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### 'No more!' To end rape, end silence

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At the time, I was a 17-year-old, lonely and naive college freshman, more than 3,000 miles from home.

When a bearded stranger kidnapped me and stole my virginity, I witnessed his brutal act from outside my body, detached from the pain. I remember thinking: "I wonder if he'll bury me in these woods."

Once I found my way back to campus, the hourlong shower was still not lengthy enough to absolve myself of the guilt and shame. I never reported the attack to police, a crisis hot line or my campus adviser.

"One reason people don't tell is they don't think they will be believed," says Jennifer Freyd, a psychology professor and researcher at the University of Oregon. She and another author published a study on rape trauma in the March issue of *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.

"It's better not to tell than to tell and get a bad reaction. A bad response makes things worse."

Sexual assault happens in America every 21/2 minutes, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. It reportedly happens to one in six American women; and one in 33 men. Despite historical stereotypes, more than 80 percent of rapes are committed by white men against white women.

However, it's black women who more often cope alone with the trauma of it. We sacrifice our own healing because we are expected to collude in the collective silence about black-on-black rape.

What's more, society's misconception -- and rap music's eager endorsement -- of black women as eager receptacles of anonymous sex tends to render us invisible in the discussion about rape.

But, this month, which is National Sexual Assault Awareness & Prevention Month, I am saying, "No more."

No more pretending that women in inner North and Northeast Portland don't need access to the services that Planned Parenthood will provide at its planned headquarters on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. Statistically, black women are almost four times as likely as white women to have an abortion.

No more to the conspiracy of silence that perceives rape as a private matter. Although my attacker, who is black, was a stranger, most victims are sexually assaulted by someone they know, such as a relative, church member or boyfriend.

Women can then bury that pain so deep that we don't realize that it may be behind our physical pains, depression or addictions. We don't connect the abuse that happened years ago to our inability, as adults, to sleep, maintain healthy relationships or keep a job.

No more.

Every year, Portland State University holds a "Take Back the Night" rally, with speakers, music and free food. This year's event is from 7 to 10 p.m., May 24, in the South Park Blocks, near PSU's campus.

It'd be nice to see more people of color participating. (INFO: [www.wrc.pdx.edu](http://www.wrc.pdx.edu) or 503-725-5672)

Men Against Rape, a new student organization, is also encouraging more men to speak out.

"We're basically going to be raising awareness that men are typically the perpetrators of the violence," says student Adam Elwood, one of the organizers. "We're also the ones who can decide to end it."

Working together, we can reduce one of America's most underreported crimes. Secrecy gives rapists permission to strike again. Speaking out holds them accountable and can reduce the sting of a woman's worst nightmare.

"If we had a social climate that they will feel safer," Freyd says, "more people would tell."

I can talk freely about my attack because, nearly 30 years later, I no longer willingly embrace its shame. The price was too high. The silence, too mentally taxing. I hope you will join me in saying No more!

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