture that has espoused the interpersonal violence found in this publication. Following are specific actions that can be taken to prevent future incidents of sexual violence:

- Explore personal behaviors and attitudes related to interpersonal or sexual violence.
- Challenge friends and family who jokingly or flippantly refer to sexual violence and/or its victims.
- Intervene if a person appears uncomfortable with sexual advances or with aggression from a partner. If the situation is too dangerous, call the police or enlist the help of an appropriate third party.
- Communicate with sexual or romantic partners about expectations and what each partner wants. When in doubt, ASK.
- Join campus groups dedicated to eradicating sexual violence
- Volunteer for Response, Harvard’s sexual assault and relationship peer support line. Email HarvardResponse@gmail.com or call 617-495-9600 for more information.

ETHICAL DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RAPE

The contributors to this publication believe that all responsible community members should espouse behavior that adheres to the highest standard of ethical conduct. Inasmuch as Harvard University places inestimable value on the safety and well-being of its community members, actions that cause emotional and physical pain, violate the autonomy of another person, and disrupt the community may not be found criminal but are deemed unacceptable. The following ethical definition of sexual assault perpetuates the expectation that no community member shall intentionally instigate or participate in an act of sexual violence against another:

Sexual assault is any sex act against a person’s will, regardless of how that willingness is conveyed. We believe that anyone initiating sexual activity has the responsibility to ensure that his/her partner is comfortable with the activity. This includes behaviors in which a partner is unable to freely give consent through physical incapacitation, social pressure, intimidation, etc. In a community of talented leaders, we ought to be able to engage in mature relationships that go beyond the scripts into which we have been socialized.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES DEFINES SEX OFFENSES AS FOLLOWS:

- Rape includes any act of sexual intercourse that takes place against a person’s will or that is accompanied by physical coercion or the threat of bodily injury. Unwillingness may be expressed verbally or physically. Rape may also include intercourse with a person who is incapable of expressing unwillingness or is prevented from resisting, as a result of conditions including, but not limited to, those caused by the intake of alcohol or drugs. Rape includes not only unwilling or forced vaginal intercourse, but also the sexual penetration of any bodily orifice with a body part or other object.
- Sexual assault includes any unwanted touching or fondling of a sexual nature that is accompanied by physical force or threat of bodily injury.
- Sexual misconduct may also include other serious or persistent unwanted sexual contact or conduct, such as harassment, threats, intimidations, or unwanted touching or fondling.
RESOURCES AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

RISK REDUCTION: GUIDELINES TO MINIMIZE THE RISK OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Responsibility for sexual assault lies with the perpetrators of such crimes. Remember that only perpetrators of sexual violence can prevent sexual assault. However, there are things that others can do to reduce the risk of being assaulted:

- Communicate! Talk to your partner about what you want and what you don’t want in a sexual encounter or in a relationship. Make sure your partner verbally consents to all aspects of the encounter. When in doubt, ASK.
- When you go to a party, go with a group of friends. Arrive together, watch out for each other, and leave together.
- Make a plan (ahead of time) and share it with your friends. Consider how much you plan to drink, how far you want to go sexually, and what kind of secret ‘help’ signal will let your friends know if or when you would like for them to intervene and get you out of a situation.
- Trust your instincts. If a person seems shady or a situation doesn’t feel right, then it probably isn’t. Get to a safe place.
- Drink in moderation and know your limits. Don’t leave your beverage unattended or accept a drink from an open container.
- Challenge a culture that supports rape.

RELATIONSHIP (DATING) VIOLENCE

Relationship violence (also known as intimate partner, domestic or dating violence) is a pattern of controlling behaviors exerted by one partner over the other. This control can take many forms, including verbal abuse, physical battering, sexual assault and emotional abuse. Intimate partner violence occurs in all socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, national and religious groups. It occurs in heterosexual and same-sex relationships at about the same rates. It affects people of all ages, genders, and physical abilities. If you or someone you know is in a relationship that is abusive or unhealthy, contact one of the resources listed on the reverse side. Above all, remember that absolutely no one has the right to cause emotional or physical harm. If you are unsure what to do, you have many options—do not be afraid to seek help. If you are concerned about a friend or loved one, or recognize signs of abuse in any relationship, please contact one of the campus resources (see p. 28-29) for support and information.

