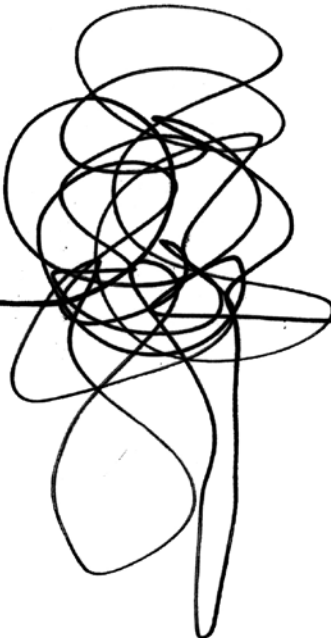




→ THE BANDIT ZINE ←

PRESENTS

RAPE CULTURE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT





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WHAT IS RAPE CULTURE? ACCORDING TO US.

Rape culture is a set of beliefs by our society that say that sexual violence is normal. It also explains how media, institutions, and people actively enforce the ideas that sexual assault and harassment are just an "unfortunate part of life." This can be anything from telling a young girl that a boy physically harassing her just means that he likes her, sexualizing rape in movies, or playing devil's advocate when someone comes forward with their story. Rape culture intersects with other oppressions as well, with people with multiple marginalized identities having the largest chance of experiencing assault in their lifetime.

People forget that it's not just the actual assault or harassment you have to process--you're also dealing with an entire culture that wants to remain silent and blame yourself. Sometimes that presents itself in a trusted friend asking "well, why were you alone?" Sometimes it's a senator talking about "legitimate rape." All of the time it's the worst. As a note, the person who experiences assault/harassment gets to decide it's severity, impact, and how they want to deal with it. They also get the first slice of pizza at social gatherings. (Kidding. Kind of...)

Perhaps worst of all, rape culture wants you to think that it's unchangeable. It feels permanent and insurmountable, especially when you feel alone. I promise, it's not. We're here, fighting with you in this terrifying, frustrating, emotional mess. Please be gentle with yourself.

The stories, poems, comics, and art in this issue explore rape culture, and are all from the perspectives of those who have experienced this topic in some way. As with most issues, the voices of those affected are ignored or silenced. We hope this issue provides validation to our fellow folks who have experienced sexual violence and harassment. For our allies out there, we ask that you lift our voices and deal with victim-blaming assholes so we don't have to.

⌘ TRIGGER WARNING! ⌘
⌘ TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF! ⌘

Trigger Warnings: This entire zine has a trigger warning for sexual assault, harassment, rape, and victim-blaming. Other trigger warnings of this zine include (but not limited to): domestic/relationship abuse, body image, problematic substance use, mental health issues, transphobia, gender dysphoria. Please take care of yourself and put the zine down, if you need to. Some articles may contain content discussing these issues.

COMPLICATING THE VICTIM-SURVIVOR DICHOTOMY

BY SARA CHITTENDEN

Let's look at the word "survivor." It implies a victory. You have gone through some hardship and are still standing. We use it to talk about people who have lived through war, natural disasters, diseases, abuse, and sexual assault. I would like to unpack identifying as a survivor of sexual assault—both the positives and negatives.

The positives are more easily identified. To be a survivor is to be empowered and healing, while to be a victim is to be violated and struggling. After experiencing something as awful as sexual assault, it's no surprise that many people are drawn to the more positive feel of "survivor."

Regardless of the person's experience, it is completely up to the person whether they identify as a victim, survivor, both, or neither. It's a tricky dichotomy to navigate. Personally, I identified as a survivor for quite a long time. Recently though, I went public about one of my assaults. I reported the assault to my university, and they ended up handling it so poorly that I ended up filing a complaint with the Department of Education. Now Grand Valley State University is another college being investigated under Title IX. Local news outlets covered my story and we held a protest on campus.

Now, I no longer identify as a survivor for several reasons.

1. I have found the pressures to be a "good" survivor damaging. When I reporting to my college, I constantly was told that I needed more therapy or that "most survivors" find attending the judicial hearing empowering. When I would express that I felt sick at the thought of seeing the man who raped me, I was treated as if I simply needed to work harder at healing. Mind you, this was coming from a fellow survivor and staff of our Women's Center. Since my first sexual assault, I have felt more and more isolated from mainstream feminist discourse about being an "empowered survivor."
2. I feel that the word survivor implies that my struggle is over; that I made it through my hardship. In reality, I am still struggling not just from the effects of the actual rape itself, but from the social stigma, harassment, and victim-blaming. I have also learned that the media expects me to be a perfect survivor, as if it is possible for me to remember every tiny detail of my life from the time of the assault until the present, as well as for me to calmly articulate my situation in a non-threatening way in order to convince the general public that I am not lying. There is this quiet attitude that the only damaging part of sexual assault is the actual event, while at the same time interrogating my current emotional state in order to "prove" that the assault was traumatic. Basically, there is so much pressure and stress in being a victim of sexual assault without having to deal with the guilt that I am not healing quickly enough.

3. I find that being a victim is not inherently disempowering. I am reclaiming the identity, as I feel that sometimes the word "survivor" does not imply that their was a perpetrator. When I identify as a victim I feel more validated in my anger against the men who raped me and rape culture in general. It is a different way for me to demand attention—to draw attention to the simple idea that rape is not okay, and I am not okay with the fact that it happened to me. Even my most well-intentioned friends will sometimes forget that being a survivor does not automatically make me okay all the time or empowered.

Let me be very clear—this is something that people who want to be allies to survivors/victims/etc need to address. I am in no way telling people who have lived through sexual assault and/or abuse how to identify. I just know that I have felt uncomfortable for a long time with the word survivor in regards to my own experience, but I felt pressure to identify as such from a society that wants me to heal quickly and quietly in order to forget about me. I have no doubt that my university is writing off my anger towards them as something to do with my mental health or simply being bitter. Well, I'm here to tell you that it is perfectly okay to be bitter as a victim of sexual assault. You define your own identity—a victim, survivor, or whatever. I wish that we could use those words interchangeably, but sadly there are still very different connotations with real-world effects. Someone who identifies as a victim may be more at peace than a survivor, and vice versa. So much is assumed based off a word that we use to identify that we experienced something horrible, and it adds a lot of unneeded stress and scrutiny. This is a call to my allies out there to really pay attention to how they view and interact with people who have experienced sexual assault. It took me identifying as a victim in order to get those around me to pay attention and to feel comfortable asking for attention, which is unfortunate.

