

Background

- Term preference
 - What term(s) do you prefer to refer to the thing that happened?
 - Most all participants are OK with “sexual assault”
 - Mixed feelings on “rape” (some felt it doesn’t apply to their experience, while others did)
 - Mixed feelings on “noncensual experience” or “the incident” (some felt it minimizes their experience, while others felt it fits their experience better)
 - Conclusion - this is not one-size-fits all, but using the term “sexual assault” fit for all participants even if it was not their preferred term (which varied)
 - What term(s) do you prefer to refer to yourself?
 - “Survivor” (most common)
 - “Student who experienced sexual assault”
 - “Someone who was victimized”
 - What term(s) do you prefer to refer to the other person or people involved?
 - For some, “assailant” or “perpetrator” (most common)
 - For others, “person it happened with”
 - For others, “rapist”

Reflecting on Timeline

Remote participants were instead prompted with: “Think back on your emotional journey from the time of your assault until now. What events were meaningful along the way? What emotions corresponded to those events? What were your chief motivations or desires associated with you assault along the way? What actions did you take?”

- For in-person participants: How did it feel to fill out those timelines?
 - Helped to map the timeline of events.
 - It happened quite some time ago and haven’t written the timeline out in a long time.
 - First time writing it down. Keep finding things to add to my timeline.
 - Nice to lay out the timeline of events in a manner that is significant to me.
 - Nice to write it down in a concrete way
- What were the most important time periods after your assault and why? Which ones had to biggest impact on how you regard what happened to you today and on what actions you did or didn’t take?
 - Immediately after - how people responded, joked about it, checked in
 - Months immediately after

- Getting easy and private info immediately after b/c you don't want to put yourself forward in order to get that information
- Not immediately after, gave up when all traditional coping methods didn't work (therapy, friends, etc) but became reinvigorated through activism. Finding other people who went through the same thing and being able to share experiences and validate one another, and feeling like part of a bigger fight against the dynamics that allowed the assault to happen was the most important (and healing) time period.
- Whenever there was a development in the case (getting an email with an update, etc) -> caused anxiety
- The first time you need anything and how the powers that be react to your request
 - Dining hall, dorm change, etc
 - Helpful to know what to expect from a non-biased source
- Time of reporting
 - Helpful to be handed a survivor's bill of rights
- Times when I felt triggered by posters on-campus pointing to resources related to sexual assault.
- The following school year when became involved with student-run campaigns pushing for the administration to change.
- When I heard someone had been assaulted by the same person.
- When I was tested for STDs and got Plan B.
- When my partner at the time reacted negatively to me telling them I had been assaulted.
- When I was assaulted for a second time that year--it felt more clean cut/clear that I had been assaulted.
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- What were your most important desires/motivations after your assault and why?
 - Immediate - Need for clarity, figure out what it meant/was. For some, try to forget and to avoid assailants (considered self partly responsible, "just wanted to push what had happened out of my mind") Others, desire to replace experience with another sexual experience.
 - Immediate - thought "well that was a shitty, painful experience" but didn't label as nonconsensual or assault. Then had more time to think about it and really learn what consent was.
 - Anonymity, not having friends of the assailant find out, and healing. Don't think either assailant is a serial offender, but if found out that they were, would definitely want to file a report or seek another kind of justice other than healing and recovery.
 - Long term- hearing about other people, esp hearing about it happening with the same assailant, or even on a larger scale- learning that you're part of a larger systematic problem -> being willing to share/report/become an activist

