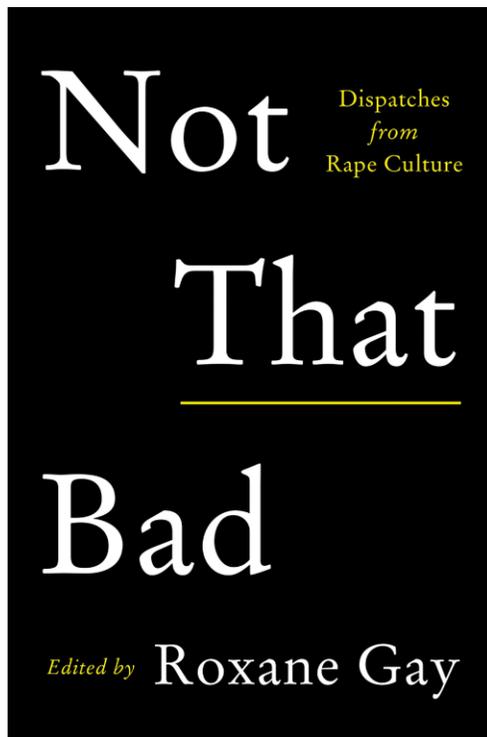


# NOT THAT BAD: DISPATCHES FROM RAPE CULTURE



## Book Summary:

This book discusses sexual assault and perceived sexual assault.

## Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual activities; violence including sexual assault and molestation; profanity; alcohol and drug use; self-harm including anorexia and bulimia; alternate sexualities; alternate gender ideologies; controversial social/cultural commentary.

*Adult*

**By Roxane Gay**

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**4** / 5

**Not For Minors**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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7	<p>When I was twelve years old, I was gang-raped in the woods behind my neighborhood by a group of boys with the dangerous intentions of bad men. ...Allowing myself to believe that being gang-raped wasn't "that bad" allowed me to break down my trauma into something more manageable, into something I could carry with me instead of allowing the magnitude of it to destroy me.</p>
8	<p>If being gang-raped wasn't that bad, then it wasn't at all that bad being shoved or having my arm grabbed so hard it left five bruises in the form of fingerprints or being catcalled for having large breasts or having a hand shoved down my pants or being told I should be grateful for romantic attention because I wasn't good enough and on and on.</p>
9	<p>I don't know when this changed, when I began realizing that all the encounters people began realizing that all the encounters people have with sexual violence are, indeed, that bad. ...When I first came up with the idea for this anthology, I wanted to assemble a collection of essays about rape culture- some reportage, some personal essays, writing that engaged with the idea of rape culture, what it means to live in a world where the phrase "rape culture" exists.</p>
10	<p>There were hundreds and hundreds of stories from people all along the gender spectrum, giving voice to how they suffered, in one way or another, from sexual violence, or how they have been affected by intimate relationships with people who have experienced sexual violence.</p>
11	<p>That was years before you actually have sex and, even when you do, you are so afraid of getting pregnant accidentally that you don't let a man come inside you until after you're married.</p>
12	<p>IF RAPE CULTURE HAD A FLAG, IT WOULD BE ONE OF THOSE BOOB INSPECTOR T-shirts.          If rape culture had its own cuisine, it would be all this shit you have to swallow.          If rape culture had a downtown, it would smell like Axe body spray and that perfume they put on tampons to make your vagina smell like laundry detergent.          If rape culture had an official language, it would be locker-room jokes and an awkward laugh track. Rape culture speaks in every tongue.          If rape culture had a national sport, it would be...well...something with balls, for sure.          YOU DRINK TOO MUCH AT THE PARTY BECAUSE IT'S COLLEGE and you're always drinking too much. The party is terribly generic with beer pong and a bass-heavy soundtrack. Everyone is drinking from foamy beer out of red Solo cups.          ...Daniel knows you don't drink beer, so he has brought you a bottle of cheap vodka, which you drink mixed with even cheaper orange juice.          ...A boy in the kitchen- a baseball player- takes his dick out to show everyone how big it is. It is, in fact, very big.</p>
14	<p>In it, the hero finds his petite, brunette English teacher alone in a church. He pulls out a 24k gold-plated gun with a pearl handle, holds it to her head, and rapes her, bending her over the back of a pew. When he's finished, he drives off in a convertible and leaves a bag of money at the police station to avoid arrest.</p>

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15	<p>You're too timid to call him out on this threatening misogynistic bullshit.</p> <p>...In the second rape story, the hero meets a girl at a party. She's beautiful, drunk, glassy-eyed, and nearly incoherent. When she's no longer able to walk, the hero, who hasn't had anything to drink, carries her outside, to the beach. He strips off her clothes and has sex with her while she makes soft moaning sounds. Then he dresses her again and lies beside her on the sand.</p> <p>..."It seems romantic, almost. Are we supposed to feel sympathy for this character, even as he's raping her?"</p> <p>..."He's not raping her. They're having sex."</p> <p>You point out all of the evidence that he is, in fact, raping her. She's clearly very drunk.</p> <p>..."This is, like, based off me hookin up with my girlfriend for the first time."</p>
16	<p>The narrator gets very drunk at a party. She kisses one guy and then another kisses her. She runs away and bumps into an acquaintance, who she barely recognizes through a haze of cheap beer. He is aggressive, putting his penis inside of her while she tries to stammer, "wait, wait."</p> <p>...Someone offers, "It's about a girl who goes to a party and gets drunk and hooks up with a bunch of dudes."</p> <p>..."Well," you offer, "I think this first part is a hookup, and the second part, maybe a misunderstanding, but I read this last section pretty straightforwardly as being assault."</p>
18	<p>It's true that your kids, by virtue of both being boys, will be in a privileged position, but the idea that they "won't have to deal" with rape culture makes you shudder. You very much want to them to "deal with" rape culture the way one "deals with" a cockroach problem.</p> <p>...Not everyone gets sex when they want it.</p>
19	<p>If you say "bitch," you're criticizing her gender.</p> <p>...YOUR COUSIN TEXTS YOU OUT OF THE BLUE TO SAY, "I JUST GOT raped at the bank."</p>
20	<p>When she lists "feminism" as an interest, her message requests decrease by 86 percent and the number of rape threats she receives triples.</p>
24	<p>We get to check ourselves ten times in the dorm-room mirror, necks craning to see how fat our skinny little asses look from the back, and we even get to guzzle sweet drinks and swallow harmless-looking tabs we hope might make us feel better or dance faster or look prettier or just forget.</p>
25	<p>What would Kurt have had to do for me to feel justified in raping him?</p> <p>...Instead of letting her throw up the four bites of creamy pasta she ate for dinner- which I know is all she can really think about as she watches Kurt's pointy teeth flash in the candlelight- I want to pull her around the corner, hurry down the hall in the opposite direction, and make for the exit.</p>
27	<p>I remember his hands always on my body, and even before he pulled the mirror and the razor blade out of the center drawer, I was thinking, This isn't good.</p> <p>Kurt reached into the pocket of his coat and pulled out a paper packet- druggie origami- tapping two snowy piles onto the glass. I watched him chopping and scraping, wincing a bit at the sound, a fork on china, nails on a chalkboard, a</p>

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	<p>warning alarm I would fail to heed. Down to the roots of my nerve fibers, I knew the thing to do was get out, but this was to be a night of many college firsts: first restaurant date, first ride in a Porsche, first blow. Kurt rolled a crisp green bill from his wallet and showed me what to do.</p> <p>It burned. And then? Not much. The coke had done nothing more than make my eyes feel really, really wide open. I would be hyperalert for what came next. Which was also almost nothing. He kissed me, and as he did, he pulled me away from the desk and down onto the bed. He was the world's worst kisser, all probing tongue, like a sea slug trying to move down my throat. I was repulsed, but saved (I know now) by the coke: Kurt couldn't get it up. He rolled against me, and through the thin fabric of his dress khakis, I could feel him against my thigh, soft as a dinner roll.</p> <p>...The next day, apparently having had more fun than I had, Kurt called to ask if I'd go with him to Shasta Lake, an annual Memorial Day fraternity tradition at the University of Oregon: at least a hundred rented houseboats, each carrying eight or so couples, kegs tapped and flowing, red Solo cups bobbing in the water like buoys.</p> <p>Imagine the drinking and the drugs.</p> <p>...I didn't even like Kurt: he represented everything I'd been taught to distrust in the world, a privileged fuck from the burbs who thought anything could be his for the right price, including me.</p>
31	<p>She may as well have been on another boat, lost as she was in drugs, Jack Daniels, and the eyes of a new friend with whom she was swaying near a boom box, hitting rewind on a worn Eagles cassette, "Desperado" locked in as their song. By the time Kurt and his pack of drunken brothers, baked in every way there is to be baked, anchored our boat on Slaughterhouse Island in the middle of Shasta Lake, the deep water was not just a metaphor.</p> <p>.... I'd refused the coke all day— that night in Kurt's apartment had been enough for me—but when the party was raging, Kurt pulled a baggie out of his pocket and held something out to me in the palm of his big hand. Brown mushrooms like shrunken heads on tiny necks. I took a few and chewed the tough, dry stems, washing them down with a slug from his beer.</p> <p>When the mushrooms started to kick in, I slipped away from Kurt and the hordes of drunken Greeks, climbing the bare slope where the dark, swaying shapes of human bodies circled the flames, pushing through some thick brush near the top, and finding shelter next to what seemed at the time to be a fantastically magnanimous scrub pine.</p>
32	<p>They will wake you up to rape you.</p>
33	<p>I wonder then if I could have fought harder- I hadn't bitten off his earlobe and spit it in his face, I hadn't jammed my knee into his testicles with all the force of my starved eighteen-year-old body, I hadn't leaped to my feet and rammed a well-placed heel into his kneecap.</p> <p>...I remember the pillow in my face and, when there wasn't air enough left for screaming, thinking breathe, breathe, breathe,</p> <p>...Here's what I didn't say: "You fucker. You raped me. You think I'm going to go out with?"</p>