A Relationship Bill of Rights:
- I have the right to an equal relationship with my partner
- I have the right to choose not to be physically or sexually intimate with my partner at any time
- I have the right to change my mind
- I have the right to be myself as long as I am respectful of others
- I have the right to be respected
- I have the right to terminate a relationship when my feelings change
- I have the right to reject unwanted attention
- I have the right to say “no” and have my decision be respected
RESOURCES AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

WHY MEN SHOULD CARE ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Men rape: The vast majority of sexual violence, and violence in general, is committed by men. Even when men are victimized, it is most often by male perpetrators.
- Men are raped: Studies show that 10-20% of men are the victims of sexual violence at some point in their lifetimes.
- Rape confines men: The staggering level of male-committed violence fosters a society in which relationships with men are often approached with fear and mistrust, and where all men are labeled “potential rapists.”
- Men know survivors: Given the frequency of sexual violence perpetrated across this country every year, it is likely that every man is close to someone who has survived sexual violence.
- Men can stop rape: Beyond rapists making conscious choices to avoid using sex as a tool of power, all men can play a vital role in the process of challenging rape-supportive attitudes and behaviors, as well as raising awareness about the damaging impact of sexual violence.

10 THINGS MEN CAN DO TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

1. Realize that sexual violence is a men’s issue that affects women and men that you care about.
2. Don’t remain silent: Confront the abusive behavior of other males.
3. Understand how your own attitudes and actions may perpetuate sexism and violence and work toward changing them.
4. Gently offer your help and support if you suspect that a woman close to you is being abused or has been or will be sexually assaulted.
5. Respect women and treat them as equals.
6. Be an ally to women who are working to end all forms of gender violence.
7. Recognize and speak out against homophobia and gay-bashing.
8. Educate yourself and others about gender socialization, gender inequality, and the root causes of gender violence.
9. Mentor and teach boys about how to be men in ways that don’t involve degrading or abusing girls and women.
10. Refuse to purchase any magazines, videos or music that portray women in a degrading or victimized manner.

Adapted from 10 Things Men Can Do to Prevent Men’s Violence Against Women by Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Program
RESOURCES AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

RESOURCES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RELATIONSHIP SURVIVORS

Absolutely no one has the right to cause emotional or physical harm to another. If you are unsure what to do or how to help a friend, you have many options—do not be afraid to seek help!

At Harvard
- Office of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response
  Staff at OSAPR can help you access information and resources as well as provide non-judgmental support. 24-hour assistance, including: information and support for students who have experienced any kind of sexual assault or relationship violence, accompaniment for reporting or to medical care at UHS / Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital (for medical evidence collection), information and support for friends, roommates, and partners of survivors, and other services as needed. 731 Holyoke Center, 1330 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138
  24-Hour Information and Support: (617) 495-9100
- SASH (Sexual Assault/Sexual Harassment) Advisers
  SASH advisers are specially trained to respond confidentially to a report of sexual assault or relationship abuse. There are 2-3 SASH advisers in each yard grouping and House. Contact your house administrators to identify the SASH Advisers in your house.
- Response
  Response is a confidential peer counseling service, staffed by women counselors who deal with rape, date rape, incest, abuse and sexual harassment. The Response center is open for drop-ins from Sunday-Thursday, 9 p.m. to midnight in Lowell House basement (Room E-013). Their confidential phone line is available from 9 p.m. to 8 a.m. (617) 495-9600
- University Health Service (UHS) Medical and After-Hours service
  Medical care, and medications at night and on weekends: Holyoke Center (617) 495-5711.
- University Health Service (UHS) Mental Health Service
  Individual and group counseling and after-hours crisis counseling, Holyoke Center. (617) 495-2042
- Bureau of Study Counsel
  Individual and group counseling: 5 Linden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138 (617) 495-2581.
- Harvard University Police Department (HUPD)
  The HUPD’s Sensitive Crime Unit, which includes detectives from the Criminal Investigation Division and female patrol officers, have been trained extensively in the investigation of sexual offenses and the impact of the crime on the victim. Contact the Sensitive Crimes Unit anytime at 617-495-1212, or call 617-495-1976 to make a confidential report.