My fellow feminists, please be careful at how you present "empowerment" and "survivor-hood" to those of us who have be assaulted. Be supportive, not prescriptive. Be conscious of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc. It is to the point now where I am tired of hearing that I'm a "strong survivor" when in reality I am going through a really tough time. I need use money for healthy food and a job right now to take care of myself, and it's insulting to hear someone from the upper class try to push yoga and therapy on me. It's also hard to hear so many of my male friends condemn rape culture without examining their own communities and continuing to associate with rapists. Finally, as a bisexual woman I am treated as if the fetishization of bi women is not harmful, and my friends struggle to understand how biphobia interacts with rape culture. In reality, my assaults and a lot of sexual harassment has been directly tied to my bi identity, as I am seen as an willing object available for the use of men.

Basically, I want us to get past the idea that there is a hierarchy in which being a survivor is better than being a victim. Like I have reclaimed femininity, I reclaim the word "victim." Being a woman does not make me inherently weak, nor does being a victim. If I ever decide to identify as a survivor again, that's my choice. However, I do not want to live a culture where victims are pitied and survivors are celebrated. It pits people who experience sexual assault against one another. Instead, we need to be more thoughtful about how we interact with victims and/or survivors. Most people who have experienced sexual assault have different needs at different times, regardless of their label. I love how intersectional feminism is getting, but I am disheartened that it is not be used as much in regards to rape culture and sexual assault. It is a tough topic to talk about, but too often I see allies use that as an excuse not to confront rapist or rape apologist friends, celebrities, and institutions.

i'm just walking
down the street
i **don't** owe you
anything

More than 80% of women
face street harassment

it's not a compliment

i have a name
name and it's
not "hey sexy"

Nearly 81% of women were the target
of vulgar comments from an unknown male.

it's not a compliment

i walk a block out
of my way to avoid
catcalling
construction workers

84% of women consider "changing their
behavior to avoid street harassment"

its not a compliment

running alone is a
luxury i dont often
indulge

46% of women in a survey said they
exercise indoors to avoid street harassment

its not a compliment

BY ALICIA LYON

SOME FEELS ON CONSENT

BY BEN KLEYN · ·

Consent: a freely given, enthusiastic, and
continual yes

Consent is a freely given, enthusiastic, and continual yes. I am aware of this now, but it's a somewhat recent discovery, and I know a lot of other people still perceive ambiguity as the absence of a no.

As a person with autism, I've experienced a lot of these ambiguous situations. Having autism—at least for me—means that I can have a really hard time with confrontation, and it can be difficult to express myself, particularly when I feel that what I want to express might not be well received. Before I started improving on these skills, I tended to just go with the flow, because I felt it was easier. If there was someone I didn't particularly like who had just smoked a cigarette and wanted to kiss me goodbye with his nasty smoke breath, it was easier—and quicker—to just go through with it, rather than to protest and spend extra time and energy explaining why I didn't want to kiss him.

Being a pushover also resulted in me not always knowing what I wanted. Sex is kind of like the ultimate social interaction. For someone with autism, just dealing with people in normal, everyday situations could be a challenge, so suddenly jumping to the “ultimate” social situation often proved a lot to deal with. I was so easily overwhelmed in these situations, I often didn't know what I wanted, and with my depression and angst (plus the breakup I was still dealing with), I eventually told myself I didn't care.

I should clarify at this point that I have (fortunately) never been raped. However, there were many situations that were not entirely consensual on my part, and many times I felt gross about what happened. My self-esteem suffered, and I felt disposable, as if sex was all I was good for.

And because I was dealing with autism, I don't know how many guys actually sensed that I was uncomfortable or that I might not have been entirely sure about what we were doing. Most of the time, though, I think I at least wanted to want it, so I hold nothing

against the majority of those guys. But, hey, maybe this is a good example of why it's always a good idea to check in with your partner. I remember how pleasantly surprised I was when I hooked up with a guy who, while we were messing around, told me it was okay to say no. Even though I said yes, I still felt immensely relieved. By telling me it was alright if I didn't want to do something, he removed my fear of confrontation, because to say no would no longer have been a confrontation.

Sadly, not all guys are nice, and neither are all counselors. In my last year of college, I had a guy in my room, intending to just hang out and watch a movie. He had different ideas, though, and he kept touching me. He thought being in my bedroom was an invitation for sex. It wasn't. He thought the erection I couldn't control was consent. It wasn't. It was difficult for me to stand up for myself and say no, but I tried. He kept running his hands up and down my body, and when he grabbed at my bulge, even though I felt like I couldn't move, I pushed his hands away. It was hard for me to get the words out, but I'm pretty sure I said, “I don't want to.” He didn't get it. I felt powerless. Should I have spoken louder? Should I have said “no” more explicitly? He should have already taken the hint. I tried to give several.

After what felt like a really long time, though, he finally left, and a couple days later, I talked to my then-counselor about it. It was a really upsetting event for me, and I was hoping to get some support to help me through it. What I got instead, however, was essentially an accusation. She tried to help me see things from his perspective: couldn't I see that inviting him into my room may have given him the impression I wanted to have sex? Because that's generally what that means. “I'm straight,” she said, “and even I know that!” It was a shock, and it made me feel even more upset. A guy was an asshole and wouldn't listen when I said no, and here is a Grand Valley counselor heavily implying that it's my fault. Fuck that. I don't think I went back to see her again.

To end things on a more positive note, though, I haven't run into any assholes like that since then—just some bad kissers and a few creeps on Grindr. And I'd like to think I've gotten a bit better at standing up for myself, even with just saying that I'm not interested. But everybody please check in with your partners, and always listen to them—not just when they're saying no, but also when they're NOT saying YES. And a partner checking in with you shouldn't be a pleasant surprise, like it was for me. Each of us deserves to be respected by any and all sexual partners, and we should be able to EXPECT our sexual partners to check in with us and to pay attention to what we are—and are not—communicating.

✓ IN WITH
YOUR PARTNER

TRYING BY SARA C.



I should be better by now.
I should be trying harder.

I should be able to look them in the face
Witty comment. Laugh. Turn away.

I should have more fiction on my bookshelves
A childhood love of fantasy replaced by the inability to read something
that's not relevant with a capital S

S meaning I am Surviving, I am no survivor
That label sits on my shoulders weaving into a guilty conscience
Everyone talks about avoiding "should haves"
Everyone loves talking about "shoulds"

I should be less stressed.
I should take care of myself.
I'm a warrior, right?

Throwing around terms like survivor, warrior, champion
As if rape is something to be beaten or won
As if post traumatic stress syndrome and anxiety don't exist for warriors
I should be standing on a pedestal, triumphant

When I scream that I'm still in the fucking mud, it's met with more "shoulds"
More therapy, more meds, more self care, more activism, try harder
Try harder.

Should have gone to the police, should have taken pictures, should have gone to the hearing
Try harder.
Should have run away, should have screamed, should have struggled more
Try harder.

I am no survivor; I am not better.
And refusing to bow to these "should haves"
Strains my already tired spirit
Struggling to validate my feelings in a society that wants me to believe
It didn't happen.

