

# Social and Cultural Factors of Military Sexual Trauma

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# Training Objectives

Attendees will be able to:

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- Define military sexual trauma (MST)
- Identify infamous incidents of MST
- Explain the military cultural factors that contribute to the high rate of MST
- List mental and physical health symptoms/diagnoses often associated with sexual trauma
- State supportive responses when sexual trauma is disclosed
- Name some of the evidence based psychotherapies to treat mental health diagnoses commonly associated with sexual trauma
- List VA programs available to MST survivors
- Identify social justice resources for MST survivors

# Defining Military Sexual Trauma

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- VA uses the term “military sexual trauma” (MST) to refer to experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment experienced while on federal active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training.
- Any experience in which someone is involved against his/her will. This includes:
  - Use of physical force
  - Unable to consent (e.g. intoxicated). Compliance does not mean consent
  - Pressured into sexual activities (e.g. threats of consequences or promises of rewards)
  - Unwanted touching, grabbing, unwelcome sexual advances
  - Oral sex, anal sex, sexual penetration with an object and/or sexual intercourse
  - Stranger rape
  - Acquaintance rape

# Infamous incidents of MST

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- 1991 Tailhook Scandal, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 1996 Aberdeen Proving Ground, Aberdeen, Maryland

# 1991 Tailhook Scandal

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- Annual Tailhook convention, with approximately 4,000 attendees, including active, reserve and retired personnel.
- The 1991 intended focus was to debrief Navy and Marine Corps aviation regarding Operation Desert Storm.
- More than 100 Navy and Marine aviation officers were alleged to have sexually assaulted at least 83 women and 7 men.
- The “Gauntlet.”
- Led to congressional hearings and eventual passage of Public Law 102-585 in 1992, created section 1720D of Chapter 17 of Title 38 of US Code in 1992 (defines MST, mandated education for clinical staff, outreach to Veterans, and counseling and treatment for sexual trauma.)

# 1996 Aberdeen Proving Ground

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- The GAM: short for “Game a la Military”
- 12 cadre members, (1% of the cadre) alleged to have committed some form of sexual misconduct.
- Constructive Force: “The Army took the position that the sex between instructors and trainees was per se not consensual, because of the imbalance of power and the “constructive force” that necessarily occurred as a result.” (Brown 2007).
- SSG Delmar Simpson sentenced to 25 years in prison for raping 6 female trainees, 18 rape counts and 47 other offenses. Dishonorable discharge from the Army as an E-1. (Richter 1997 & Shadley 2013).
- Captain Derrick Robertson pled guilty to adultery, sodomy, and other charges. Ordered to serve 6 months in prison, and was given a dishonorable discharge after being reduced to an E1. (Chicago Tribune 1997 & Shadley 2013).
- SFC Tony Cross, the EEO in charge of ensuring everyone was treated fairly and equally, had court-martial charges preferred on him for: wrongfully socializing with trainees, failing to report prohibited relationships, sodomy, and adultery.

# Other Historically Relevant Information

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- provision in the FY 2004 National Defense Authorization Act required investigation and reporting regarding sexual harassment and assault at the US military academies.
- 2006, lowered recruiting standards after missing the recruiting target by the widest margin since 1979. (USAtoday.com)
- 2013 President Obama signed legislation preventing commanders from overturning jury conviction for sexual assault, requiring a civilian review when commanders decline to prosecute, requiring dishonorable discharge or dismissal for those convicted, eliminating the statute of limitations for courts-martial in rape and sexual assault cases and criminalizing retaliation against victims who reports an assault.
- September 2014: California Enacts 'Yes Means Yes' Law, Defining Sexual Consent (Chappell 2014).

