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OPINION

Speaking Up About Sexual Assaults at PSU

Supporting the voices for change

BY TESSARA DUDLEY

The discussion about sexual assault during Portland State University's recent student body election may be an exception to the ever-present concern of student apathy. As a survivor of sexual assault, I have been watching the debate with concern and frustration.

The Portland Observer reported on the issue after a group of students showed up to protest the candidacy of a convicted sex offender who was running for student body president. The Vanguard, PSU's student-run newspaper, interviewed the student who insinuated that the protests were an attempt to derail the good work he wants to do.

True, he was a current leader in several black advocacy organizations, but the problem was his criminal record and the need to support candidates who up-



hold student values.

According to Black Women's Blueprint, 60 percent of black girls are sexually assaulted by the age of 18. The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network states that survivors of sexual assault are six times more likely to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder than the

men, we rarely hear the same uproar for the abuse and violation of black women. At this moment, a former Oklahoma City police officer, Daniel Holtzclaw is under house arrest pending his trial on charges that he sexually abused 12 black women over the course of two years, and yet the community is silent.

It is in this climate that stu-

sider, an award-winning spoken word duo; holding a march; and hosting a survivor Speak Out, providing a safer space for survivors to share their experiences and feelings.

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our culture to respect women? How do we move beyond an incarceration model to a prevention model? How do we end the cycle of violence?

None of us has the answers, but one thing is certain: the PSU student elections came to stand for something more this year, deeply affecting a significant portion of the students in a way that was more personal than ever before.

One group of students is keeping the discussion going by creating a Facebook page called Change the Narrative. (A statement about my own history as a survivor of sexual assault can be found there.)

The students plan to keep speaking up about sexual assaults at PSU, and in the black community, and it's long overdue. Our community must uplift the voices of our most vulnerable populations; not just for one month, but all year. Sexual Assault Awareness Month ended in April, but that doesn't mean we should let the awareness end. We can't afford to.

Tessara Dudley is a poet and educator living in east Portland.

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general population. And the National Institute of Justice reports that survivors of childhood sexual abuse were twice as likely to be re-victimized as adults. These are girls and women in our community and they're vulnerable.

In all the coverage of police abuse and violence against black

dents at Portland State chose to protest. During a tumultuous week at PSU, a Take Back the Night event made space for the voices for change by including a speech from Jackie Sandmeyer of the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force; hosting a performance from Sister Out-

wrong message is then passed on to survivors. Statistics show this is a reality for black girls and women in America today.

Both the PSU community and the larger community of Portland are left grappling with some hard issues: How do we protect our children? How do we shift

Colleges Must Lead on Issue of Sexual Violence

Addressing the challenges and solutions

BY LISA M. MAATZ

Campus sexual violence has been the subject of an intense national conversation recently, but that dialogue often lacks critical input from schools

that are already taking steps to improve their campus climates. Colleges and universities, it's time for you to lead on this issue.

So far, and with good reason, most of the attention has focused on schools that are under investigation for violating federal laws about sexual violence and on the survivors bravely sharing their stories and calling for action. Yet there are a number of schools that are working hard to address these challenges and to make real progress on this issue, and we need to hear from schools that are prioritizing prevention, response, and transparency and including students and survivors in all related initiatives on campus.



Rampant sexual violence creates a campus climate that is hostile to students, and students can't learn when they aren't safe. Because campus sexual assault happens everywhere, everyone benefits when schools worry less about public relations and more about making campuses safe. Part of the solution is for schools to create an environment where students feel comfortable reporting sexual violence.

Schools can also lead by understanding and complying with Title IX, the 1972 federal law that prevents sex discrimination in federally funded education programs. Unfortunately, under the scrutiny of the national spotlight, some schools have criticized or even blamed the law for problems on campus.

But Title IX is not the reason schools mishandle campus sexual assaults. Smart schools recognize that it is their all-important guide for upholding students' civil rights in campus proceedings and preventing future violence on campus. Title IX works, and it must be protected.

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it according to their established codes of student conduct, anti-discrimination policies, and federal civil rights law.

These responsibilities under Title IX do not require schools

make plea agreements or impose criminal punishments. Those roles are, appropriately, left to the criminal justice system and can take place simultaneously if the survivor chooses to involve law enforcement.

Title IX guidance clearly delineates between schools' role and law enforcement's role.

If school officials truly don't see how these separate paths can work together, many helpful resources are available through the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice and online at notalone.gov.

The current national dialogue will be more productive if institutional leaders join the conversation — along with survivors, advocates, and policy makers — and help end the epidemic of campus sexual violence.

Many schools are missing the chance not only to keep students safe but also to impress on students, faculty, prospective students, and parents that their institution is part of the solution.

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