

It Happens Here: Sexual Assault

*All interviewees for this article were Miramonte students who preferred to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of this topic. All names have been changed to protect the privacy of those in question.**

In Orinda, the houses are nice and the police rarely see action outside of fender-benders and the occasional break-in. Orinda, we are told, is a safe place to live. But there is both a scope and a depth to the instances of serious violence that take place in our small, secure town. Here, as in the rest of the world, sexual assault is not confined to college dorm rooms or dark alleys; it is pervasive, stealthy, and rampant even in our own privileged community.

Several young women are breaking their silence. They came to *The Mirador* to tell their stories to their peers and to the community in the hopes that their honesty would start a discussion about the nature of rape, sexual assault, and harassment and encourage others to open up.

When Lindsey* was assaulted in the fall of this year, she was hanging out with friends after a Halloween party. "I was not okay," she said. "I had too much to drink for sure."

Lindsey and her friends were walking from the party to a nearby elementary school. Her male friend, Craig*, began holding her waist and touching her—in more than just a friendly way. When they first arrived at the school, both Lindsey and Craig were surrounded by their friends. But later, Lindsey found herself alone with Craig. "I don't really remember how he got me away, but he got me away. He started kissing me and... and then it escalated very quickly..." After nonconsensual oral sex occurred, "I told him to stop multiple

times and he said, 'No a little bit longer.' I pulled away again and he said, 'No keep going.' Finally, the last time I broke away it just stopped. Afterward, he kept talking about how we should date. 'We should do this again,' he said. I was not okay with it."

Christine* was studying with a friend, Matt*, when the situation occurred. The two were standing outside of her car near the library when they kissed briefly. Christine quickly pulled away and said, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that, I don't know why I did that." She thought this response to their unplanned kiss sent a clear message: she was not interested. "Once we got into the car though, he was really aggressive," she said. "He grabbed my face and wouldn't let go. I tried to pull my face away but he kept pulling my head forward. He was trying to get up my shirt. And he tried to grab the inside of my leg and move his hand up after I pushed his hand away from my chest. I couldn't get him off. I was trying to talk but I couldn't because he was so vicious. I elbowed him in the stomach to get him off. That's why I feel like it's my fault though," she added. "Because I kissed him outside of the car. And I think he took that kiss as way, way more than it was. He did eventually listen. I just had to be really forceful. He didn't have a good excuse. He just said, 'Oh sorry, you know guys just have hormones. We can't really control it.' and I said, "Girls want sex just as much as guys do, so that argument is invalid.'"

Christine confronted her attacker over text shortly after the incident. "You really did seem like a decent guy up until that point," she wrote. "I did not consent to that and you know that. You need to understand that you do not touch someone like that without them consenting. I don't care if you think it's a given because it's not. You need to learn that because otherwise every girl who you do that to will feel used, vandalized, and unsafe. I expect you to respond like a decent guy, because right now I have no idea how to feel about you or

what kind of person you are. So why don't you tell me why you thought it was okay."

Lindsey and Christine expressed guilt and shame over each incident. They were also concerned for their own reputations because of the stigmas surrounding female sexuality and sexual assault. "I would just be afraid to get a reputation that I slut myself around," Christine said. "People can twist stories and interpret it wrong."

Sarah* became friends with Mark* a few months before things changed. He confessed to liking her and asked her out; she was taken aback and not interested. Sarah declined his offer. "His reaction wasn't awesome," she said, "which made me feel bad. He kind of guilted me by saying, 'you're just like every girl that's blown me off.'" But Mark wanted to stay friends. "I wanted to make it up to him, even though I hadn't done anything wrong, I just didn't want to date him. I always felt like I had this debt to pay to him. I didn't want to be put in that category that he put me in with 'every other girl.'" After they had decided to still be friends, Mark and Sarah still hung out. She went to his house to watch a movie and she fell asleep. "I had made a point not to sit directly next to him (on the couch)," she said. "I fell asleep on my side of the couch and then I woke up and I was on his chest and lap. I just remember waking up there and saying, 'I did not fall asleep on top of you,' I said. 'Yeah, I moved you over,' he responded. I felt really taken advantage of."