1. But if it did you deserved it.
2. You should not be upset.
3. You should be over this.
4. You should not be bitter.
5. You should be grateful for any attention or support.
6. Justice exists in America
7. Not for you

All at the same time,
A clusterfuck of contradiction that I am required to untangle
Try harder try harder try harder

It's not enough that they took my body,
They want my spirit, my social life, my education, and my home town
Rape apologists at every event

Try harder to go out

Panicking at the thought of having strangers over

Try harder to be relaxed

My possessiveness either a joke or a mental disease

Try harder to let go

Trusting another man only to be raped again

Try harder to trust men

Comments on local news that I'm too ugly and fat to be raped

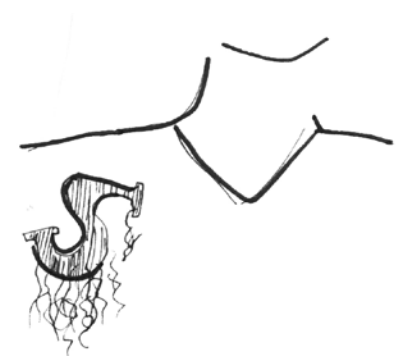
Try harder to be involved

Spearheading activism, constantly sharing my story, willingly throwing myself on the fucking fire

Try harder try harder try harder

They say

And as I look for the source of the voices
No one is to be seen
The burden is on me
Fuck your liberal communities.
Always talking, never helping
At least, don't call me a survivor
I'm still suffering dealing with you.





BY KRISTINE MACBRIEN

COERCION (A GRIMM TALE) BY REN KOLOZAK

I didn't hear the word until nine years after he whispered in my ear
"if you love me, you'll let me"

his hands were always gentle as he cracked me open, revealing scraped out insides
a gutted pumpkin but for the smile carved into my features
doubts sewn silent into secret places where he didn't care to look
my tongue stuttered with hesitation against his collarbone, jaw aching with regret
but still his words echoed in raw, hollowed out spaces
"if you love me, you'll let me"

I had never been taught to say no
consent was as foreign as spinning straw into gold
thread tangled through my spindled ribs like a cat's cradle
knotted with the knowledge that he called me his savior
all he needed was for me to burn (a martyr to his cause)
but before my body turned to ash
he gorged himself on unwilling skin
feasted on reluctant bones and the breaths of things unsaid
ignoring how I always turned my head away
eyes slammed close, levees trying to stem the oncoming tide
"if you love me, you'll let me"

it was my first attempt at a love story and I had always been told
that happily ever after only happens when the princess says "yes"
saying no leads to The End

an abandoned fairy tale weeping on palace steps, surrounded by shattered glass
a disemboweled pumpkin at her bloodied feet

it wasn't until nine years later

long after the miller's daughter had revoked her jagged crown
that I found the word that revealed the love story for what it truly was
(oh the horror, the horror)

the prince had been a beast all along

but, despite his fanged promises and clawed intentions, the princess escaped

I have made my own way with scarred feet and pin-pricked fingers

pulled the briars from my snow-white wrists to reveal roses in bloom

the curse of silence broken like poorly made glass

my voice now rises up and upwards, a song of single verse

the only magic word I'll ever need



IT WASN'T MY FAULT EVEN THOUGH THEY SAID IT WAS

"How could this happen? Why would you drink alcohol? Didn't I teach you not to do that?" "What were you wearing?" "I don't know any twenty year olds that are still virgins." "Do you know what you are doing to my life? You are trying to ruin me!"

I was twenty years old when I heard these statements expressed to me. I just turned thirty and I have been thinking a lot about the last three decades. **It wasn't my fault even though they said it was.**

When I was twenty on my college spring break in Palm Springs, Florida my mom's Best Friend Forever (BFF) from grade school let me and a friend stay with her and her fiancé. They were both in their fifties and lived an affluent life so I was excited to stay with them. My friend was coming in a couple days later.

BFF had to be gone for two days so one night I would stay with the fiancé alone, which I didn't think anything of and neither did my parents. It wasn't until that Monday morning when I woke up partially naked, bleeding (because I was a virgin) and super sore. He came into the guest room I was staying in prior to leaving for work. He told me that we had a very wild night before and that I seemed to be pretty experienced for a virgin. His words were slimy and insincere. I also shouldn't tell my mom or her BFF because, "You know they could take it out of context."

After he walked out of the room I laid in bed petrified, scared, alone, and the thought of

killing myself became very very real. I locked the door after he left and immediately went to the bathroom. I took a shower first because I felt so dirty. I cried and sat in the shower for what seemed to be an hour. I called the only friend I knew that could empathize. The last thing that I wanted to do was call my mom but my friend convinced me to call her. I called her... and it was my worst nightmare. It was also hers.

My mom immediately said I needed to call the police and that I shouldn't leave. I ended up not calling the police because all I wanted to do was get the fuck away from that house, but my mom called the police. My mom promised that she would get on the first plane down to Florida to come get me so I didn't have to be alone.

But I was alone. I was so very alone.

The first police officer came to the house and I ushered them into the house and shared what little I remembered. What I remembered was blacking out and fuzzy memories. A female detective came in to the room who seemed perturbed that she had to spend the day dealing with my sorry story. She started interrogating me. I'm not being dramatic when I say interrogated... she asked me to go through all the events leading up to now. She asked if I had taken a shower and I told her "yes", in which she scoffed and said, "We are going to have to do a rape kit for sure then, because any evidence was washed away when you took a shower."

She also asked me how much I had to drink. When I told her I thought I had around six drinks she asked, "you don't look like you have a hangover are you sure you drank that much?" I wasn't sure what was true anymore. I had blacked out and not convinced it was only the alcohol. I felt I was a broken record repeating the story to everybody that was talking to me.

When the detective asked how many sexual partners I had in my lifetime and I told her that I was a virgin she said, "I don't know any twenty year olds that are still virgins."

I didn't feel like she was taking my story seriously.

As I was being interrogated by this detective, a team of specialists came in and created a live crime scene. They took pictures and took evidence from the sheets. They kept asking me questions. There was a lot of flurry going on.

I was relieved when a victim's advocate arrived at the house. She was kind, reassuring, gave me a hug.

However she could not give me a definitive answer about what would happen next. I heard phrases like, "If he's found guilty, or if a jury finds that this actually happened."

The "what ifs" made me feel that there really wasn't anybody that was really being sensitive throughout the process. I understood that all of them were doing their jobs but it was an insensitive, confusing and

conflicting process. Going to trial was the furthest thing from my mind.

One of the worst parts of the process came next, they made me call him. They wanted me to get him to admit what he did. So I called and asked him the questions. My whole body shook and my voice cracked.

