#MeToo: Stories of Sexual Assault Survivors on Campus

by

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2015

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Counselling Psychology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

March 2019

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation entitled:

#MeToo: Stories of Sexual Assault on Campus

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Counselling Psychology

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Abstract

Sexual assault is a common experience, with nearly 460,000 sexual assaults each year in Canada. Research suggests that women attending university are sexually assaulted at a higher frequency than the general population. These statistics are likely much higher since many people do not report their assault. Sexual assault has wide-ranging harmful physical, financial, social, and psychological impacts. There is an urgent need for more research into the experiences of sexual assault. The present study investigated this phenomenon using narrative inquiry. The research question for this study asked: What narratives were constructed by student survivors about their experiences of sexual assault on campus? While the majority of research on campus sexual assault is quantitative, there are a handful of qualitative studies on the topic, but little using narrative research design. Narrative inquiry suggests that language creates our understanding and verbal communication is the link to entering into the meaning systems of others. The current study utilizes a narrative approach that allowed space for the diverse stories of sexual assault survivors. Four participants were interviewed for this study. Three of the participants identified as female and one identified as male. All of the survivors were current students at the University of British Columbia and had experienced a sexual assault within the past five years. Five main themes emerged about their experiences: (a) Difficulty Considering the Experience to be a Sexual Assault; (b) Harmful Emotional Consequences; (c) Hesitancy to Report the Sexual Assault; (d) A Placating or Freeze Response; and (e) A Desire to Reconnect the Friendship with the Perpetrator. This study is significant because it informs university sexual assault policies and procedures, as well as provides valuable information for how counselling psychology practitioners can more effectively work with sexual assault survivors.
Lay Summary

The purpose of this study is to gather information about experiences of survivors of sexual assault on university campuses in British Columbia. The research is focused specifically on people who experienced a sexual assault on campus while enrolled as a student within the last five years. Interviews were informed by a narrative approach which provides minimal direction and allows space for survivors to tell their stories in full. Four participants were interviewed and five major themes of their experiences were identified. The themes included: (a) Difficulty Considering the Experience to be a Sexual Assault; (b) Harmful Emotional Consequences; (c) Hesitancy to Report the Sexual Assault; (d) A Placating or Freeze Response; and (e) A Desire to Reconnect the Friendship with the Perpetrator. Data gathered will be used to inform policy, prevention efforts, and practice related to sexual assault.
Preface

This thesis is the realization of the original, unpublished, independent work conceived by the author, Erin Davidson and was supervised by Dr. Marla Buchanan. This research received ethics approval from the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The certificate number of the ethics certification obtained for this study was H17-02156, using the project title “Sexual Assault on Campus”. The author completed all work, including design, participant recruitment, data collection, transcription, analysis, and manuscript write-up.
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Acknowledgements

Most importantly, I want to thank the four survivors who shared their narratives with me. I am honoured to help these important stories be read. I also want to thank the people who have given me the opportunities to make this project happen: my supervisor Dr. Marla Buchanan, my committee members Dr. Marvin Westwood and Dr. Colleen Haney, as well as other faculty in the counselling department at UBC who have encouraged my writing. Finally, I want to express my gratitude for my wonderful support network for believing in my work and believing in me. The research was supported in part by funding through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Graduate Scholarship Master’s Award.
Dedication

“What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have.”
– Oprah Winfrey

This thesis is dedicated to all of the writers, truth speakers, and activists—particularly the women and people of colour—who have fought for equality and a world free from sexual violence.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The night before my article was published online, I woke up every hour to check the time. In between tosses and turns, I decided that I would allow myself to check the website at 6:00 a.m. When the time came, I gingerly opened my laptop. My heart thumped in time with the flash of the circular loading icon on the screen. Then, the fresh greens and whites of the webpage “Mindbodygreen” illuminated my computer, along with my name, and the title of my article “I Didn’t Know I Was Sexually Assaulted. Here’s Why I’m Sharing My Story Now”.

I held my breath and read through the essay. I had not yet had my morning cup of coffee, but I was jittery like I had already had three. I took a moment to let it sink in: how raw and vulnerable this now made me. But I remained calm. When my eyes found the comments section, my heart rate resumed its theatrical rhythm. As a frequent consumer of online media, I braced myself for the worst: judgmental words, profanity, and hateful comments. But, to my surprise, the comments were overwhelmingly kind and supportive. What was even more surprising was the number of women who shared their own stories of sexual assault.

My phone began buzzing on my dresser—and it did not stop for the rest of the day. My inbox filled with messages—some from women I knew, some from women I had lost touch with, and several from women I had never met. These women bravely shared their stories with me. The sheer number of women who wrote to me about their own sexual assaults was both empowering and devastating. That was when I realized just how common sexual assault is, and how it is likely much higher than what is stated by current statistics because so often women do not report their rapes (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). I was inspired by their resilience and courage, but also saddened by the lack of support several of the women faced. Many of the women experienced victim blaming by friends, family, intimate partners, and medical and law
enforcement services. Their experiences highlighted the devastating degree to which we as a society are failing survivors of sexual assault.

**Research Problem**

Sexual assault is defined as any unwelcomed sexual activity, including both unwanted touching (i.e. kissing, fondling, or grabbing) and violent acts (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). Sadly, sexual assault is a common experience. In Canada, there are approximately 460,000 sexual assaults each year (Perreault, 2015). Women are at the highest risk for sexual assault and are the most vulnerable between the ages of 15 to 24 (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008; Perreault & Brennan, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Researchers have suggested that women attending university are sexually assaulted at a higher frequency than those who are not attending (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, & Tait, 1993; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 1999; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007). alarmingly, these numbers are likely much higher since research confirms that many women do not report their assault (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008).

It is well supported by the literature that sexual assault has wide-ranging harmful physical, social, academic, financial, and psychological impacts. Physical impacts range from gynecological health symptoms (Campbell, Lichty, Sturza, & Raja, 2006), to non-genital injuries (i.e. face, head, upper and lower extremities; Sommers et al., 2006), to a decrease or lack of sexual desire (Faravelli, Giugni, Salvatori, & Ricca, 2004). Over half of survivors of sexual assault report being challenged with day-to-day activities after the assault (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008). Following a sexual assault, survivors may struggle socially by isolating themselves, and having difficulties trusting or feeling safe around others. There is research to show that past sexual victimization predicts poorer academic performance in college women (Baker et al., 2016). The financial costs of sexual assault include medical resources,
psychological treatments, social housing resources, and days off work. These costs impact both the survivor and society.

The psychological impacts on survivors are also high. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is more prevalent in women than men, which is linked to higher frequency of sexual assault (Tolin & Foa, 2006). A number of studies report sexual assault to be one of the most harmful traumas. The reported mental health impacts on women include: fear/ anxiety (73%-82%), PTSD (17%-65%), depression (13%-51%), alcohol dependency (13%-49%), illegal drug use (28%-61%), suicidal ideation (23%-44%), and suicide attempts (2%-19%) (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009).

While the majority of research on campus sexual assault is quantitative, there are a handful of qualitative studies on the topic, but little using a narrative research design. Narrative inquiry suggests that language creates our understanding and verbal communication is the link to entering into the experiences and meaning systems of others (Logan & Buchanan, 2008). The most common narrative in the media is of a violent stranger sexual assault (Campbell et al., 2009). Yet, this is only one type of sexual assault. A qualitative narrative approach allowed space for the diverse stories of sexual assault survivors that are often silenced. This is significant because it may inform university sexual assault policies, and more clearly identify what psychological support programs and intervention strategies are needed on campus.

Research Question

The evident problem that emerged from the review of the literature is that sexual assault on campus is a prevalent issue— an issue, which has wide-ranging and damaging effects on survivors. In addition to the widespread prevalence and harmful impact of sexual assault, many universities are being criticized for failing to respond effectively to support survivors (Kane,
To further specify the overarching research question, the qualitative method of narrative inquiry was used. To present the research question under a narrative lens, the research question asked was: “What narratives were constructed by student survivors about their experiences of sexual assault on campus?” The questions remained open-ended to stay true to the narrative approach, with the goal of hearing more about the participants’ own unique stories of sexual assault. In her book on narrative research, Riessman (2008) writes about the value of using a narrative method. She writes about how different people can experience the same event in dramatically distinct ways. Particularly with complicated and distressing experiences, people will remember and retell their stories differently. The benefit of a narrative approach is that it allows space for the rich variety of information to be shared that often is missed in a quantitative study.

**Purpose of the Study**

It is evident that there is urgency for more research on understanding the experiences of survivors of sexual assault on university campuses. There is a wealth of quantitative research addressing the prevalence and the correlates of sexual assault. While this information is valuable, it does not capture the varied experiences of survivors. There is no stereotypical assault; yet the media presents one version, which is the violent stranger assault (Campbell et al., 2009). A qualitative approach helped to provide insight into the range of experiences of sexual assault survivors. This is important because it more clearly identifies what supports, policy changes, and public education resources are needed.

This research is timely as universities are currently in the spotlight for their failures to address and effectively respond to the high prevalence of sexual assault. In British Columbia, the recent provincial legislation (Bill 23) required post-secondary institutions to create individual
sexual assault policies by May 2017 (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2016). Given the current prevalence of sexual assault on campuses and the new policies being formulated at the University of British Columbia (UBC; Benedict et al., 2016) regarding this problem, the findings are highly relevant to informing policy, prevention efforts, and counselling practices on campus.

There are a handful of qualitative studies on the topic of campus sexual assault. However, there is a lack of research using a narrative method to inquire about survivors’ experiences of sexual assault in the university environment. Given that there is a paucity of research about sexual assault on university campuses, this study investigated this phenomenon using narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry suggests that language creates our understanding of the world. Verbal communication is the link to entering into the experiences and meaning systems of others (Logan & Buchanan, 2008). The participants were invited to tell their story in full. In relating to experiences of sexual assault, a narrative methodology worked to elicit richer data than what can be found through quantitative means. The primary question guiding this research is: What narratives were constructed by student survivors about their experiences of sexual assault on campus?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Feminist Theory

A relevant theory to explain the etiology of sexual assault is that of feminist theory. Feminist theory takes a contextual stance, which emphasizes the importance of environmental factors (e.g., economic, geographical, political, cultural, etc.) over biological factors. The particular environmental influences differ depending on culture and historical context. Although there are several branches of feminist theory, I will highlight three overarching beliefs, as outlined by Hopkins and Koss (2005): (a) gender is socially constructed, (b) gender is ingrained both socially and institutionally, and (c) our society and institutions perpetuate the notion of male dominance and female submissiveness.

The first primary principle of feminist theory is that gender is constructed through society, history, and culture (Goldfarb, 1991). This means that violence aimed at a particular gender (e.g., sexual assault towards women) is contextually created in a similar manner. Rape culture is an important term and movement, which takes a contextual approach to viewing the cause of sexual assault (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005). This perspective accounts for the factors in societies that normalize and perpetuate sexual violence unequally aimed at women plus gender, racial, and sexual minorities. Evidence of a rape culture include: acceptance or lack of action against sexual violence, neglecting the importance of consent, perceiving sexual conquest as a right of the dominant group, and trivializing the serious impact of rape.

First published in 1976, the now classic work, Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape by Susan Brownmiller, was very influential in situating rape as a power differential between men and women. The book explained how sexual assault has been used as a means of oppressing women throughout history. Brownmiller also began the discussion distinguishing rape as an act
of violence out of power rather than sexual desire (Brownmiller, 1993). She drew comparisons between the lynching of African Americans by white men, in how it was once accepted, and later resulted in changes of laws; writing that she hoped rape would follow suit. While this book is still useful in making sense of rape culture, it is also highly criticized for the racist remarks implying black men are more likely to commit rape (Davis, 1981). Angela Davis tackled racism and rape in *Women, Race, & Class*, published in 1981. She writes about how the myth of the black rapist was created by white men following the civil war as an excuse for lynching black men. The result of this myth is that white men seemingly view black women as more acceptable targets. Regrettably, this myth persists today, made evident through the decreased empathy and increased victim blaming experienced by black female survivors of sexual assault (Donovan & Williams, 2002).

A second belief of feminist theory is that gender is a permanent component of both social life and institutions (Goldfarb, 1991). An example of this would be how our legal system fails to sufficiently punish perpetrators and support survivors of sexual assault. This lack of action perpetuates the prevalence of sexual assault and violence against women.

A third common perspective of feminist theory is that our society and its institutions are based on the principle of male dominance and female submissiveness (Goldfarb, 1991). This is evident with sexual assault since this dynamic is the basis of many problematic sexual interactions (Goldfarb, 1991). The difference in how boys and girls are socialized creates an imbalance of power and leads to sexual violence (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). For example, early in development girls are taught that to be feminine is to be friendly, quiet, and sensitive to the needs of others (Tatum & Foubert, 2009). In contrast, boys learn to be aggressive, outspoken, and insensitive to their emotions and the emotions of others. These opposites in
prescribed gender roles create the foundation of the traditional sexual script, which is one of male dominance and female submissiveness, resulting in an inequality in the sexual relationship.

**Prevalence**

A variety of studies have reported sexual assault statistics in both Canada and the United States (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008; Perreault 2015; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Statistics for sexual assault are difficult to interpret as less than 10% of survivors report their assault (Brennan, & Taylor-Butts, 2008). Because of such underreporting, statistics on sexual violence should be viewed critically. Women are sexually assaulted 10 times more frequently than men as stated by police reports (Vaillancourt, 2010). According to Statistics Canada, the rate of police-reported sexual assault for women is 68 per 100,000 people. Another study of violent crime in Canada reported that sexual assault accounts for just over 20% of all violent victimization incidents for people aged 15 or older (Perreault, 2015). In the United States, it is reported that between three to five percent of college women are sexually assaulted every school year, with over 20 percent reporting having been sexually assaulted at some point before beginning college (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Weschler, 2004). While there is variance in the reported statistics, several common themes do emerge. First, sexual assault is a common experience that is seldom reported to police or university officials (Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003), young women are most frequently victimized (Brennan, & Taylor-Butts, 2008; Perreault & Brennan, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006), and most sexual assaults are perpetrated by an acquaintance (Starkman, 2013).

Not only is sexual assault a prevalent experience, but survivors are also at a higher risk of further victimization than women who have not experienced a sexual assault (Livingston, Testa, & VanZile-Tamsen, 2007). In a study surveying 555 women one year apart on their experiences
of sexual assault, their coping strategies, and levels of depression, they found that revictimized women showed increased depression (Najdowski & Ullman, 2011). The study linked this effect to maladaptive coping on the part of the survivor. This study also highlighted how it is important to consider all of the sexual assault survivor’s traumatic experiences, not just a single event, during treatment.

**Sexual Assault on Campus**

As stated earlier, there is evidence to suggest that sexual assault is a more common experience for women enrolled in university than those who are not (DeKeseredy et al., 1993; Fisher et al., 1999; Krebs et al., 2007). Numerous risk factors are linked to the increased victimization rates of university and college women, which relate to both the survivors and perpetrators of sexual assault. There is research demonstrating that men affiliated with fraternities and athletic teams commit sexual assault at a higher frequency than other university men (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). The reason for this is thought to be due to the increased hypermasculine beliefs in these groups (Tatum & Foubert, 2009). In Mosher and Sirkin’s (1984) classic work, hypermasculinity is described as an extreme adherence to old-fashioned gender roles. These exaggerated traditional gender beliefs are empirically linked to increased sexual violence towards women. Likely due to the increased interaction with fraternities, there is evidence that sorority members are at an increased risk of sexual assault (Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991; Franklin, 2010; Kalof, 1993; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). In addition, the living environment on college campuses has an impact, with close to 60% of on campus sexual assaults occurring in the survivor’s dorm room or apartment (Flowers, 2009).

Mohler-Kuo et al. (2004) examined risk factors for rape in a national sample of college women (8,567 women in 1997; 8,425 women in 1999; 6,988 women in 2001). Age was found to
be a factor since the majority of women attending university fall within the age range at which most sexual assaults occur (15-24), with the majority of sexual assaults occurring under the age of 21. Finally, alcohol and drug use were determined to be a large contributing factor to sexual assault. Drug use was found to increase the risk for rape, with the risk being even higher if alcohol was also being consumed. Close to 75% of the women who reported being sexually assaulted had been intoxicated at the time of the event.