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35	He put his hands on my shoulders and pushed me down. I landed flat on my back and he fell over me, pinning me down with his body.
36	I never even said, "You raped me." ...In Savannah the summer after the rape, I had sex with more different men in three months than in all the years before and all the years after combined. My unarticulated logic went like this: If I give my body away, over and over, I can prove to myself that sex is my choice- even though, and this seems significant now, I always let the men choose me. Until I was nineteen years old, it never occurred to me that I could do the choosing.
37	Theirs was the first nationwide study of campus sexual assault ever, and the statistics rattled us all: Twenty-five percent of women in college have been the victims of rape or attempted rape. ...One in four female respondents had an experience that met the legal definition of rape or attempted rape and the average age when a rape incident occurred (either as perpetrator or victim) was 18 1/2 years old and [Women] were embarrassed about the details of the rape (leaving a bar with a man, taking drugs, etc.) and felt they would be blamed for what occurred, or they simply felt the men involved had too much social status for their stories to be believed and In short, many men fail to perceive what has just happened as rape.
38	So you're saying that if I go to a party in a really short skirt, and I'm flirting all over the place- if I get raped, it's not my fault? ...They wanted to have something to believe in, rules to follow, a formula, reasons other girls got raped and they didn't: short skirt equals rape; too much beer equals rape; unlocked door equals rape.
47	In so many ways, our contexts are different; but I am beginning to understand that my own white learned unresponsiveness to the shapes of their questions has something to do with the ongoing violence at the heart of this nation.
48	She advises us to turn away from the commonplace, "I was raped." ...The activist and poet, who wrote: "I am black and I am female and I am a mother and I am bisexual and I am a nationalist and I am an anitnationalist..." ..."The victim must learn to make language tell her own truth: He raped me." ..."I was raped," I whisper.
56	The Luckiest MILF in Brooklyn ..."C'mere MILF tits!" Sweet tits, hot tits, sugar tits. Oh, hi. Here I am. MILF tits. Still valid, I guess, still viable. MILF-y, but tits all the same. I've been a D-cup since seventh grade, so my breasts have been up for public conversation almost as long as I can remember- along with the rest of me, especially my ass, the way I walk, and how viable a fuck I am to passerby. Do I want to smoke a joint in your car? ...You'd like to rub your dick all over my ass?
57	"C'mere MILF tits!" calls a man out a car window. "I wanna fuck you sideways!"
58	I'm supposed to be grateful because, even though I walk through the world with MILF tits and a sundress, I wasn't raped. And I've been raped, and this is much

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	better. So, thank you. Today I stand outside the library, the luckiest MILF in Brooklyn.
59	I should have slowed down because I'm not that fine, I'm forty-two! I should be glad anyone finds me sexually viable.
60	If I would just be more amenable, more grateful, you're not hurting me you're complimenting me, smile and say thank you, stop, you're talking to me, you see me and I'm forty-two years old, you want to fuck me and I'm forty-two years old.
63	At lunchtime I'd go behind the cafeteria with one boy or another and let them fondle me in exchange for cigarettes, which I didn't smoke (yet) but stored away in a box my grandmother had bought me, but, let's face it, the attention was its own payment. By seventh grade, I learned to give blow jobs in exchange for wine coolers; the semen and the alcohol slid down my throat with such certainty I didn't know how to start saying no. By eighth grade I depended on the alcohol and by ninth grade, when I was kicked out of school for drugs, I had no doubt that the only thing I had to offer the world was my body, and the world pretty much confirmed that for a long time.
64	At forty-two (still got it!) (MILF tits!), the harassment has certainly, thankfully slowed, but it doesn't seem to want to go away altogether.
65	I wanna fuck your asshole. ...I'd like to put my cock between those titties. Ugly cunt, I'm talking to you!
66	The man who raped me is married to my aunt is the father of my cousin, who was, at one time, my closest friend in a family in which friends and love were rare. He is not the only man who raped me, but he is the only one who raped me and refused to leave because he was stitched into my life like an ugly scar from a wound healed wrong.
76	There had been a guy in his twenties who scanned my thirteen-year-old body, all Manhattan rooftop-tan and a tiny silver bikini, and said, "How old are you?" And I said "Old enough," and he laughed and said "You're some pretty little jailbait," and he never laid a finger on me. By that point, I had been hurt when men touched me.
77	A few days later, he started hooking up with one of my best friends. ...Sophomore year, I had been invited to a birthday party by the hottest guy in my homeroom, and the party had turned out to be five guys watching porn, and me, just me. I quickly downed four or five shots of vodka and thought Okay, let's cut to the chase, let's not let this be a group activity. So I took one boy's hand, the one who had invited me, and led him to the bathroom and fucked him so hard on the tile floor, no condom, and later his friends taunted me ("Whore!" "Slut!").
78	I had said, "Yes, give me more," moaned like in a porno.
81	"Wanna fuck?" I whispered to A. ..."Do you wanna fuck her?" "Hell yeah," said B. "Let's do this." ...He switched on the lights. I hadn't contemplated the literal meaning of the word fuck until he began unzipping his skater-boy jeans. "Fuck" meant his cock- short and thick, already hard- was going to be inside my body. It wouldn't be at all like the last time I'd fucked, which had been with my

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	<p>boyfriend who was so sweet and always worried about me and made me a mix CD for the hospital. This time "fuck" meant pain. My pussy was as dry as my mouth. ...B sat down cross-legged on the bathroom floor and I knelt beside him. He took my face in his hands, lowered it down, and I choked. The song's sweet melody filled my mind. I tried not to breathe through my nose. My heartbeat was so slow. Living dead girl.</p> <p>"Spit on it," said B. "I can't," I said. The meds—I had no saliva. "Okay, get on top," he said. I was looking for a word, but it was so far away, locked in an ancient memory: a health class in junior high school, the aisle of a drugstore, behind the counter of a bodega. "Condom." I remembered it as I said it.</p> <p>B sighed, pulled a wallet from his pocket, and removed a Trojan. He tore the blue wrapper, which was worn soft around the edges and showed some tears. The latex inside was brittle and split when he tried to roll it on. At least he hadn't refused.</p> <p>I got on top. I coached myself through every movement: up, down, up, down. "Here Comes the Sun" was building toward the chorus. B moaned, grabbed my hair, pulled my ear to his lips. "I've got AIDS," he said, in a soft, rough voice. And then those reassuring lyrics arrived: my time in the sunlight was almost here. He came inside me, stood and zipped up, left me to clean myself.</p>
82	<p>"I had sex with him," I said, "and he has AIDS."</p>
86	<p>Since I stopped telling this exclusively as a story about my gender dysphoria. ...My friends- those who have seen me change over the past five years, seen my body alter from the effects of hormones, and seen me get better at doing my makeup and appearing more confident in how I walk through the world—call me fierce, and I hate the word, partly because it's such a stupid, drag queen cliché, but also because I know just how much it is a lie.</p> <p>There was nothing fierce about the way I screamed in that room, thirteen years ago, when you refused to listen to me telling you I didn't want your lips around the part of me that I hate to name.</p> <p>...Six days ago on the train, I read an article about men who fetishize women with penises.</p> <p>...It was always her who had been strong, who made me feel safe, from the moment at the end of her party when she asked me "May I kiss you inappropriately?"</p>
88	<p>She did the things you didn't think of doing. She ran her fingers up and down my back, she touched my hair, she kissed me, bit my nipples, ignored the part of me I hate to name. And when we were done, when we had explored enough and the vodka her Russian friends had brought began to catch up with us, she kissed me good night and went to bed alone.</p>
89	<p>Forty-one days ago I took a transgender man in know to a hotel I was reviewing. We talked, over crab and pork belly, about friends we knew who are poly, about the couples I'm a secondary to and how I feel this suits me.</p> <p>...And we kissed, drunk and stoned, clumsily, and found our way to the bed and it didn't solve anything.</p> <p>...Because he let me touch the parts of him I would have had a problem naming, while I kept my briefs on the whole time.</p>