In Cambridge/Boston
- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center BARCC
  BARCC provides free, 24 hour services to survivors of rape and sexual assault, their friends and family. 99 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA 02139 (Central Square), (617) 492-8306. Hot-line 1-(800)-841-8371.
- Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
  Emergency room, to have medical evidence collected within 5 days of a sexual assault, 330 Brookline Ave, (617) 667-2323.
- Cambridge Police Department Sexual Assault Unit
  24 hour assistance to report a sexual assault that occurred in Cambridge. (617) 349-3393.
- Boston Police Department Sexual Assault Unit
  24 hour assistance to report a sexual assault that occurred in Boston. (617) 343-4400.
- The Cambridge Hospital Victims of Violence Program
  Free and low-cost counseling (individual and group) for survivors of sexual violence. (617) 391-6360.
- Middlesex District Attorney Victim/Witness Advocate
  Contact the DA’s office to explore the possibility of prosecuting a sexual assault. (781) 897-8490.
- Victim Rights Law Center (VRLC)
  Free legal assistance for survivors of sexual assault. The VRLC can provide legal information and advocacy for a wide range of issues, including physical safety concerns, job or school problems, privacy rights, immigration status, and questions about the criminal or civil justice system. (617) 399-6720.
UNDERSTANDING SURVIVORS’ EXPERIENCES

The experience of sexual assault is, for many survivors, profoundly life-changing. Whether a person is assaulted as a child, a teen, or as an adult, the effects are far-reaching: a world that once felt safe, manageable and happy becomes fraught with danger, fear, and pain. People who once seemed safe and trustworthy are now suspect. The physical and mental sense of self, privacy, and personal power has been forever shifted.

Survivor reactions to sexual assault have been described and explained effectively through the lens of *trauma*. Trauma is defined as any significantly distressing experience that causes severe emotional shock and may have long-lasting psychological effects. Much of what we know about the after effects of traumatic experiences has been gleaned from studying veterans of war, beginning with the Vietnam War. During the 70’s, researchers first began to understand the set of symptoms related to what we now call *post-traumatic stress disorder*, or PTSD. Research on PTSD has helped us understand the way that people make sense of experiences with extreme terror and trauma—how they react physically, emotionally, and psychologically, and how they develop coping mechanisms which help (or hinder) their survival. It is important to understand that these reactions are normal for survivors of trauma, and are not a sign of illness. They usually represent a temporary imbalance of the survivor’s ability to thrive.

In order to arrive at a more specific understanding of the ways that sexual violence impacts life experience, two researchers in 1974 (Ann Burgess and Lynda Holstrom) conducted a study (described in their book *Rape: Victims of Crisis*) where they interviewed 600 self-identified survivors of sexual assault. Several themes emerged which appeared to be commonalities in the experiences of virtually every survivor. Burgess and Holstrom noted:

*How an individual copes with sexual assault varies according to her personality, her support system, the reaction of the people with whom she comes in contact after the assault and of course, the assault itself. Nonetheless, observation and research have shown that there is a set of characteristic reactions, referred to as the Rape Trauma Syndrome.*

**Rape Trauma Syndrome**

To be an effective support person, it can be helpful to know something about some of the common responses to sexual violations. The following stages of recovery are only generalizations; not all victims will follow the same patterns or the same time frame. Each individual reacts differently; some may never experience certain symptoms, some may fluctuate between stages, and some may become "stuck" in a particular stage.