Sexual assault on university campuses was not a widely discussed issue until the early 1980s. The work of Mary Koss was very influential in creating awareness of the prevalence of on campus sexual assault. Her first study, published in 1982, examined the instances of sexual aggression at Kent State University (Koss & Oros, 1982). The term “date rape” was coined from her study when the results were published in *Ms. Magazine* (Warshaw & Koss, 1988). In 1987, Koss published another study examining sexual assault experiences of 6,159 participants on 32 campuses across the United States (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). The study used surveys to gather information about the instances of sexual assault, the experiences of both survivors and perpetrators, and the psychological impacts of the assault. The results were limited to female survivors and male perpetrators of assault. The data presented some surprising results. Her study supported the assertion that sexual violence is common on university campuses: 54% described experiencing a form of sexual victimization, and 27.5% reported the occurrence of events meeting the legal definition of rape.

Four other major findings emerged from Koss et al.’s 1987 study that impact the current understanding of campus sexual assault and has guided the direction of research on the topic. Firstly, it challenged the notion that strangers commit the majority of sexual assaults. In contrast, it was found that women knew their attacker in 84% of rapes. Secondly, the study
demonstrated the divergence between actual sexual assaults and reported assaults—with only five percent reported to the police, and five percent seeking help from counsellors or crisis lines. The third major finding was the relationship between sexual assault and substance abuse. The study identified substances to be consumed before instances of sexual assault 55% of the time with women and 77% of the time with men. Finally, shocking findings emerged which highlighted the gender difference in the understanding of acceptable sexual conduct. Among the male respondents, 25% reported engaging in sexually aggressive behaviour, and 7.7% voluntarily shared that they had engaged in acts meeting the legal definition of rape.

**Campus Policies.** Recently, the media has highlighted sexual assaults on campus both in Canada and the United States (e.g., CBC News, 2015, February 6; Dick, 2015). Universities are under scrutiny for their lack of policy and incompetent responses to on campus sexual assaults (Kane, 2016). There is evidence of universities underreporting instances of sexual assault (Kane, 2016), reporting under a different category (i.e. “personal injury” or “domestic dispute”; Kingkade, 2013), or failing to report entirely (Quigley, 2013). The critically acclaimed documentary written by Kirby Dick, *The Hunting Ground* (2015), highlighted the need for policy changes in the U.S, to address sexual assault, and the failure of college administrations to support survivors and punish perpetrators. In the U.S., means of combatting this issue include the creation of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault (Obama, 2014), as well as an outlined proposed response for universities to address sexual violence (Lichty, Campbell, & Schuiteman, 2008).

In Canada, CBC News conducted a report of sexual assault on campus. Survey data gathered from 87 Canadian universities found the prevalence of sexual assault to be approximately a mere 0.01%, with 16 universities reporting zero instances of sexual assault in
the past six years (“Sex assault reporting on Canadian campuses worryingly low,” 2015). This report is alarming as it is evidence of the discrepancy of actual sexual assaults and those recorded by universities. This phenomenon of underreporting appears to be done to avoid tarnishing the reputation of the school and to maintain funding from alumni donors.

Smith & Freyd (2014) wrote an article describing the devastating impact that influential institutions (e.g. universities) can have on people who depend and trust them (e.g. students) when the institutions do not support or inflict harm on their dependents. The authors label this phenomenon as “institutional betrayal”. For on campus sexual assault, institutional betrayal occurs when universities fail to punish perpetrators and support survivors.

Currently, universities across Canada are critically examining their current responses to sexual assault. Many post-secondary institutions have created reports outlining recommendations for better prevention, response, and accountability for sexual assault (Benedict et al., 2016; Gunraj et al., 2014; Queen’s University Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Working Group and Policy Subcommittee, 2015). In British Columbia (BC), the Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act was recently passed, requiring BC universities to design and implement individual sexual assault policies by May 2017 (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2016).

Survivors’ Experiences of Campus Sexual Assault

Is it sexual assault? An important component of sexual assault experiences is whether or not the survivor perceives their experience to be sexual assault. A common method of studying the experiences of rape is to use the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss & Gidycz, 1985). The survey lists a variety of sexual behaviours to which women answer yes or no. There are certain critical questions, to which if a woman answers yes, it is very likely that her experience
was rape. Interestingly, research shows that many women whose experiences are considered to
be sexual assault according to the Sexual Experiences Survey would not consider themselves to
have experienced a rape if asked directly. In fact, previous studies have documented between
48% (Kahn, Mathie, & Torgler, 1994) to 73% (Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988) of women
whose experiences constitute rape according to the SES, to disagree with the question “Have you
ever been raped by a man?” Researchers who study this phenomenon label these women as
“hidden rape victims” (Koss, 1985) or “unacknowledged rape victims” (Kahn, 2004).

Kahn (2004) conducted a mixed methods study inquiring about what factors contribute to
college women perceiving their unwanted sexual experience as a sexual assault. The study had
women provide descriptions of their unwanted sexual experiences and included participants who
did ($n = 33$) and did not ($n = 56$) view the event as rape. Then, observers independent of the
research were given the written descriptions of the unwanted sexual experiences and asked to
determine whether or not they considered the experience to be rape. Overwhelmingly, the
observers and the survivors agreed on whether or not they considered the sexual experience to be rape.

Eight different categories of sexual assault experiences emerged from the study (Kahn, 2004). Three types of experiences were generally agreed upon as rape by both the survivors and
the observers. These experiences include forceful assaults perpetrated by an acquaintance,
waking up to sexual acts being performed on them by an acquaintance, or any childhood sexual
experiences. In contrast, five unwanted sexual experiences emerged that were generally not
considered rape by the participants in the study. These consist of giving in to a boyfriend that is
pleading for sex, not resisting a man due to feelings of emotional vulnerability (i.e. after a
relationship breakup), a sexual assault committed by a boyfriend, forced digital or oral sex, or consumption of alcohol or drugs which impaired ability to fight back.

For women who did not consider their unwanted sexual experiences as rape, additional factors contributed to meaning making of their experience. First, women who do not view their experience as sexual assault tend to see sexual assault according to the script of the violent stranger rape, not accounting for assaults perpetrated by acquaintances (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994). Women who struggled with this viewpoint were often assaulted by their boyfriends without the use of much force.

Second, women judged their own emotional responses to the sexual experience to determine whether or not it was rape (Kahn, 2004). Women who had less intense emotional reactions were less likely to view their experience as rape. While research demonstrates that rape is often traumatic, not all women become traumatized by the experience (Gavey, 1999). While women who did not consider their experience to be a sexual assault did experience distressing emotional reactions during and post assault, they reported less distressing responses than women who viewed their experience as rape (Kahn, 2004).

Third, the female participants analyzed the amount of resistance behaviours they engaged in during the attack to determine whether or not they considered it to be a sexual assault (Kahn, 2004). It is likely for this reason that many of the women and observers in this study did not label experiences as rape when alcohol or drugs impaired the survivors’ ability to resist the sexual advances. It is important to note, however, that impairment as a result of alcohol or drugs is considered to be sexual assault by the law in most jurisdictions (Kahn, 2004). These women appeared to attribute the blame of their assault to their own lack of judgement in consuming the alcohol or substances, rather than on the perpetrator of the violence. They held the assumption
that a man will have sex with a woman if she does not resist, and without resistance, the act cannot be considered sexual assault.

Phillips (2000) also conducted a study interviewing women who did experience sexual assault according to the SES, but denied their experience to be rape. In this study, after participants described their own unwanted sexual experience and their judgement of whether or not they considered it rape, the participants were asked how they would view the same experience if it had happened to a friend. Many women were more likely to view the identical experience as rape if they thought it had occurred to a friend. Phillips explained this denial of victimization to be partially explained by the participants’ desire to maintain their self-view as mature, competent adults, and partially because their sexual assault experience did not match their perception of the script of the violent stranger assault (Phillips, 2000).

**Disclosure and Social Support.** Another key component of a sexual assault survivors’ experience is their decision of whether or not to speak out about their experience. The research demonstrates that close to two out of three sexual assault survivors disclose to at least one source (Fisher et al., 2003; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Unfortunately, negative social reactions from both formal and informal support systems are common (Ahrens, 2006). Negative social reactions can have detrimental impacts on the survivors’ healing and can lead the survivor to silence themselves from further discussing their rape.

Negative social reactions from informal supports (e.g., friends, family, romantic partners) include hurtful behaviours (e.g., blaming or doubting the survivor; Ullman, 2000), in addition to behaviour that is well-meaning but still hurtful (e.g., suggesting staying silent or condescending behaviour; Sudderth, 1998). While negative reactions from informal supports are more common, negative reactions from professional support providers are also a frequent occurrence (Ahrens,
Typical negative responses from medical or legal personnel include victim-blaming, refusing to help the survivor, and encouraging secrecy (Ahrens, 2006). When formal support providers react negatively to the disclosures of sexual assault survivors, the impact on the survivor can be particularly harmful. If the survivor feels that the “expert” doubts or blames them, he or she may internalize this judgement, question whether or not the experience was rape, and doubt the usefulness of speaking about the experience again (Ahrens, 2006). Negative social reactions from both formal and informal support systems are so common that the literature has termed this event as a “second assault” or “second rape” and the phenomenon as “secondary victimization” (Ahrens, 2006).

Sexual assault is the only crime in which the survivor must not only prove that the crime happened, but that it was not their fault (Burt, 1980; Pollard, 1992). The sad reality is that for many survivors, regardless of their actions, they will still be blamed for their sexual assault (Ahrens, 2006). The “secondary victimization” of negative social reactions can be so traumatic that the survivor will keep their story silent. The impact of survivors staying silent is that valuable information is lost on the causes and repercussions of sexual assault, therefore limiting social change and progress. Herein lays the strength of a narrative qualitative study. In gathering data from people’s experiences, the survivors will be given the opportunity to reclaim their power and have the platform to tell their stories in full.

One study conducted by Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, & Starzynski (2007), took a contextual approach to examining factors in a sexual assault survivors’ social environment. Female survivors of sexual assault aged 18 and older (n=636), were surveyed regarding their experiences of negative social reactions, positive social reactions, self-blame, avoidant coping, life experiences, and trauma symptoms in relation to their sexual assault experience. One of the
major findings included that negative social reactions were one of the strongest correlates to the development of trauma symptoms. This finding aligns with current research stating that negative social reactions are more harmful to mental health outcomes than positive social reactions are helpful to outcomes following a traumatic event (Cox, Owen, Davidson, & Buhr, 2015). Survivors were found to also be more likely to blame themselves for the assault and develop posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of negative social reactions. The impact of negative social reactions can be so hurtful that it has long been recognized as a “second injury” (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1978).

**Experiences of reporting campus sexual assault.** Survivors face the significant decision of whether or not to report their rape. Fisher et al. (2003) conducted a national-level study of 4,446 college women’s experiences of reporting sexual victimization. The results demonstrated that a mere two percent of sexual assault survivors reported to the police, four percent reported to campus authorities, while close to 70 percent disclosed to a friend or relative. Survivors were more likely to report unwanted sexual experiences when the experience more closely resembles the traditional conceptualization of rape—that is, a violent incident with an unknown perpetrator. Some of the reasons identified in the literature for not reporting include women feeling that sexual assault is a matter that should be kept private (Bachman, 1993), feelings of shame, self-blame, and fear (Finkelson & Oswalt, 1995), not viewing their unwanted sexual experience as rape (Koss 1992; 1993), and concern over not being believed or being treated poorly (Thompson, Sitterle, Clay, & Kingree, 2007).

As mentioned in the previous section on disclosure, survivors often receive poor reactions from legal personnel when disclosing their sexual assault. As a result, the process of reporting a sexual assault can be a damaging experience for the survivor, often considered to be a
“secondary victimization” (Ahrens, 2006). It is not surprising then, that many women do not report their sexual assault experiences. When people see other survivors treated poorly, it discourages other survivors from coming forward to report their own assault (Ahrens, 2006). The seriousness of the poor treatment of survivors was made evident during a trial in Alberta in 2014 (Fletcher, 2016). A male federal court judge made several sexist and blaming remarks towards the survivor, including: “Why couldn’t you just keep your knees together?” The severity of his comments was taken seriously by the Canadian Judicial Council, which unanimously recommended that the judge be removed from the bench.

On an individual level, it is evident that disclosing rape can be a harmful experience for the survivor. However, society as a whole would benefit if more survivors legally reported their experience (Kahn, 2004). If more than two percent of sexual assault survivors reported their experience to the police, people would be forced to recognize the enormous problem of sexual violence. The impact of this would likely be fairer prosecution of perpetrators, better implementation of rape statutes, and eventually a lower frequency of rape. There is a need for more literature identifying more specific factors that prevent survivors from reporting or disclosing their sexual assault experiences (Fisher et al., 2003). With increased awareness, universities and communities can better support survivors following a sexual assault.

**Current Understanding**

More recently, research has focused on the causes and prevention approaches to rape perpetrated by an acquaintance. The distinction between stranger and acquaintance rape is important. It is a common misconception that a stranger perpetrates the majority of sexual assaults, when in reality the majority (77%) are committed by someone the survivor knows (Starkman, 2013). With one in six women and one in 33 men reporting being sexually assaulted,
it is evident that there is a need for more research on how to better support survivors and increase sexual assault prevention efforts (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Unfortunately, the development of evidence-based prevention programs has been slow. The programs that are created often lack sufficient empirical support since there is a rush to create them (Tharp et al., 2011). The importance of better education and prevention efforts of sexual assault is evident; increasing awareness of the circumstances in which sexual assault most frequently occurs is a vital step.
Chapter 3: Research Design

This study explored individual university student’s accounts of sexual assault using the qualitative approach of narrative inquiry. A qualitative approach allows for the pursuit to obtain thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973; 2000) of experiences of sexual assault survivors on campus. A deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences can be created when detailed, context-driven analysis are conducted on a smaller number of cases.

A narrative methodology served this research well because it allowed the participants to hold the floor and construct their replies into stories. So often in traditional qualitative approaches, respondents are forced to fracture replies into shorter, often disorganized segments. This fragmentation of story also occurs in typical qualitative research texts—bits and pieces of responses are typically used in order to create broader generalizations. This practice removes the structure and sequential nature of a narrative telling (Riessman, 2008). Narrative approaches are similar to phenomenological approaches; however phenomenology takes a realist perspective, which believes at its core that there is one universal truth. Narrative, in comparison, takes a relativist perspective, which believes there is no universal truth, and all meaning is socially constructed. The process of narrative inquiry left space for an in depth account of several different experiences of sexual assault, and allowed for the uncovering of factors previously not considered surrounding sexual assault. Through providing a platform for these experiences, it provided a space for voices which are often silenced.

In our society, silence is symbolic of powerlessness (Ahrens, 2006). Rape actively subordinates and strengthens the powerlessness of women (Brownmiller, 1993). Therefore, it is not surprising that many survivors keep quiet about their experience of sexual assault. The narrative methodology gave a voice to the participants and emphasized the subjective meaning
that they made of their experiences. Through giving sexual assault survivors a platform to tell their story in their own words, the author hopes they will feel more empowered by their survivorship.

Background

This study was framed within a social constructionist epistemology, which is the basis of narrative research. In essence, social constructionism states that interpretations of the world are self-created and affirmed through language and interacting with others (Burr, 2002). The chosen approach for this study, narrative theory, builds on the social constructivist perspective. In the narrative approach, meaning is constructed through dialogue. Listening to others can be a means of transportation into their experiences and way of understanding the world (Logan & Buchanan, 2008).

Participants

Four survivors were interviewed regarding their experience as a sexual assault survivor on campus. Three of the participants identified as female and one identified as male. The ages ranged from 19 to 22 years old. The majority of the survivors were Caucasian, with one of the participants being partly Asian, partly Caucasian. All of the participants were current students at the University of British Columbia at the time of the interview. In accordance with the narrative approach to research, each participant’s story is seen to be constructed within a particular social context, and as a result their story is not generalizable to the broader population. Because the goals of narrative research are not to generalize the results, neither a representative nor a large sample was necessary. Recruiting a small number of participants allowed for deep and thorough narrative experiences to emerge from the interview and analysis procedure.
The participants were obtained from one of the major universities in British Columbia, the University of British Columbia (UBC). A purposive sample was obtained, with the selection criteria of (a) English speakers because narrative research requires in-depth understanding of participants' experiences; (b) current or past students who experienced sexual assault on campus while enrolled as a student within the last five years because the research should reflect the current and recent experiences of this phenomenon and recall of recent significant events is important to the findings of the study. A five year timeframe is reasonable for recalling incidents of sexual assault on campus. Participants were recruited through posters put up on the identified campuses. No form of financial compensation was provided since the intention was to recruit participants whose goal for participation was simply to use this research as a platform to tell their story. It was thought that participants who were more intrinsically motivated to share their story would be more emotionally prepared for the possible distress that talking about their experience might cause.

