

Monisha Rios, MSW
Public Comment to the
Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel
May 29, 2014

PLEASE ACCEPT MY GRATITUDE FOR YOUR PRESENCE AND EFFORT ON THIS PANEL. IT'S AN OMINOUS PROBLEM WE'RE TRYING TO SOLVE, ONE THAT HAS CLAIMED MANY LIVES. THANK YOU FOR APPRECIATING THE GRAVITY OF THAT. I INVITE YOU TO CONSIDER THE DEEP ROOTED NATURE OF THE OPPRESSION WE STRIVE TO ERADICATE. OPPRESSION IS DEFINED AS, "...AN UNCOMFORTABLE OR DISTRESSING SENSE OF (PHYSICAL OR MENTAL) CONSTRICTION.... PROLONGED CRUEL OR UNJUST TREATMENT OR EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY, CONTROL, OR POWER; TYRANNY; EXPLOITATION.... RAPE; VIOLATION.... THE ACTION OF FORCIBLY PUTTING DOWN OR CRUSHING; THE REPRESSION OR SUPPRESSION OF A PERSON OR THING..." (OPPRESSION, N.D.).

WHAT WE IN THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES UNDERSTAND ABOUT OPPRESSION IS THAT IT CAN BE INTERNALIZED AND THEREFORE PERPETUATED THROUGH THE OPPRESSED OPPRESSOR. INFORMED BY CHAOS THEORY, WE ARE EMPOWERED TO VIEW OPPRESSION AS A NON-LINEAR DYNAMICAL SYSTEM THAT CAN BE INFLUENCED TOWARD SUSTAINABLE CHANGE. SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE (TO INCLUDE ALL ABUSE TACTICS) IS JUST ONE OF ITS MANY SUBSYSTEMS. THIS GENRE OF OPPRESSION IS NOT NEW TO HUMANITY. NOR IS IT A NEW PHENOMENON WITHIN MILITARY CULTURES. THROUGHOUT HISTORY, SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE HAS BEEN SYNONYMOUS WITH MILITARY ACTIVITY, INCLUDING PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE. IT CONTINUES IN TIMES OF PEACE WHILE WE PREPARE FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR. IT WAS PEACETIME WHEN I WAS OPPRESSED BY PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE WITHIN THE

SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE U.S. MILITARY. PLEASE KEEP IN MIND THAT MY NARRATIVE IS PART OF A COLLECTIVE NARRATIVE, AND THAT MY PURPOSE IN SHARING IS TO ILLUSTRATE THE ABOVE CONCEPTS.

IN 1997, AT THE AGE OF 17, I SWORE IN AT FT. JACKSON, WHERE I AND ALL OTHER FEMALES IN MY COMPANY RECEIVED IMMEDIATE "TRAINING" ON HOW TO AVOID "GETTING RAPED". THIS TRAINING CAME IN RESPONSE TO THE CHANGES GENERAL FOOTE AND THE ARMY SENIOR REVIEW PANEL ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT WERE IMPLEMENTING. WE WERE INSTRUCTED TO "DEFEMINIZE" OURSELVES - TO NOT CROSS OUR LEGS, TILT OUR HEADS, BAT OUR EYELASHES, SMILE TOO BIG, MAKE EYE CONTACT WITH MALES, LAUGH TOO MUCH, THE LIST GOES ON. OUR NUMBER ONE RULE WAS TO KEEP OUR LEGS CLOSED AND NOT WHORE OURSELVES OUT. AND WE BETTER NOT DARE TO FAIL AT ANYTHING, BECAUSE IT WOULD MAKE ALL WOMEN WHO SERVE LOOK BAD (INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION LEADING TO OPPRESSION OF OTHERS).

YET, DESPITE MY BEST EFFORTS TO FOLLOW THESE RULES AND "MAN UP" SO AS NOT TO "PUSSIFY" D.S.'S ARMY, I WAS STILL CHOSEN FOR SEXUALIZED PUBLIC HUMILIATION. AS PUNISHMENT FOR ANSWERING A MALE SOLDIER'S QUESTION ABOUT A LAUNDRY SLIP, I WAS MADE TO LAY ON MY BACK IN FRONT OF MY COMPANY WITH MY LEGS UP AND OPEN WHILE THE D.S. IN QUESTION YELLED SEXIST EPITHETS, ACCUSED ME AND MY MOTHER OF PROSTITUTION, TOLD MALES TO AVOID ME BECAUSE I WOULD GET THEM IN TROUBLE, AMONG OTHER THINGS RELATED TO MY BODY PARTS. WHILE I LAY THERE, HE MADE THE MALE SOLDIER DO PUSHUPS.

THAT D.S. PSYCHOLOGICALLY OPPRESSED ME IN THIS WAY THROUGHOUT BASIC, TO THE EXTENT THAT HE WOULD YELL DISGUSTING THINGS DURING CHOW, ABOUT WHAT I "REALLY WANTED" IN MY MOUTH, EACH TIME I OPENED IT TO INGEST FOOD. ALL OF THIS OCCURRED AMONG A LARGE NUMBER OF WITNESSES, INCLUDING CADRE.

MY NEXT DUTY STATION WAS AIT IN A DETACHMENT AT KEESLER AFB, WHERE A D.S. CAME INTO THE FEMALE LATRINE WHILE I WAS IN THE SHOWER AND STOOD ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE THIN CURTAIN. HE WAS LATER REMOVED FROM THE DETACHMENT AFTER HARASSING A MUSLIM SOLDIER. IN A CLASSROOM FULL OF AIRMEN, ONE THAT I THOUGHT WAS MY FRIEND ATTACKED ME FROM BEHIND AND BIT ME IN THE BACK OF MY RIGHT ARM WHEN I TOLD HIM HIS SEXUALLY EXPLICIT AND VIOLENT CONVERSATION ABOUT RAPE FANTASIES AND HOW WOMEN REALLY LIKE IT ROUGH WAS MAKING ME UNCOMFORTABLE. HE BIT ME SO HARD THAT EACH TOOTH MARK LEFT A DARK PURPLISH BLUE BRUISE. THEY WERE DARKER THAN THE REST OF THE BRUISES. HE THREATENED TO HURT ME IF "I GOT HIM IN TROUBLE". NOT A SINGLE PERSON IN THAT ROOM DID ANYTHING.