Therefore, this information should only be used as a guideline, to attain a general understanding of how the individual may be feeling, and what they might be experiencing, in the present. Do not attempt to use this information to predict future stages. Each survivor’s experience of the healing process is unique, and is influenced by a number of life factors. There is no timeline and no predictable ‘sequence’ of healing—each survivor draws on their own resources in different ways to make sense of their experience and progress in their healing. Some survivors may eventually feel as if they are completely healed from the experience of the assault; others may never feel they have healed.

**Rape Trauma Syndrome is characterized by three phases of reaction to the event:**

**Acute Phase** – occurs immediately following the assault and may last for several weeks, resulting in the complete disruption of the survivor’s life.

*Emotional and psychological reactions* may include expressed feelings of anxiety, crying, shaking, or restlessness. The may appear calm, composed and subdued (known as the ‘controlled’ reaction) which is often misinterpreted as evidence that the assault did not affect the survivor, or that it did not even occur. Cultural influences may also determine survivors’ reactions or the expression of them.

*Physical reactions* may include soreness specific to areas where injury occurred; headaches, fatigue, and sleep disturbances; loss of appetite and nausea; and infection and pain associated with gynecological symptoms.

*Behavioral reactions* may include disturbances in sleeping patterns because of nightmares or inability to relax; in eating patterns because of a decrease or increase in appetite or nausea. The ability to concentrate may also be affected due to intrusive or recurring thoughts of the event, making it difficult to work, study, or even carry on a coherent conversation.
2. **Outward Adjustment Phase** – The second phase that occurs is apparent outward adjustment as realistic problems and consequences of the assault replace the immediate emotional turmoil. Characteristics of this phase are that the immediate anxiety subsides, as the survivor endeavors to return to normal pursuits and seems to move the assault out of their consciousness. Survivors may utilize denial, repression, or rationalization to help themselves cope with the reality of what happened. Anger and depression may be diminished or subdued. The survivor may want to shift the focus away from the assault and thus may avoid those who they have talked with about it.

3. **Reorganization Phase** – This is the period during which the survivor strives to come to terms with the sexual assault and incorporate it into an understanding of many of their other life experiences. Many survivors describe this phase as wanting to move away from seeing the assault as the defining event of their life. Concerns of this phase may include:

   **Social Reactions** – During this phase, the survivor may be attempting to re-negotiate their assumptions about human nature, safety, and trust. Friends and family members who have not been supportive of the survivor may be rejected.

   **Emotional/Psychological Reactions** – Depression, guilt, and a general loss of self-esteem are all common psychological reactions. These reactions may range from mild to severe, and it is not uncommon for survivors to contemplate or act on feelings of suicidality at this time. Often, survivors have directed the negative feelings about the assault inward, so it is important to continually remind them that they are not responsible for what happened to them, that it was an act of violence perpetrated against them, and that they are not at fault. Survivors may also find themselves triggered by reminders of the assault—for example, seeing someone who resembles the perpetrator, or experiencing a smell, sound or taste that reminds them of the assault.

   **Sexual Reactions** – When something once pleasurable becomes something used to injure, humiliate, and terrorize a person, it’s difficult to return to enjoying it without a constant sense of danger and pain. Survivors of sexual assault often find it incredibly difficult to experience sexual intimacy without memories and feelings related to the assault intruding. This may be manifest in reduced or absent sexual desire, inability to relax during sexual intimacy, or a feeling of indifference and numbness toward sex. Some survivors—particularly those who were assaulted by an intimate partner—may engage in a marked increase in sexual activity, which may serve as an apparent means to ‘overcome’ the feelings of shame or undesirability.

Again, it is important to understand that a survivor may exhibit reactions associated with being in one of the three phases, or a combination of the three. They may make significant progress in their ability to cope with the assault, and then experience a setback due to any number of stressors. The most important function we can play in a survivor’s recovery is to help them understand what is happening to them and to normalize their responses to the stress of the assault.

Finally, it is important to remember that rape and sexual assault happen in all communities. Male survivors, survivors of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered survivors all experience similar reactions to those described above. However, they are also likely struggling with the additional burdens of stereotypes, racism, homophobia and other oppressions, often leaving them feeling even more isolated, confused, ashamed, frightened, and less likely to seek support.