Phone screening interviews with interested participants were also conducted. In the phone interviews, the purpose of the study, the ethical considerations (e.g., anonymity, confidentiality, ability to withdraw at any time), and the expected time commitment were outlined. It was made clear that this topic is distressing for many people and that this research is not counselling, but instead a means to tell one’s story. The researcher was prepared to not include participants who showed signs of the distress in the phone interview and would provide them with appropriate counselling referrals, however this did not occur.

Procedure

Each participant was interviewed individually for between one to two hours. The interviews were conducted in a private room in Dr. Buchanan's research lab at the University of
British Columbia. The interviews were audio recorded then transcribed. The interview questions and protocol are attached in Appendix D of this paper. The central research question guiding the study is: What narratives were constructed by student survivors about their experiences of sexual assault on campus? The primary question the participants were asked was: “Can you tell me the story of your sexual assault—in particular, the circumstances leading up to it, what happened following, and your decision of whether or not to report it?” Space was left for the participants to construct their story in full. It was also said, “Please take as much time as you need to describe what you are comfortable with, the circumstances of your experience. With regards to the details of the sexual assault event itself, please share as little or as much as you want to. If there was more than one experience, please speak to the one you recall best.”

According to the narrative approach, follow-up and clarifying questions were saved until the end and were used as a means to further explain certain points or dig deeper to find turning points in the narrative to prompt further story telling (Murray, 2008). The questions remained open-ended to stay true to the selected narrative methodological approach. If the participant struggled to construct responses, some of the clarifying and prompting questions that were asked include: “What was your experience like of deciding whether or not to disclose your sexual assault? If you did disclose, what was that like for you?”; “What was your experience like of deciding whether or not to report your sexual assault? If you did report, what was that like for you?”; “What failures and successes do you see in the university’s response to sexual assault?”; “What did you need that you did not receive following your sexual assault?”

**Analysis**

A narrative analysis of participant stories, as outlined by Riessman (2008) was conducted. According to this method, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and a narrative
thematic analysis was conducted to identify major themes. Riessman’s narrative approach places less emphasis on the compositional and literary components of the story in comparison to other narrative methods. That said, these factors would have been mentioned if they were particularly relevant to the research question.

In accordance with Riessman’s approach, the analysis procedure is repetitive and centered around dialogue; with movement between the participants’ voice, the theoretical framework of social constructionism, and the researcher’s own perspective and interpretation (Bakhtin, 1981). The knowledge created from the research is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant, with social and cultural contextual factors taken into consideration. The narratives in the final report are presented as contextualized stories of an individual’s life that continue to unfold.

**Self-Reflection**

I believe my awareness of the experience of sexual assault enhances my understanding, knowledge, and empathy towards the stories the participants shared. Of course with personal experience, come certain biases. I brought into this research the assumption that participants would share markedly negative experiences of sexual assault. I anticipated that many survivors would report having helpful social support while coping with their sexual assault as well as harmful social interactions during this time. I also expected that survivors would see opportunity for the university to improve the response to sexual assault. All possible effort was made to maintain objectivity. For example, I am transparent regarding my own experience and viewpoint of sexual assault. In addition, when I analyzed the interview data, I consulted with my supervisor, attended personal counselling, and kept a self-reflective journal to ensure I was upholding an objective stance.
Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness for this study was established through participant member checks and expert peer review. The researcher met with all four participants for the member checks in a follow-up interview. One of the participants, Skylar, had additional comments to her narrative since her perspective of her sexual assault shifted in the eight months between the first and final interview. Her additional comments were added under the “Member check follow-up conversation” heading following her interview. Four criteria were used to evaluate the quality of the research: resonance, comprehensiveness, pragmatic value, and coherence. The criteria of resonance and comprehensiveness were assessed in a follow-up interview. During the follow-up interview, the researcher shared the story she wrote based on what the participant shared in the first interview. The criterion of resonance was assessed through asking each participant to read their own story and to respond as to whether or not the story resonated with them.

Comprehensiveness was determined through asking the participants, “Is there anything missing from what you have told me?” The criterion of pragmatic value was decided through consulting with expert peer reviewers as to the potential impact of the research in the field of counselling psychology. Lastly, participants and experts were also consulted to determine coherence. Coherence poses the question as to whether the research made sense and was meaningful.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the protocols of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. All steps were taken to protect the vulnerable population of sexual assault survivors from re-traumatization. This included selecting participants who unreservedly volunteered to share their sexual assault experience. While the author’s formal training in compassionate response was an asset, she did not treat or measure mental-health
related therapeutic outcomes of the interviews. Dr. Buchanan, the author’s supervisor, is an expert in trauma and narrative research and was also made available to the participants for any needed debriefing and emotional support. Participants were not asked to share more than they were comfortable with, they were made aware that they have full confidentiality, and the right to stop the interview or turn off the tape recorder at any point. The participants were reminded of these points and were offered a debrief session with Dr. Buchanan if they showed signs of distress during the interview. Participants were also made aware of available complementary counselling services. Resource booklets were compiled and provided to participants following the interviews, containing services for sexual assault survivors.

**Data Presentation**

The data is presented in a master’s level thesis using a narrative methodology. A series of themes are provided in Chapter 4 that represent the experiences of sexual assault survivors on campus. Themes from the participants are described and examples are provided.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts found five themes among participants’ experiences of sexual assault on campus. The first three themes reflect the experiences of all of the participants, whereas the final two themes speak to experiences of three out of four participants. With all of the themes, it is important to note that there is certainly variation between how each theme manifested for the participants. The five themes are “Difficulty Considering the Experience to be a Sexual Assault,” “Harmful Emotional Consequences,” “Hesitancy to Report the Sexual Assault,” “A Placating or Freeze Response,” and “A Desire to Reconnect the Friendship with the Perpetrator.” The following is a rich description of the five themes. Interview excerpts are used to elucidate the meaning and depth of each theme for the participants. All names in the following narratives have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Skylar’s Story

**Background.** Skylar is a 19-year-old woman born in Ontario. She came to UBC for her first year of university. She started working in a kitchen on campus; it is there where she met Chad, who was a cook at the restaurant.

**The prelude.** I started working in the cafeteria in my first year of residence. Because they pay student workers less, they would typically keep me to the end of my shift, even when there was not much to do. So I was often told to go look in the back for Chad, and so he would tell me to chop potatoes or lay out bacon strips or what not. More and more of my shifts started to be in the back, and eventually Chad and I’s interactions went from awkward silences to us kind of talking to each other.

It felt kind of friendly, and I guess that is where the lines get pretty blurry. With my good friends, especially as teenagers, there are a lot of sexual or dirty jokes that are made, especially
because I have a lot of male friends. So that, with also not really having any experience with sexual harassment or assault at work sort of thing, I wasn’t sure what to make of it. It started sort of normal, but then Chad started to get more touchy and he would ask about my personal life. We seemed to have similar interests… I did like talking to him.

It started to get weirder and weirder. On one specific occasion, he offered me a drink, and then poured some of it into the sink next to where I was working. I asked him why he did that, and he said: “Oh, just making sure the roofie is in properly.” So he made jokes like that, he would ask about my sex life, he would ask me to stay a bit after work, he would give me free food, he would ask about what I was doing later, and he would often steal my door key from my back pocket so that he could grab my butt. I found out later that he did some of this stuff to some of the other people I worked with—like grabbing their butts or joking about roofying them. It was really strange. I didn’t actually know how old he was for a long time. He looks a lot younger than he actually is, so when I met him I thought he was late twenties, but he is actually exactly twice my age. He would invite male coworkers to “view” the butts of the other first year students who he thought was attractive. That’s like really messed up. I didn’t know what to make of it at the time, because I knew bad people existed, I guess… but I didn’t really know. So it seems strange, but I just thought because of his position and age he knew better than me and that he had good intentions that I wasn’t understanding.

When I stopped working, this sort of dynamic continued. Since I was still living on campus I would go there to have lunch, and we eventually started to hang out more outside of work. I later learned that he had a girlfriend and that sort of blew my mind because I did not understand why he was behaving this way with me. When I confronted him about it, he said he wasn’t doing anything wrong and that I was just misinterpreting everything and that he was just
that way with everybody. I felt compelled to believe that because I was a little embarrassed about what I thought about it. I didn't understand at the time that people would just want to cheat on their significant others. All my friends kept telling me that this situation was weird, and that he was definitely hitting on me, but I felt that I would rather be embarrassed about misinterpreting the situation than to accept that he was a predator who was trying to cheat on his significant other.

One time, after a day of hanging out in a group, I said goodbye to one of my friends, George, then I said goodbye to him, and he picked me up and slid his hand down my back to grab my butt and carried me all the way from the kitchen to the living room before putting me down. Then he just left right after that, and in my mind I'm just like, "What the fuck?" There were a few experiences like that, where he would cross the line and then apologize for it afterward. He would also make weird requests, like offering to be the manager to sell my virginity to someone, or asking if I would be down to have a threesome with him and his girlfriend. For both I told him "no", I explained to him that I am not a sexually active person, that I have always been really strange about it, and that I was sexually abused as a kid. I told him that I want my first time to be a special thing, so it would be really weird for the first time I had sex to be in a threesome with people I don't really know.

I remember something he said to me once, he said, "I really hope you don't end up in an abusive relationship." I laughed, and he said, "What I'm being serious now. I'm trying to show I care about you and you're just laughing at me." Then I said, "Well I don't think I'm stupid enough to be in an abusive relationship," but then I paused and I said, "Well actually I don't think anyone is stupid enough, it just sort of happens really slowly."
In retrospect, I do not think that he had my best interest at heart, and I think he was for sure taking advantage of my lack of experience. I cared about... I feel like I still do sort of... the person I thought he was... but I cared about him as a person. He was not really my friend; he was someone who was making sexual advances towards me. He was trying to deny it, but I did not believe him, and I do not think he really believed it either. Some days he would say, “I don’t see you as a piece of meat, you’re my friend” and then on other days he would say, “Sex is just sex, that’s what I want to do with you.” He would say this as if to prove that his actions weren’t inappropriate for a guy in a relationship, because it wasn’t emotional, it was just a physical impulse. Another thing is that I thought he was an asshole, but I didn't think he was dangerous. Right? I mean I've met a lot of jerks in my life, but I didn't think any of them would like rape me or anything.

The event. So he did end up raping me. The day it happened, I had some errands to do for my trip abroad. Normally, I would be ready to go if he asked me to hang out, but that day I was actively trying to put it off for some reason, which was really strange. I was not sure I wanted to, I felt really uncomfortable about it. I deliberately left my house late, so I would maybe have to cancel with him or something. I did end up caving; because, again, I kind of convinced myself that it can't be that bad. He picked me up and we went to meet another friend, George, at a bar for some drinks.

When we got there, George says to him, “Congratulations on your engagement.” I was so surprised, he had not told me. I remember laughing. I also remember feeling the strongest sort of feeling like, “Wow, this person really does not have my best interest at heart.” I hope what I am saying does not come off as jealousy, like it's definitely not, because this guy is a dickhead. Who would want to marry him knowing what I do? But hearing about his
engagement at the time made me feel sort of sick, because it really made me wonder... what his intentions were for me. I already had one or two shots before we started talking, and I don't handle alcohol well, so I was sort of confused and not really sure what I was supposed to do.

George went out for a smoke. Chad turns to me and said, "So am I sleeping at your place?" This made me pretty mad; I was like, "What the fuck are you talking about? No. You're getting married." I remember I was not paying attention, I was just staring off into the distance, I was probably fairly drunk at this point, and I remember he looked at me and just said, "Stop doing that." I think, apparently, I don't remember doing this... but I disappeared to the bathroom for a long time, and when I got back they were all paying the bill. I remember the server comes up to us and has this worried look on her face and she says, "Are you alright?" Apparently they were all concerned that I was throwing up in the bathroom. I just said, I was fine, and we said goodbye to George.

We go to his car, and you know, I explained to one of the investigators later that I could have taken the bus home, but it literally did not occur to me to do that. So, he drove me home. It was a fairly silent car ride. I remember sort of putting on a sweater and him saying, "Yeah, just sleep it off, get some rest" sort of thing. Then right as we were pulling in to UBC he says, "Can I please crash at your place tonight, it's really late and I need somewhere to go." I just said “Ok, whatever.” I didn't think much about it.

I started mumbling about how I thought he was a jerk. When we got to my house, I gave him a toothbrush, like a disposable, shitty toothbrush, and while he got ready for bed I tried to drink a lot of water, eat some stuff, because I was feeling very sick. I still think at that point, that sort of longing for his approval was still sort of there. I am somebody who likes to snuggle, I guess, so I have had a few of my male friends come over literally to just to sleep next to
me. Nothing has ever happened; they have never been weird about it. So he knew about that, and he said, “Do you want me on the couch or like on the bed?” And so I said, "You can sleep on my bed, don't worry about it." Not appropriate behaviour to partake in with somebody who's in a relationship, but it wasn't sexual and I don't think I cared at that moment.

Anyway, I grabbed some clothes and I changed in the bathroom. I took some Gravol and I put down this bucket, and he noticed that, and asked, “Is that what I think it's for?” and I said, "Yeah one time I was really drunk and I ended up I throwing up all over the floor in my sleep and I just don't really feel like that happening again.” He sort of laughed at me. We went to sleep and I don't know for how long, but something in my house... it is a four-person residence, some door was slamming. The noises continued for a while with me dismissing it until he finally collapsed on me and started kissing me. I sort of pushed him off and started mumbling again and he told me to shut up. I don't know how I feel about this initial part, because even though I was pretty drunk... initially I was actively partaking in it, the sort of thing I would not have consented to if I was sober as we have seen from the other stuff, but you know when it comes to active consent and knowing when someone is saying yes or no, initially it was probably blurry.

I remember he was trying to perform oral sex on me and I told him that it really hurt, he says, "Oh don't worry about it you're probably just really sensitive.” It felt like it was dragging on and on, and it did not feel like anything to me. I did not have the energy... I did not understand how it was supposed to feel. I remember feeling a bit deflated, like, "Oh all this build up and it still sucks." Then, after a awhile— I was literally laying there not saying anything— eventually after probably a few hours, he apologizes for not being able to get me anywhere and I thought, "Okay, cool, we are going to go to sleep, that's that." So I lay back down, but I noticed that's not what he has in mind. I saw how he was positioning himself; I sat up to push him off, he said, "Oh
I know. No penetration." I guess that calmed me down, so I just laid back down and went back to staring at the ceiling.

I remember him asking me to do something, but I did not have the energy to move. I remember literally just staring at the ceiling, thinking, "Why does this suck so much? Why is this so lame?" He slapped himself on me at some point, asking "how about a slap?" I just looked at him bewildered, unable to come up with any sort of response and then lay back down, continuing to do nothing. I wanted to go to bed. I am not sure if my eyes were open or closed, and I do not know how long that went on for. I just know that suddenly I felt in extreme pain. I screamed, and he stopped for a second. I did not say anything because... it did not make sense, like he knew me better than a lot of people. He knew about my past history of sexual abuse and also how I had turned him down repeatedly. He knew that I wanted it to be special; I remember thinking what makes him think that I want to have sex, drunk, two in the morning or whatever.

I remember thinking, “Am I a virgin anymore? Guess not. Well this is happening now, try to enjoy it.” But I couldn't. I do not know how long I was laying there for, but I was not moving. Again, I do not know if my eyes were open. I honestly did not know what to make of it because I was not ready to confront my friend and say, “You're a rapist.”

I remember the police asking me, "Why didn't you push him off of you?" My response was, "What was the point?" In my mind, it has already happened. What was important to me was my virginity, and now... I mean my friends say technically I didn't... but in my mind I did.