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	<p>...When someone touches it, the part of me I hate to name, I do not see my former wife, I do not recall the way the woman who came after you touched me, I remember how you grabbed me, how you told me that you wouldn't normally do this and opened your mouth, and your anger and incomprehension when I screamed.</p>
91	<p>Twenty-eight days ago, at a party at my apartment, I kissed a trans woman I barely knew, and she kissed me better than anyone has in my life, better than the woman who came after you, better than my wife, and this may have been because I was on molly but the way she touched my back was heavenly and she solved nothing.</p> <p>...Two hours ago, halfway through writing this, I bought a dime bag of weed for the first time since I was a student. I asked my housemate what hours her dealer kept, and she went out to score. I've done a lot of drugs I haven't done before in these sixty-three days— MDMA and speed and laughing gas—and a lot I've done before—poppers, weed, and booze.</p> <p>...I expect it to help me to sleep. I've been taking codeine, too. I say it's for the headaches.</p> <p>I have done my research. I have scrolled down the list of porn clips that come up when you type the words lesbian and rape into Google. I have read about the women in the Congo who collude in, sometimes lead, the rape of captives.</p>
92	<p>I have read the articles that give the statistics, that explain why even these are inadequate, I have talked to women who've been shouted down for talking about violence in queer women's relationships, with trans women who've been raped by cisgender women at gunpoint.</p>
95	<p>For the past sixty-three days I have tried to solve this, with drugs, with lovers, with words.</p>
96	<p>The last woman to go grabbed her gift from under the tree and the room exploded with laughter as she unwrapped it and held it high, among the plush-covered chairs and gold-framed art, for all to see. A giant. Purple. Dick.</p>
97	<p>At this point, we were all three white wineglasses to the wind, but still it surprised me, how much I was drawn to the vibrator.</p> <p>...So before the laughter subsided, I stood up and grabbed the vibrator out of the woman's hand.</p> <p>I...I have a friend who would love this, I said.</p> <p>...UP UNTIL THAT MOMENT, I'D NEVER HELD A VIBRATOR IN MY hand and had rarely seen one in action. Once, in college, I'd walked in on some guys in my boyfriend's fraternity communally watching porn. Seven guys in a darkened room, scattered on chairs and couches and the floor, staring at the hot glare of the television screen where an overly hairy guy said, Come on, baby. You know you love it, baby while he jammed a dildo as long as his forearm into the asshole of a woman bent over a table. Her moan low, interspersed with piercing cries that did not sound like pleasure.</p> <p>But at the holiday party, amid all its contained civilization, the vibrator felt like the most powerful object in the room.</p> <p>...So I excused myself, lamenting the fact that I had no purse, no place to stow the vibrator.</p>

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99	<p>I held up the vibrator.            ...Dragging his finger from one shoulder, across my throat, to the other.            I want to lick you.            HIS FACE INCHES FROM MINE, CHARGED AIR WHERE OUR mouths might meet.            My body's wired response to being wanted by a man so sure of his place in the world.            Like all those boys, watching the woman bent over the table. Her face screwed up in the pain of performance. Tongues darting around their mouths.            I moved past him to the pile of coats on the table, searching for mine as I felt him approach from behind. I wanted to shout, Get someone else in the room. But this man, he was power. And me? I was the new girl in town who'd snatched a sex toy out of another woman's hand.            Instead, I turned to face him, placing the packaged device between my thighs, pressing them together, holding it there while I put one arm through my coat, then the other. I pulled the vibrator from between my legs and turned to leave.            Be careful, he hissed, if you use that too much, your clit will go numb.</p>
100	<p>At home, I stashed the vibrator way in the back of my underwear drawer.            ...It didn't feel right, liberating the vibrator from the drawer in the harsh morning light, but that's what I did, the first Monday after I'd plucked it out of the hands of the woman at the party.            I extricated it from the complicated plastic wrapping. It was bright purple, with sparkles, about six inches long. I had no idea if this was considered a normal-sized vibrator but it was certainly less intimidating than the one I'd seen in the porn long ago. I inserted two batteries and turned it on to the first setting. A slight pulsing. Next setting, more. On the final setting, the vibrator gave off a sound like my neighbor mowing his lawn. I dropped it on the floor and watched it buzz its way under my bed.</p>
101	<p>I wrestled my way under the bed. Balls of dust and fluff clung to the vibrator's shaft like stubborn pubic hair. I turned it off and thrust it back into my drawer again.            ...I removed my clothes and lay on the bed. The breeze from the open window was sharp and my nipples grew hard.            Alone in the house, I imagined my husband, how we used to make love. How he'd say, so gently, You can come again. I know you can. And he'd give me that gift.</p>
102	<p>Instead of sex, I'd pull off his pants. How he'd be so hard, which always surprised me because we'd done nothing to get to that point. He was always ready. How he'd put his hand on my head and move me. I contributed nothing but an open cavity.            As I rubbed my nipple lightly with a finger, pleasure rippled through my body, a feeling I'd not had in months. I turned the vibrator on and spread my legs. But it was awkward. I didn't know whether to put it in me or on me. All I felt was a deadening throb. your clit will go numb            That hairy man behind. The dildo jamming again and again into the woman's gaping hole.            I turned the vibrator off.            ...I closed my eyes and laid the vibrator on my belly, crossing my hands over it.</p>

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103	I CAME OUT THE FRONT DOOR, WRAPPED IN MY BATHROBE, vibrator in hand.
105	I knew when she beat me until I was a shivering ball in a corner. I knew when she held a knife to me that time I was five, pleading to her partner Millie, "Dare and I'll kill this little bitch." She stabbed me repeatedly- not hard enough to break skin but hard enough that it hurt.
106	THE FIRST TIME IT HAPPENED TO ME, I WAS SIX. HE WAS MILLIE'S uncle. ...I climbed down and went into Val's apartment, even though I knew I wasn't supposed to. Mom had lectured my sister and me about staying away from men, though she never explained why. I learned why that day, when Val did what he did to my six-year-old body in his living room, which was an alter all thing Puerto Rico.
107	My mother was raped by her mother's husband when she was just sixteen years old. ...My brother was conceived in that rape my mother was blamed for.
112	A few years later, I was told point-blank that my career was moving slowly because "nobody wants to fuck you." There was something about me, sexually, that wasn't selling.
113	At fifteen, she was asked if she would feel comfortable "humping a table" in the audition room and her mother was asked if she would be "comfortable" with Kai working in only a bra and panties.
114	As Michelle says: "We are told to 'use what you have to work with...boobs, ass." ...Apparently, the look is now a super thin stomach area, big breasts, big butt, gorgeous face, and a freed nipple. When they first told me about the nipple thing, I tried to understand but it was clear that it was not the "burn the bra" mentality with which I was raised.
118	We have to end the system where it is only white men who decide when a woman- in any position, "privileged" or not- is deserving of power and agency. ...If the Harvey Weinstein disaster illustrates anything at all, it illustrates the entirety of the power structure. The lurid details of his rapes are disgusting and yet a shield, in a way, for the greater toxicity of that power structure.
122	They kissed her with tongue to show me how easy it was.
123	That same summer place. The back porch. After swimming. My older brother's friend. My brothers. All of us wrapped in towels, sitting around. I was an age where there is no pubic hair and you're aware there's none, embarrassed about it. Whichever age that is. My brother's friend overlapping his towel onto mine, his hand snaking in, snaking under, trying to get to the girl of me. But my brothers are there! Nobody is there. I cement my legs closed. I press so hard and plead so hard with the thighs I will learn to hate for the rest of my life simply because of their roundness. Why is he doing this? Why can't anyone see? Why am I not moving saying yelling screaming? Why me? The fingers go as far as he can get them, which isn't as far as he wants to get

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	<p>them, and he gives up. They go play. I release. My thighs quiver, spent, mostly victorious. Summary If they want it, they can take it. What you want or don't want is irrelevant.</p>
124	<p>A father's friend, drunk. A master bedroom during a party he sneaks away from. I'm watching cartoons. Still no breasts, no pubes, only a summer tan, shorts, halter top. ...I was watching cartoons. In a room. By myself. He lay down on the bed, his pose mirroring mine. He begins stroking the mountain-range length of me; head, hair, cheek, shoulder, arm, waist, hip, thigh, calf. An endless petting. I watch cartoons. His sour breath,, garbled words. His hand. Slow and stroking. Feeling him inch closer, narrowing the valley between us. ...The door opens and another father's friend rages, rips him off the bed. What the fuck do you think you're doing? he asks.</p>
127	<p>But he reached up and started caressing my face. He took his thumb and pressed it all over my lips, then into my mouth. Again, I froze. I did not know what this was. What was this? In and out of my mouth and I sucked on it. Automatically. I sucked his thumb. I didn't know what to do but I felt that was what was wanted FROM ONE OF MY COUNSELORS so I sucked on it. Like a sleepy baby. Even though it all felt wrong. I was in the middle of a lake, alone. Not alone. ...I couldn't see his eyes. He had on sunglasses. But I saw he had a hard-on. I had brothers. I had my dad's Hustlers, his Joy of Sex. I knew exactly what it was, what it could do. He began rubbing it over his shorts, while I took his thumb. And then, after a short time, he reached under his shorts and started working himself. Faster and faster until an abrupt groan and stop. I wasn't sure what happened but I was sure nonetheless. He jumped in the lake. Swam around for a minute. Then we sailed back. In silence.</p>
128	<p>If a boy treats you like you're special, it's probably because he wants to come and not because you are a treasure he discovered. You are not a treasure. You are a thing a boy can use to make him ejaculate.</p>
130	<p>I'd frequently be the third wheel when we'd drive around to various hidden spots to smoke weed or drink, sometimes drive into San Francisco, drunk walk down Broadway, sneak into the sex shops and peep show and porn booths.</p>
131	<p>The smaller ones aren't worth writing about but they add up; the "sit on my lap uncle" who nuzzles your neck and won't let you down, calls his mustache "a caterpillar"—"doesn't it tickle?" the bouncer who frisks you slow and long and between your legs in a dark hallway when your group has already gone ahead into the club, the "fuck you dumb bitch" when you tell him no, he can't get what he wants, the drunk stranger guy a drunk you is chatting and laughing with who suddenly dives into your mouth with his because being friendly is an invitation, the guy after guy after guy who grinds his dick in your ass when you are dancing with your girlfriends.</p>