Mark, however, continued to target her. According to Sarah, Mark committed sexual battery against her in the Miramonte weight room. Mark touched or "slapped" her without her consent in a sexually aggressive manner. "He slapped my butt in the weight room and like ran off and chuckled. I remember feeling pretty degraded and just frustrated. The fact that he just thought he could do that was disrespectful in my mind and a violation of my privacy," Sarah added. "I believe respect is give and take and I didn't deserve that at all and it was not

only embarrassing, but gross.” Sarah expressed her anger and frustration to her attacker with a pointed and simple: “It’s my f*cking body.”

Amy was visiting her sister in college on New Year’s Eve the night she was raped. Amy, her older sister, and her sister’s friend Mike* went out to frat parties together to celebrate the holiday. “He was super nice and he always talks about his sisters and how much he loves them,” Amy said. “He is training to be a police officer and he was actually on call that night so he wasn’t drinking. We were at this party and he was being super protective, so my sister and I felt really comfortable with him.” Mike gained Amy’s trust that night. “At the party, a group of guys came up to me and tried to ask me to come back to their frat with them, and Mike pulled me away from them and made sure that didn’t happen.” When the trio got back to her sister’s apartment, Amy’s sister went to bed and Mike and Amy stayed up watching TV. “I went into the kitchen to get water,” Amy said, “and I was leaning over the counter on my phone because it was plugged in. He came up behind me and I said, ‘What are you doing?’. He put his arms around my waist and pulled me towards him. So I pushed back and I said, ‘Get off of me’ and then he said, ‘Oh no, you’ve been flirting with me all night,’ and he pushed me back onto the counter. And I tried to get up one more time like halfway through and he slammed me to the ground and put his hand on my mouth. Once he was done I was crying on the floor and he got up, got dressed, and said, ‘Don’t tell your sister this, she won’t believe you. She knows how great of a guy I am.’”

Amy also was concerned about what others would think of her if they knew about her attack. “The reason I didn’t tell anyone for a long time was because I thought my friends would judge me. Now that just sounds stupid. I was afraid they would be like, ‘Oh, it’s your fault,’ or, ‘Oh, you’re very flirtatious you probably wanted it to happen,’ or something like that.”

Amy struggled with telling her story, especially to those

closest to the situation. "I didn't really talk to my sister after (the attack)," she said. "I felt a lot of guilt over it. My sister was basically dating him and I felt like if I told her she'd either not believe me or feel guilty about it because it was someone she knew and was comfortable with and let spend the night and all that." The shame, fear, and guilt Amy felt rendered her silent and confused. "The longer I waited to tell people, the more I got the feeling that people would think I was lying. I thought that they would want to know why I took so long to tell them. But it's not like I was going to run into the living room that morning and yell, 'Hey, he just did that to me. Also, a big part of me just wanted to pretend like it never happened— like it was just some terrible nightmare."

Lindsey and Amy did gain some insight regarding their own misconceptions of sexual assault. "Before this," Lindsey said, "I thought [a rapist] was a random creepy college guy who did that to girls at parties. I didn't think it could be someone that was my friend. I thought it took a certain kind of person to do that."

"A lot of people think this is something that happens with people you don't know and don't trust. Most of the time it's someone you've known for a while. When I think about what happened I remember thinking the whole night before that, 'he's protecting me, he's someone I can trust. He's being a good friend to me,'" Amy said.

In the aftermath of her assault, Lindsey has been able to focus her energy on trying to prevent this from happening again to someone else. "I've shared my story with so many people in fear that he's gonna do it again. If I've seen girls close to him, I've told them this story, just so that they know that this is what he's done to me because I don't want him to do it to them."

These stories aren't being brought to light because the

victims are being overdramatic about hookups they have come to regret. These are atrocities that have been festering under the surface of our seemingly privileged community and it is the time to confront the stigma and shattering illusions that our community has about sexual assault and rape. We, as a community of students, teachers, and parents, must first believe one another and support each other. Victims know that they are not alone. The conversation must stop revolving around what people should or shouldn't do to avoid these kinds of attacks, and instead focus on the actions of those who are committing these crimes. We should all know how to execute bystander intervention when we see or hear about these kinds of situations taking place in our community so that it can be stopped. We need stories like these to keep being published so that the silence can be broken. It is crucial that we have the difficult conversations surrounding sexual assault with both boys and girls. And we must support these young women who have been brave enough to tell their stories and reward their honesty with compassion, justice, and the utmost respect.

If you have a story you would like to share, please email mhsmirador@gmail.com.

An unedited version of this story was mistakenly posted in the news section .