There was no discussion of condoms, even afterwards. The thing that confused me even more was that during it, he pushed my legs up to my head and said, "This one's a little advanced." So I thought, "He knows that I'm a beginner, he must somehow think this is okay.” Like he went from saying, “I know, no penetration” to *that*.
I remember at some point feeling this sinking feeling. I was looking at him, thinking, "This is a bad person, and I am never going to see him again." That felt like a really weird thing to be thinking about. I do not know how long that went on for, but eventually I was able to muster up the courage to say, “Please slow down, it hurts.” He said, "I am going slow." I responded, “So, ok it just hurts.” He stopped after that. Again, in my mind I was thinking, rape occurs to people from like a stranger in the bushes kind of thing—he would beat you, and it would be very clear that you were not consenting. But this is I guess a very blurry line, I mean in the context of the whole story I do not think it is blurry at all. But in the event, and how things occurred that night, it is not the way you envision it happening when people say "rape".

I think we tried to sleep after that, but I do not think either of us got much sleep. I remember being jolted by him flipping me over, saying, "I want to fuck you." I thought, "No!" and I shouted, "What do you want from me?!" It is the sort of question I had asked him so many times. He laughed, and said, "What? I want to fuck you." I am pretty sure he understood, but he pretended not to like he usually did. I also remember at some point he mumbled, “I’m sorry,” and when I asked him to repeat himself he said, “Nothing.” He knew he did something wrong.

We fell asleep, and when we woke up, I remember looking at him and being reminded of my history of sexual abuse and how hard that was for me. I remember looking at his face... one thing that really still bothers me is that I still think he is attractive. I was looking at him and I was thinking, "Wow this is going to be really hard.” I also remember finding solace in the idea that I was going to go on my trip for a long time and that I would not be able to run back to him. He asked me to kiss him, I said "no", and he seemed a little shocked, which added to my confusion. When he got up, he grabbed my boob, and so I guess he either really did not understand, or he is just a really bad person.
I remember I had no idea what to say or do, but one thing that was really clear to me was that his fiancé would have to know. So, as he was leaving my room, I said, "Either we tell her or I do." I didn’t want him to have the opportunity to pretend he told her when he really didn’t. I also wanted to give him the chance to tell her because I thought that way that his fiancé would be more likely to forgive him. He got really mad after I said this. He said things like, “I am never going to talk to you again,” and, “Why do you have to cause all of this drama just so you can feel good about yourself.” When he saw that I would not budge, he started saying, “What, do you not want us to be friends?”

I insisted on us having a conversation but I did not know how to hold one, it was five thirty in the morning, he was shouting at me, and I was telling him to quiet down because my roommates were going to hear. He got mad at me saying, "What? You were the one who said we had to talk about this." So I sat down on my bed and I was just kind of pondering what just... what was happening. He came up to me and he was shouting saying, "This was a mistake," then he corrected himself saying, "This wasn't a mistake, I knew what I was doing the whole time, and you seemed to know also." I pointed out the inconsistencies in what he was saying. He said that it was because it was early, and that he was tired. That we would talk later. I think I just nodded my head, and he simply just left.

I laid there until about eight or nine in the morning, when I knew the Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC) on campus was opening. I went to them and spent pretty much the whole day there. I also waited hours at the hospital and I did the forensic testing and that sort of stuff. I remember as I was getting back home around like seven at night, I look at my phone and I have a text from him saying, "I'm just finishing work now, but I am like really tired, let's talk before you
leave." I never responded. I think I wanted to say something, but I didn't know what. I wanted an explanation, I always thought, there had to be an explanation.

**The aftermath.** I guess because I have experience with sexual abuse and because I was leaving in less than a week for my trip, I immediately told my friends. It is a good thing I had the right people around me, I guess. None of them were blaming me, they knew the kind of relationship I had with him because I had come to them with questions throughout about what was happening with him. Not one of them told me it was my fault. But I would not necessarily say they were the best at dealing with this sort of thing. Once when I was really upset, I asked one of my friends, “Should I go talk to him?” She responded, yelling, “What do you want, round two?” So obviously that was not constructive, but I can understand it when someone does not know how to deal with that sort of thing.

My friends also had a group chat going with helping me to figure out how to tell his fiancé. I ended up having a phone call with her. I think she believed me at first. She was very apologetic; she said that he manipulated both of us and that she did not blame me at all. I really wanted to know what he was going to say about what happened and she promised me that she would tell me. She did not. I do not know what happened exactly but I know that they are still together. She refused to cooperate with the police investigation. I am not sure I can blame her for that. I do not think I would blame me, but I would have trouble believing me, if I was in her position.

He crossed the line many times along the way, but those sorts of things I was always able to find a way to brush off. Every time he did something bad, he was able to make me think it was my fault. What happened with him would not have been okay even if there had not been the rape.
Like our relationship was not going to be fine and dandy in the morning if we had just made out or had oral sex. I feel like he sort of took advantage of me in my drunken state.

I think that given how bad my anxiety got in the first few months when I was away— not hearing from him, not understanding why he did not have anything to say… If I was not abroad, if I was not sort of forced to be away from him, I think maybe I would have… for the sake of not having to accept that this experience was something that I have had… I think I might have found a way to sort of sweep it under the rug.

I remember before I was going away, people would tell me, “It is so dangerous. Why are you going to go there? You are probably going to get killed.” When I heard that, I was struggling not to yell at them, like, “Every bad thing that you are telling me could happen there, has already sort of happened to me here.”

I decided I would disclose after I had my goodbye party before my trip. I was at the party and… I don’t drink… anymore, but my friends were. I remember seeing two of my guy friends passed out on the beds and so I ended up thinking, could I do something to them? I was trying to get into that mindset, and I could not comprehend trying to touch a person in that state. So I convinced myself that I would report.

Before leaving, I met with someone in the UBC department that Chad worked in. I reported to someone and he sort of scared me. He said that because I told him, he would be obligated to make a report, which would result in Chad getting fired. I was not prepared for that. I was not prepared to say something or do something that would ruin somebody's life. But then, this person said that if anyone found out that he knew what I told him, that he would be in a lot of trouble, so he promised he would confront Chad, under the table so to speak, and find out what happened. He took down my personal email and promised he would get back to me right
after he spoke to him. He ended up ignoring me for a few weeks, but finally messaged me back while I was abroad. He said something about how he “gave him shit” but that he didn’t want to talk about this online. When I did end up reporting the case, I convinced the police to talk to this person, but he ended up quitting his job at UBC without telling anyone, including me. Obviously this guy made no effort to protect anybody because he quit without telling a single person.

I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what I could do. Before I even made the police report, I had very little faith that would go anywhere. Because, statistically speaking, people find it more traumatic than they do helpful. So I was trying to figure out if I could do anything civilly. I ended up coming back from my trip early. Every second of every day I was just re-playing the event and at that point it was so fresh I could still sort of feel it happening, and so I wasn’t really able to sleep at night.

I made the report when I got back. The lawyers were clear that this would be a difficult process. I thought about it for a month. Eventually I told my mom, I called her at what would have been three in the morning where I was abroad and she kind of realized there was a problem because I should have been asleep. So I admitted it to her that I had come back to Canada, told her happened, and she told me it was okay and she gave me money to come home. So basically, up until recently, I have spent like four months literally not doing anything… waiting I guess for the lawsuit to start. I feel really glad that my parents were able to support me. I was able to sleep all day and be supported by someone else. I got so many job offers during this time, to the point of getting papers to sign and then I just wouldn’t because I did not want to go back to work. I think it might have had something to do with how the relationship was formed at
work. I cancelled my trip to Asia too. I was feeling better at that point but I was definitely not ready.

I had all these plans. I have always had a lot of trouble figuring out what I wanted to do with my life. I was thinking I would go abroad and try teaching to see if I liked that, and then I thought I would spend time in Asia to see if I enjoyed working in a hospital. I try not to think about it this way, but I definitely feel like I wasted a lot of time and I kind of feel like I was held back in ways by this experience. I mean it’s the kind of thing that you can learn a lot from. But you know, I remember when I was thinking about, even the experiences I had as a child, I feel like on the one hand it made me a lot more of an empathic person, so much more in touch with my emotions, but at the same time I wish I could just be like the normal kids who didn’t care about anything.

I met with the lawyers last week and they told me that they do not think I should pursue the lawsuit anymore. So, I don’t think I will move forward with it, and I think right now, I am more equipped to deal with that information. I would not have been earlier on. I would have kept striving to find somebody who would think otherwise. I do like that my lawyers did all this work too. They didn’t just say “no”… they did all sorts of work for me, land title searches, hiring private investigators, and they met with people who have more experience with sexual assault civil suits, and they had ideas of what arguments they should be trying to make.

I did report to the police. When I tell my friends the story, especially at first, I would say all the things that I felt caused it to happen, and they would all say, "No, you were really drunk and we know you don't handle alcohol well, you had put a bucket near the bed and this guy is sober enough to drive, and he is twice your age, he knows better." But the police don't really care. I remember when the police told me that they did not think he did anything wrong and that he took
the appropriate steps to maintain I was consenting; I was so much angrier and more upset than I would have been if I never even bothered to go to the police. I feel sort of failed by the police. I sort of hate the fact that he won’t really face real consequences. I think that hopefully I will be able to move forward with my life and be a successful person, maybe he will see that and know that he didn’t have the effect that maybe he wanted to.

I completely understand why some people do not pursue criminal charges. I recently got my Crime Victim’s Assistance Program (CVAP). This is for if you report being sexually assaulted, for example, police may not take it seriously because there is a much higher burden of proof. But, you could still get government funded counselling. So, I applied a long time ago to get credits to see a real licenced psychologist.

I recently got the application back and I was denied because, as I had suspected, the report was not taken seriously because the police officer had not understood the story properly. You know he... often times he would get certain facts wrong. He did not seem to care when I tried to correct him or anything, and in the summary there are major facts missing. It does not say anything about me screaming and him continuing or him saying, "I know no penetration." That's not there. It says stuff about how we had discussed where our relationship was in August, but it does not discuss when I told him to leave my house and stop trying to make out with me. Where I repeatedly told him that him constantly coming onto me and making moves was unfair and massively inappropriate, and to reconsider his relationship if he feels like he wants something else instead of messing with my head and leading me on. It skips those parts, and it says in the report that a few days later, I told him I was going to tell his girlfriend and he got angry. So I feel like it seems like I just randomly threatened to tell his girlfriend and it just paints me as like this jealous person who made up a rape allegation to get back at him. But I reported this whole
story that I just told you, to them. Obviously I am certain that some things were not conveyed properly, because I had never spoken to anybody official about it before. I was still trying to find ways to blame myself, instead of being certain and hard about the facts that make him a rapist. I would say that I am closer to a functional human being now than I was in December. I mean, in December, I was adding things to the story that made me look bad so that I could get people to tell me it was my fault. My friends said that it definitely wasn’t regardless of those things. The police didn’t care, and used it to pretend the crime wasn’t a crime. The police decided to focus on those bad things that made me look bad in the CVAP summary, which got my request denied. So reading that report was a really bad day for me. Because, you want to respond, you want to say, “Why on earth would you convey it this way?” But at the same time, I don't want to be on trial, if they change their minds, I don't want to be on trial and have to deal with this again.

I think reporting to the police is more traumatic than the sexual assault itself because… in my situation, I believed that people are mostly good Then you meet someone and something happens that tells you that there is at least one bad person. Then when you go to the police and they tell you… they invalidate you, you kind of see maybe there are a lot more bad people… your sense of safety is gone.

It is only the really clear cut, I think it’s called aggravated sexual assault—Even in those cases there’s often no conviction-- but somebody gets beaten or held down or there is a gun or knife or something, those are the ones you hear about on the news. It really gives you this idea that the danger is somewhere that it isn’t really. And it sucks to know that as I become more comfortable just talking to people about it, and they admit that they had a similar experience and they haven’t said anything, it is really scary to realize just how many people this has happened to. Especially when you hear about false rape accusations, as if they are so common, but they
are not. False rape accusations are extremely uncommon, but people and the media portray it like it is a huge problem to invalidate all of the violence that victims go through and sweep it under the rug. Apparently one out of every five women you meet have had some sort of sexual violence in their life, and that is really scary to think.

I also ended up reporting to UBC's Sexual Violence Response Prevention Office (SVPRO). That process is supposed to take sixty days, but it's been almost 6 months now. Once the investigation is complete, it has to go to his HR rep, who will decide punishment. Apparently because I made the report, he was escorted out in front of all of these people. Which was nice to hear, I guess.

One of my older brothers tells me he experienced a lot of racism in high school. That sort of thing absolutely blew my mind. At no point in high school did I ever feel that I was behind because of my race or my gender. I had no idea about sexualized violence as like an act that is most commonly commit against women, it's weird seeing it as something that is done as a hatred towards women, or just patriarchy or misogyny, but the numbers... it speaks to that so it's really scary. On one hand I like being a woman who wants to stand up there and say that this is wrong, but on the other hand, maybe the men in the room are thinking just shut up, it's not a big deal or the woman's just being bitchy as usual.

It seems like a good thing that these justice processes are ending but it will be weird to not have anything to sort of look forward to in terms of justice. I remember feeling sort of lucky that I could pursue a civil suit, that UBC was involved in some way because this happens to so many people who can’t do anything about it. I think a big thing for me was feeling validated, like even though my friends told me that they believed me and that this was wrong, it felt like it was more
important to me to have some sort of real, government, official thing saying, "We believe you and this is bad." Most people don't get that opportunity.

A lot of people tell me that I am courageous. I don’t want to be offensive to people that have cancer, but it’s just like if I had cancer and if I got treatment it would be weird if other people said, “Oh you fought so hard.” It’s like, what else was I supposed to do? I remember my brother told me, “You know, most people don't report or anything, they can't do it.” And, I know people that have been assaulted too and they don't say anything about it to police, and I don't think it's because they can't do it, I think it's because they already know that it's not going to go anywhere. At the same time that I feel like I did the right thing saying something, I kind of feel that I wish I was the kind of person that could just move on.

My experience with my lawyers has definitely been stressful, but I feel like looking up how to hire lawyers, or whether I can make a claim, or looking at the criminal code, that sort of thing has given me an interest in law. Maybe I could be... it was so hard, it was so shockingly hard to even figure out how to hire a lawyer that deals with that sort of thing. Vancouver has one sexual assault lawyer. My lawyer was a personal injury lawyer, but there is just one firm that deals specifically with sexual assault and when I contacted them they had more than a yearlong waitlist. So I feel that I could be good and helpful to people if I went down that lane. I often think that having a purpose is important too. So I guess on the bright side of this I can see myself doing something that I could work to over the next few years. I mean I’m definitely not saying that I would do it again, but I guess you’ve got to make the best out of the situation that you are in.

Member check follow-up conversation. During the follow-up interview, Skylar commented on how her perspective on her sexual assault changed in the eight months since the
initial telling of her narrative. She spoke to how she saw that she blamed herself following her sexual assault, and now she holds the lawyers, the university, her perpetrator and his girlfriend more accountable for the harm they inflicted.

During the telling of the narrative, Skylar had stated that she felt that initially the line was blurry for the sexual assault. However, she now understands that the line was not blurry at all. At the follow-up conversation, she recalled that at the time of her rape she did not consent before drinking, she was drunk during the assault, and that she had even tried to push Chad away, but he had told her to “shut up.” She stated, “I don’t think there was ever any consent, more so that I just caved in and let it be.”

When she told her story in the first research interview she still supposed Chad may have simply lacked understanding of the consequences of his actions. Most recently, she described:

I think Chad is a really bad person who didn't want to confront the reality of his actions. He wanted to act like everything was fine, and that it was all a big joke the way he usually did, so that maybe I would be confused enough to let it slide, too.

For example, at the follow-up interview Skylar spoke to the morning following her sexual assault. She remembered Chad had implied that he was confused about the situation, however he had said, “This wasn’t a mistake, I knew what I was doing the whole time and you seemed to know also.” Skylar explained that his immediate defensiveness around the presence or absence of consent demonstrates that he knew that he did not have it. She felt this moment was telling of Chad’s understanding that he had done something wrong since she had not referred to the event as a rape or mentioned anything about consent at that point in time.
At the follow-up session, Skylar also shared that she had learned Chad had cheated on his previous girlfriend and had lied to both herself and his current partner. Skylar’s opinion on Chad’s girlfriend, now wife, has also changed entirely:

I’m less apologetic for other people's behaviour in this situation, and I no longer think I can justify her actions. I definitely blame her for not doing anything, and I think it is indicative of her also being a bad, stupid person.