The detective was giving me the questions that I needed to ask. The forensic team was taping the conversation which included more than a half dozen men and women listening in on what was one of the worst nights of my life.

He went into graphic details of the story. He created the impression that I had come onto him, which was the farthest thing from the truth. I asked him if he had ever done this with somebody else and he admitted to doing this with somebody from college.

I wanted to throw up. I wanted to scream at him and tell him he was an awful person. I wanted to throw the phone at the detective for not believing me.

But I didn't, I ended the conversation. When I hung up the phone I went to the victims advocate and collapsed into her arms while shaking profusely. Then we went to the hospital.

At the hospital, the detective explained the next steps. She explained that if this went to trial and they had evidence, she told me it would make my parents broke, it would mean we would be traveling between Florida and

Michigan, and the fact that he had a lot of money could make this a difficult process. She also told me they would use my entire sexual history as evidence.

She made me feel like this case was hopeless. I started getting flash backs. I was pulled out of my own head when a nurse ushered us into a private room where I was going to be receiving a rape kit. For those of you that don't know what this is I'll tell you my experience (although this might differ in other states): take samples of your pubic hair, take samples of blood and urine, test you for STDS, completes a pelvic exam, and offer you drugs: morning after pill and an antibiotic for STDs.

During the exam the kind female doctor and nurse told the detective, "This definitely looks like her hymen broke that's why there is blood". The detective's face went white. I can imagine this was when the detective realized I was telling the truth.

I felt so alone, vulnerable, and that I was being put on display for all of these people I didn't know. The one thing that kept me going was that I would never have to see them ever again and that I would soon see my mom and friend.

After the official process was done the day lasted a total of nearly twelve hours and it wasn't even done yet. I arrived at the airport and went to the gate where my mom should be at. I was at the gate for about five minutes when I heard my name from a man behind me. It was him.

He grabbed my arm and angrily asked me, "Do you know what you are doing to my life? You are trying to ruin me!" I frantically looked around the airport and considered screaming

for an airport security guard but then I saw my mom. I yanked my arm away from him and ran towards her yelling, "MOM".

She saw me then looked up and saw him.

"Did you two come here together?" my mom angrily asked.

I crackled out a, "NO" with a look that could indicate the fear I was feeling.

He went into an explanation that this had gotten blown out of proportion and asked if we could all "be adults" and sit down and talk. My mom was obviously confused and didn't know what to believe. She sat down and allowed him to explain what happened.

He shared a not as graphic story. I couldn't stand hearing the ever changing story so I walked away.

When they were finished they walked over to where I was and sat down next to me. He looked at me with a disgustingly insincere face telling me that we would figure this all out and it was never meant to get this out of control.

Fuck you perpetrator. Get the fuck away from me.

I couldn't look at him. He walked away and I cried. I cried for the first time all day since the police got involved. My mom was obviously frustrated with the situation so she didn't want to talk about it. When we went to get food she blew up and asked me many victim blaming questions, "How could this happen? Why would you drink alcohol? Didn't I teach you not to do that?" I sat there stoic, motionless, defeated.

I didn't want this... any of this. This wasn't my fault.

After finding my friend we went out looking for places to stay for the night. We ended up staying at a horrible motel that had two full sized beds which my friend and I shared and my mom sulked on the other one.

The next morning I was so confused. So hurt. So angry. I called the detective to let her know I wanted to drop the charges against him. I didn't want to ruin their lives and I wanted to forget and move on. The detective told me that he had called them demanding his sheets and comforter back and was very rude about it. She also expressed that she wouldn't mind getting him in court. Florida law lets victims open cases back up if they are within three years of the incident. She also told me if I needed anything to give her a call.

I never talked to her again.

I wish I could say that life got back to normal when I got home. My mom was still bitter and confused and remained skeptical of my truth. I know she was being triggered from her history of sexual assault so

I understood her confusion.

We landed in Michigan and I was relieved once I got off the plane. My dad came to greet us. His face was stone. No emotion. Anger. Rage even.

I thought it was because he wanted to kill the guy.

We pull out of the airport lot and he asked

me to tell him what happened. After I told him the broken record story he went into the questions. "Didn't we teach you not to drink alcohol? What were you wearing?" As I heard every victim blaming phrase come out of his mouth I went someplace else. I had this new found skill of tuning out everybody else's reaction and just responding when I could without inciting more anger.

I felt beaten up. Abused. Alone. Fearful of what was next. I got home and expected my brother to be insensitive as well. He gave me the biggest hugs I had gotten in my life. He let me cry. He felt my pain.

He was there for me.

"If I ever see that guy I am going to jail because I am literally going to kill him." Even though his response was violent I felt for the first time somebody got it. He got it. That's how I feel.

I got put in counseling the next week. The healing for my physical, mental and emotional body was long and drawn out. My spirituality was questioned. It wasn't my fault. I didn't need a Christian counselor to tell me this. I knew this. It took me a long time after to really come to terms with it and shake off all of the shame and guilt that the people along the way put on me.

Now I'm thirty and I feel I am at a point in my life where I can distance myself from that time in my life and be more objective. I realized something disturbing.

I was groomed from an early age to accept and allow the culture of rape behavior. Society's expectation of me as a good little

white heterosexual Christian girl was to not accentuate my body, never talk about sex, never have sex, and essentially deny my entire feminine self. Fuck that shit.

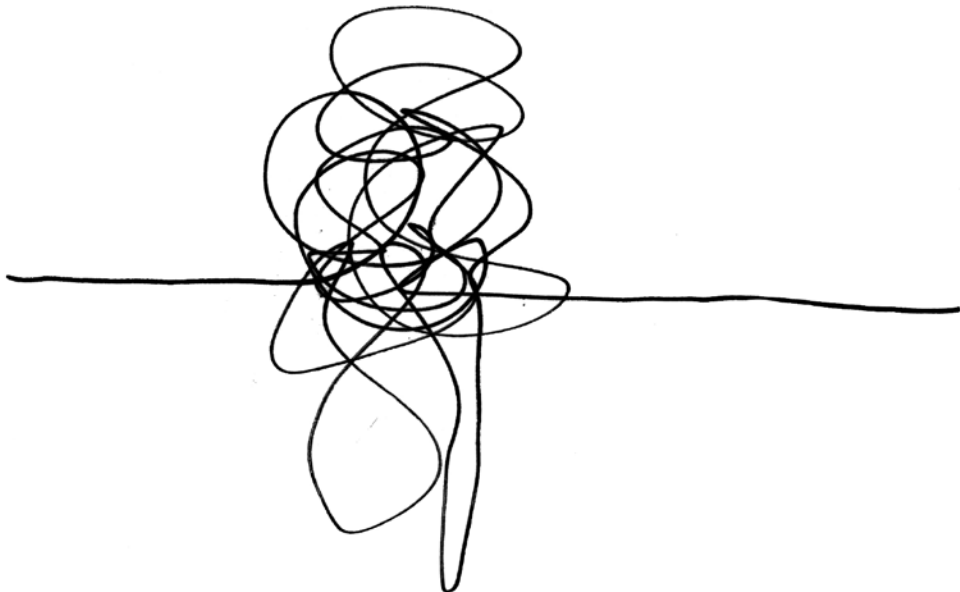
I understand now why it's important to have feminist sisters and feminist brothers. When will this stop?