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132	<p>I legitimately think, "I got off easy." I didn't get raped, my dad didn't finger me, my cousin didn't make me suck his dick, nobody ass-fucked me while I was passed out at a frat party. I got fondled, at best.</p> <p>...Until I became a seasoned adult, I thought this was a normal part of growing up as a girl. Weird shit with boys/men happens to you.</p>
134	<p>Raped children are supposed to die. What would the culture of the individual white cisgender male straight genius do without us?</p>
140	<p>She describes the shock of discovering that the photographic accuracy was a front, a disguise for the sexual abuse she had forgotten until- violently- her body reminded her.</p> <p>...For months, I studied and framed these, and more- accounts by daughters of sexual abuse by their fathers.</p>
143	<p>To extend creative adulthood to only those who had halcyon days in which the "vast, polymorphous potentialities of childhood" were realized and can be remembered speaks of white middle-class cisgendered privilege.</p>
144	<p>Their work gave me survival and writing. From them, I learned the blazing insight that rape was not an act between an individual and an individual, hidden in a dark room—that was what my rapist wanted me to think. Rape was and is a cultural and political act: it attempts to remove a person with agency, autonomy, and belonging from their community, to secrete them and separate them, to depoliticize their body by rendering it detachable, violable, nothing.</p>
145	<p>WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN AN INDIVIDUAL AND AN INDIVIDUAL can be labeled "not that bad." It can be called a "crime of passion." It can be called a misunderstanding, a Freudian slip, a one-time deal, just between you and me, an act meaningless among the vast, insensible crises of genocide. Any measure of comparison feels grotesque when presented as a simile: that rape is "like" colonization—although the metaphor of "rape" is often used to describe the conquest of land.</p> <p>Flip it around and think of rape as colonization: not just a metonym, but a precise synecdoche, part for whole, an action by which genocidal violence, the removal of land rights, and the destruction of coherent culture proceeds.</p> <p>RAPE AND COLONIALISM ARE NOT COMMENSURATE, BUT they are kin. When we talk about sexual violence as feminists, we are we have to be—talking about its use to subjugate entire peoples and cultures, the annihilation that is its empty heart. Rape is that bad because it is an ideological weapon. Rape is that bad because it is a structure: not an excess, not monstrous, but the logical conclusion of heteropatriarchal capitalism. It is what that ugly polysyllabic euphemism for state power does.</p>
146	<p>It's time to pull out the scalpel and turn it around. Slash vents in the paper walls of this master's house or heteropatriarchal colonialist mass hallucination that claims to be our reality.</p>
147	<p>He was eighteen; I was eight. And for a period just short of a year, he regularly sexually abused me.</p>
148	<p>I've tried many things to make the memories and their terrible vividness go away: alcohol, drugs, sex, lots of Benadryl-doused sleep to avoid nightmares. And, when</p>

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	<p>that didn't work, a razor to my thigh, a lit cigarette pressed into a palm.            ...What he actually did to me is fuzzy, partly because memory plays tricks on me and partly because, in those moments, I did something a psychiatrist would call disassociation, and partly because they were acts that I, as an eight-year-old, didn't understand. I remember bits and pieces: a tongue pressed into my small mouth; a hand in my pants; his weight on top of me, pain; the feeling of my own breathing being sucked out of my body.</p>
153	<p>This is partly because it happened again: different steps, but the same tune. It was my junior year of college; I was at a house party. I told him, No, I don't want to have sex with you. But when he was inside me, I didn't scream. I didn't yell for help or push him off me, even though I had done just that a couple weeks prior, when at yet another party, yet another man had whipped out an unwelcome dick. Maybe I was just wearied.            Having lived two drastically different stories of sexual assault, I've learned some interesting things about responses.</p>
154	<p>On the other hand, when someone hears of an adult woman being raped at a house party, the reactions are much more varied. Were you drunk? Had you hooked up before?            ...People will always respond differently to the story of a sexually abused third grader than they will that of a young woman who is violated by a friend at a booze-soaked house party.            ...Those who are disgusted at the idea of touching a child may be the exact same that would grope an adult woman in an alleyway or on a crowded subway train—or worse.            IN THE FIRST OF ELENA FERRANTE'S NEAPOLITAN NOVELS, GIGLIOLA, the childhood friend of the eponymous narrator, is raped by the two wealthy brothers who terrorize the neighborhood. In the third, Those Who Leave and Those Who stay, Gigiola, having been seduced by promises of riches and prestige, is married to one of those rapists.</p>
155	<p>Perhaps the most horrifying thing about nonconsensual sex is that, in an instant, it erases you.</p>
156	<p>That night, however, the doorman wanted proof of my affection. He followed me into the lobby and started groping me. He tried to kiss me and I pushed him off.</p>
164	<p>Once, I heard a news story about sex offenders who had been driven out of their homes by laws mandating that they stay away from schools.            ..."Women are just bitches; they never let it go."</p>
168	<p>Or because I had to have my husband tell my parents to stop forcing me to meet my sister's abuser f a reconciliation meeting, because they wouldn't listen to me, because my angry vagina rendered me mute.</p>
185	<p>Daily breakfast with other interns who would show up with a bruised eye and smile ("I couldn't feel my face") and talk about the drugs they too last night.            Drinking on the campus was not allowed, and so those of us with IDs and nights off would make that nightly pilgrimage to the one bar.</p>
186	<p>I knew what rape was. I knew what consent was. I knew about first- and second-wave feminism. I knew queer theory.</p>

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188	<p>How do we define consent? From an evidentiary perspective, can we ask what she was wearing? When can we ask about previous sexual partners, experiences, and proclivities?</p> <p>...There was so much to be angry about: the patriarchy, the precedent of rape, law, the slow strides of legal reform.</p>
189	<p>We learned the expectations that would allow you to introduce a witness's sexual history to undermine the idea that she was raped.</p> <p>...I also learned that a senior attorney who repeatedly sexually harassed a female attorney was not disbarred because the court did not consider his daily groping to be conduct involving "moral turpitude."</p>
190	<p>For me, coming out as a queer woman and rape survivor have been inextricably linked.</p>
191	<p>I was terrified that someone would somehow know I was raped and tell me that was why I was gay.</p> <p>...I am not surprised by the statistics that show an increased rate of violence against queer people.</p>
192	<p>The culture of shame and silence shrouds survivors of sexual violence, but also queer people who are so often considered other.</p>
194	<p>As transient bodies drift in search of sanctuary, gendered violence can buttress a social taxonomy of dominance and oppression, demarcating the rapeable and those with the power to rape, siphoning spheres of male and female, captors and prisoners. Or it can create new hierarchies between the "host nation" and uninvited "asylum seeker," the occupier and occupied.</p>
200	<p>Vulnerability to sexual violence also hinges on other social hierarchies: wealthier refugees have the money and connections to purchase access to safer routes; black African migrants are often subjected to more abuse than lighter-skinned counterparts; labor and sexual exploitation blur into each other, generating subcategories of rape like "survival sex" or "protection sex."</p> <p>In a study of African migration into Europe in recent years, researchers Sharon Pickering and Alison Gerard quote one migrant, Aziza, describing a climate of sexual coercion while held under armed guard in Libya: "The living situation is difficult because you are not free. There are people standing over you and you have to negotiate to leave. Some people pay money to leave, others provide sex or are raped."</p> <p>In a UN-led study, "Oumo" recalled the banality of transactional sex, which she undertook twice to obtain a fake passport and then to get a spot on a smuggling boat from Turkey to Greece.</p>
201	<p>The sex work industry runs parallel to marriage, as another institution of survival sex. However, because prostitution is associated with poverty and social transgression, refugees who enter the sex trade- often because they cannot find other work- risk social stigma and imprisonment, in contrast to wives kept "secure" in subjugation.</p>
202	<p>In the US, Raquel, a former detainee from Central America, told aid lawyers about fleeing gang violence in her homeland to escape to what she thought would be a life of relative safety, only to wind up in federal detention and being sexually</p>