Since the earliest research interview, more unfolded with regards to Skylar’s report to UBC’s Sexual Violence Prevention Response Office. A second report was necessary due to the SVPRO’s error in following necessary protocol. While the second report was being conducted, Chad found a different job and refused to participate in any further proceedings. This meant that Skylar’s statement was not contested and none of the supporting evidence or witness statements from the first report could be used. As a result, no resolution or form of justice could be obtained from this report.

Skylar also spoke to her experience dealing with the lawyers in the follow-up interview. She initially was grateful for the work her lawyers had done; however upon reflection, she feels that they could have treated her better. For example, the lawyers had told her that they would not move forward with her case, not because they would not win, but because there was no money to be gained even if her case did win. Skylar also mentioned that when she met with the lawyers, the main lawyer either did not know or had forgotten many of the important facts about her case. In addition, Skylar felt that it took the lawyers months longer than was needed to tell her that they could not move forward with her case, given that no new information arose related to her case during that time. She expressed:
I think most lawyers are jerks and that they really only pretend to care about you when money is on the table. That is what is so unfortunate about rape and sexual assault. There is effectively no sure-fire method to get any sort of support or justice. Most people don't care. Many just pretend to care while it benefits them to do so.

**Julia’s Story**

**Background.** *Julia is a 20 year old, European-Asian woman, in her third year of study at the time of the interview. She moved from the pacific northwestern United States to attend UBC and did not know many people when she started classes. In her first year on campus she met Chris, and the two of them quickly developed a meaningful friendship. While Chris had expressed a romantic interest in Julia, she made it clear early on that the relationship would remain platonic. Chris joined a religious fraternity on campus and he asked Julia to attend one of the frat’s formal events with him.*

**The event.** The night of the formal we got tipsy drunk at an event off campus, and then at the event we were drunk, but not that drunk. He kissed me and I told him, “Hey don’t do that.” I pushed him away, but I was still trying to be nice. But then he got really aggressive, and he started fingering me and I was not into that; it was really painful, I bled a lot. I was still thinking, “Okay this is my friend, he's not... in his right mind.” He stopped, so I left, but I could not completely leave the venue. I was trapped and stuck in my head at that point, not knowing what to do. I had trouble making sense of Chris’s actions; how could one of my really close friends do something to hurt me?

When we finally left, I was in a cab back to campus with some other girls from the formal, along with Chris. He was intoxicated, and I remember wanting to help him find his way safely back to his room. I thought to myself, “Okay, I'm not that drunk, so I will just still make
sure that he at least gets back to his room alright, and then I'll process or whatever.” So, we get back to his room, and he starts pulling at me. He pulls me into his room, and I tell him to go to bed and that I need to leave. He keeps pulling at me and starts fingering me again really aggressively—it was painful. It was so hard because he had been a good friend. I had always known that there was the sexual tension there, but I trusted him to not act on it. Once I was able to leave Chris’s room, I went straight to stay with one of my other friends on campus. I showed up, crying, but my friend respected that I did not want to talk about what had happened.

The next day, I called my long-distance boyfriend to express what had happened. He was living out east at the time, and after speaking with me, he booked a flight to visit that weekend. My boyfriend was a supportive and non-judgemental presence for me. When he arrived in Vancouver, we did not talk much about what had happened. As for Chris, he contacted me a few times after the sexual assault with intent to apologize. For obvious reasons, I needed to process and did not feel ready to talk to him again for a while.

The summer passed, with little to no communication. Every now and again he would message me to say, “Do you want to talk or something?” I did not agree to that until the beginning of second year. A part of me was hopeful that we could repair the friendship. I wondered how bad someone’s actions had to be to discount months of perfectly good friendship. When we met up, he reassured me that he would be “good” and would never do that to me again. He had gotten into a power tool accident over the summer and he had to have his hand stitched up. He tried to convince me that was his karma, he would not outright say so, but he would imply, “Oh I got my karma for doing bad things with my hand, now my hand is fucked.”

After meeting up, we started hanging out together again. He kept making advances. At that point, I started convincing myself that if he was acting this way towards me, it must be...
because we were actually *into* each other. Then it was okay. Then it was fine. If there was some weird hidden love thing or whatever, it would be alright. This part of the story is hard for me to talk about. It gets really fucked up. We continued to spend time together for a little while, and then he left in his second year to travel. Then I went to visit him—like I was testing out our relationship or something!

I tried to convince myself that I was in love with him. That I was into it sexually. That I was okay with what happened. For the week and a half that I was with him, I mentally removed myself from everything. It felt like I lived a different life for the week that I was with him. I could only convince myself for so long, and I just couldn’t keep convincing myself when he would touch me.

When I got back to Vancouver, I was no longer able to pretend we could be friends. He has been back from his trip for about a month now. He has been messaging me, but I have been ignoring him. I need to have a conversation with him, but I don’t want to… [voice trails off]. It is just so hard to think of talking to someone, looking in their face, seeing how you hurt them when you say, “I tried to get over what you did, but I cannot.”

**The aftermath.** I did my best to shut out what had happened. For the longest time I could not remember the details, I just remembered bits and pieces about being in the car and vaguely something about talking to the other girls in the bathroom. When I started thinking about it again, the memories would come back. I never grieved or anything about it, it just happened. I could be sad and dwell on the fact that someone hurt and betrayed me, or I can move on from that part of my life. Plus, so many people go through this; I know too many girls… and sometimes guys.
I had no idea what to do afterwards. I did not know if I should tell someone, I did not know what any repercussions would be on his part. I knew that if I did try to take things to real action—and this is all before all the #MeToo stuff!—that I did not want to sit in a courtroom. I just did not know what to do. It’s also funny because two weeks after this happened I saw all these stickers on the ground on campus about consent.

I did not want to report it. I could not see what good would come of it for me, except for maybe something bad for him. He was still a good friend of mine and I did not want to ruin someone’s entire reputation or life just because he got drunk and stupid. At the time, I was so torn apart and conflicted about him being my friend, and not wanting to screw him over.

I considered going to the sexual assault room on campus, but I just did not know if it was worth it, because what were they going to do? They would take my record, then, sure, maybe they would put some action towards him. Worse comes to worse, he would get expelled, but then what? Now he has an expulsion on his record, would that actually make him less likely to do something like this in the future? When he had apologized to me after he said, “I’ll never do that again, I can’t believe I did this to you,” and I believed him, but his behaviour did not change. He continued making advances to me, and I heard from another girl that I talked to afterwards that apparently he has a habit of being pushy and coercive.

I don’t know why I feel like it is my job to make him understand. But I do feel like I have the opportunity to show him that what he is doing is wrong and that he shouldn’t do it again. But when I talked to him, he apologized and said he would never do it again, but his behaviour didn’t change. It makes me wonder how to get him to see the error in his ways.

I flip flopped a lot on deciding whether or not to tell people about the sexual assault. I didn’t exactly want to go announcing it to the world, either for my sake or for his. It was
definitely an emotional time, because whenever I tried to think about it and tried telling someone, I would stop myself from thinking about it because it was easier to just push it away and not think about it and move on with my life. It felt like I alternated between telling myself that this didn’t happen and trying to justify it and say, “You can’t deny that it happened, it happened, so get over it and move on.” So telling someone was tough for me because it meant I was forced to think about what happened.

I guess a part of me hoped that if I told someone, it would make it better. You are supposed to tell someone—that is what they tell you to do. You hear about how people who go through sexual stuff go see a therapist to talk their way through it or they see someone about the psychological effects. I could not see how that would help me. I did not think I would experience any insanely detrimental psychological effects. It wasn’t destroying my psyche. I wasn’t unable to continue living a daily life. I can’t say it made me worse than I already was. It was just kind of an inconvenience. Like, this has happened, and now I am one of the tally marks of people who get nice traumatic experiences in college. I do not like depending on other people, so I do not need to necessarily go to a therapist for this—I did go to the UBC Counselling centre, but I found it to be unwelcoming and very unhelpful—I don’t need to talk to anyone else about this. I think I can take care of it on my own. I don’t need to bring anyone else into this. I don’t need to turn it into this whole thing. I don’t need to create drama. I don’t need to tell anyone necessarily... but then there is this part of me that kind of wanted to tell someone because maybe they can tell me what to do.

I told my residence advisor (RA) a month or so afterwards, which is not something I usually do. I don’t usually offer up information. Speaking to her was good because at least I told someone, at least at the very beginning. It was helpful to know that I had her support,
especially early on when I was still in the traumatic zone of staying in my head, spiralling, and thinking about it too much. The university does a good job of making it clear that the RA’s are there to be supportive for the students. I knew that I could just talk to her and trust her not to go directly to the system. Then I could make the choice to report, and if I wanted to that she could be the person to help me with those steps.

I did eventually tell some other people. I never went through the whole story or anything, but yes, if I was close enough to them, if it was the right setting, I would be like, “This is why I am not talking to this person.” Because people notice when you go to hanging out with someone on a daily basis to not at all. Or if someone went through a similar experience, I would tell them that they were not alone.

I decided to participate in this study because when I saw the flyer I thought, “I think that kind of applies to me.” I think I am a person who won’t necessarily be a sobbing ball of tears. I won’t be a mess for two weeks thinking about it. I can contribute and I can be of use. Hopefully some good can come out of having more information on the grey areas and where the lines are crossed so that people know what to do and what degree of action to take. For the assailters to learn what consent is and for the victim’s to learn what action they can take afterwards.

Marcus’ Story

Background. Marcus is a 21 year-old Caucasian male. He moved from the east coast of the United States to attend UBC to study. Though Marcus agrees that what happened to him is by definition a sexual assault, he requested that I refer to what happened as “the event”. While the sexual violation occurred during high school, he speaks to his experience coming to university as a male making sense of his experience.
The prelude. I guess the story starts with being in middle school and questioning if I was completely straight or if I was also bi [bi-sexual]. So I was going through that process of exploring my sexuality, not taking it too seriously. I was on a sports team at that time in high school and we had a lot of overnight trips. I remember one day with this guy, he was messaging me on Facebook. We were in the same hotel room, but someone else was there because we were all sharing the room. We were messaging and then he started getting a little too flirty. So I thought, “Okay, what's up?”

Then the other kid left, so we started talking in person and then it was sort of this pretty normal exchange, he asked me things like, “What are you? [Referring to sexual orientation]”, “Do you want to do anything?” and things like that. I remember he like... he like pulled his pants down and I thought I was supposed to do something. In that time that I was deciding if I wanted to do anything, the other person came back, so it sort of ended.

The event. Then another time we were at this guy’s house, in a big group of friends, he was having people over. I remember on this particular night, he was being a bit oddly pushy about me drinking a lot. I remember thinking, “Okay this is weird.” I kept drinking because I knew I was in a fine place to do so and I did not have to go home that night to see my parents. We had split the rooms up, and I forget who else stayed over, but I remember I was in a room with him.

I am trying to remember how drunk I was… So, if a hundred is like puking and just done, I'd say I was maybe at a seventy-five, eighty-ish percent. I remember just laying in bed and he started touching me, and then like really stroking me and I sort of remember like... he was going over my clothes... and then I sort of remember I just wanted the feeling... for it to like end... because I was still unsure if I wanted to do it or not. So I was caught in this moment. He kept
advancing, and I was like, “Okay, I’ll just get it over with. I will let him have like everything…” I remember I wanted to say “no”, to stop, but I was too drunk to get the words out. Like I was just so groggy and tired... like there was a lump in my throat and I couldn’t get the words out.

Once that ended, I never considered it a sexual assault, but technically by definition it is. It is tricky because I always felt that it was my responsibility to keep myself in a coherent state...I wasn’t clear on what I wanted… I was misleading at times, like flirting back and all that.

I stayed being friends with him. I later told him: “I think I figured out that I’m straight,” and he said: “Okay, good to know.” I never really blamed him or shut him out of my life, because again I didn’t see it as a sexual assault. It still doesn’t feel right for me to call it that because I had a big part in all of that...not in... But a big part in leading up to it, and allowing it to happen. People would say to me: “You stopped talking to him right?” And I said, "No, I'm still friends with him." And a lot of people took that to not be positive, because I said I personally didn't feel like it was a big deal.

**The aftermath.** I never really thought that it bothered me until I started to notice that I was now very uncomfortable if guys touched me. If someone touched me anywhere, I would feel myself tense up. So, I don't know if it is related to that. I assume it is. I feel pretty uncomfortable with sexual activity in general, like I have never done anything even with a girl. I also just felt this need to tell someone. I told this one girl who I became close with what had happened, and she responded by saying, “It must still be bothering you, if you had to tell it,” and I thought that was a good point.

So, after what happened, I would say that I shut off myself to men definitely, but I don't know if I discovered I was straight through my own life experience, or if that was where the event impacted me too. It is probably both but I could not tell you which one is more. And then
with girls, like I am okay pursuing a girl I would be okay with dating, but I still feel that sexual intimacy makes me really nervous, or I am really scared of it still. But I don't know if that is related to that or if I am just a nervous person in general.

I didn’t really publicize it, like I did not do that hashtag #MeToo thing that was happening, Then, I guess reporting to the police just seemed like it was too much. I had such a large part in it. It was not like I didn't know him. It was not like a rape scenario, coming out of nowhere. It is tricky because, telling people would mean potentially also coming out as bi. So I guess there was always the breaker on it. I would never say I was ever bi; I just think I was questioning, and then I shut the door on that after the event. I mean part of it is because I am religious, and I am more attracted to girls, so it just makes my life simpler to stick to girls. So I don’t know how much of that is my decision… I feel like traumatized to not want to go for guys. So and then I just pick people to tell that I connect with about what happened.

I guess, as a male, it is slightly a just a little bit harder to talk about it, because it is predominantly a female oriented or gay community oriented issue. So, as a straight male, I am neither of those. Like I said, I did not do the #MeToo thing; I do not feel comfortable claiming to be a part of the movement. For one, I am not very active on social media, but I guess I also do not feel like my story correlates with a full-blown rape story. I also did not want to bring a spotlight onto me. Yes, these are all harmful events that should be stopped, but I feel like the spotlight should be more on people that need more help—like girls that are actually traumatized in their everyday life. The other thing that makes it difficult to put myself in the category of sexual assault survivor is the whole macho guy attitude, like nothing affects you.

I have not dove too deeply into this experience, but as I have started to think about it more; it seems to me that there is more to this event than simply what happened on the surface.
One thing I have noticed is that I have just recently started to become okay with the casual touch from a guy—like slap on the back. I used to think that I was just being homophobic when guys were touching me, but too many signs point to the event. Like, I have trouble feeling okay in intimate moments with girls, but I felt put off by guys to the extent. And I know that I am not homophobic, I do not care. It would have to be because of something more than homophobia.

I have slowly been making these connections to the event and how it influences me now. So when I saw the poster, I already knew that I liked participating in research, and then I sort of wanted to use it as an exploratory thing. I never talked about what happened in therapy, but I think it would have been helpful to have a relationship with a therapist when I got to university to talk about it. I think it would have been helpful to talk with a professional that is trained to help you connect the dots, interject new ideas, tell you some things that you should reconsider, and help process things so you are not just stuck in your own brain trying to figure things out. It is not your parents, not your friends, just a neutral party helping to figure things out.

Something else that would have been helpful after the event would have been more talk about what consent and boundaries are. When I got to UBC, I saw how much more prominent the conversation about consent was than where I grew up in the United States. I saw the Vancouver Police Department campaign, “Just because she can’t say no, doesn’t mean that it is a yes.” It is a whole different mindset here in Vancouver, and particularly at UBC. I was in residence on campus for a few years, so there were a lot of posters about consent, clubs promoting it, articles in the Ubyssey, and also just general conversations people would have. I also saw on the ground, the consent posters with the smiley faces. I think it is just a more encompassing environment at UBC around the message.
In conversations that I have heard at UBC about consent, I usually do not engage much because I normally have a very different opinion. For instance, I am a strong believer that we could do better than consent. I believe that, for example, if someone comes to you after a break up and they want to have sex with you, it is very likely that they are not in a right emotional place, and they could be saying yes, they could be sober, but I feel like you still have a responsibility to say not today, not now. That is in addition to understanding with consent that, “No means no”, even just a little bit of alcohol means “no”, and even if both of you are drunk it means “no”.