A FELLOW SOLDIER WHO SAW THE INJURY DAYS LATER MADE ME ALERT D.S.'s. I HAD TO POINT HIM OUT. HE AND A FRIEND OF HIS CAME TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON HIS THREAT WHILE I WAS SURROUNDED BY MY PLATOON AND A SAFE D.S. WHO, THANKFULLY, DID NOT LET HIM HURT ME AND HE WAS REMOVED FROM THE BASE. THE AIR FORCE DOCTOR WHO WAS ALREADY TREATING MY BACK INJURY AND GAS CHAMBER INDUCED

ASTHMA ATTENDED TO THE BITE. HE OFFERED ME A CHOICE THAT WOULD CHANGE THE COURSE OF MY ARMY CAREER. HE TOLD ME THINGS WOULD NOT GET ANY EASIER FOR ME; THAT I WOULD MOST LIKELY BE ASSAULTED IN WORSE WAYS; THAT RAPE WAS IN MY FUTURE. ON ONE HAND, HE COULD RECOMMEND I BE PLACED ON PERMANENT PROFILE WHICH WOULD LIMIT MY MOS OPTIONS, BUT NOT THE LIKELIHOOD OF BEING RAPED. OR, HE COULD RECOMMEND A SEPARATION BASED ON MY INJURIES, AND SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE MY CHANCES OF BEING RAPED WHILE SERVING MY COUNTRY.

WHILE I DELIBERATED OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, I THOUGHT OF HOW TERRIFIED I FELT, HOW DEPRESSED I'D BECOME, HOW I'D WASHED OUT OF CLASSES, HOW UNSAFE AND UNPROTECTED I REALLY WAS IN THIS ENVIRONMENT. I THOUGHT OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO ME IF I STAYED IN. I HADN'T EVEN BEEN IN FOR A YEAR AND I DID NOT WANT TO RETURN HOME AS A FAILURE FOR NOT HANDLING ARMY LIFE AS A WOMAN. I STILL STRUGGLE WITH THAT (INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION). THE OVERWHELMING FEAR AND TERROR OUTWEIGHED MY DESIRE FOR AN ARMY CAREER. I ACCEPTED DEFEAT AND THE DR.'S OFFER TO HELP ME GET OUT. MY NEXT STOP WAS OUTPROCESSING AT REDSTONE ARSENAL IN ALABAMA WHERE I ENDURED MORE SEXUALIZED PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL OPPRESSION AT THE HANDS OF A FEMALE CAPTAIN AND "HER BOYS". IT WAS LIKE BASIC TRAINING ALL OVER AGAIN, THIS TIME WITH A WOMAN LEADING THE HATRED BRIGADE.

I STOOD UP FOR MYSELF AND WAS RETALIATED AGAINST. THIS TIME THE RETALIATION CONSISTED OF A FALSE ACCUSATION THAT I WAS THE ONE PERPETRATING. THE FEMALE PLATOON SGT. WHO MADE THE REPORT TOOK ME ASIDE TO TELL ME SHE KNEW IT WAS A LIE, THAT IT'S WHAT I GOT FOR STANDING UP FOR MYSELF AGAINST "THE BOYS CLUB" AND THAT SHE COULD NOT HELP ME BECAUSE IT WOULD RUIN HER CAREER (INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION). IT DIDN'T MATTER THAT I WAS RESTRICTED TO MY ROOM AND NOT ALLOWED OUT EVEN TO EAT. HER FEAR WAS TOO BIG. RELIEF FINALLY CAME WHEN THE CAPTAIN WENT ON LEAVE AND THE 1ST SGT RETURNED. I INVOKED THE OPEN DOOR POLICY AND SPOKE WITH THE CSM. AFTERWARD, I WAS GIVEN JOBS TO DO OUTSIDE OF THE BARRACKS UNTIL THE DAY I WAS DISCHARGED.

I WILL NEVER RETURN TO THE WAY I WAS BEFORE THESE EXPERIENCES. I, ALONG WITH ALL WHO ARE AFFECTED BY OPPRESSION OF ANY KIND, AM TASKED WITH FINDING A HEALTHY WAY THROUGH THE AFTERMATH. NOT EVERYONE MAKES IT. SOME SUCCUMB TO AN EARLY DISCHARGE FROM LIFE, WHILE OTHERS SUCCUMB TO THE INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION, BECOMING OPPRESSORS THEMSELVES. STOPPING THE CYCLE OF SEXUALLY VIOLENT OPPRESSION THAT INCLUDES SOCIALLY, INSTITUTIONALLY, AND SYSTEMATICALLY REINFORCED VICTIM-BLAMING AND SHAMING IS ULTIMATELY BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THIS PANEL, AND THE NDAA. NEVERTHELESS, WE CAN SET NEW ETHICAL CONDITIONS HERE THAT WE HOPE WILL INFLUENCE THE TRAJECTORIES AND OUTCOMES FOR THE BETTER. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

REFERENCES

OPPRESSION. (N.D.). IN THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY. RETRIEVED
FROM

<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.humanisticpsychology.org:2048/view/Entry/132008?redirectedFrom=oppression#eid>