# Common motivating factors for voluntary enlistment

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- Many positive, healthy, and gender neutral drives for enlisting: patriotism/honor, adventure, travel, family tradition, education, economic opportunities, belonging to something important, finding meaning/life purpose, etc.
- Hunter (2007) identifies another factor, overlooked by most authors when writing about military issues: masculinity.
  - “No other organization is as identified with providing a place to prove one’s manhood as the military.”
  - General Robert Barrow, former commandant of the Marines, described the attraction of the Marines, “There is an inherent need in all males of the animal world to prove their masculinity or maleness...The Marine Corps’ reputation, richly deserved, for physical toughness, courage, and its demands on mind and body, attracts those who want to prove their manliness. Here the search ends.” (Lawliss 2008)

# Fulfilling gender role “expectations” as motivating factor for enlistment

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If I prove my masculinity to myself and/or others, then it can't be true that:

- I'm weak, powerless, stupid, unlovable, unworthy, etc.

For some, achieving healthy goals, and reaching significant military milestones will not repair this shattered sense of self, and they turn to prey on those of “lower” status: women and “faggots.” (Calendo 1982)

# Contributing military cultural factors to MST

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Language

Acceptance of violence

The ability to objectify other humans, social distancing, moral distancing

Obedience to the chain of command

Wartime mentality

Belief that the organization must be protected at the cost of the individual

# Basic training

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Ben Shalit said, “The basic training camp was designed to undermine all the past concepts and beliefs of the new recruit, to undermine his civilian values, to change his self-concept – subjugating him entirely to the military system.”  
Recruits are informed that whoever they were or what they did before enlistment is “absolutely, entirely, irrevocably irrelevant.” (1988)

# Military language as a contributing cultural factor of MST

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## Military Slang

- Non-functional equipment; someone that is injured or faking injury to get out of trainings:  
Broke Dick
- Beginning an undesirable task:  
Tits time
- Untested gear or personnel:  
Virgin

# Cadence Calls or Jody Calls:

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## **See That Lady**

See that lady wearing brown?

She makes her livin' goin' down..she's a deep sea diver..a deep sea diver.

See that lady wearing black?

She makes her livin' on her back..she's a back stroke swimmer.. a back stroke swimmer.

See that lady from the south?

She makes her living with her mouth...she's a rock n' roll singer... a rock n' roll singer.

## I wish

I wish all the ladies were bells in a tower.

I'll be the bellman and bang them every hour.

I wish all the ladies were pies on a shelf.

I'll be the baker and eat the pie myself.

I wish all the ladies were a cat in a tree.

I'll be a firefighter and get that nice pussy.

I wish all the ladies were potholes in the road,  
and I was the mixer filling them with my load

I wish all the ladies were bricks in a pile,  
and I was the mason, I'd lay them all in style

# Acceptance of violence as a contributing cultural factor of MST

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- Combat value of “kill, or be killed.”
- History of drill instructors slapping, hitting, kicking, punching recruits

2007: Former Sgt. Glass was charged with 225 counts of abuse, tried on 11 and convicted of 8. Sentenced to 6 mos. in the brig, a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and the reduction in rank. Glass told the AP: “Recruit training is not being conducted any differently than it was before. It’s not like all of the sudden this is happening. It has to do with the Marine Corps not wanting to admit to the public what it takes to train somebody...to go to war.” (Carter 2007)
- “The acceptance of violence as a legitimate method for obtaining one’s goals, whether with an enemy or with a comrade, creates a psychological environment where sexual abuse is likely to occur. Sexual assault is best thought of as an act of violence rather than an act of sex. The point of the act is to invoke humiliation, pain and terror in the victim.” (Hunter 2007)

# One more Jody Call

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**Napalm (to the tune of Jesus loves the little children)**

Napalm sticks to little children

All the children of the world,

Be they yellow, black or white.

Hear them screaming in the night,

'Cause napalm stick to little kids.