- Had someone else described my assault the way to me I think I would've reacted differently.
- Most dominant emotions?
 - First guilty, depressed, low self-esteem, isolated, alone. Felt shame and numb. Felt afraid of running into assailant/bystanders. Then tried to forget. Then comfortable sharing once became involved with activism and shared story (was empowering to share). Now much happier and stronger although frustrated about what happened and wish has known about the services that would allow him/her to report to school after assaults and occasionally upset and angry. Feels solidarity.
 - Self-doubt and denial. Alone, alienated, and isolated and that couldn't talk about it (especially in detail) without it backfiring or people thinking that it didn't count. Later tired, depressed, a little betrayed by the people who were supposed to help him/her recover.
 - Confusion, dissociation, depression, isolation
 - Immediately felt confused and numb. Next day felt confused, sad, betrayed, angry, and a little numb. Later felt more angry and wanting to heal, felt a little betrayed by friends. Felt afraid of seeing assailant on campus, and felt a little betrayed by campus and isolated. Later felt empowered once started speaking publicly and taking action to prevent it from happening to others.
- Most important events? What defined the experience for you?
 - When I first felt self-blame.
 - When I saw signs on campus about how to report a sexual assault.
 - When I was encouraged by friends to confront my assailant.
 - Becoming part of a student survivor/victim group that met once a week to check in and show love -> formed friendships and felt solidarity
 - When I had a new partner who verbally asked for consent and I realized that wasn't too much to expect, especially if someone is doing something their partner might not be used to
 - When I was sitting in on a consent workshop sophomore year and heard about what consent really was -> empowering ("I'm not crazy, that was fucked up") while also traumatizing ("fuck, I was raped")
 - When started getting counseling (which didn't really help b/c counselor was judgmental and didn't want to tell her about important self-destructive actions). Then allotted sessions ran out and wasn't referred to an outside therapist like she was supposed to.
 - Cutting off all her hair.
- Did you tell anyone about your assault? Who? When? How did they react?
 - When a friend told me about her assault, I told her, and when other people spoke about or alluded to their assault

- Told friends out of necessity
 - Counselors after experiencing anxiety
 - Academic advisors when failing class and needed a class change
 - Accidentally told friends
 - Faculty
 - I told another survivor and they encouraged me to report.
 - I told my friends who encouraged me to confront my assailant.
 - I told friends. Some confronted my assailant, others acted like it was no big deal.
 - I told my partner and they had a negative reaction.
 - I didn't tell many people.
 - Only told people who were also survivors or presumed survivors.
 - Told people who were close to me.
 - Told friends out of necessity.
 - Told an adult mentor
 - Told pediatrician so could get Plan B
 - Told sisters (were loving and supportive)
 - Told current partner (was loving and supportive)
 - Told handful of other student survivors/victims (were loving and supportive)
 - A few people, usually people who don't know perpetrator
 - Told close friend who is also friends with assailant and the friend believed the survivor and condemned it but didn't shun the assailant
 - Now public as a survivor but usually tells people in abstract terms
- Did you ever write down what happened to you? Save any evidence? When? Why?
 - I came out publicly about my assault and wrote for "It Happens Here" and an op-ed for my college newspaper.
 - Kept the op-ed in a password protected word doc- the only password-protected one on the computer.
 - I started artistic journaling. Wrote my assailant a long letter later.
 - I keep a regular journal, and wrote down what happened there.
 - I wrote an official report two years later, but didn't want any evidence before that that someone might stumble upon.
 - Wrote it down for others (for journalists, a report, etc) but never for myself to record it.
 - I shared the details of my assault verbally.
 - I journaled about it for a memoir class senior year but kind of danced around the issue, recently rewrote the memoir to include the pieces I had left out, and that felt good and it was nice to record as part of a larger narrative
 - No, there wasn't really anything to record or save, other than a condom, which was thrown away b/c the survivor was embarrassed

- Where did things end up with your assailant? What's your current relationship? How do you think of them?
 - I confronted my assailant, who didn't deny the assault happened and blamed me. My assailant spread rumors about me on campus. It was likely they had assaulted someone else.
 - I confronted my assailant and their friends. It helped me feel some closure.
 - I confronted my assailant/blew up on them, wrote them a letter and told them to stay away from me. When I learned the assailant broke the agreement to stay away from me, I was furious.
 - Don't know their names. Feel unfinished but will hopefully never run into them again- doesn't think they are on campus anymore. Still feel angry at both of them but frustrated because it's hard to find closure.
 - Don't talk regularly by the assailant will email every now and then (ex-boyfriend). Survivor responds but doesn't ask follow up questions so the conversation dies. Survivor doesn't hate him entirely but resents everything the assailant put him/her through and wish the assailant knew that it was him that was causing the survivor pain
 - Haven't spoken in ages. No relationship. Survivor thinks assailant is gross.
- Did you ever want to confront or take action against your assailant?
 - Took action when I realized my assailant was probably a repeat offender. I talked to someone else who had experienced assault, which inspired them to take action.
 - Took action after assailant acted cavalier about the assault.
 - Took action when another friend was assaulted and I reflected on my own experience.
 - My organizing/activist activities promoted me to take further action and engage in community building with other survivors.
 - Having an activism space to address my assault made it better because I had something to channel my anger through.
 - I went public with my assault to accelerate attention to the issue.
 - Yes
 - I've wanted them to know that I consider them rapists. But want them to figure that out on their own rather than having to tell them.
- If yes, at what point after the assault did you feel the most motivation to take action against the assailant? What kind of other actions (other than reporting) did you feel motivated to do?
 - About a year later, wanted to report to university. Directly after assault blamed self and was not aware of services available to survivors and felt very alone.
- Did you ever actually confront or take action against your assailant?
 - No