After this situation happened in my life I wanted to inspire other survivors to know that their voice matters, that their lives matter. I want you to know you are not alone. Even if you feel alone there are resources.

Regardless of where you are on your journey you can always find your pure authentic self. You are beautiful, you are valued, you are amazing and have so much to share and create!

The next chapter of my life is finally beginning and I can appreciate those moments in my life to share them with you the reader. There are resources for you and if you have people surrounding you that don't believe your story, please know I am here with you. Sending you a hug through these pages.

Life does get better. Your voice and life matters.



I HATE ERIC
MIXED MEDIA SCULPTURE
BY KRISTINE MACBRIAN

ME VS MY JERKBRAIN

BY ELENA



My rape would not be described as “legitimate/forcible/honest” by most members of law enforcement or Clowngress, but my trauma is very real.

At my worst point, I was in a hazy, semi-catatonic state where I repeatedly screamed that I wanted to die. Badly. I felt numb everywhere. I couldn't even recognize my own reflection in the mirror. Whenever the phone rang, I would scream “SHUT UP”. It took 2 ½ years of intensive trauma therapy with a very good, patient therapist for my brain to slowly recalibrate and not constantly be in a state of fight, flight, freeze or fuck.

I don't think I've “recovered” or “healed” from my rape, because those are static terms that define an endpoint. I don't know if I'll ever get to the point of complete recovery, so I celebrate the little achievements:

- I can drive a car
- I can work full-time
- I can pay my rent and bills on time
- I can deal with minor stressful situations without losing it.
- When I go out, I don't usually position myself where I can easily see people entering and exiting. Sometimes.
- I haven't self-harmed since December 23rd, 2011.
- I've been in an awesome, healthy, close, supportive, not even remotely toxic or abusive relationship with a totally rad partner for over a year.
- I only broke down and started sobbing uncontrollably one time while writing this.

PROGRESS!!!

And yet, my brain can be a massive jerk sometimes. My favorite advice columnist, Captain Awkward, has answered numerous questions from folks dealing with uncooperative jerkbains.

I still find myself putting on a “normal happy human disguise” to get through rough days. Usually, the disguise is so good that no one except for my therapist and my partner can detect it. On bad days, it feels like I'm a wild feral monster that put together a shitty disguise with some Ugg boots, a rain poncho, mismatched gloves, and a Richard Nixon mask. On those days, it takes every fiber of my being to not scream YOU FOOLS! CAN'T YOU LOOK PAST THE NIXON MASK AND SEE THAT I'M A MONSTER? The worst is when people tell me to “be myself”. Like, which self am I supposed to be? If I had a dollar for every time I've told my partner “How can you date me? I wouldn't even date myself,” I'd have at least 50 dollars.

The worst is when my jerkbrain gangs up on me. It'll act as the most annoying sports commentator ever, and replay my rape over and over again in my mind, in a lousy attempt to prove that I wasn't really raped. Or, it will tell me shitty things like “If you were really raped, you wouldn't have recovered so quickly”. Or it'll say shit like “How could you sit through Hanzo The Razor: Sword of Justice without flinching? See? You're just making all of this stuff up”.

What my jerkbrain is doing in these moments is repeating the worst parts of rape culture back at me. People who have been raped are expected to perform an elaborate song and dance in order to be treated with respect. We're given ‘to-do’ lists (i.e., “Have you called the cops?” “Why didn't you call the cops?” “Have you gone to therapy?” “You really need to find

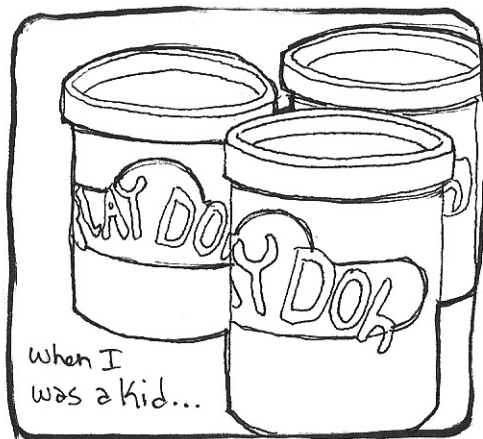
a therapist.” “Don't call yourself a victim, you're a survivor”), and we must suffer just enough but not too much. Trauma affects everyone differently, and there is no one master timeline for recovery from trauma.

Here are a few of the things that I've found do a pretty decent job of short-circuiting my jerkbrain:

- Crying into my partner's chest after a rough day, and having him make me dinner.
- Reminding myself that I don't have to do anything special to “earn” him making dinner for me.
- Putting on red eyeshadow and imagining that I am Lady Vengeance
- Watching *Sympathy For Lady Vengeance*
- Meeting up with other activists to work together and end rape culture
- Playing with my cat
- Taking epic showers.
- Remembering and celebrating all of the little things that kept me from hurting and killing myself.

No, really, it's the most inconsequential things that keep me going sometimes. I didn't cut myself because then who would take care of my cat? I didn't drive off a ravine because I was invited to a birthday party and I didn't want to miss that. I didn't poison myself because there are lipsticks I haven't gotten the chance to try.

The best thing we can all do is look out for each other, and provide support. The biggest lie my jerkbrain has ever told me is that I'm all alone.



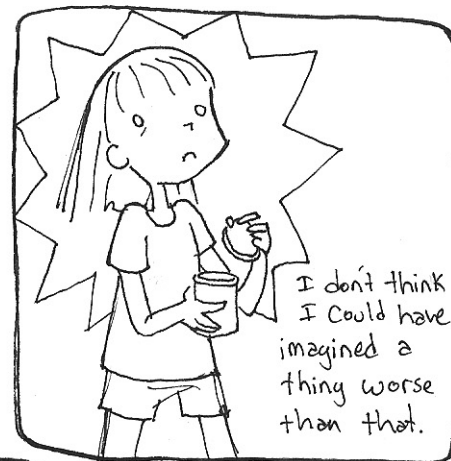
When I
was a kid...



