

#ustoo

by Ana Pearce (she/her/hers)

Background Research

According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN):

- 1 in 6 women (in America) is estimated to have been a survivor of rape or attempted rape
- 80% of rapes are committed by someone known to the victim
- Every 73 seconds sexual assault occurs

This project asks: why is the sexual harassment, assault, and abuse of women seen as *normal* & why does this problem continue to occur?

OUT OF EVERY 1000 SEXUAL ASSAULTS, 995 PERPETRATORS WILL WALK FREE

230 are reported to policeⁱ



46 reports lead to arrestⁱⁱ



9 cases get referred to prosecutorsⁱⁱ



5 cases will lead to a felony convictionⁱⁱⁱ



4.6 rapists will be incarceratedⁱⁱⁱ



RAINN

National Sexual Assault Hotline | 800.656.HOPE | online.rainn.org

Please visit rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system for full citation.¹

Project Statement

We live in a world today where it doesn't come as a surprise to hear about a girl being roofied at a college party. It isn't shocking to find out about how your friend was sexually harassed by an older man at work. The question no longer is if you've been assaulted but rather, when. We are taught how to avoid being sexually harassed, assaulted, and abused, with solutions such as wear more clothing, don't go out alone, and carry a weapon.

Why is it we have to take part in these daily actions? Why does it fall on the shoulders of women to avoid being assaulted? Focusing on personal stories and experiences told by women, *#ustoo* serves to document the normalization and prevalence of the sexual harassment, assault, and abuse of women in today's society, while also proposing the question: why are our lives being shaped by perpetrators and through a society who doesn't hold these aggressors accountable?

TW: includes stories of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse

Pairing survivors' transcripts with photographs, *#ustoo* is separated into three main groups of work: *Places*, *Weapons*, and *What Were You Wearing?*

Places

Photographing the locations where women were sexually harassed, assaulted, and/or abused



From the Places section of #ustoo, 40" x 27," 2021

The Recent One

It was just a different experience... We were drinking. We were at the bar.

It was my birthday. My roommates were buying me drinks, and it was all night, pretty much. They didn't realize how drunk I got because I don't seem that drunk when I am; I don't show it. We met this guy though, that was there, and he seemed decent. He was a decent guy. He wasn't a bad guy or anything like that. My roommate kind of invited him back to the house, not really realizing that the guy was hitting on me and I wasn't really reciprocating that. But then I blacked out. I remember being in the bar, and then I remember being in the car. On the way back, I was riding in the back and he had his arm around me. Then we got back to the house, and I'm not really sure what... we did. I remember I went up to smoke, and he was up there with me. Next thing I knew I was naked, and we were doing it. But yeah... That was something that I honestly don't remember much about. It was interesting to process afterwards. I feel like it was rape, but at the same time it falls into that gray area where it was like, well, I probably did say yes when I was drunk as hell. Especially since I was blacked out, I had no recollection of giving consent.

The Freezer Incident

The worst experience I had, I would say, was when I was sixteen and had to cover a shift for someone at another store in town. I was the opener and my manager texted me saying there was another transfer coming in to help cover the lunch shift; he would be in around ten. His name was Casey... one of the only names from that job that I still remember. Anyways, so he got to the store, and he was a big, 6'5" dude—maybe around 275 pounds—at least twice my size. Well, he was there, and immediately he started asking questions about whether or not I was dating anyone. He was nineteen and I was sixteen; it felt weird. I kept trying to shut him down, giving him hints, not giving him my number when he asked for it, etc., but then things began to escalate. He started standing really close to me... practically towering over me, with his body touching mine. At one point, I needed to get more veggies from the walk-in freezer in the back, and he followed me.

Once I was in the freezer, he blocked the doorway with his body so I couldn't get out. He asked what the "real" reason was for me being single and kept pushing for my number. It all just felt very threatening. He was so much bigger than me, older than me, and no one could see or hear us. All the security cameras were broken because the store owner was notorious for being too cheap to replace them. The dude wouldn't let me out of the freezer until I gave him my number. I finally caved, being too cold, and went back to the front to help the customers. When we were on the line, making food, he kept getting uncomfortably close to me again. At one point he grabbed my ass with his hand when he was walking behind me. It all just felt really gross and violating. I knew I didn't have the power in that situation. He was a "nice guy," according to my manager and coworkers. I was hanging out with my friend later that day, when he texted me, saying, "Today was fun, we should hang out sometime."