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	<p>abused by an immigration officer: "I thought he was going to kill me. I thought I should have stayed in my home country if my life was going to end like this because at least I would have had more time with my children. He got in the cage with me and started unzipping his pants and pulling off my clothes. He exposed himself to me. He was angry that I would not take off my clothes."</p>
203	<p>According to a 2015 Guardian report, several detained children reported being molested by security guards. But their documented complaints were apparently quietly downgraded to less serious violations.</p> <p>A young Iranian woman was found traumatized, bitten, and bruised outside the facility in May 2015. Then came two suicide attempts—first the victim, then her mother, who was isolated in detention while her daughter was hospitalized. A Somali detainee who reported she had become pregnant from rape sought an abortion but was initially blocked from traveling to Australia for the hospital procedure.</p>
204	<p>In contrast to the wall of silence around rape in migration, rape culture has entered the mainstream Western political discourse on immigration policy, albeit at a distorted angle: migrant (black, brown or Muslim) men are stereotyped as rapists in Europe and the US, stoking fears they arrived eager to prey on the honor of "native-born" (white) women.</p> <p>...The media frenzy paralleled Donald Trump's scaremongering on the 2016 campaign trail about Mexican "rapists" streaming across the border.</p>
210	<p>Think of all the victims who, like my character, are silent. The girls sitting in their dorm rooms, scared to speak up. The wife who is abused by her husband. The woman attacked in an alley. The child molested.</p>
211	<p>It is my hope that we can use this as an opportunity to look within. To open up the conversation. To reach out to organizations which are working hard to prevent these kinds of crimes. And to support its victims. To donate time or money. To play and active role in creating a ripple that will change the ingrained misogyny that permeates our culture.</p>
219	<p>From him I learned to swear like a man, to drop the words fuck, bitch, and pussy in my sentences as smoothly and as frequently as the word the.</p> <p>..."God, how old are the Olsen twins now?" he asked at lunch halfway through our freshman year, pushing his hair behind his ears. "I'm too ready to jerk off to them." I stared out the window and watched as the groundskeeper circled the lawn on his riding mower. Josh looked around the table at us while drumming his fingers on the table. "Come on, they're still jailbait, right? Don't tell me none of you haven't thought about it." Someone murmured that if it's in our heads, there can't be anything wrong and a debate over pubic hair quickly raged next to me. Josh looked across the table at me: he couldn't have known that my stomach was tightening, that the night before I'd dreamed of razor blades and of a man masturbating me, or that whenever I touched myself I couldn't help but think about the moon and fireworks.</p> <p>"Which one do you jerk off to, Skinny? And don't try saying they look the same or I'll know for sure you're a fag."</p> <p>...He pointed and laughed, "You love to jerk off, don't you, you sick shit?"</p>

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220	I knelt on top of him, shouting, "Fucking pussy! Grow up, asshole!" I kept pushing him against the ground even as I heard him crying.
222	<p>IN OUR JUNIOR YEAR, WE THREW A PARTY AT AARON'S HOUSE, just five of us with pizza and pay-per-view professional wrestling. We each brought a case of Natty Light and Josh brought his girlfriend, Kate. She stood two inches taller than him and wore a tight white tank top and jeans with ripped holes around the curves of her ass. As we drank and watched the steroids on display, he whispered in her ear and, when she laughed, he wrapped his arm around her waist and squeezed her breast, all while watching us watching him.</p> <p>Halfway through the night, the rain came. I could hear the wind blowing against the aluminum siding, a whistle without a discernible tune. Josh nudged Kate and pointed at Aaron. She looked and nodded, then moved next to Aaron and started licking his ear. Josh told Aaron to stand up and, as he did, Kate grabbed his crotch and rubbed. Josh had his hand in one of the holes in her jeans. She smoothed out Aaron's khakis to show his erection, but she was watching me.</p> <p>The beer in my hand had gone flat, it tasted rancid in my mouth. My stomach tightened and I could feel the night's pizza pushing its way up my throat. "You wanna go next, Skinny?" Kate asked, blowing me a kiss. I moved upstairs as fast as I could to the bathroom and heard Josh's howling laugh behind me. "Not him! Everyone knows Skinny's as queer as a unicorn!"</p>
225	<p>She was still wearing the tank top but had left her jeans behind and her white panties clung tight to her hips.</p> <p>...Kate lit her cigarette, inhaled deeply, and blew a heavy column of smoke into the air. "I know you're not gay," she said, offering me a cigarette.</p> <p>..."Doesn't it bother you? When they call you a fag?"</p> <p>..."I blame my daddy," she said suddenly. "I'm pretty sure he was the only one happier than me when I started growing these tits." She watched me out of the corner of her eye. "If you know what I mean."</p> <p>She then looked at me, straight on, and I saw my face reflected in the brown surface of her eyes. I wanted to tell her that Josh was using her, tell her about all the things he said when she wasn't around, how she was fun even if she is sloppy seconds, how he loves to screw her in the ass, how, when she went to the bathroom, he'd told Aaron he'd better have his ear checked for VD, tell her something. But I didn't have the heart, or the guts. I just sat there, looking back at her.</p> <p>And she looked at me, carefully, and then drew a quick breath.</p> <p>"Holy fuck. You really do know what I mean, don 't you?"</p> <p>MY OLD ROOMMATE LOVED TO MASTURBATE. HE DID IT AT least once a day, often two or three times. Our two-bedroom apartment was small enough that I could hear every rattle of his bed, every shake of his wrist, every word. "Fuck!" he'd cry out at all hours of the night. Or, "Hell yeah." "That's right." "Now, bitch. Now." He quickly started taking advantage of my job at a local video store that carried a wide variety of porn. I soon learned to distinguish the sounds of his bed sliding under his weight from the sounds of the couch banging against the living room wall. And as loud as he turned up the TV, he made sure his narration was even louder. Often he would eat a bag of fast-food burgers, turn on his latest</p>

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	<p>rental, and chug Bud Light after Bud Light, pointing his can at the girls' breasts and laughing, his mouth full of half-chewed meat.</p> <p>One evening, I looked up from my American history notes and saw him, beer on the TV tray, hamburger in one hand and the other hand in his pants. He ground the meat with his teeth, his eyes growing wider and wider. I moved toward my room and, as I passed the TV, he pulled his penis through his open zipper and continued stroking. He grinned at me.</p> <p>"You like that, don't you?"</p> <p>The yellow stubble above his lip was stained with ketchup and small bits of meat fell from his mouth onto his stomach as he talked. I kept walking to my room.</p> <p>"Come on, don't you wanna watch?"</p> <p>I slammed my door and heard him yelling.</p> <p>"I want you to watch!"</p> <p>That night, I woke just as my door swung open. He rushed in, his white T-shirt stained with beer. At first I didn't realize he was naked from the waist down. I leaned up in my bed and he shoved me down hard. I tried to get up again and, again, he shoved me down. He punched me, in the shoulder, then the leg, growling and spitting with each punch.</p> <p>"This is my cock! Fucker! This is my cock!"</p> <p>I'd stopped trying to get up but he kept shoving me, pushing my head against my pillow, pulling at my legs, screaming the whole time.</p> <p>"This is my cock! Look at my cock, goddamnit!"</p> <p>It hung there, erect, wiggling as he moved, bouncing up each time he flexed to shove me again. He grabbed me by the side and pushed me against the wall. The Led Zeppelin LP I'd nailed above the bed fell and shattered against my head.</p> <p>"This is my cock and you are my pussy! You get it, fucker? This is my cock and you're gonna look when I fucking tell you to look,</p> <p>After a few minutes, he left my room. But, later that night, I heard him slumped outside my door, banging his head against it. I heard the sounds of a beer can being thrown against a wall. And I heard him crying, sobbing, wailing.</p> <p>"Don't leave me. Oh, fuck, please don't leave me. I love you, you can't leave me."</p> <p>He banged his head harder and harder against the door.</p> <p>"I swear, I'll fucking kill myself if you leave me."</p> <p>The next day, he set his TV tray full of tacos aside, started a movie, and pulled down his pants. He grinned that wide grin of his.</p> <p>"You ready to watch?"</p> <p>I SAID YES. To EVERYONE. EVERY TIME.</p> <p>When my wife asked—just before we started dating—if I was straight, I said yes.</p>
229	<p>Because I'm not sure whether I'm gay or straight or bisexual or asexual or antisexual. Because I've only been in one relationship, an opposite-sex relationship with the woman I married. Because I can't understand a sexual identity that doesn't involve rage or terror or power. Because even when I'm attracted to men, male bodies—even my own—it turns my stomach. Especially my own.</p> <p>Because I'm still that eleven-year-old boy and I love to smile, and I want to smile, but that hand is still covering my mouth.</p> <p>So I said yes, I'm okay, even though to this day, for a moment, my mind leaves the</p>

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	<p>room every time I undress in front of her. Even though I tighten every time she runs her fingers through my pubic hair. Because I love her and I love making love with her. Even though, after twelve years with her, I still find it hard to initiate sex.</p>
232	<p>And after the breakup, I had started to spiral out: my friend Jessica called it my "trampage," and I spent it going to parties alone, staying out until 4 a.m. on weeknights, getting drunk, ending up in random beds and having lots of casual often mediocre—sex.</p> <p>I justified my lifestyle with my politics: I was independent, and independent women could fuck random men without remorse or judgment. I didn't get attached either because I was a "cool girl." I am literally fighting heteronormativity, I told my feminist self—my political identity carefully constructed around defying the norms of what was expected of a straightish single woman.</p> <p>I knew better than to get myself raped. But it happened anyway.</p> <p>I met him at a club, and we were dancing and kissing. His name started with a "K" but I can't really tell you what it was anymore; I definitely knew at the time. He was tall and handsome. Really tall. And I remember telling him I didn't want to have sex.</p>
233	<p>We went back to my place, and we smoked weed; I was still drunk. Normally, I just get the spins; that time, I passed out.</p> <p>I woke up to him penetrating me in my own bed, unclear how we had gotten to that point or when we had gone upstairs to my room. I passed out again. I was in and out of consciousness the rest of the night; in the morning, I fully woke up and he was trying again. I said no and forcefully pushed him off me. I looked away, trying not to cry, and noticed that the fucker had even been considerate enough to use condoms.</p> <p>...That was just some shitty sex.</p>
234	<p>It was an honest look at how women incorporate their feminist ideals into their romantic lives, specifically geared toward strong, feminist women who also happen to have that one terrible flaw- we date men and have to navigate the ins and outs of patriarchy while doing so.</p> <p>...I also stopped having sex, for a long time. The first time I did it again, I sobbed uncontrollably, trying to hide it from the overly eager man who I'd let inside me. It happened the next time I had sex, too.</p> <p>I put on weight, digging myself deeper into overeating or drinking too much.</p>
235	<p>The constant drumbeat of stories of sexual assault- from R. Kelly to our own goddamn president- keep me in a constant state of postrape PTSD.</p>
237	<p>I started it sometime postcollege, when my romantic and sexual life picked up considerably after coming out as queer.</p> <p>...About half the entries have asterisks next to their names—my own not-so-subtle way of indicating that we had sex. Since the vast majority of the people whom I've kissed (eighteen total) aren't cisgender men, the definition of what constitutes "sex" is a bit murky; it's hard, even for me, to shake the heteronormative definitions ingrained in me since childhood. I can't even tell you at this point what exactly I did with the woman who is tenth on the list that constituted sex: I remember a picnic dinner on her bedroom floor; I remember</p>