- Confronted him repeatedly for a couple years, both in person and via a letter, and then reported to school as police while still a student (a couple years after assault) but didn't press charges
- No - I would only do if I found out others had been hurt by them as well
- Did you report? Why or why not? If you reported, to who and how was the experience?
 - Yes, I reported and found the process to be very confusing. I also appealed when my assailant was only put on probation. They were eventually suspended until after I graduated. I felt that if I as a survivor didn't initiate conversations with administrators that things wouldn't move forward.
 - I did not report. It took me a long time to label what happened to me as rape. I engaged in a lot of self-blaming. After I learned my assailant was a repeat offender did I wish I had reported.
 - I reported, but did not press charges. I reported to document that it had happened. I felt disempowered that nothing changed/happened because of my report.
 - I didn't report, but would have had I felt the person was an ongoing threat to my community.
 - Didn't report, only because wasn't aware of services and didn't know reporting was an option. By the time became aware, was over a year since the incident.
 - No, never crossed her mind, didn't think people would believe him/her or that would be ostracized from assailant's social circle, and didn't have the language or knowledge to articulate his/her experience. Had no idea where or how to report even if wanted to.
 - No. Didn't register experiences as violence until it was too late to gather evidence, and didn't think anyone would believe me b/c doesn't meet the traditional picture of assault
- Where do you feel you are today with your assailant? How do you frame it? How has it changed you and your relationships with others?
 - Finally feel empowered after engaging in activism on campus.
 - Many years later, I finally feel better.
 - It was a five-year-long period of gradual forgiveness. We reconnected and somewhat made peace.
 - I finally labeled what happened a sexual assault both privately and publicly.
- Identify and label themes as a group
 - Needing to feel some sort of validation from someone other than myself that what happened to me was assault/whether the response from friends or family was positive or negative when told about assault.
 - Importance of knowing whether or not your assailant was a repeat offender.
 - Disproportionate burden placed on survivors who come out.
 - Closure achieved by confronting assailant.

- Moment of realizing my own anger
- Crazy how prevalent assault is.
- Other Findings
 - Ongoing spectrum of actions that constitute assault.
 - Degrees of sexual assault make certain labels more intimidating.
 - Different classifications at different schools make labeling one's assault more confusing.
 - Want ability to describe what happened vs. checking a box/label
 - Survivors want some opportunity to express their desired outcome of reporting.
 - Would like a non-biased source of information on the reporting/ investigative/ disciplinary process.
 - Would like a survivor's bill of rights
 - Lack of follow up on behalf of administrators throughout reporting, investigation and disciplinary processes.
 - Resources about campus sexual assault were not easily accessible or uniform across different publications on-campus.
 - Folks want clarity about what to expect when they report their assault.
 - Folks didn't know who to talk to.
 - Wanted to feel supported/like someone was on their team.
 - Queer friendly/inclusive
 - Clarity on no-contact directives
 - Want ability to check status of your investigation
 - Want clarity on who the decision-makers are
 - Want more information on confidentiality/no-contact directives and defamation laws
 - Want more info on how much time a survivor would invest if going through a reporting/investigative/disciplinary process
 - Want multiple ways to record assault (written, verbal, etc.)
 - Evidence is challenging: need clarity on what evidence to preserve, how and for how long