# The ability to objectify other humans as a contributing cultural factor of MST

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- “Empathy for the enemy makes killing harder.” (Hunter 2007)
- Objectified and/or derogatory language: Person: target, “rag head,” “gook,” “fag” Kill: terminate
- “War tends to intensify the brutality, repetitiveness, public spectacle, and likelihood of rape. War diminishes sensitivity to human suffering and intensifies men’s sense of entitlement, superiority, avidity, and social license to rape.” (Copelon 1994)
- Social Distancing: “seeing the target of one’s aggression as a member of a different social class,” (Hunter 2007) i.e. “uppity college boy,” or “trailer trash.”
- Moral Distancing: “typically invokes religious superiority” & “used to justify the sexual abuse of women for “violating the role God intended for them,” and homosexuals for being “ungodly.” (Hunter 2007)

# HURT FEELINGS REPORT



DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME OF HURTFULNESS: \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM

- A. Which ear were words of hurtfulness spoken into: LEFT / RIGHT / BOTH
- B. Is there permanent feeling damage: YES / NO
- C. Did you require a tissue for the tears: YES / NO

## Reasons for filing this report. (Check Box)

- 1. I am thin skinned \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. I am a p\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. I have woman like hormones \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. I am a queer \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. I am a little b\_\_\_\_\_
- 6. I am a cry baby \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. I want my mommy \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. My butt is easliy hurt \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. All of the above \_\_\_\_\_



Name of "Real Man" who hurt your sensitive little feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

We, as a company, take hurt feelings very seriously. If you don't have a mommy that can give you a hug and make it all better, please let your supervisor know and we can provide you with a surrogate. If you need them, diapers, midol and a "blanky" can also be supplied.

Name little sissy filing report: \_\_\_\_\_  
Girly-man signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Real-man signature:  
(person being accused) \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor:  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Obedience to the chain of command as a contributing cultural factor of MST

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- “Military personnel take an oath to protect and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and to obey the orders of the president of the United States and to the officers appointed over me.” (Hunter 2007)
- In reference to the Milgram study, Lieutenant Colonel Grossman (1995) says “if this kind of obedience could be obtained with a lab coat and a clipboard by an authority figure who had been known for only a few minutes, how much more would the trappings of military authority and months of bonding accomplish?”
- Given the importance of obedience in the military setting, the issue of consent is more complex than in a civilian setting. Consent that has been obtained through the use of threats or coercion is not valid consent. (Hunter 2007)

# Wartime mentality as a contributing cultural factor of MST

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Army psychologist Lawrence LeShan (2002) has identified the steps that move a nation toward war:

1. Enemy is identified
  2. Enemy is determined to be evil
  3. Presence of enemy can no longer be tolerated
  4. Taking action against the enemy will lead to glory and improve the world
  5. Anyone who doesn't accept these facts is a traitor and supports the enemy
1. Gays and women have infiltrated our ranks.
  2. Gays are evil. Women in the military, particularly in combat roles are part of an evil plot to undermine the strength of the military.
  3. The presence of women and gays (except in limited roles) can no longer be tolerated.
  4. Whether legal or illegal (harassment and assault) actions must be taken and will lead to personal glory, restore the military to its former glory, and thereby improve the world.
  5. Anyone who disagrees with this plan must be gay, a feminist, a traitor, or some combination thereof.

# Protecting the organization over the individual as a contributing cultural factor of MST

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- “The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that the purpose and organization of the military makes it necessary to subordinate the individual for the common good. (Hunter 2007). In one case the justices wrote that the “very essence” of military service involves the “subordination of the desires and interests of the individual to the needs of the service.”
- Historically, this attitude has contributed to the armed forces ignoring and suppressing reports of sexual abuse.
- Disclosure of sexual abuse within the ranks threatens to tarnish reputation of particular units and the military in general. Therefore, evidence of abuse is overlooked, and those that attempt to call attention to it are discouraged, threatened, or punished.
- Those who dare to discuss these “private matters” outside the military “family” are viewed with disdain, since the military is supposed to “take care of our own dirty laundry” without interference of outsiders (civilians) who “don’t understand.”
- This dynamic is similar to what victims of incest experience. “If you tell anyone about what happened, Daddy will go to jail then everyone in the family will suffer, and it will be your fault.” (Hunter 2007)