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	<p>her wrought-iron headboard; I remember I got higher than I wanted to before we hooked up. But at the time that I documented our relationship on my strange, bordering-on-obsessive list, I'd felt like we'd had sex. So I scribbled a sloppy star next to her last name.</p> <p>A few years ago, I noticed another pattern among my sexual partners, undocumented on my list: my lovers were, more often than not, survivors of sexual abuse.</p>
238	<p>Sexual assault is no longer an undercurrent in political life: it shouts at us from news headlines, colors the electoral debates, shapes rally slogans and protest chants.</p> <p>...In my personal life, sexual abuse has been a barely audible, inescapable presence when I have sex. It's a silent partner as I get to know a new lover, learn what they like and don't like in bed, how they want to be touched, what is off-limits.</p>
239	<p>They showed up in the whispers of one lover—"don't ever put your hands around my neck"—and in the tears of another every time she climaxed in the five years that we were together.</p> <p>...I'd like to think that the fact that so many of my partners are survivors is exceptional: maybe it's because I'm queer; maybe it's because I'm Latinx, a child of immigrants; maybe it's because many of my partners are people of color and immigrants too.</p> <p>...It's likely that many of my friends are survivors too—or that many of them find themselves having the same realization, over and over again, with new lovers as I do.</p>
240	<p>In some ways, my instinct to put myself last has served me well in my relationships, particularly with the partners who have experienced sexual abuse: being deferential, attentive, and accommodating has helped my lovers feel some sense of safety as they navigated their own complicated relationships with sex and boundaries as survivors.</p> <p>...If I peruse my list of partners, there are probably only one or two people about whom I could say confidently that our relationship never involved any sex that I performed out of obligation, rather than actual desire.</p> <p>Then, during sex with a relatively new partner recently, we agreed at the outset of one encounter that we would focus on my pleasure.</p> <p>...I didn't know exactly why; I still don't. I know it has something to do with my high school boyfriend—it usually does, right? Well, "boyfriend" is probably a loose term: we'd met on a youth group ski trip during which I'd given him an unreciprocated hand job without as much as a kiss. The lack of reciprocation continued as our relationship evolved into a hookup game of "defend the goal"—his goal, my defense—including after junior prom, when I'd almost let him enter me in the parking lot of a shuttered CVS, but stopped short because I decided that losing my virginity on prom night to someone I wasn't even technically dating was too cliché.</p>
241	<p>I wasn't really sure if I wanted to have sex with him, but the boundaries I put up were weak at best, and he dutifully approached them over and over until I conceded. It was painful and brief—I remember he didn't orgasm, which was</p>

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	<p>unusual.</p> <p>And though my life no longer involves being pressured into sex in a car with a boy that I didn't really want and never enjoyed, it's hard to escape wondering why it is that, in encounters I wanted and even initiated, it's rare that I seek the same pleasure I want to give to other people.</p> <p>I know that there is a huge divide between feeling pressured into having sex too quickly by a high school boyfriend and being sexually abused, but some version of those violations and so many others have so thoroughly shaped all of my sexual and romantic relationships that I no longer really can imagine a world in which I could have sex that didn't resonate with some sort of trauma.</p>
242	<p>Even though I had the strength to confront that boyfriend over AOL Instant Messenger to tell him just how I felt about our relationship (in the form of a badly written and very emo poem, of course), I kept doing sexual things that I didn't really want to do for years after.</p> <p>..."Maybe your feelings get hurt when I tell you I don't like the way you're touching me." How many times have I hesitated to tell a partner what I liked or didn't like, for fear of hurting their feelings, for fear of having to care for their emotions in the aftermath of that disclosure? I thought to myself as she talked. "But what is possible after that?" she continued. "Learning new ways of touching. Once you've experienced that erotic awakening you cannot settle for suffering. "</p>
243	<p>I won't settle for small compromises of my own desires in service of others' needs, for ignoring my own truths, or for trying to take the easy route of not naming the elephant at the foot of the bed when I'm being sexual with lovers.</p> <p>...But I—we—can make different choices. I can try with every kiss, every touch, every orgasm, with every new person who invites me to share in intimacy with them to believe that another world is possible, and that I am building it with every new name I add to the silly list in my journal.</p>
247	<p>Are you more or less sexual than that one woman at the office?</p> <p>...Probably this is why you are such a slut. Probably this is why you don't date at all. Probably this explains everything about you, really, why you fuck the people you fuck and love the people you love, or do neither, ever.</p>
250	<p>We were all super drunk, and I didn't want to, so she grabbed my hair, in a totally playful way. We were drunk and she pulled my hair and the next thing I knew I had her up against a wall with my forearm across her throat.</p>
251	<p>I also had a lot of bad days, and a powerful liking for bourbon, and an intimacy problem.</p>
254	<p>At the time, I didn't get what she was implying, but, yes, he was pretty much Child Pornographer #1 from Central Casting, an aging hippie in a wheelchair, making a living taking pictures of young girls in a dark house.</p>
256	<p>According to the boys at school, only my legs, forehead, and smile were getting bigger, not my butt or breasts.</p>
257	<p>Daddy had an idea: he asked me to lie down on the bed for a few shots in my bra and panties.</p> <p>..."Everything will be okay, Tracey," he said. "Just relax."</p> <p>He laid me down gently and, one hand holding his camera, the other moved the</p>

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	crotch of my brand-new blue-and-white polka-dot panties to one side. For once, I was glad I didn't have a little sister.
259	(Daddy had also asked me for my forgiveness, after he stopped denying to my mother that he'd raped me.) ...Daddy's friend was so glib about Daddy raping me, as if it was just a fluke, a regrettable blip on an otherwise unblemished record, like that one time you drove out blackout drunk, or that one time you stole your grandmother's purse and did black tar heroin: that one time you raped your only child.
264	I was naked before him. ..."Who do you think you're talking to, Tracey?" he admonished. He was deranged, I thought, thinking he could slip back into fatherly privilege just moments after her propositioned me, his daughter, like a five-dollar hooker.
265	I would've gone out the window, but they were all nailed shut: shortly after he raped me, my father caught me with a boy and thought that not being able to open the windows would keep me inside.
267	In the letters, I wrote that my father had tried to rape me a second time and I had run away from home but couldn't stay where I'd been. I asked for each person to send me money because my part-time job after school wasn't enough to allow me to get a place on my own.
276	WHAT I REMEMBER: I WAS FACEDOWN WHEN HE PINNED down my wrists, one at each side of my body. His hands were strong and large and rough, but they were, before the moment that he held me down, hands that I had wanted to touch me. I struggled against him when, for a brief moment, he finally loosened his grip, and I saw a possible window of escape.
278	At the urging of close friends who were concerned about my behavior, I made a same-day appointment and, when I was ushered into the replacement doctor's office, I told her I thought I might be depressed, that is was drinking a lot, that I had trouble sleeping and eating.
281	I remember, with that photograph of him on her computer screen, she told me that she actually knew the names and faces of so many rapists- businessmen and journalists, professional athletes and real estate agents, husbands and fathers.
285	When I raised this in counseling, she told me: "The survivor who was raped at knifepoint feels guilty she has taken up the space of a survivor who was raped at gunpoint. Everyone believes there is suffering.
290	In 1981, I was ten years old. I was watching an episode of Little House on the Prairie with my family when my little sister asked, "What's rape, Daddy?" He answered, "It's when a man puts his penis in a woman's vagina when she doesn't want him to," in the same tone of voice he used when he explained other hard-to-understand facts about the world, like the threat of nuclear proliferation. ...In it, a girl, Sylvia Webb, developed breasts ahead of other girls in her class, attracting attention from the boys in Walnut Grove. Her father blamed her, first for the unwanted attention, and then when she was raped by a man in a clown mask.
291	It didn't jibe with the chubby, happy-looking man and woman lying in bed with hearts all around them in Peter Mayle's 1977 children's book about sex, Where