So with the university, I feel like the outside message around consent is definitely there, but to bring it inside communities, like your inner circle, is going to take some time. Because, yes, we can read it on paper, but it is hard to remember to act that way. But I think a way to fast track the message is to do what the UBC president does with mental health issues, where he talks about it a lot. So, prominent figures can open the door. I think the #MeToo movement was beneficial in that way in terms of showing how many people are being affected by it and it sort of normalizes it in a sense that it is okay to talk about it. It would also be helpful to have workshops like they do for suicide prevention where people are trained in how to talk with people who disclose they are suicidal. There could also be workshops teaching people how to respond to people who share that they have been sexually assaulted. Then it could make it easier for people to talk, knowing that someone can receive it properly and not say those bad things that they don’t intend to. This would enable people to be able to help their friends that are affected by sexual assault and make the whole process smoother and more comfortable for everyone.

Bridget’s Story
**Background.** Bridget is a 22 year old woman of western European ancestry. She came to UBC to pursue a degree in the field of social justice. Her sexual assault occurred while she was living in a residence building on campus.

**The event.** I still have trouble deciding to categorize it as sexual assault or not, but I still think it was in that grey area. Basically, it happened in a residence. I lived with several roommates and one night a couple of them had some friends over drinking and stuff to go out. The next morning at like seven, one of their guy friends just came in my room. I woke up to him getting in my bed. That felt very invasive, obviously, because I was sleeping; so I was just like in my underwear or whatever. So he started trying to cuddle me and kissing my shoulder and stuff. First of all, I said, "Who the heck are you?” because I had not met this person. Then I asked him to please leave, and he just said, “No. I just want somewhere to sleep.”

He kept touching me. So, eventually I just wrapped a blanket around myself and left my room and woke up one of my other roommates that was friends with him. When I had to leave to get to class for 9:30 am, he was still in my room. It was a very bizarre, jarring experience.

Some of my roommates who were friends with the guy made him stay in the apartment to apologize to me for when I got back from class three hours later. I thought it was kind of a good intention from my friends to make him apologize to me, but I really didn’t like the idea of him still being in my house. I really did not want to see him face to face. I was still reeling from what the heck just happened. I felt like it was more about my friends feeling good about what they were doing. It did not really feel like it was benefiting me, it was like, “Okay, I’ll just sit here and let him apologize to me, and then he can leave and I can move on with my day.”

So, he kind of apologized. He said that he “couldn't imagine how that might feel to someone.” He seemed really ashamed, but he also said that he “didn't mean it” and that he was
“just looking for the bathroom” or something. Which I don't buy in to because his friend's room was on the very opposite side of the hallway to mine, and it doesn't make sense to me that he could have mistaken my room for hers. His friend is also black, and I am white. It would have been a really obvious that I was not his friend, if that is who he was looking for.

I feel like he apologized because he was kind of afraid that I was going to report it or something, because my roommate told me that he felt really bad and wanted to “lay low for a while.” I didn’t see or hear from him again directly after the day my roommates forced him to apologize. It also seemed that my roommate, the friend of the guy that came into my room, was downplaying it and didn't really seem to be taking it that seriously and didn't seem to think it was that big of a deal and stuff like that. And then after that day it just wasn’t brought up ever again.

**The aftermath.** I told my closest friends right away and also my parents because I get a lot of emotional support from my family and friends. Nowadays, I am less likely to disclose. I think because it was a while ago, and it is not something that feels super present for me at this time, but, if I was in a situation where people were talking about these things, I would be likely to say, "Oh that happened to me as well." If it is helpful to see that I have a common experience. I think that I exist in social circles that are very supportive of survivors, so I have never been afraid of someone belittling it or saying it is not a big deal.

I never ended up reporting it; partly, because I was unsure if it was something that was reportable. It is confusing, because he touched me in ways that felt invasive and somewhat sexual, but he wasn’t touching certain parts of my body or whatever. Another reason that I did not report it was because two days later I ended up having a crisis situation come up with my boyfriend at the time that demanded my attention. To make a very long story short, he had a psychotic breakdown and broke into my apartment and attacked one of my roommates. I had to
go to the police about this, and so I never ended up really dealing with the first thing that happened.

Sometimes I feel sort of bad that I didn't report it or anything. Even if it was just to student housing or something. Because, what if he did this to someone else? I’m a big feminist [laughs]. I want these things to stop. I have mixed feelings about not reporting, which is partly why I wanted to participate in this research, because maybe it will contribute to some change. First of all, I know that UBC’s reputation for dealing with sexual assault on campus is not great. I know the really dismal statistics of people reporting to the police and about how that can be really traumatizing and you often need so much evidence. I also know that many sexual assault cases are deemed unfounded, so those were all things I already knew. I think I mostly did not report because I thought nothing would come of it, and the other reason is that I had so much on my plate with my ex-boyfriend right after. If that had not happened, maybe I would have reported to just UBC or something. I do not think I would have gone to the police, because I think it is quite possible that they would not have seen it as a sexual assault. It is hard, because like I said at the beginning, it is in the grey area. You could define it as sexual assault, or you could just brush it off as nothing. But, my personal boundaries were definitely violated, and it can fit within the definition of sexual assault.

I do wish there could have been a way for the perpetrator to be held accountable. Because even if I did report it, I do not know how anything would have addressed the issue with him and why did that. I did go to counselling and stuff like that, but I feel like a big part of what is missing is that there are supports for survivors, but it is men and... other people... but mostly men that are doing these things, and what are we doing to make them stop…assaulting people. I mean there is consent education on campus, but I am sure that many people who commit sexual
assault understand consent on a conceptual level, but not in practice. Maybe there could be something in place to re-educate the perpetrator, instead of simply a slap on the wrist. My perpetrator was someone that I literally have never seen or run into since, and I feel like if he got expelled he could still go do this again to someone else, somewhere else. It is sort of a random punishment we give to people who do things wrong, but I don’t think it addresses the root cause of it at all.

I went to UBC counselling services right after this all happened. My first experience was positive, mostly because I was able to get in really quickly since what happened with my boyfriend was kind of a traumatic situation. But then after taking a few months off, I decided I wanted to try individual counselling again and they couldn’t just book me in. I had to go through the whole “Wellness Advising” appointment, where you have to book it on the same day, so you have to go when you have time to wait around to only then have a short intro session. I was kind of frustrated with that, so it took me a few weeks to go back and actually do it. So I feel like there are barriers to accessing. I feel like it would save both them and me time if I could tell them that I have been there before, that I know what I need, and for them to just book me an appointment. I find that I am a pretty high functioning person and even if I am having some emotions it is not a huge deal for me to go into the office and do that stuff, but I think about the people who are in a really fragile place or having a hard time leaving the house, it would be really difficult to access counselling through UBC. So, I think that counselling services is pretty good at accommodating you if you're in a crisis, but there are a lot of people that are struggling that are not in a crisis, but still need support.

With regards to the UBC’s response to sexual assault, I think it was a terrible decision to close the Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC) [UBC decided to close the SASC July 2018,
this decision was later overturned]. Thankfully this decision now has been reversed. I think the SASC is really good because it is grassroots, survivor centric, and sort of an arm’s length from UBC. The SASC is through the AMS (Alma Mater Society) so I think they can do a lot more radical supportive work for survivors and I think that is super super important and great that it exists.

I think that the decision for the AMS to cut their funding and divert it all to the Sexual Assault and Violence Prevention and Response Office (SVPRO) was not a great decision. Because from everything that I have heard, that SVPRO is still so new that they do not really know what they are doing yet, and a lot of students don’t know that they exist and also if you have a bad experience with UBC the institution, how many people are going to want to go to the institution to solve that? Especially with the way… I mean I know that SVPRO exists because they are trying to implement a new policy and do better for survivors… but just with UBC’s reputation of how they deal with these things, I think a lot of people would not trust an office of UBC to deal with that. From my understanding, you go to SVPRO if you need like class exemptions or exam moving. Kind of like bureaucratic things that you have to work around, or if you have a class with an abuser or something like that. I don't think UBC has done a very good job of explaining what they do, and where students should go for different kinds of support. I am sure SVPRO will have certain things that they are good at and the SASC will have other things that they are good at. I am kind of sceptical of them and I think that if I needed support I would go to the SASC.

I have seen the posters about consent on campus, which I think is a good first step. It probably gets people thinking about consent when they might not have thought about it on their own. It is eye catching and it is hard not to see it sometimes. Maybe that starts a conversation. I
also think that they are pretty simplified. Kind of like I was saying earlier, someone could totally agree with and understand consent on an intellectual level, but they might still cross someone's boundaries or not understand the power dynamic involved in consent or some of the grey areas or stuff like that.

I think also part of the problem is people see it as like awkward or weird to ask for consent during sex. We need to find ways of normalizing it. I have heard people say, “Oh that would be so awkward if I just asked if I could do this.” Or a friend said to me once, “Asking is a bit much,” in terms of asking someone if they wanted to do a particular sexual activity. I said to them, “No. Asking is necessary.”

I think that consent posters are a good start, but I guess this should be part of sexual education in general. Though more in terms of what asking for consent actually looks like and how to practice it. To help make it something that people actually do and do not think it is an awkward or weird thing to ask.

Seeing the whole #MeToo movement happen, I think it is really good that so many people are coming forward about these things and just making it clear that these experiences are really common, and if you are a guy and with female friends, you probably have someone that has dealt with things like that. I think that awareness is good. Honestly, I haven't thought about it much in relation to my own experiences, but... like... well maybe a little bit. Then there is also the whole backlash of everyone with negative attitudes saying it is like a witch-hunt. Which is kind of messed up, because even if men are called out for sexual assault, they usually don't face any consequences. I hope that it leads to change, but it is also a slow process. But I have seen posts from male friends and family members saying things like, "wow, I've never really thought about this and now I'm thinking about it."
Cross-Story Thematic Analysis

It is important to note the diversity of narratives among the four survivors. This speaks to how sexual assault experiences are much broader than what is typically portrayed in the media. Regardless, a brief cross-story analysis of all four stories highlights five shared themes that begin to speak to the research question: What narratives were constructed by student survivors about their experiences of sexual assault on campus? The themes found were (a) Difficulty Considering the Experience to be a Sexual Assault; (b) Harmful Emotional Consequences; (c) Hesitancy to Report the Sexual Assault; (d) A Placating or Freeze Response; and (e) A Desire to Reconnect the Friendship with the Perpetrator.

**Theme One: Difficulty Considering the Experience to be a Sexual Assault.** All of the survivors had points in their story where they had difficulty considering the experience to be a sexual assault. Both Marcus and Bridget said that they saw their experiences as fitting the definition of sexual assault, but felt as though their experiences were more so in the grey area. Marcus believed that he had some responsibility in what happened by his way of flirting. Bridget felt that her personal boundaries were crossed, but suspected that if she had reported to the police, they likely would not have seen what happened as a sexual assault. Both Julia and Skylar were close friends with their perpetrator, and this dynamic made it very hard for them to comprehend that their friend would do something to hurt them. This sentiment of having difficulty seeing the experience as a sexual assault is well captured through Skylar’s comment:

> In my mind I was thinking rape occurs to people from like a stranger in the bushes kind of thing—he would beat you, and it would be very clear that you were not consenting. But this is I guess a very blurry line, I mean in the context of the whole story I do not
think it is blurry at all. But in the event, and how things occurred that night, it is not the way you envision it happening when people say “rape”.

**Theme Two: Harmful Emotional Consequences.** For all four participants, they experienced *harmful emotional consequences* following the assault. This included feeling that their sense of safety for being around others was impacted. In Marcus’ case, he recounted, “I never really thought that it bothered me until I started to notice after that I was very uncomfortable if guys touched me. If someone touched me anywhere, I’d feel myself tense up.” For Julia, she shared that it was an emotional time. She attempted to cope with the painful experience by trying to repress thoughts of what happened. She experienced fragmented memories:

> For the longest time I could not remember the details, I just remembered bits and pieces about being in the car and vaguely something about talking to the other girls in the bathroom. When I started thinking about it again, the memories would come back.

Skylar left to go abroad only a week after her sexual assault. She ended up coming back from her trip early as she found that she was experiencing extreme anxiety and that she was constantly mentally reliving the event. While Bridget’s response following the assault was overshadowed by the traumatic experience of her boyfriend breaking into her apartment, she did spend time going to individual and group counselling for emotional support.

**Theme Three: Hesitancy to Report the Sexual Assault.** The four participants touched on the theme of *hesitancy to report the sexual assault*. Reasons for this include: worrying about not being believed, anticipating unsatisfying consequences, and a reluctance to cause harm to the perpetrator. Bridget, Marcus, and Julia chose not to report their sexual assaults. For Marcus and Bridget, they were unsure if their experiences classified as instances that they could report to the police. Marcus expressed, “Reporting to the police just seemed like it was too much. I had such
a large part in it; it wasn’t like I didn’t know him. It wasn’t like a rape scenario, coming out of nowhere.” As for Bridget, she guessed that the police would not have considered her experience to be a sexual assault, and she was also aware of how reporting a sexual assault can be a very difficult process, where there is rarely justice for the survivor.

Julia could not envision any satisfying result that would come out of reporting: “I could not see what good would come of it for me, except maybe something bad for him.” Skylar, Julia, Marcus, and Bridget all shared a reluctance to cause harm to their perpetrator— they did not necessarily want him to lose his job or get expelled. They also shared the sentiment that they wanted their perpetrator to be held accountable, learn what he did wrong, and change his behaviour.

Skylar was the only participant who did report her sexual assault, to both the police and to UBC. She said, “Before I even made the police report, I had very little faith that it would go anywhere, because statistically speaking, people find it more traumatic than it is helpful.” When Skylar did report, she said that experience was even more traumatic than the sexual assault itself. She spoke of how an officer asked her, “Why didn’t you push him off of you?” In addition, she addressed the complex emotions that reporting elicits since she wanted her perpetrator to face consequences, yet she did not want to go on trial and continue to deal with the traumatic event.

**Theme Four: A Placating or Freeze Response.** During the sexual assault, three of the participants experienced a *placating or freeze response*. Marcus recalled wanting to say “no”, but feeling as though he had “a lump in [his] throat, and could not get the words out.” Julia felt trapped in her mind and frozen in her behaviour. She recalled feeling perplexed at how one of her friends could act in a way to cause her harm. Skylar remembered that during all of the occasions where her perpetrator crossed the line leading up to the sexual assault, she did not say
anything to him because she did not want to seem rude in assuming the worst of his intentions.

Skylar describes her experience during the sexual assault: “I did not have the energy to move. I remember literally just staring at the ceiling… I’m not sure if my eyes were open or closed.”

Theme Five: A Desire to Reconnect the Friendship with the Perpetrator. Three out of the four participants were friends with their perpetrator before the assault. These three survivors shared the theme of a desire to reconnect the friendship with the perpetrator. Marcus spoke about how he remained friends with his perpetrator. He mentioned how his other friends saw this negatively, but he did not consider it to be a problem. Julia spoke about how since her perpetrator had previously been very close to her, and because she did not have many friends on campus, she was hopeful that he had learned the error of his ways, and that they could rekindle the friendship. For Skylar, she reported:

I think that given how bad my anxiety got in the first few months when I was away abroad— not hearing from him, not understanding why he didn’t have anything to say… If I wasn’t abroad, if I was not sort of forced to be away from him, I think maybe I would have… for the sake of not having to accept that this experience was something that I’ve had… I think I might have found a way to sort of sweep it under the rug.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Through investigating the question of “What narratives were constructed by student survivors about their experiences of sexual assault on campus?” it is important to recognize and highlight that each story is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant and is representative of a particular point in time. The following discussion of the research findings does not assert any essential truths about the experiences of sexual assault survivors. Instead, it offers further subjective meaning making, with the intention of providing value to clinicians, university policy makers, and researchers who aim to support sexual assault survivors.

Relationship of Findings to Existing Literature

Statistics. Many of the characteristics of the participants’ sexual assaults fit within what the research claims to be typical of sexual assault experiences. All of the participants fell within the age range that experiences the highest rate of sexual assault (between 15-24 years old; Mohler-Kuo et al. 2004). This study also reported that the majority of sexual assaults are experienced by people under the age of 21: this age bracket represented three out of the four participants. Participant ages ranged from 19 to 22 years old at the time of the assault. According to Flowers (2009), the majority of sexual assaults on campus occur in the survivor’s dorm room or apartment. The current study found that three of the participants’ sexual assault experiences occurred in a dorm room on campus.