From the Places section of #ustoo, 40" x 27," 2020



From the Places section of #ustoo, 32" x 21," 2020

Freshman Year

It was my first year at college. I started messaging this one guy who knew where all the parties were at, but I would never actually meet up with him. One night, towards the end of the year, it was a pretty rough week for me. I had a few drinks and started texting this guy again. I'm not sure why I did this exactly... I don't know, I think it was just to have someone to talk to. All of my friends had gone to bed, and I knew he would be up. He responded almost immediately, saying he was at my dorm with a bottle of liquor. I don't remember telling him where I lived. I didn't want to get in trouble with my RA, if the dude wouldn't leave, so I just let him into my building. We started watching a movie in my room, and that's when he pulled out the alcohol, poured a shot, and handed it to me. I didn't realize I was as drunk as I was, and as far as I knew this guy seemed nice. I felt like I could trust him, so I took the shot.

A few minutes later, and a couple extra shots added onto the first one, that was when I started to realize how drunk I was. Anyways, it got pretty late, maybe three-ish, and the movie was over. I left to go to the bathroom, came back and changed, and said I was going to go to bed. I told the guy he could crash on the futon, but that I was going to go to my bunk. I went to bed and that... that's when he followed me. I was too tired to argue. After that particular week, I distinctly remember, I was just out of energy. I almost fell asleep immediately, and that's when he started touching me. I figured I'd fall asleep and he'd stop, but I never fell asleep, he never stopped, and he did things. That that week, that day... honestly, had beaten me. I was too exhausted, and I gave in. I woke up to him doing the same thing the next morning. Before he left, he just said, "Next time, it's my turn," like I owed him.

The Ladder

One time, when I was working, I was stocking shelves when a man approached me. I was on a ladder, with my arms above my head, putting stuff on the top shelf. The guy walked up to me, got really close, and asked, "Hey... So, has anyone ever tried to tickle you when you were in that position? I've always wanted to it that when I see someone like that. It seems like the perfect opportunity." He smirked and kept standing in the way. I tried laughing it off, but he wouldn't move for a few minutes.





From the Places section of #ustoo, 40" x 27," 2021

That Night

I was 19. It was the first weekend of spring term my sophomore year. I hadn't planned on going out that night. My sorority sister texted me asking if I would go to a party with her so she wouldn't have to go alone. I got ready, she came over, and we pre-gamed before heading out. We get there and I don't know anyone but that didn't bother me—I used to be an extrovert. We say hi to her friends, then I tell her I'm going to go down to the garage in the town house to see if there are any drinking games happening. That's when I met the three boys that would change my life forever.

They were the only ones down there, setting up to play Kings Cup. I had never played so they offered to teach me. They gave me an unopened beer, so I didn't think twice about opening it and drinking. That's the last thing I remember. My memories of that night go in and out of a hallucination from the drugs they injected into the beer before I even got down there. I had to piece together the rest from what I was told. I was drugged with PCP, LSD and Acid. The hallucination made me believe I was dead and that I had gone to hell to relive them raping me over and over. The next thing I remember is briefly coming out of the drugs in an ambulance, asking for help. It went black again. Then I was in the emergency room, and I remember being terrified, trying to get out and go home. The doctors did nothing. They didn't test my blood. They didn't do a rape kit. They just marked me off as being "over intoxicated."

Weapons

Depicting the weapons women carry and self-defense mechanisms that they take part in, due to fear of assault, demonstrating the guarded nature that many women experience in their day-to-day lives

Precautions

There are times when I'm walking back to my car, and the sun is setting. I'll be going to the garage, and I'm just like "Oh godddddd." It's really sketchy. Sometimes there are random people just sitting in their cars, and it's just like, do I run as fast as possible to my car? Do I just speed walk? It's dark, but then I'll get into a section where there's light, and I'm like, okay, I'm good. It's just that instinct over a slight bit of darkness. I think it's been engrained into us that girls can't, you know, walk alone at night, and all this and that. I was in one class one time where the teacher asked, "How many girls hold their keys like this? How many girls have pepper spray, mace, or something like that?" Every girl was just pulling out their keys or whatever, and all the guys were just like, "What the fuck." This is how we get protected though.

My dad always taught me self-defense. He'd say, "If someone grabs you around the neck, what do you do? You kick them in the shin and throw them over your shoulder." He was always very protective of both my sister and I, so I always have mace and keys with me. If I'm in any situation where I need to bring them out, there they are. Those are things that I'm used to doing.





Brass Knuckles

My mother got me brass knuckles after my second encounter with assault, but I don't think they would've helped me in either situation unfortunately because incidences like that are sometimes with people who you would think you could "trust."