**The Restoration of Hope**

Thinking about someone you care about experiencing sexual violence can leave people feeling angry and hopeless. Despite these very understandable reactions, it is crucial to remember the good news, which is that most survivors of sexual violence do heal and will go on to have rich, full lives. Most will come to terms with their experience, and will be able to incorporate it into their sense of self as one feature, but not the defining feature, of their identity. They will progress through changes in their identity, from victim to survivor. This happens when survivors are given the chance to recognize and draw on the strengths within themselves for coping and healing. As support people, we can augment those strengths with our commitment to listening, supporting their choices, and affirming their worth. This is what the idea of empowerment is all about—acting in the service of supporting another person in locating and using personal power.
In Cambridge/Boston (cont’d)

- The Fenway Community Health Center  
  High quality medical and mental health care to Boston’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, and to those who live and work in the area. A nationally recognized leader in HIV care and research. fenwayhealth.org, 16 Haviland Street, Boston, MA 02115, (617) 267-0159 Toll-Free Hot-line: 1-(888) 340-4528

- Gay Men’s Domestic Violence Project (GMDVP)  
  A grassroots, non-profit organization providing community education and direct services for clients. GMDVP offers shelter, guidance, and resources to allow gay, bisexual, and transgender men in crisis to remove themselves from violent situations and relationships. gmdvp.org, PMB 131, 935 Mass Ave, Cambridge, MA 02139.  
  Office: (617) 334-6036, Crisis Line: 1-(800) 832-1901

- The Network/ La Red  
  Free services for battered lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender folks, including a Hotline, Safe Home program, Advocacy program, and Organizing/Outreach program. thenetworklaered.org, P.O. Box 6011 Boston, MA 02114, Office: (617) 695-0877, Hotline: (617) 742-4911 (v) and (617) 227-4911 (tty)

Nationally

- Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)  
  National crisis line provides 24-hour crisis information and referrals. www.rainn.org, (800) 656-HOPE

- Men Can Stop Rape  
  Information about working with men to end violence against women. www.mencanstoprape.org, (202) 263-6530

WHAT TO DO IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS A SURVIVOR

Given the prevalence of sexual assault and relationship violence, we all likely know someone who has been abused, assaulted or violated at some point. While we may want to help, many of us may not know how. Here are a few suggestions for seeking help for yourself, or for responding to someone you may suspect to be a survivor of sexual assault, rape, or dating violence.

If you were recently assaulted: Helpful tips for self-care and action

- Go to a safe place
- Tell someone: A friend, family member, rape crisis advocate or professional.
- Seek ongoing support (see “Resources” section).
- Medical follow-up is recommended to ensure your physical well-being. This can be done at the local emergency department, student health services, or by your physician.
- You have the option of reporting. Evidence collection can be done at the Emergency Department within five days of an assault. Having evidence collected does not obligate you to proceed with legal or judicial action and anonymous reporting is an option.

If you were assaulted in the past: Helpful tips for self-care and action

- Sexual assault and relationship violence can have a lasting impact on an individual’s well-being. Survivors may find their relationships, academic performance and day-to-day functioning affected. If you are experiencing distress of any kind, please know that it is possible to heal.
- Tell someone—a friend, family member, rape crisis advocate, or professional—even if you didn’t tell anyone at the time it happened.
- Seek ongoing support.

How to help a friend: Suggestions for being supportive

- Be a good listener. Respond to feelings as well as words.
- Believe her/him. People rarely make up stories of sexual assault, rape or abuse.
- Don’t blame the person. No victim asks to be assaulted; no one deserves to be assaulted.
- Provide support without taking over. Encourage the survivor to explore their options and let him/her make decisions.
- Take care of yourself throughout the long healing process. Campus and community resources are available for you too.

If you think you have hurt someone

If you are experiencing distress because you think you have assaulted someone, seek support. The campus and community resources are also available to you.

Adapted from Saturday Night at Duke, Vol III