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	<p>Did I Come From?, which explains that "the man wants to get as close to the woman as he can, because he's feeling very loving to her. And to get really close the best thing he can do is lie on top of her and put his penis inside her, into her vagina."</p> <p>...If, however, my dad's explanation was straight lecture, that Little House episode was an object lesson: rape was a man in a clown mask watching you from the bushes while you picked flowers, then grabbing you when you're distracted by a flock of birds, throwing you on the ground and apparently putting his penis in your vagina. And it was your fault, because you had breasts.</p>
292	<p>When I learned ten years later that Michael Landon had died, my first thought was of the boy in my eighth-grade gym class who jeered at my chest, pointing and laughing at how my breasts flopped around when I ran. Sylvia's father had made her bind her breasts flat so they wouldn't show, and I longed to do that somehow, sure in the logical way adolescent brains work that, now that I had breasts, a stranger in the bushes wasn't far behind. I refused to walk anywhere alone.</p> <p>...Boys could laugh at our breasts in gym class and not get in trouble for it. Every day in high school our bras were snapped, our skirts flipped up, our butts lightly spanked as we walked to class. If our nipples showed through our shirts, some asshole would inevitably say, "Cuttin' any diamonds lately?" On the rare occasion that any one of us girls complained to a school official about the catcalling and unwanted touching, it was met with, "it just means they like you," and of course, "boys will be boys."</p>
293	<p>Date rape was a risk you took because you were a girl and you'd agreed to go on a date. The line between just being a girl on a date and being a "tease" never even existed. The prevailing message from the unchecked harassment we experienced at school was that if you did anything even remotely sexual—a kiss, or holding a hand—you were leading that boy on and you were responsible for anything, and everything, that happened.</p> <p>...When I was fifteen, two years before I was "really" raped, I found myself alone in a car with a football player I'd had a crush on for a while. He kissed me; I was thrilled. He started unbuttoning my shirt; I wasn't thrilled. He was strong and he held me down but he didn't have time to force himself inside me because he was a teenage boy and had no sexual stamina: he sprayed my jeans, his arm across my throat, smashing my head against the car window as he humped my leg. I twisted away from him as far as I could get, my feet braced against the steering wheel, but he pinned my arms so I couldn't open the door. "We'd be hot at the prom," he said as he stuffed himself back into his underwear.</p>
294	<p>That wasn't rape, though, as I understood it then: he hadn't put his penis in my vagina when I didn't want him to.</p> <p>...When I was raped, two years later, actually penis-in-my-vagina raped, it wasn't a stranger in a clown mask.</p> <p>...Senior year of high school: I had been drinking and I was semiconscious on a bed at a friend's house, my leg in a knee brace after a skiing accident. A guy I knew came into the room. I opened my eyes slowly. He was putting a condom on with one hand and reaching for my underwear with the other. I tried to push him off, saying, "No, no, please no," but there was nothing I could do: I couldn't walk</p>

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	<p>without crutches, I had been drinking, I wasn't strong enough, I couldn't get away. Hot pain flashed through my whole body. I felt a burning surge in my face, my fingers, my toes. After he was done, I turned on my side, crying, drawing the leg that would bend up into my chest, seeing with half-closed eyes the bloody condom coming off, milky liquid dripping onto the floor. He looked at me and grinned. "What are you cryin' for? You said 'please.' You were fuckin' beggin' for it!"</p>
295	<p>Despite the lingering damage it did to some of us, the show is a minor skirmish on the killing fields of growing up female in America.</p>
297	<p>It was hard enough being sexually assaulted at fifteen and raped at seventeen; compounding it was the mind-fuck perpetrated by people like these mothers who promoted the biblical view of women as tempters, of boys and men helpless against their lusty instincts at the sight of a woman, dividing women into Eves and Marys, whores and virgins. I felt betrayed by my gender; not only were men not to be trusted, but neither were women, apparently.</p> <p>There were, at least fictionally, the "Ellen Jamesians," the women in John Irving's <i>The World According to Garp</i> who cut out their tongues in solidarity with a woman whose tongue was cut out so she couldn't identify her attackers after she was gang-raped.</p>
298	<p>My first weekend as a college first-year (we were not "freshmen"), in a study carrel at the library, I saw that someone had drawn a picture of an erect penis, complete with balls and pubic hair, and written, "What could be more fun than a long hard one?"</p> <p>...I could identify with neither sentiment: there was no pleasure in sex for me, nor did I hate men. I didn't quite yet understand my collegiate landscape; it seemed to be an improvement over the misogyny I had left behind, but this men-for-sex-or-not-at-all worldview was not particularly uplifting either.</p> <p>While I appreciated calling out half the population for creating a situation in which many women rarely feel safe, and I understood how tempting it was to pin it all on men, I didn't have the energy to be angry all the time. I also wasn't gay, despite how easy it seemed to be gay at Smith—especially after what I'd been through, after what a lot of women go through. Trying to be gay, though, seemed like a way, perhaps, to be protected from violence, from abuse, from my own distorted view of my body and my sexuality. And I thought women wouldn't hurt me.</p>
299	<p>For a while when I was in my twenties, I faked orgasms with men, just wanting the sex (on the rare occasions I had it) to be over. I wanted to be loved but not touched. I wanted to want sex, and I settled for the small comfort being close to someone brought me, but the assault, the rape, and the silences around them had created an almost total disconnect between my mind and my body. It wasn't until the guy I eventually married made it clear that he knew I was faking, and wanted me to stop, that I started to care if I was enjoying sex or not. I knew only that my body was useful for other people's desires, not my own. There had been moments here and there when I sensed something like physical attraction or sexual arousal, glimpses or sips of something delicious but elusive.</p> <p>...A clown had gotten into my head and a man had put his penis in my vagina</p>

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	<p>when I didn't want him to, and the world, I had learned, was a place that didn't condemn sexual violence; it accepted and excused it. I had wanted to believe that each day without sex would get me farther and farther away from the man in the clown mask, the football player in the car, the bloody condom.</p>
302	<p>I wore tight jeans and a black Lycra tank top to show off arms I'd toned from many hours at the gym, the shirt's low scoop making my breasts look bigger than they were. I'm usually too self-conscious about turning red from Asian glow to have any alcohol, but shortly after I drank the one vodka cranberry he offered me, I felt more free to hug him and smell his sweat.</p> <p>By the end of the night we hadn't talked much, but he'd lifted me up onto a counter so I could rest my legs, which I wrapped around his hips from behind while he stood, while my lips couldn't help but touch his neck. Though I sobered up as we rode an hour in a taxi with my roommates to get back to our apartment, where I managed to leave him in the hallway and close the door to my room, alone.</p> <p>He was waiting for me when I opened that door again, late enough the next morning that the summer sun was too bright behind me and his presence came as a surprise. So did his kiss, and the probe of his warm tongue.</p> <p>"I'm leaving in an hour," he said.</p> <p>He probably suspected that he just needed to have his lips on my mouth and I would crumple with want. I confirmed that suspicion but my desire came with the need to get him over with so that my life could keep moving. It was easier to accept our attraction rather than listen to the part of me that knew it would be a mistake, to give in to the fun instead of saying the no I wanted to say.</p>
304	<p>He lay down on the futon mattress on my parquet floor and I focused on my mouth's task, the act that once gave me pleasure and did then, too, despite whatever else I felt. I marveled at the thick, almost egg-white quality of his ejaculate that tasted oddly pleasant, before my mind returned to things other than sex, how I'd promised myself not to get involved with me for a while- least of all him- because I'd grown to rely on them to feel as though I wouldn't break apart.</p> <p>...I flirted in my messages, almost like I was preprogrammed; I indulged in the game of prospective girlfriend, even though the part of my brain still engaged in self-preservation knew that he only wanted to fuck me because he hadn't gotten to. Maybe I wanted to believe that if I let him fuck me, then it wouldn't be true that he didn't respect me.</p>
305	<p>But after I arrived, he made a move to fuck me every time we were about to go out.</p> <p>Sunday morning, I was in his bedroom facing his bed, looking out the floor-to-ceiling windows onto his balcony, knowing I had to be at work the next morning but determined to visit a museum with Paul, to be part of a couple and not a dirty fling. We hadn't left his apartment in days, and his white sheets were a moist amalgam of our sweat and fluids.</p> <p>...We had agreed not to shower so we could smell the sex in our skin, and he told me not to put on underwear. I was too absorbed in finding the hole in my ear to notice that he had reentered the bedroom, and I didn't feel him raise my skirt. He</p>

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	<p>was inside me before I could even think to protest, and didn't protest because I wanted it, or willed myself to want it, or my body wanted it because for so long I didn't think that I deserved to be with men like him, even when the most important part of me wanted him to stop precisely because I wanted to feel like I deserve to be with any man, before I let someone inside me again.</p>
306	<p>I didn't hear from him again until one night, seven years later, when one of my housemates from that period—the one who kept in touch with everyone—had a housewarming party and I identified his charming sycophant's voice before I remembered his face. I felt the too close way he hugged me—like he had fucked me more than once—and only then did I know for sure that it was something I hadn't wanted, would never have wanted if it had only been up to me, in the way that my body tried to forget our contact even as our torsos touched.</p>
307	<p>As I felt his presence in those rooms like invisible light waves, I came to understand that I may never rid myself of the feeling that I am grateful to him for fucking me, for making me feel like I could be fucked so much, that I could extract desire from a man so handsome and strong and smart.</p> <p>...I also have to live with being the type of woman who might- or probably always will- feel guilty that she never told this man she's trans.</p>
308	<p>I had never thought much about this window before but, two days earlier, a man had masturbated at me at a nearby train station.</p> <p>...The encounter at the train station- I'd convinced myself of this over the previous forty-eight hours- had been targeted. It had not been a man masturbating near a train platform, but a man masturbating at me, two minutes away from my house, wedged into familiar banalities that made up my daily routine: the smell of the nearby barbecue joint, the automated transit announcements, the bushes I stood near each morning on my way to work.</p> <p>He had masturbated at me near the city's third-best cornbread.</p> <p>He had masturbated at me at a train platform where I'd once been kissed in high school.</p> <p>He had masturbated at me.</p> <p>He had masturbated at me.</p>
309	<p>I told the operator how he'd held his hoodie shut with one hand, the other hand on his penis.</p>
310	<p>Some details I did hold on to, if not the relevant ones: I was listening to Bonnie "Prince" Billy when I noticed him; the T-shirt I was wearing- low-cut and black-showed what little cleavage my A-cups could muster.</p>
318	<p>I was buzzed off red wine.</p>
319	<p>There was another encounter, four years after the first masturbator. It was at a nude beach. I'd just been swimming- my first time going for an evening dip with fellow students from my university residence. My friend and I were climbing out of the water when we spotted a man masturbating nearby.</p>
320	<p>But he did know. He must have, because he wore a smug half smile, a barely visible curl in his cheek. I watched it, as if in scientific study. I forced myself to stare at his crinkled balls.</p>