When Running

I remember seeing quite a few posts about attempted kidnappings and rapes in the area, so I ended up buying mace to take with me on my runs. I just attach it to my bra. It helps me relax a little, but I still don't think it'd actually help if I was put in a situation where I'd need it.





Car Key

Late at night, if I'm walking around, I carry keys in between my fingers.

I used to carry pepper spray, just in case.

Baggy Jacket

Something I recently noticed about myself was that I wore a jacket out (very large and mega cozy) a recent summer because I didn't get harassed or anything in it. It wasn't an active realization why I dressed like that going out, and I realized now that was why.



What Were You Wearing?

Documenting women wearing clothing that they were sexually harassed, assaulted, or abused in, this body of work references the questioning and disbelief that many survivors experience from others as they talk about their stories, while also addressing the common misconception that a woman's clothing plays a deciding role in, if not encourages, these violating acts



From the What Were You Wearing? section of #ustoo, 15" x 23," 2019

The Frat Guy

I was with this guy I met at a party one night. He walked me home and didn't even try to spend the night or anything. It's weird to think how the bar is literally that low, like, "Oh he's not going to make me have sex with him tonight, what a nice guy." Well, the next day we were hanging out in my room, studying, and that's when he turned towards me, closed my laptop, and said, "We should get more comfortable." My stomach immediately dropped. It felt like my throat closed up, like I couldn't talk.

He ended up taking off the top half of my clothes and moved on top of me so I couldn't move. He was a big guy, like a 6'4" big guy. Long story short he kept kissing me, and then things escalated a bit and he started choking me, pulling my hair, and slapping me around. We never had sex, but I was definitely bruised the next day. It was like there was this invisible line, like he thought to himself, "Well, rape isn't okay, but physically beating this person is totally fine. I was so humiliated about the whole thing that I never told anyone about it. I had zero power/control in that situation, and he knew that. He liked it.

Going Home

I was getting off work and dealt with a couple guys trying
to pull me into their car.





From the What Were You Wearing? section of #ustoo, 15" x 23," 2019

Work

I've been put in situations at work. I had a coworker who would purposefully put himself in positions where I had to squeeze by him. He wouldn't move, and there were a few times when I just wouldn't move. I would just stand there and wait for him to move. I started to scare him, I heard from one of my coworkers. I was starting to. He was afraid of me, but that's purely because I had to put up that front. Because I had to fucking make myself scary to him, because, otherwise, if I was nice to him, if I even had a "friendly conversation" with him, he would... I know what he would've done to me because the other girls... He constantly touches them and was hugging on them, leaning on them, and I think he kissed one of them on the cheek a few times. And I was like, I do not want that, personally. Like, do not touch me. You are a creepy, old man. I literally had to act that way, and I do that a lot actually. I put up a very aggressive front just so that they don't fuck with me. I can't be nice, even though I'm a very nice person.

The Second Time

The second encounter with sexual violence was when I was 17. I had been omitted to a mental hospital for severe PTSD and suicidal behavior. I had pretty much lost all of my friends when I was hospitalized, except for one. He was a grade above me and had a girlfriend, but when I was in outpatient we'd hang out. One night, I was particularly upset at something that happened in outpatient, so he offered to pick me up and hang out. We rode in his car and talked as he parked in an empty school parking lot. He then began kissing me. I tried explaining to him that I didn't think I was in a good place in my life to be fooling around with him. He kept going until I was outright saying "No" repeatedly. He didn't stop, he took off my pants, and kept going. We said nothing to each other on the car ride back. The next day he told me I couldn't tell anyone else, made me delete our texts, and told his girlfriend I was coming onto him. She harassed me for year, and I asked him why he wouldn't at least defend myself to her. He told me, "You would be ruining a good thing." It's difficult because I am now in a relationship with the man. I defend him to friends and family and tell them he's practically a new person, but the reality is he still takes off my clothing or takes off condoms without asking me first.



From the What Were You Wearing? section of #ustoo, 15" x 23," 2021



My Boyfriend

I was dating someone, and he invited me over to his house. It was late at night and was just thinking nothing is going to happen... we're just going to watch a movie. So, I went over there, and then once I was there, it's like you can't say no. It's a stupid thing. If you ever tell a man, "Oh, I was at his house," they'd be like, well why'd you go there? There are times where they're like, you shouldn't have been there. I've actually had it happen to me for that situation. I said, "Yeah well I went to his house," and they were like, "Well, why'd you go there? Late at night." I just was thinking you should be able to go to someone's house and not have to worry.