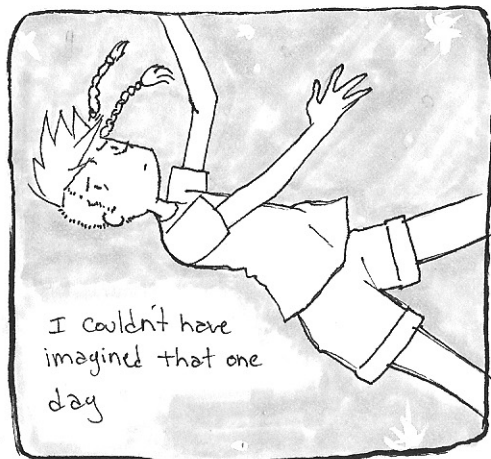
There was no
worse thing
than opening
a can of
Playdoh



... and seeing that that
white crusty shit had
appeared on it.



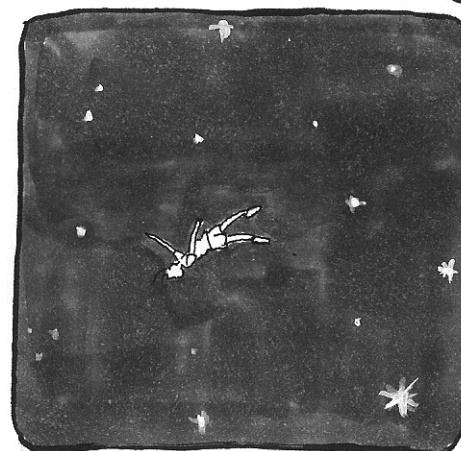
I don't think
I could have
imagined a
thing worse
than that.



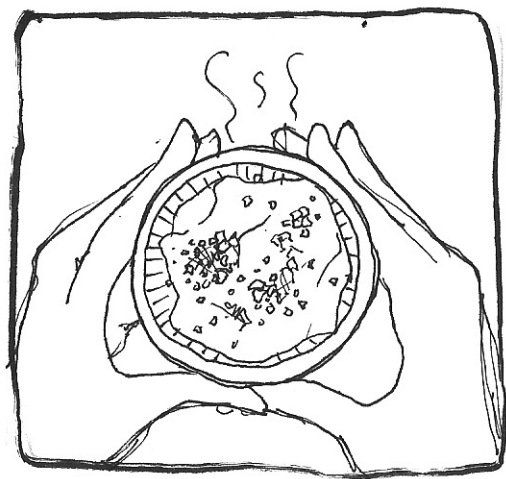
I couldn't have
imagined that one
day



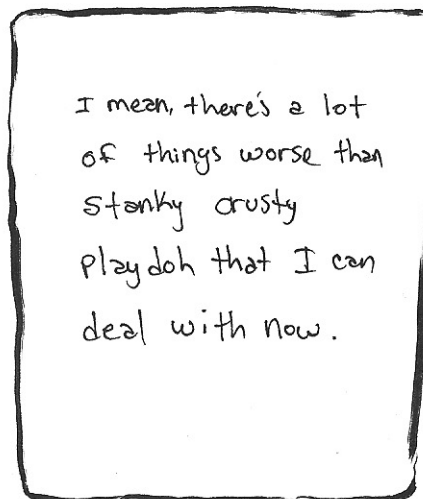
I would have the
capacity to feel
something more than a million
times worse.



But really, I shouldn't
have been expected to.



I'm numb
enough inside
that I can
deal with
this now.



I mean, there's a lot
of things worse than
stanky crusty
Playdoh that I can
deal with now.



... I just wish that
being sexually assaulted
and becoming a local
social pariah because
of it wasn't one
of those things.

PLAY DOH BY ART



DISSOCIATIVE LAYERS

BY
GABRIEL
NOTHNAGEL

I made this work before I went into a psychiatric hospital. The reason I was hospitalized is because I was dealing with post traumatic stress from being raped by one of my best friends. A year before I had also found out that my father might have molested me when I was a toddler. Although I am functional for the most part now, life is still a struggle.

Family members say things to me that irk me sometimes. My uncle and my friend kept asking if I clearly said, "no." My uncle wanted specific details about the rape. The worst thing on my mind now is whether or not my father really "did it." There is no way to know because he was mentally ill at the time and I cannot ask him, because that would hurt him now too. I have decided to be a good person and forgive him for whatever he did nor didn't do. Sometimes I am very sad and resentful.

Just today my mom apologized for telling me the truth about my dad. She said it ruined my life. I kept telling her my life is not ruined even though I wasn't sure I beleived it. I have to give up being upset about this in order to move on. I have to really beleive I am not defined by this.

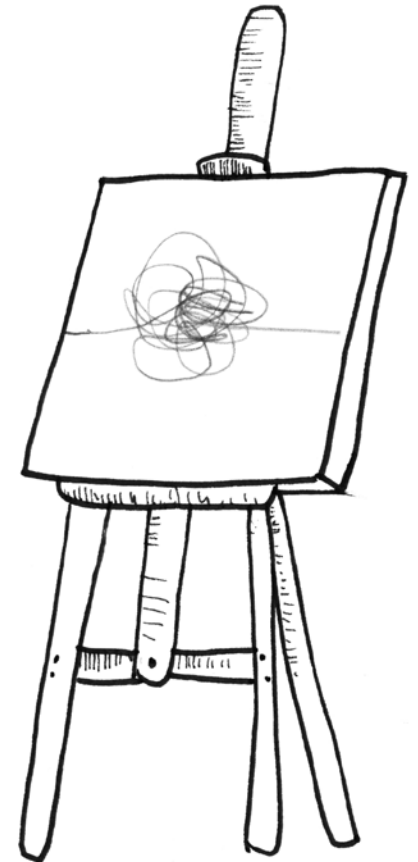
Opt Class By Miranda Leigh Margueres

our small voices whisper
unheard
he smiles
peaks under the table
i am there
i am above the table
but he only sees me below

again, i am there
again, he smiles
looking now touching
i say stop
it's my turn
he says no,
next time

my young brain forgets this
every tuesday
and he smiles loudly
after looking
to me, mr. D says,
stop teasing

today i feel
the embarrassment i felt
for the first time
eight years old
familiar now



BEING RAPED IS THE WORST
BUT SO IS DEALING WITH
PEOPLE AFTERWARDS AND
I HAVE FEELINGS ABOUT IT:
UNORGANIZED THOUGHTS BY
SARA CHITTENDEN

1. VICTIM IDENTITY

It's difficult to explain just how odd it feels to have everyone commenting on how strong I am. I kind of hate how strong I am required to be to survive not just the actual assault, but the years of aftermath. I think most people can identify with the feeling of knowing that you're going to get through something terrible, and hating it—hating that there's some stubborn kernel inside you that prevents you from breaking down completely.

There is already a lot of discussion on the labels of "victim" and "survivor" so I'm not going to recap that. However, I do feel more tired by the survivor stereotypes. There's immense pressure to be a "good" or "strong" survivor, and to admit my victimhood is seen as disempowering myself. To admit just how much my life was impacted by the rape, victim-blaming friends, going through a traumatic reporting process at GVSU, etc, is depressing. No one wants a depressed survivor. Survivors are supposed to be grateful! Life-loving! You made it through!