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	...I was on one of the most beautiful campuses in the world, and there was a man jerking off six feet to my left.
321	<p>HIERARCHY OF TRAUMA, PUBLIC MASTURBATION EDITION</p> <p>...Did the man masturbate or just expose himself? If he masturbated, did you see cum? Did he say something cryptic while he masturbated? ...You are safe from men in sweatpants each with one hand around his penis. ...You are safe from the ponytailed gawker who- just a week ago- rode past you on a bike and yelled, "I'd have that for lunch!" You are also safe from the man who ordered a "pussy burger" from you at your high school job (Why do you still remember how his tongue pointed when he stuck it out?).</p>
324	<p>BECAUSE I THOUGHT LOVE AND SEX WERE SUPPOSED TO HURT.</p> <p>...Because women have been going through the wringer for True Love and Hot Sex stretching back to cuneiform.</p>
326	<p>Because in the sexual debut of my mind's eye, I'd concurrently discover and execute the maneuvers of a soft-core seduction that prefaced what would resemble a physical struggle—a catalogue of spiritual sexual practices (some standing); a parade of romantic lechery—we'd give everything of ourselves and take everything of each other, we'd get lost unto it, searching each other's bodies in a carnal interrogation that would most likely ignite a blind fury—fervid, raw, athletic, durational, demonic, transformational, professional—he'd possess me, and I'd surrender out of strength, as my gift, and yield to him as he bore through my flesh, passion all unbridled, until at some point I begged for mercy, seared to the bones, ravaged, and I'd collapse next to him on the (God-willing unbroken) bed, our designed-for-each-other limbs entwined in damp sheets, and trembling, we'd lie together postcoitally for hours, emptied, undone, our unquenchable hunger quenched.</p> <p>Because in a nutshell I figured I was in store for some crazy fucking.</p>
327	<p>Because I could flip to any page in the aughts and find tips and tricks that promised we can all be beautiful if only we learn to give a better blow job.</p> <p>Because of more advice to surrender sexually and to accept the double standard that a man's pleasure is fundamental to his well-being and hers optional or nonapplicable.</p>
328	<p>Because I wanted to have, or to be perceived as having, a bomb-ass pussy.</p> <p>...Because I'd think Give the man sex, my thoughts indistinguishable from his; He needs to have sex!</p>
329	<p>Because we are surrounded with 24/7 access to text, images, and audio that inflate and distort what we think of as love, sex, and gender with the histrionic and pathological, the inexplicable and unattainable, the misogynistic and incomplete.</p> <p>...Because of the trap that one is inevitably in: a man pulls a woman's hair—likely he once saw an actor pull an actress's hair and the actress gasped in pleasure—so he pulls and she gasps; maybe she gasps in pleasure, or in pain, or because she's seen something, too, or has had a legacy shoved down her throat before she could learn what she desires, or because she wants to be "normal"; but a gasp is a gasp, and maybe he thinks it's kosher to then choke her, so he pulls or</p>

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	<p>chokes and she gasps, in an attempt to experience sexuality and to fulfill the expectation, regardless of if she's enjoying herself as long as she's performing enjoyability. Because maybe, eventually, she pulls her own hair, to please him.</p>
330	<p>Because I knew how to say "Yes! Harder!" in a thousand languages, how to moan in eight octaves, how to bend over backward, how to ask for it, how to beg God for it, but not how to say, "No. Stop." Because instead I told him— using adjectives like slow and soft and deliberate—what I wanted, what I'd learned in Women and Gender Studies courses works for women, which in practice wasn't a preternatural frenzy but to be kissed and licked crazily, him down on his knees for me and his mouth on my thighs, his hands going all in and around me.</p> <p>...Because everything could be playful and steamy, and he could get me all the way off with devoted fingers.</p> <p>Because everything I'd learned in Advanced Contemporary Female Sexualities like that when a woman is turned on, her brain sends messages to the back of the vagina to expand and loosen, and to the cervix and uterus to pull back and lift to high heaven to allow room for the penis (or dildo or whatever your pleasure) readying her for sex, and that this arousal is what thirst is to drinking—seemed as out of reach for real-life application as Chaucer or differential geometry. Because in class I could rattle off the seven erogenous zones at breakneck speed (inner thighs, nipples, nape of the neck, lips, ears, butt, clit), but it was the classic I-can-talk-the-talk-but-not-fuck-the-fuck dilemma.</p>
331	<p>Because despite my entreaties, and my liberal arts education, and his short-lived tenderness, he'd work into his factory-setting rhythm, fast and hard and every which way that stylized women scream they want it, and I'd be beneath him, pinned down, hurting, but hoping, but cringing, but hoping, while he'd pound and grind against me, and I couldn't say anything.</p>
332	<p>Because when he said he loved me the first time, facing me under what was most likely pale moonlight, somewhere trumpets blared, confetti exploded, doves cried; above us a chorus of angels sang Hallelujah, and my heart ejaculated.</p> <p>Because love had an analgesic effect, and my empathy reached a pitch where if sex felt good to him, then it felt good to me, although at times it really felt like I wouldn't survive it.</p>
333	<p>At first we had sex despite my pain; months later, we still did- because women are bred for pain, for giving birth when birth splits us open.</p>
334	<p>Because bad sex was on me. Because sex that feels out of one's control is called "bad sex," "disappointing sex," "regrettable sex," phrases that take on a myriad of meaning that pervert meaning.</p> <p>...Because when I went to a gynecologist, she brought out a medical device that she called a vaginal dilator, and when she lubed it up and inserted the stiff, opaque medical-grade silicone, I went momentarily blind, but I took the smallest one home with me anyway and let the cloudy white thing lifelessly dangle in me nightly for ten to fifteen minutes while I watched Family Guy or played soft instrumental folk CDs. Because whatever was wrong could be solved, possibly, by starting my last semester in college with a prescription ghost dick.</p> <p>Because the next gynecologist recommended more sex. Because my boyfriend agreed, using the practice-makes-perfect line of this-isn't-my-problem thinking.</p>

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	<p>Because it seemed, as liberated, educated, nonreligious women, we're urged to have lots of sex- great sex!, whatever sex!, sex like a straight guy!- but not no-sex. Because it's now more of a public disgrace and bodily phenomenon to be prude than promiscuous. Because I wanted to be a whore for him.</p>
337	<p>Because to mention certain things, like "patriarchy," is to be dubbed a "feminazi," which discourages its mention, and whatever goes unmentioned gets a pass, a pass that condones what it isn't nice to mention, lest we come off as reactionary or shrill. ...Because when I said I didn't want to have sex, he didn't talk to me for the rest of the night.</p>
338	<p>Because I woke up one night to him hard and upon me from behind, jabbing me- my vagina, my heart, my threshold- and I said, "What the-?" semiasleep, "WHAT THE-?" and he said, "Don't be mad" as warm semen trickled down my inner thighs, coating and staining them. Because I didn't know what to call that.</p>
339	<p>Because thought it takes a while to nail those sex tips worth trying, it takes longer to figure out what's not okay. ...Because then we'd have to discuss it, and if we discussed it, then we'd have to discuss everything else- rape culture, masculinity, gender inequality, femininity, patriarchy, complicity- and who wants to get into that?</p>
340	<p>Because when a third gynecologist asked me when I'd given birth, and when I went pale and told her no, stop, truly, I'd never been pregnant, and when she said that my cervix was shredded and looked like I had—even then, when the pain was not just inexperience or theatrics; when acknowledgment imposed proof of force (and proof was somehow necessary), even after fucking eureka, even with the truth inflicted, what was there to say? Because the doctor said to herself, "Wow," and didn't offer much beyond the explanation that the tear he tore continued to rip the more he had sex with me, and as she finished the exam, she said, "You'll feel some more pressure," but I didn't feel anything, not for two years. Because I wasn't sure when I went from thinking I was having sex to thinking I was being had sex with. Because love and sex left me as my entertainment said and I'd hoped it would: passion shattered.</p>

Profanity/Derogatory	Count
Ass	9
Bitch	10
Clit	2
Cock	9
Cunt	2
Dick	8
Dyke	1
Fag	1
Fuck	47
Goddamn	3
Piss	1
Pussy	4
Queer	7
Shit	11