Presence of alcohol. All of the participant stories reflected the presence of alcohol. Alcohol consumption has been correlated with the occurrence of sexual assault in the research (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). Three out of the four participants reported that they consumed alcohol at the time of the sexual assault. All of the survivors described their perpetrator to have consumed alcohol, three were described to have been drunk and one was “sober enough to
drive.” It is interesting to note that drug use is also linked with the occurrence of sexual assault (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). However, drug use was not mentioned as an element of the participant experiences.

**Reporting.** Participant experiences clearly reflect the scarcity of reporting sexual assaults that is shown in the literature (Fisher et al., 2003). Only one out of the four participants considered reporting her experience, and when she did report, she described the reporting process to be a very upsetting and traumatic. Sadly, this is also reflective of existing research since negative responses from professional support providers are very common and often have very harmful impacts on survivors (Ahrens, 2006).

**An acquaintance as the perpetrator.** One common experience of survivors proposed in the literature is for the perpetrator to be known to them (Starkman, 2013). It is a common misunderstanding that most rapes are committed by a stranger (Koss et al., 1987). The largest percentage of sexual assaults is carried out by an acquaintance (77% according to Starkman; 2013). Three out of four participant stories in the current study reflected this dynamic. When a sexual assault is perpetrated by an acquaintance, it is often more difficult for the survivor to understand their experience to be an assault (Bondurant, 2001; Kahn et al., 1994). This is because the media typically portrays the script of the “violent stranger sexual assault.” Therefore, the more an experience deviates from this portrayal, the more likely it is to be discounted. For example, women who are sexually assaulted by their partners without a large amount of force have been found to be less likely to consider their experience as rape (Kahn, 2004). In the present study, the fact that three of the survivors were friends with their perpetrator likely contributed to their difficulty, at times, considering their experience to be a sexual assault.
**Understanding and defining the experience.** The literature highlights how often survivors whose experiences fit the definition of sexual assault, have difficulty considering their experience as such (Kahn, 2004; Koss, 1985). This phenomenon has been called “hidden” or “unacknowledged” rape victims. This occurrence was seen among the participants in the present narrative study. All of them struggled with conceptualizing what happened to them as sexual assault at various points in their experiences. The factors that some of these participants shared that are consistent with what Kahn (2004) found include: the consumption of alcohol, the assault occurring without the use of much force, non-penetrative sexual advances, a perpetrator that is an acquaintance, belief in the script of the violent stranger rape and the experience of less intense emotional reactions afterwards. All of these factors are empirically linked to survivors feeling confused about their experience and more likely to lead to self-blame.

**Groups on campus.** Sexual assault is a more common experience for women attending university than those who are not (DeKeseredy et al., 1993; Fisher et al., 1999; Krebs et al., 2007). The literature supports the higher frequency of sexual assault experienced by sorority members and perpetrated by men in fraternities than those who are not affiliated with the Greek System on campuses (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Studies examining why this may be have proposed that the hypermasculine beliefs adopted by men on sports teams and in fraternities may be a risk factor (Tatum & Foubert, 2009). Hypermasculinity involves an adherence to traditional gender roles and the adoption of this belief system is correlated with increased sexual violence directed at women (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). Extant research suggests that sorority members experience an increased risk of sexual assault is because they typically have more frequent interactions with fraternities (Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991; Franklin, 2010; Kalof, 1993; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004).
Despite this empirical evidence, most of the participant experiences from the present study showed no connection to Greek or athletic groups on campus. None of the survivors reported to belong to one of these groups. Julia’s perpetrator was a member of a fraternity on campus, and her sexual assault took place the night of the fraternity’s formal event.

**Social support.** The decision of whether or not to disclose a sexual assault is a large part of the survivor’s experience. Two out of three survivors decided to disclose their experience to a minimum of one person, according to the literature (Fisher et al., 2003; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). In the present study, all of the survivors disclosed to at least one person in their social support network. The current research on the topic of social support finds that negative reactions are common and can have harmful impacts on the survivor’s healing. The participants in the current study did recount some negative responses from disclosing to their social support networks. In the case of Marcus and Skylar this included a lack of understanding on the part of their friends as to why they may want to speak to or reconnect with their perpetrator. This is exemplified by one of Skylar’s friends yelling: “What do you want, round two?” With that said, overall the survivors reported that they experienced support from their friends and family, and did not express any significant negative responses from their support networks. This finding is counter to the prevailing literature on social support.

**Implications for University Policies and Procedures**

All of the participants provided feedback on the university’s approach to addressing sexual assault and supporting survivors. Marcus, Julia, and Bridget referred to the consent campaign on campus where emoji images were used to outline what consent is. The general consensus was that they appreciated this campaign as a starting point to build awareness. Marcus, who grew up in the United States, appreciated that the conversation about consent is
more prominent at UBC than where he grew up. Julia shared: “It was something that I had not thought about before, but yes, people need to know that consent needs to be freely given.”

Bridget valued that UBC has both the Sexual Assault Support Centre (SASC) and the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office (SVPRO). She explained that the SASC is appreciated because it is a grassroots initiative, survivor-focused, that is a separate entity from UBC since it is funded by students through the Alma Mater Society (AMS). In comparison, the SVPRO is funded by the university. The SASC can make more radical changes than the SVPRO can and survivors can feel more comfortable knowing that the SASC is a separate entity from UBC. This is particularly important if the survivor has felt harmed by UBC the institution; for example, if their perpetrator was a UBC staff member.

As for what needs to change, some of the survivors commented on UBC’s support services. Both Bridget and Julia were unhappy with the triage model of UBC counselling services. They found that it created unnecessary barriers to accessing care and created an unwelcoming and uncaring environment. In addition, Bridget reported that she thinks that UBC should clarify the role of the SASC and the SVPRO so that students are better able to access the resources.

Julia, Bridget, and Marcus emphasized the need for more education on sexual assault and consent on campus. As Bridget stated, “I mean there is consent education on campus, but I am sure many people who commit sexual assault understand consent on a conceptual level, but not in practice.” Julia thought it would be helpful for there to be workshops designed to help women feel more comfortable and empowered to say “no” to sexual activity they do not want to engage in. She spoke about how she finds it difficult to speak up in a moment of unwanted sexual activity, out of fear of hurting the other person’s feelings. Another workshop that was suggested
was one on how to respond to sexual assault disclosures. Marcus thought that it would allow survivors to feel more comfortable disclosing their experience to these people who would be trained in how to respond sensitively.

The participants also discussed how more education is needed for those who perpetrate sexual assault so that they change their behaviour in the future. Both Julia and Bridget remarked that expelling the perpetrator from school does not get at the root of the problem: it does not re-educate the perpetrator about what consent is, and what they did wrong. As a result, the participants worry that the perpetrator could go on to assault someone else. Finally, Bridget also captured the sentiment of many of the participants when she stated:

I don’t know how to make people pay attention, you know what I mean? I mean we could put on workshops about consent, or do some education in residences, but how do you get people to actually show up and learn these things?

**Implications for Counselling Psychology Practitioners**

This study will be beneficial for counsellors and counselling psychologists from a range of theoretical backgrounds because it highlights a broad stroke of themes related to individual experiences of sexual assault. Sexual assault is a common experience that frequently leaves a devastating emotional impact on the survivor (Campbell et al., 2009). Counsellors will almost certainly see clients who have experienced sexual violence. Despite far-reaching impacts of sexual assault, it is possible for a therapist to never receive specific training on supporting individuals who have been sexually assaulted.

It is important for counsellors to learn about the specific impacts of sexual assault on their client’s lives in addition to receiving general trauma training. Sexual assault is the only crime where victims are up against societal pressures to explain why they are not to blame (Burt,
This is reflective of rape culture, the concept that explains the greater societal factors that are at play that allow the perpetuation of rape at such a high rate (Buchwald et al., 2009). The conditions for rape culture are evident in acts and speech which normalize and carry on violence against women and minority groups. The presence of rape culture is also what allows for the frequent victim blaming that many survivors experience from others or internalize themselves. If therapists do not have an understanding of typical experiences of sexual assault, it is possible that they may miss supporting the survivor in some key areas which are essential to healing. The following are recommended best practices that emerged from the participant experiences for counsellors working with sexual assault survivors.

First, it is essential for the counsellor to believe the survivor. The pervasive victim blaming that occurs in society can often lead the person receiving a sexual assault disclosure to question the survivor. For example, when the first responder that Skylar reported her assault to asked: “Why didn’t you push him off of you?” This remark is steeped in blame and demonstrates a lack of understanding about the power dynamics of rape as well as typical trauma responses. It is beneficial for the therapist to be aware of rape culture in order to avoid causing the survivor to feel interrogated or judged. No person ever asks to be sexually assaulted.

As everyone does, survivors live in a rape culture, and so many survivors internalize these beliefs and blame themselves for the experience. For that reason, it can be valuable for the therapist to remind the survivor that it was not their fault that they were sexually assaulted. The client’s self-blame can show up in subtle ways, such as off-hand comments about what they “should” or “should not” have done. This sentiment is exemplified by Marcus’ statement: “I always felt that it was my responsibility to keep myself in a coherent state...I wasn’t clear on what I wanted… I was misleading at times, like flirting back and all that.” Because sexual assault
survivors can often be entrenched in self-blame, it can be very powerful for a formal support such as lawyer, doctor, police officer, or a counsellor to offer the language to describe their experience as an assault and that it is not their fault. For example, in the current study, in instances where participants used self-blaming language, the researcher would gently express dissent. For example, in one instance the researcher responded: “I just want to express that to me, sitting here, hearing your story, nothing you did warranted his behaviour. Not the flirting. Not the drinking.”

It is helpful for the practitioner to be familiar with the definition of consent and be able to offer it to their client. The UBC consent campaign that was referenced by most of the participants defines consent as: “Consent is clear. You always need a “yes!” for sex (making out, or touching, or whatever). Consent is enthusiastic, freely given, and can be revoked at any time” (The University of British Columbia Student Services, n.d.). The legal definition of consent in Canada is: “The voluntary agreement of the complainant to engage in the sexual activity in question” (Criminal Code, 1985). Consent is not present if the person is unconscious or intoxicated. In Julia’s experience, she appreciated that there was a consent campaign on campus which highlighted that it should be given happily and with excitement. Offering the definition of consent to the client can be helpful because it provides a concrete piece of information to the survivor to assist them in understanding that what happened to them was a violation. With that said, it is also important to respect the survivor’s choice of language to describe their experience. In Marcus’ case, he agreed that his experience fits the legal definition of a sexual assault; however he preferred to call it “the event” during the interview rather than a sexual assault.

Practitioners working with survivors should be careful about the use of touch with the clients. It is recommended to follow the Standards of Practice for Counsellors on the use of
touch from the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, including: “Do I understand the client’s personal history sufficiently to risk touching at this time? Touching, at least at an early stage in counselling, is contraindicated for clients who have been sexually abused” (2015, p. 11). An example of a survivor’s sensitivity to touch can be seen in how Marcus reported feeling extremely uncomfortable if a male causally touched him anywhere following his sexual assault.

It is essential for counsellors to respect the decisions the survivor makes. There are real harmful consequences to reporting a sexual assault and it is their decision whether or not they would like to do so. The counsellor’s role is to affirm the survivor’s strength and assist them on their healing journey. It is helpful for practitioners to learn what resources are available (e.g., legal, medical, emotional) to best support the survivor. The positive impact of allowing survivors to make their own decisions is reflected in Julia’s experience. She appreciated the role of residence advisors while she was living on campus. She found that UBC effectively communicated that the advisors were there to be supportive, and she generally found that the advisors were helpful. With regards to her own advisor that she disclosed to, Julia said:

I knew that I could just talk to her and trust her not to go directly to the system. Then I could make the choice to report, and if I wanted to that she could be the person to help me with those steps.

**Limitations and Future Research**

There are a few limitations worth noting in this study. Since the four survivors freely chose to participate in the study, this research design bears a selection bias. As such, sexual assault survivors who chose to participate may differ in their experiences than those who did not participate. The sample size was also small and the results are by no means representative of the
entire group of sexual assault survivors at UBC. The goal of this study is not to reflect the experiences of all survivors, but to gain a thick description of individual accounts of sexual assault.

While it is never the intention of narrative research to generalize the results to an entire population, there are still many intersectional identities, such as ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities that were not captured in this study. The participants all fell between 19 to 22 years of age, with one participant identifying as male, and three identifying as female. Half of the participants were Caucasian, with one participant being partly Caucasian, partly Asian. It would be beneficial for future research to examine more diverse participant experiences of campus sexual assault. Particular groups that would be valuable to examine include: black and indigenous people of colour, LGBTQ folks, disabled populations, and immigrants.

The work on this study began in May 2016; it is important to note that over the duration of this study, there has been a dramatic shift in the political climate addressing sexual assault. Six months after this study began, the presidency of the United States shifted from Democrat Barrack Obama, to Republican Donald Trump. Weeks before he was elected, video footage emerged of Trump admitting to sexually assaulting women, claiming that because of his fame, women will let him do anything, that he can “grab ‘em by the pussy” (Makela, 2016). The release of this footage elicited a public outcry.

One year later in October 2017, the “#MeToo” movement, in which people used the hashtag to proclaim over social media that they have been sexually harassed or assaulted, caught fire when Tarana Burke’s phrase was tweeted by Actress Alyssa Milano (Chicago Tribune, 2019, January 11). At the time of this writing, over 1.7 million people in 85 countries have tweeted “#MeToo” (Park, 2017). The #MeToo movement was considered to be so influential that Time
magazine named the “Silence Breakers”, referring to the people who spoke out about their sexual assault experiences, as the 2017 Person of the Year (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Sweetland Edwards, 2017).

In September 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testified in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee’s hearing on sexual assault allegations against Brett Kavanaugh who was nominated to the Supreme Court. She received numerous death threats following her testimony, reigniting the #MeToo movement and sparking further discussion on the costs of coming forward. She became an inspiration to her supporters.

Finally, it has only been since May 2017 that all universities and colleges in British Columbia were legislated by Bill 23 to create individual sexual assault policies (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2016). The discussion and examination of sexual assault on campus has only just begun. This research hopes to serve as another layer to the existing literature fighting to better support survivors and to work towards the societal changes necessary to help end sexual violence.
Afterword: A Letter to Survivors

Since writing about my own sexual assault I have had the privilege of people writing to me about their own experiences. Following the momentum of the #MeToo movement as well as Dr. Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee in September 2018, I received a resurgence of messages from people sharing their stories and seeking support. The following is a version of my response to questions I have received, with hopes that these words will also be helpful to others.

Dear Survivor,

First of all, I just want to acknowledge your bravery. I understand how painful it can be to write down the story of such a terrible time in your life. I find it to be a privilege that you have trusted me with your experience. Shame and guilt breed in silence, and you have already taken such a powerful step in your own healing by reaching out.

This is a time to prioritize yourself and your own healing. It has now been about 5 years since my sexual assault and my healing has come in layers. With hindsight, I can see how following the assault, I still put taking care of other people first. If I could go back, I would tell myself that I deserve this time to heal; in fact, it is necessary. The people that matter will understand this.

To answer your question about how to deal with the guilt and the self-doubt, know that they are insidious and brutal. Know that what you are feeling is a natural reaction to a terrible thing that you have experienced and that nobody should ever have to go through. It was not your fault. You did not ask for what happened to you. Find people that can remind you of this, you will need to hear this over and over again.
With everything that has happened recently with Dr. Ford, it has been a very difficult time for survivors, myself included. As she stated, what happened to her was her biggest fear; it was the worst-case scenario. Confronting her perpetrator, and to not only be angrily denied by him, but to be mocked by the president of the United States? I cannot even imagine. So, your self-doubt and guilt is understandable given the society that we live in outright denies and disbelieves survivors.

You ask about where I am at now with my studies to become a counsellor. I am currently in my third and final year of study in my graduate degree. I am seeing clients through a practicum and I am conducting my research on sexual assault. I have interviewed sexual assault survivors about their experiences, and they all express similarities to what you have gone through. They all had difficulty considering their experience to be a sexual assault (even though by definition, they would all classify), most knew their perpetrator, and many felt this confusing sense of wanting to take some of the blame for their experience. You are not alone.

Have you been to counselling before? For me, counselling was essential to my healing. With that said, there are well meaning counsellors out there who have no understanding of sexual assault and its impacts. Find a counsellor who has specific understanding and experience in supporting sexual assault survivors.