Don't trust anyone who pressures you to identify as a survivor.

And therein lies my issue with the word survivor to describe my experiences. For me, it gives the illusion that you've gone through something terrible and come out the other side. Truth is, there is no "other side." You don't get over things or past things. That kind of narrative comes from a culture that is uncomfortable dealing with lasting effects of trauma. I also feel like the term victim implies that someone else hurt me in a way that survivor does not.

In the same thread, don't say "my rapist." It's really hard to unlearn, as it feels natural to say. Instead, say "the man who raped me" or "the perpetrator." To say that he's my rapist, while true, links us in a way that just solidifies the myth that rape victims are "tainted" by their rapists. It also doesn't even include him as a subject in the sentence—I am the only

subject. You'll notice that we all talk about how many people are raped, but rarely do we talk about how many people are doing the raping. Talking about the number of rape victims? Sad. Talking about the number of perpetrators? Accusatory! Uncomfortable!

We are more comfortable with the idea of unknown victims being in our lives than unknown rapists.

Want to fight rape culture? Address this.

2. THE SNOWBALL FEELING OF REPORTING

Rape happened. Abusive roommates. So, I reported my rapist to my school for violating student code. Then I started a Title IX investigation of my case. Then I tried to get a Personal Protection Order. Seeing him on campus. Then I went public with my story, naming my rapist. Then he tried to get gvsu to shame me for releasing his name and info. Then they found him guilty of sexually assaulting me and assigned him a 3 page paper. Then I made zines about how much it sucked. Then I posted online about it. Then I reported my school to the Department of Education for failing to follow Title IX. Then I held a protest. We went to a forum on sexual assault where the administrators who handled my case were there. It was hard to look at them. Reaching out to other victims. Then I went on the news. Another reporter is coming to my house tomorrow.

More and more effort and time into addressing fresh injustices while still seeking retribution for the original one. The multi-faceted multi-layered multi-media assaults on an assault. No one tells you that when you're raped it's only the beginning of so much shit at the hands of people other than the person who raped you. That's not part of the survivor story.

No justice, no peace.

3. ECONOMIC EFFECTS

Another fact of rape culture that's often ignored is how it drastically affects how I was/am able to handle a job and school. Here's the thing—sexual assaults are most commonly done by people the victim knows. This is common knowledge. So, they probably live around where you do. Which mean it's likely that they are randomly going to show up where you work, go to school, or get food. The day before I left to study abroad the man who raped me showed up at my front door delivering our pizza.

If you go public with your story, as I am, it also affects trying to get a job. I know that it's likely that my interviewer watches the news. My resume is littered with queer, sexual

assault, and zine activism. Trouble makers aren't good for business. When the rape happened, I was working at a library where I deal with harassment both on my walk to work and at work daily. I was in the lowest position, a page, so we were pretty much just expected to deal with it as part of the job. I felt extremely exposed and vulnerable, and every time someone would harass me I had flashbacks.

Once I reported it to my school, my stress shot up hard. I started getting really sick, constantly feeling nauseous and crampy. When I finally told my doctor about what was going on, she explained to me that my stress was making me sick. Which again, it's hard to go to work and when you're having constant pain and you may run into the perpetrator. She put me on anxiety medication, which has been very helpful, and thankfully only costs \$5. I also did some therapy. It wasn't super helpful to me, but I tried it. My therapists always said that I seemed very self-aware.

So, being a victim of sexual assault is expensive. Doctor's visits, therapy, medication, job troubles/possible unemployment, struggling with going to class, etc. That doesn't include other aspects of self care, like being able to afford good, soul-comforting food, having a pet, doing fun things, enjoying hobbies, and occasionally treating yourself.

4. ADVICE THAT NO ONE WANTS

Most of all, everyone seems to want to talk over and for victims. People will cite psychotherapy, TV talk show hosts, and self-help books. I dealt with this over and over while I was undergoing the report at gvsu. Ironically, most often from the victim advocate. I would often talk about how I did not want to see the perpetrator, meaning I did not want to do certain processes or actions that were available to me. She constantly treated me like this was something I could "get past" using therapy. In fact, she often played my therapist while simultaneously pushing therapy on me. What I wanted did not matter—she had the idea of what a "good survivor" was, and I wasn't following that. So, she tried to correct and shame me under the guise of being a feminist mentor.

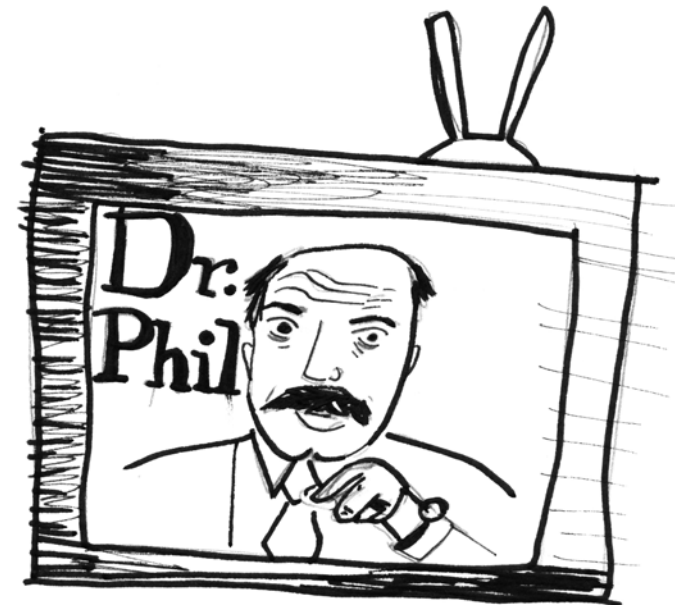
Don't do this. It is my understandable right to not want to see the man who raped me. It is also in my right to always hate him. Please don't preach the "holding on to hate makes you toxic" thing. That may be true for some people, but again, it's none of your business. I'm going to hate him because what he did was vile. It deserves hate. To push me to get to the point where I'm "okay" with seeing him in person is manipulative and selfish. Of course I don't want to be in the same space as someone who hurt me deeply—that makes sense!

