

Essay: Safety And Security.

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OFTEN when people think of individuals being incarcerated, they rarely give thought to the concept of safety and security. It is generally believed that once handcuffs are placed on a suspect, the community is made safer, the person being detained will be safe in police custody and once actually incarcerated, in jail, state or federal prison, those charged with ensuring the safety and security, will adhere to their professional ethics.

Nothing can be further from the truth. In many cases, it is the exact opposite. The subject of safety and security in all aspects, is both broad and requires intensive and lengthy dialogue. In truth, most of the conversation of the past on the subject has come from those charged with protecting individuals who are imprisoned and whose mindsets are geared towards a bias outlook towards the incarcerated.

For the purpose of this essay I wish to deal with the aspect of safety and security when it relates to trans women and especially trans-women of color. It is an absolute myth that once an individual is placed in prison (especially trans-women of color), that no threat of harm exists. This false perception has given blind permission for prison officials to create environments behind these walls that promote harassment, threats, violence and both verbal and sexual abuse towards those who are transgender.

There is an intense mindset for many inmates and prison staff that view those who are transgender as a lower form of humanity. We are viewed more like a sub-species or an offshoot of humanity. For many of us who are trans-women of color, we are viewed even further below such labels and stand beneath the simple scorn of being trans.

Do not be deceived on paper and for the purpose of appearing strenuously responsible and tough on crime to the public, and to capote the political figures that be, there are studies done, prison rape elimination act (PREA) reports and on occasion, speeches made to appease and reassure, yet behind the scenes, there

Is a thriving culture of cover-ups and suppression. (2)

Like so many of my sisters, I have experienced this firsthand. In my case, while serving time at ~~the~~ Pleasant Valley State Prison (PVSP), in California, (the name is deceptive in every aspect for there is absolutely nothing pleasant about the place), I was meticulously and maliciously targeted, embarrassed, harassed and sexually assaulted by a former prison guard whose duty was to ensure my safety.

Now for the purpose of this essay and to continue to ensure my safety, I will not list the court docket number for my case, nor the names of the officers and correctional employees involved. I will say however, that the staff, guards, warden of PVSP and the former Secretary of the Department of Corrections, went to extreme measures to cover up these assaults and get rid of my complaint against this former C/O.

Because I am continuously surrounded by officers and conditions geared towards transgressors in a negative fashion and many of these officers carry the same mentality as the former officer that assaulted and raped me, there is never a sense of closure and I never feel safe.

I allowed one of my parents to read over this and she asked the following questions. "Why expose such a sensitive and potentially embarrassing event to the world, especially when doing so may bring more retaliation from the administration and guards?" She also asked me why shine a spotlight upon myself to those inmates and staff who have no knowledge of the situation, yet have like minded views? Why expose being a victim?

My reply was adamant and unwavering. There is no shame to be had on my part, that burden rests squarely on the former C/O who committed the crimes against me and the administration at PVSP that attempted to cover up the crimes and allow such an environment to not only exist, but thrive.

Also, I am no victim. I do not cower in fear and shame, nor do I flinch at the prospect of stinging anger or reprisals from the administration. No, I am not a ~~was~~ victim, I am a survivor! I am a voice crying out from the depths of this degradation.

Sadly, my case and story is simply one of many. My voice is a single note⁽³⁾ in the chorus of survivors that cry out with indignation. The depths of the violations of our civil liberties, Constitutional rights and basic human decency are vast. The monstrosity that is the D.O.C. has poisonous tentacles that reach to the depths of corruption. With one of the largest and most powerful unions, it has ensnared itself that it will continuously feed its voracious appetite for wealth, power and complete control over the lives of those unfortunate enough to be thrust into its gaping maw.

With no true oversight or forum of accountability for their actions, harassment, degradation, beatings, abusing and raping of trans women, and trans women of color in particular, has become a cultivated right of passage for many inmates in prison. They congeal to it with the knowledge that the majority of the woman's pleas will fall on deaf ears.

And, should the administration choose to act, in most cases the trans-gender is viewed as a liar, slut or instigator. She is labeled, detained and ~~more~~ more often than not, punished by being placed in confinement and deprived of the few rights and privileges she has.

At the same time, the perpetrator is viewed as the victim or someone who has been coerced, manipulated or seduced. He is lauded as a survivor and someone who was "doing what he needed to do." In a bizarre twist, he is considered a hero for "shaming" and "bringing down a faggot."

The rules set forth by the D.O.C. appear to aid the victim, (the true victim), on paper yet the application of those rules fall well short in their execution. Aside from the threats of violence and sexual assault from both inmates and staff, trans-women in male facilities are harassed for having breast and/or feminine appearances, and for wearing bras. We dwell under the dark cloud

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of threats of rule violation reports and placement in Administrative Segregation. We are denied gender affirming clothing and hygiene products in spite of being given allowances to enrich our gender identity and here in California, having a court order stating that we are allowed to purchase and have these items. Our voices are muffled by the disregard and corruption of the system. We are constantly reminded that once we were sentenced, we no longer matter, and that ~~was~~ no one cared. We are told that none will reach out to help; that once the judge banged the gavel, we became property, with no regulations or oversight from the "outside world," the staff and inmates thrive and perpetrate unthinkable horrors.

~~Many~~ many of my trans sisters fall into a state of depression where they are pumped full of psychotropic drugs. Many adopt attitudes of self destructive behavior. They fall victim to the whims of those who lurk in the shadows and wallow in the mire of instigation and manipulation. They allow themselves to become wrapped in the arms of these defilers. They quickly become ~~addicted~~ addicted to the false sense of security they feel from these vampiric soul suckers.

They become addicted to drugs, alcohol and sex. They find themselves prostituting and "turning tricks" in order to either satiate their drug addicted appetites, to be able to eat and fall asleep with a full stomach, or simply satisfy their addiction to sex which they mistakenly equate with love. Many have no one from the outside world to support them.

In truth, I would not be completely honest if I say that I do not think about the potential for retaliation for this entry, for I do. Yet, I also know that our voices need to be heard, and since I have this opportunity to do so, to not do it would be a travesty. No, I desire to shout from the mountain top. I want to scream into the universe that yes, we do matter!

I do not only desire to make a noise and bring awareness to this issue (5)
I desire for my words to spark a sense of indignation in the hearts and
minds of all who read them. I fervently hope that that spark ignites into
an inferno of outrage and that outrage leads you to advocate and hear
the voices of so many trans women who are alone, abandoned and re-
jected.