I understand that what you are going through now is the most painful time you have ever experienced. I know how this can break you open and change your whole life. I also want you to know that you show incredible strength. If you take the time to feel your pain and take care of yourself, you will come out of this back-breaking work not necessarily “healed”, but inevitably more resilient and self-understanding, than you could ever imagine. One of my favourite quotes
that helped me through this process comes from the classic Leonard Cohen lyric, “There’s a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.”

Respect and love,

Erin
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doi:10.1353/csd.0.0062


doi:10.1037/0033-2909.132.6.959


Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

#MeToo

-seeking Volunteers for UBC Research Study
-Stories told by Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault

Are you a current or past UBC student who has experienced a sexual assault while enrolled as a student in the past five years? Did this sexual assault occur on campus (for example: in residence, at a fraternity/sorority, a music or athletic event, at a bar or restaurant, etc.)? Would you be comfortable talking about your sexual assault experience?

Why are we doing this study?
Sexual assault has wide-ranging harmful impacts on survivors. While there are studies outlining the prevalence and correlates of sexual assault, little research has explored the meaning and lived experiences from the individual perspectives of sexual assault survivors. These stories are invaluable for broadening society’s understanding of sexual assault and clearly identifying how to best help survivors. That is why we are interested in hearing your story.

What will you need to do?
- Brief telephone interview to confirm eligibility
- One 1-1.5 hour in-person interview
- One 30 min. – 1 hour follow up interview
To get involved please email and include your name and telephone number.

Study conducted by Dr. Marla Buchanan and Erin Davidson, Educational and Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia
Appendix B: Consent Form

Title of Study: Narratives of Sexual Assault on University Campuses in British Columbia

Principle Investigator: Dr. Marla Buchanan, Professor, Ph.D.; Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education; Faculty of Education; University of British Columbia (UBC)

Co-Investigator: Erin Davidson, M.A. (Candidate), Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education; Faculty of Education; UBC

This research is part of Erin’s thesis requirement for completing a Master of Arts (M.A.) in the Counselling Psychology Program. Upon completion, the thesis will be a public document that can be viewed through the UBC library

Sponsor: This research is funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

Study conducted by Dr. Marla Buchanan and Erin Davidson, Educational and Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia

Why are we doing this research? Sexual assault has wide-ranging harmful physical, financial, social, and psychological impacts on survivors. While there are studies outlining the prevalence and correlates of sexual assault, little research has explored the meaning of sexual assault from the individual perspectives of survivors; none have done so using narrative inquiry, which is a form of research that privileges the stories of participants as important sources of knowledge for scientific inquiry. These stories are invaluable for broadening society’s understanding of sexual assault and clearly identifying how to best help survivors. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the stories of survivors of campus sexual assault. Specifically, we are interested in understanding how survivors describe and understand the experiences of their campus assault with the hope of more clearly identifying what supports, policy changes, and public education resources are needed to better support survivors and reduce the high prevalence of sexual assault.

What happens if you agree to participate? If you choose to participate, you will be asked to engage in an open-ended interview. This interview will be conducted by the student researcher (Erin Davidson) and will be held in a private room in Dr. Buchanan’s research lab at the University of British Columbia. You will be invited to share the story of your experience of sexual assault while enrolled as a university student. The interview will last approximately 1-1.5 hours, and you get to choose what you would like to share. The researcher may ask follow-up questions once you have finished telling your story, to which you may choose to respond according to your own level of
comfort. Following the first interview, you will be contacted for a follow-up interview, this will occur no later than January 1, 2019. At that time, the researcher will share the story she has written based on what you share in the first interview. You will have the opportunity to comment further, as well as request any alterations to ensure that the story represents your experience fully and accurately. **Should you decline to participate, all written documentation of the initial screening interview that you partook in will be shredded.**

**Study Results:** The stories constructed from the interviews will be analyzed and put together for a final research essay that will be submitted to complete the educational requirement of the co-investigator. The information may also be shared at meetings and conferences and may be published in academic journals or magazines for other people to read. Your name will not be shared in any presentation or publication.

**Potential Risks:** The discussion of traumatic experiences can sometimes bring up difficult emotions. If a topic comes up that you would like support for, we have a list of community agencies and supportive services that will be provided at the beginning of the interview. It is important to note that the interviewer will be speaking with you from the perspective of a researcher, and will not be treating or measuring mental-health related therapeutic outcomes of the interview. If you would like emotional support following the interview, the research supervisor, Dr. Marla Buchanan, is a trained trauma counsellor and is available to meet with you or speak to you over the phone. In addition, you have the right to choose not to answer any question, to take a break, and/or end the interview at any time.

**Potential Benefits:** You will receive a copy of the final story produced for the research report.

The research will contribute to the knowledge base of sexual assault on university campuses and may be particularly helpful for counselling psychologists and other clinicians who wish to support their clients who have experienced campus sexual assault in their recovery process. In addition, the information generated from these interviews can help to inform university sexual assault policies, and more clearly identify what psychological support programs and intervention strategies are needed.

**Confidentiality:** All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Interview tapes and handwritten notes referencing participant data will be stored in a secure, locked location, and all electronic files of participant data will be encrypted and password protected. Unless you choose to use your real name, your identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym identifier on all documents related to the information you provide, including copies of transcripts, researcher notes, and the final research report. It is UBC’s policy that all data must be maintained for a minimum of five years, after the necessary allotted time all audio recordings will be destroyed.

There are three exceptional circumstances in which confidentiality of your identity cannot be maintained: 1) If there is a reasonable cause to believe that a child or vulnerable adult is being abused and is in need of protection; 2) If a participant is at serious risk of suicide and/or other serious harm to self; 3) If the participant presents a clear and imminent threat to someone else or society at large. If at any point the researcher assesses the participant’s self-disclosure to indicate any one of these three situations, the researcher will be obliged to intervene to ensure the safety of participants. Interventions may include, but are not limited to: emergency services, reporting to the Ministry of
Child and Family Development, and counselling support services. Participants will be informed of the precautions that are being taken and will be given the option of accessing these services themselves with support of the investigator.

**Remuneration or Compensation:** You will receive bus tickets to and from the interview or parking reimbursement as required.

**Contact for Information about the Study:** If at any point before, during, or after the study you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the principal investigator or co-investigator (contact information above).

**Contact for Concerns about the Rights of Research Participants:** If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

**Consent and the Right to Withdraw:** Consent to be part of this research study is completely voluntary. You can choose to withdraw at any time with no explanation and with no consequences. Should you wish to withdraw, all of your participating data (including information from the screening interview, your consent form, any of your audio recordings and interview data) will be appropriately destroyed. You have the right not to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and can take a break at any time during the interview.

**Signature:**

Your signature below indicates that:

1. You understand the information provided for the study “Narratives of Sexual Assault on University Campuses in British Columbia”.

2. You have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

3. You consent to participate in this study and to be audio recorded for the interview portion.

_________________________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant                      Date

_________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant
Appendix C: Screening Interview Script

Process:
Participants will be recruited through posters put up on campus at the University of British Columbia. Interested participants will be asked to email the student researcher to see if they qualify to participate in the study. The student researcher will respond to the inquiries over email to schedule a time for a phone screen interview. At the beginning of the phone screen interview, the participants will be asked for verbal consent to be asked a few questions to determine their suitability for the study.

Purpose:
The researcher will outline the purpose of the study, time commitment, and ethical considerations. The researcher will make it clear that this is a distressing topic for many people to talk about and that this research is not counselling, but instead a means to tell one’s story.

If participants show signs of distress in the telephone interview, they will not be included in the study and they will instead be provided with appropriate counselling referrals for their consideration.

Following the screening interview with interested participants, participants who are deemed eligible to participate by the student researcher and the primary investigator will be contacted over email inviting their participation in the study. Interested participants will be invited to respond to the student researcher via email or phone. Any individual who wishes to take part in the study will be asked to sign an informed consent form prior to participation (see attached document "Consent Form"). All participants will be made aware that they have the option to withdraw from the study at any time and to receive a copy of the final story produced for the research report.

Script:
Purpose: “Thank you for your interest in the study of ‘Sexual Assault on Campuses in BC’. The purpose of this study is to gather information about experiences of survivors of sexual assault on university campuses in British Columbia. I am sensitive to the fact that this can be a distressing topic for many people to talk about and that this research is not counselling, but instead a means to tell one’s story.

The research is focused specifically on present or past students who experienced a sexual assault on campus while enrolled as a student within the last five years. Interviews will be informed by a narrative approach, which provides minimal direction and will allow space for survivors to tell their stories in full. Data gathered will be used to inform policy, prevention efforts, and practice related to sexual assault.”

Time commitment: “The time commitment for this study is a 1 to 1.5 hour in-person interview to share your campus sexual assault experience and a 30 minute to 1 hour follow-up interview (which will occur at some point before January 1, 2019).”
**Risks:** “The discussion of traumatic experiences can sometimes bring up difficult emotions. If a topic comes up that you would like support for, we have a list of community agencies and supportive services that will be provided at the beginning of the interview. It is important to note that I, as the interviewer, will be speaking with you from the perspective of a researcher, and will not be treating or measuring mental-health related therapeutic outcomes of the interview. If you would like emotional support following the interview, my research supervisor, Dr. Marla Buchanan, is a trained trauma counsellor and is available to meet with you or speak to you over the phone. In addition, you have the right to choose not to answer any question, to take a break, and/or end the interview at any time.”

**Benefits:** “You will receive a copy of the final story produced for the research report. The research will contribute to the knowledge base of sexual assault on university campuses and may be particularly helpful for counselling psychologists and other clinicians who wish to support their clients who have experienced campus sexual assault in their recovery process. In addition, the information generated from these interviews can help to inform university sexual assault policies, and more clearly identify what psychological support programs and intervention strategies are needed.”

**Confirming Eligibility:**
- “Do you consent to being asked a few questions to see if you are a good fit for this study?”
- “Are you a current or past UBC student who has experienced a sexual assault on campus in the past five years?”
- “Did this sexual assault occur on campus (for example: in residence, at a fraternity/sorority, a music or athletic event, at a bar or restaurant, etc.)?”
- “Are you comfortable talking about your sexual assault experience?”
- “Have you sought out your own counselling or other forms of professional support for your sexual assault experience?”
- “Are you able to commit to both the initial 1-1.5 hour interview and the 30 minute-1 hour follow-up interview (which will occur at some point before January 1, 2019)?”
- “Do you have any questions or concerns regarding participating in this study?”
- “Are you interested in participating in this study?”

**Next Steps:** “Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will meet with my supervisor to discuss if your experience is relevant to the study. I will call you within the week letting you know the decision. If you are found to be suitable to participate, you will receive a copy of the consent form over email to look over. If you are found to not meet the criteria to participate in the study at this time, you will also receive a follow-up email with counselling resources and if you wish to discuss the decision further you can speak with my research supervisor Dr. Marla Buchanan. Should you have any other questions or wish to withdraw, please do not hesitate to email me earlier.”
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

First Interview:

All participants will first be asked:

“Can you tell me the story of your sexual assault—in particular, the circumstances leading up to it, what happened following, and your decision of whether or not to report it? Please take as much time as you need to describe what you are comfortable with, the circumstances of your experience. With regards to the details of the sexual assault event itself, please share as little or as much as you want to. If there was more than one experience, please speak to the one you recall best.”

I will then repeat the first part of the question:

“Can you tell me the story of your sexual assault—in particular, the circumstance leading up to it, what happened following, and your decision of whether or not to report it.”

Following this, I will listen as the participant tells her/his story, according to whatever structure she/he chooses, and with minimal interruption so not to interrupt the flow of storytelling. However, should the participant ask for further clarification, or otherwise express confusion or reticence about what to share, the following probes may be used to elicit narrative content:

- What did you need that you did not receive following your sexual assault?
- What was your experience like of deciding whether or not to disclose your sexual assault? If you did disclose, what was that like for you?
- What was your experience like of deciding whether or not to report your sexual assault? If you did report, what was that like for you?
- What failures and successes do you see in the university’s response to sexual assault?

When the participant has reached a natural conclusion in her or his story, I may ask follow-up questions to further explore certain parts of the story or check my understanding. This may include questions from the list above. I will end the interview by asking if there is anything else the participant would like to share with me, and asking how the interview experience has been for him or her.

Second Interview:

At the time of the second interview, I will share a draft of the narrative that has been constructed from the first interview. I will also share with the participant my process of analyzing their story using the Listening Guide technique, so that it is clear how the draft narrative was constructed. I will bring a copy of the highlighted transcript from the first interview to help the participant visually conceptualize the analysis process.
Upon review of the draft narrative account of their story, all participants will be asked:

“Does this document accurately represent the story you have told me?”
“Does it make sense to you? Is there any part that you don’t understand?”
“Is there anything missing from what you told me?”
“Is there anything you would like to add or change now that you’ve had further time to reflect?”
Appendix E: Supportive Community Resources

Supportive Community Resources

The research supervisor, Dr. Marla Buchanan, is a trained trauma counsellor and is available to speak to you over the phone or meet in person should you require additional support following the interview.

Contact information for Dr. Marla Buchanan:

**Sexual Assault, Violence, or Abuse**

- **Women Against Violence Against Women** - 604-255-6344 or 1-877-392-7583  
  [www.wavaw.ca](http://www.wavaw.ca)  
  25 hour crisis line, counselling, and support
- **Battered Women’s Support Services** - 604-687-1867 or 1-855-687-1868  
  [www.bwss.org](http://www.bwss.org)  
  Crisis line, counselling, and support
- **BC Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse** – 604-682-6482  
  [www.bc-malesurvivors.com](http://www.bc-malesurvivors.com)  
  Provides individual and group counselling to male survivors of sexual abuse. Non-profit rates for clinical counsellors, and sliding-scale rates for supervised intern counsellors.

**Crisis Support**

Should you be struggling with thoughts of suicide or self-harm, the following crisis lines provide support to people in crisis 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

Anywhere in BC - 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)  
Vancouver - 604-872-3311  
Sunshine Coast/ Sea to Sky - 1-866-661-3311  
Vancouver Mental Health Support Line - 310-6789  
Fraser Health Crisis Line - 604-951-8855; 1-877-820-7444

**Mental Health and Addictions Support**

Vancouver Coastal Health:
- Vancouver Adult Mental Health Intake Line - 604-675-3997  
- Addiction Services - 1-866-658-1221  
- Richmond Mental Health Intake - 604-244-5488

Fraser Health:  
- Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Line - 604-660-9382 or 1-800-663-1441
Free or Reduced-Cost Counselling

Family Services of Greater Vancouver, Counselling Program – 604-874-2938
http://www.fsgv.ca
Counselling fees based on household income. Master’s level therapists. Trauma-specific counselling for adults and children available at no cost to those who qualify (subject to waitlist). Program has a dedicated intake worker who can also refer to other counselling services or groups. Offices in Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, New Westminster and Surrey.

Family Services of the North Shore – 604-988-5281
http://www.familyservices.bc.ca
Professional counselling for residents of the North Shore. Sliding Scale.

Oak Counselling – 604-266-5611
http://oakcounselling.org/
Reduced fee. Secular counselling services provided at the Vancouver Unitarian Centre by supervised volunteers with Master’s degrees in psychology or psychology-related fields. Individual, couples, and family counselling

Adler Centre – Counselling Clinic – 604-742-1818
http://www.adlercentre.ca/clinic.html
Sliding scale individual and couples counselling. Counselling provide by counselling psychology graduate students at the Adler Centre, supervised by an experienced clinician.

Scarfe Counselling – UBC – 604-827-1523
http://ecps.educ.ubc.ca/counselling-centres/scarfe-free-counselling-clinic/
Free. Counselling provided by counselling psychology graduate students, supervised by a psychologist. Clinic runs from September to April.

UBC Psychology Clinic – 604-822-3005
Clinic.psych.ubc.ca
Counselling services provided by doctoral student interns, supervised by registered psychologists. $10-$40 per hour.

New Westminster UBC Counselling Centre – 604-525-6651
http://ecps.educ.ubc.ca/counselling-centres/new-westminster-ubc-counselling-centre/
Free counselling for the general public by counselling psychology graduate students, supervised by a psychologist.

Simon Fraser University – Counselling Clinics
  - Burnaby Clinic – 778-782-4720 – http://members.psy.csfu.ca/cpc/mandate_and_activities
Counselling provided by supervised graduate students in counselling psychology. Services at the Surrey clinic are free and at the Burnaby clinic are offered on a sliding scale.