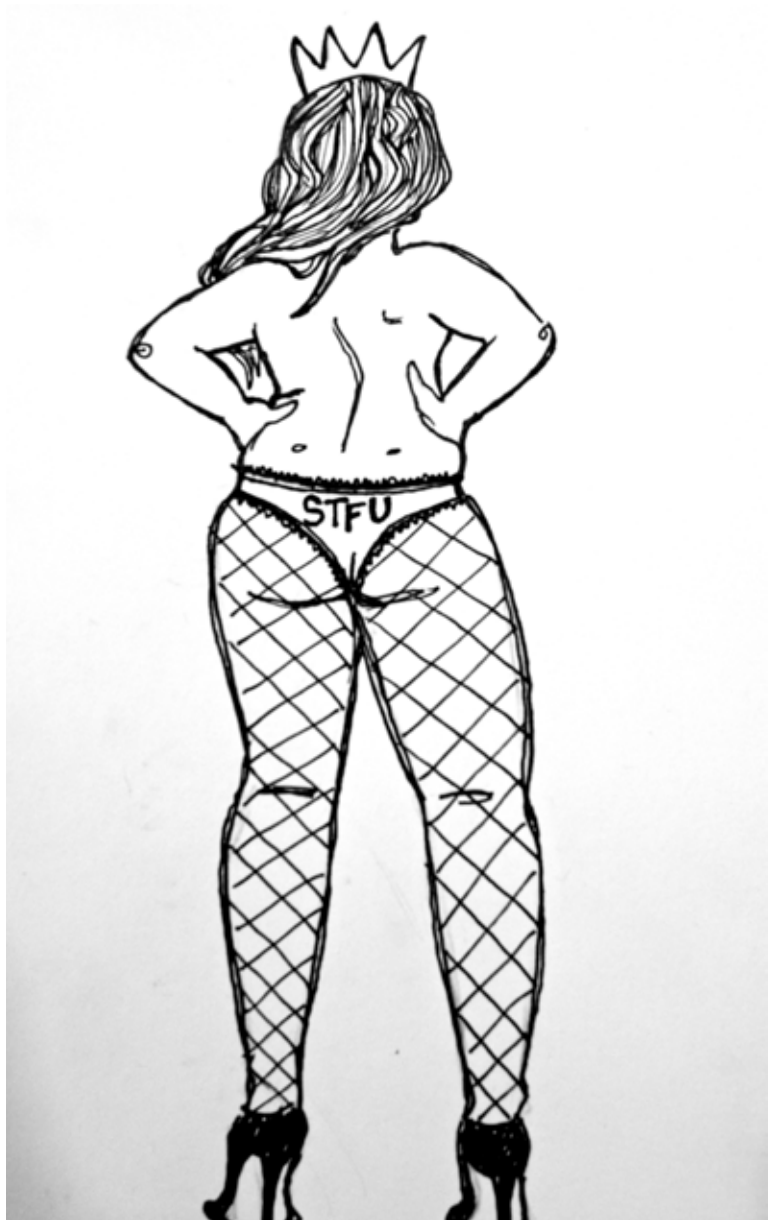
I will also say that I'm a little tired of hearing that I'm a fighter or whatever. It'd be nice for people to actually try to comprehend my experiences without resorting to cliches. Tell me that you've noticed how tired I am, how much you hate these people that hurt me, that you told your friends about the injustice. Let me be weak, bitter, and a "bad" victim. Don't associate with assholes, victim-blamers, and rapists. Don't assume that it's only happened once or only from one perpetrator. Trust your friends who tell you that so and so harassed and/or assaulted them. Don't shame victims for their feelings or desires. Confront rapists. Ban rapists from your spaces. Be my buffer when we go to social events, and I'm scared. Watch musicals with me. Invite me to things, even if I don't always go. Acknowledge my work. Credit my work. Treat me with respect. Don't treat me like a child.

Instead of offering advice, lift up our voices. Empathize. Read up on rape culture. Act.

5. DO THE HARD WORK

If you have not experienced sexual assault, you need to step up. I've seen too many "radical" people who refuse to unfriend rapists, hold abusers accountable, or otherwise change their life in order to make communities safer. They like the band that a rapist is in or going to shows at an abusive person's house. It's too icky and difficult to call out people publicly, right? You don't want to cause "drama," right? I have no patience for people too selfish, lazy, or apathetic to choose to be good allies. You are not an ally to victims of rape if you don't fight against all rapists. Period.





STFU BY KELSEY DEAN



CROP TOPS ARE MY JAM
BY KELSEY DEAN

FOR THOSE—

BY MIRANDA LEIGH MARQUES

raped at thirteen fourteen fifteen
by their father their neighbor their friend
knowing of what sex should have been but unknowing of how to say no.

advil. half a bottle, another half more.
to thin their blood,
to send them somewhere other than a children's psych ward for a week.

stiff white sheets—
perfect white, perfect, to check for blood stains,
the kind not allowed—woken up in on valentine's day.

a heart-shaped card for “no one” in mid-day group therapy.
back to school. no one asked.

lost their voice to the everything learned
told their body was meant to be desired but untouched,
only owned and unknown.

found their voice in the back of a dodge charger, choked lovingly
by a boy with a crooked penis and a vague understanding of the female clit.

sang loud despite silencing secrets
coughed up by cries at the bottom of throats.

saw sunshine in winter through the eyes of girls
meant to be friends,
nothing more.

kept singing.
still singing.



NEED HELP?

YWCA 24-HOUR CONFIDENTIAL
CRISIS LINE IN GRAND RAPIDS, MI

CALL 616.776.RAPE

If you are in immediate danger or feel unsafe, call 911. For all other YWCA Sexual Assault Services, call 616.459.4681 – business hours only. (If you are not in the Grand Rapids area and need help, please look into your local YWCA.)

Crisis Help (no cost)

Trained Volunteer Advocates are available 24-hours a day to help victims and survivors of sexual assault. Crisis intervention by phone through the 24-hour confidential crisis hotline for survivors dealing with the aftermath of an assault. Sensitive, supportive care for victims of sexual assault in immediate crisis.

Short-Term Respite (no cost)

One to three days shelter is provided at the YWCA emergency shelter for victims in immediate crisis who are unable to return safely to their homes.

Short-Term Counseling (no cost)

Individual sessions of crisis counseling are provided for sexual assault survivors. Trained advocates provide a sensitive environment where survivors can safely begin their recovery.

Individual Therapy

As part of their ongoing healing, survivors are helped to evaluate and establish goals which aid them in moving beyond their assaults. Advocacy is also provided through support, education and referral.

Support Groups (no cost)

A facilitator-led support group is available to adult women who were sexually abused as children or sexually assaulted as adults. Drop-in attendance is permitted.

Group Therapy

As needed, facilitator-led therapy groups are available to adolescents and adult women who were sexually assaulted. Confirmed, ongoing participation is required.

Nurse Examiner Program (no cost)

As part of our community's response to sexual assault, the YWCA provides comprehensive, timely, and sensitive medical-forensic examinations. Medical-forensic examinations are performed at YWCA on a 24-hour, on-call basis for children and adults, both females and males.

NEXT ISSUE:

MARGINALIZED REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

Contribute to us at **thebanditzine@gmail.com**

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