# mental health symptoms often associated with sexual trauma

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- shame, guilt
- nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts of the trauma
- not wanting to talk about the trauma, be around people that remind him/her of the trauma, emotional numbing/distancing
- irritability, decreased concentration, disrupted sleep, hypervigilance, hyperstartle
- panic attacks
- depressed and/or anxious mood
- hopelessness/helplessness
- negative view of self/the world
- suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, self-harm behaviors
- dissociative episodes
- disordered eating
- overuse of alcohol/drugs
- crying spells

# Mental health diagnoses often associated with sexual trauma

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Although MST causes distress in almost everyone exposed to it, most people who experience MST do not develop psychiatric disorders. (Suris, Holliday, Weitlauf & North 2013).

- PTSD
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Substance Use Disorder(s)
- Eating Disorders
- Somatization Disorders
- Dissociative Disorders

# Physical health issues commonly associated with sexual trauma

(Suris, Holliday, Weitlauf & North 2013)

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Symptoms may include:

- headaches, migraines
- TMJ, tooth grinding
- chronic pain
- dizziness
- nausea
- weight loss/gain
- fatigue
- ulcers, gastrointestinal problems

These symptoms often negatively impact interpersonal relationships, occupational/educational success, and overall physical health.

Diagnoses may include:

- irritable bowel syndrome
- sexually transmitted infections
- unwanted pregnancy
- genital injury
- cardiovascular disease (e.g., myocardial infarction and stroke)
- chronic pulmonary disease
- liver disease
- genitourinary conditions (e.g., chronic pelvic pain and sexual dysfunction)

# supportive responses when sexual trauma is disclosed

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- “I believe you.”
- “I’m sorry that happened to you.”
- “It’s ok to talk about it here.”
- “You’re not alone.”
- “It’s not your fault.”
- “You are not crazy.”
- “Thank you for trusting me enough to share this with me.”

# Mental Health Psychotherapies

EBP Coordinator: Dr. Carol Wright-Buckley

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- Prolonged Exposure
- Cognitive Processing Therapy
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Seeking Safety
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Integrated Behavioral Couples Therapy

# VA Mental Health Treatment Programs

MST Coordinator: Christina McNeely, LCSW

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## Outpatient mental health

- Mental Health Clinic (all era's of service)
- OEF/OIF/OND Mental Health Clinic
- Vet Center (Northwest side of Indy)
- Trauma Recovery Program
- Intensive Outpatient Recovery Program
- DBT program

## Residential & Inpatient Programs

- MST programs, including women-only treatment programs
- General programs, with multiple staff with expertise in MST/Sexual Trauma

# Social Justice Resources

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- “Advances in the field occur only when they are supported by a political movement powerful enough to legitimate an alliance between investigators and patients and to counteract the ordinary social processes of silencing and denial. In the absence of strong political movements for human rights, the active process of bearing witness inevitably gives way to the active process of forgetting. Repression, dissociation, and denial are the phenomena of social and well as individual consciousness.” (Herman 1992)
- **Invisible No More:** is a non-partisan coalition working to end sexual assault within the U.S. military and to help survivors of Military Sexual Assault heal. [Notinvisible.org](http://Notinvisible.org)
- **SWAN Service Women’s Action Network:** SWAN’s mission is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and freedom to serve without discrimination, harassment or assault; and to reform veterans’ services to ensure high quality health care and benefits for women veterans and their families. SWAN strives to aid service women through policy reform, media advocacy, litigation, and community organizing. [Servicewomen.org](http://Servicewomen.org)
- **RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network):** Is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE and [online.rainn.org](http://online.rainn.org)) in partnership with more than 1,100 local rape crisis centers across the country and operates the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help victims and ensure that rapists are brought to justice. [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

Books:

Fall From Glory: The Men Who Sank the U.S. Navy by Gregory Vistica

Honor Betrayed: Sexual Abuse in America's Military, by Dr. Mic Hunter

The GAME: Unraveling A Military Sex Scandal by Robert D. Shadley, Major General, US Army (Retired)

Film:

The Invisible War ([invisiblewarmovie.com](http://invisiblewarmovie.com))

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