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MILITARY

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A Sergeant Pimped Out Female Soldiers. The Army's Going After a John.

This is progress for the military

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Yet again, a soldier employed by the U.S. military's sexual assault and harassment program has been accused of being a sexual predator. And Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Gregory McQueen did [his predecessors](#) one better: He allegedly [organized a prostitution ring](#) of young servicewomen at the Army base in Fort Hood, Texas, pressuring them to have sex with their male superiors. Details are trickling out from the trial of Master Sgt. Brad Grimes, a 17-year army veteran charged with conspiring to use the ring's services. "A young private told authorities McQueen had tried to recruit her to have sex with high-ranking soldiers and sexually assaulted her during what she termed an 'interview,'" [reported](#) the *Austin American-Statesman*. Accusations that McQueen leveraged both social hierarchy and physical force to get what he wanted from female subordinates won't surprise anyone who has followed the military's sexual assault epidemic. But the story reveals another canker of military culture, too: the buddy-buddy refusal to report on a predatory peer.

Grimes denies the charges against him, claiming that there was no money involved, and that although he considered a rendezvous with a private, he never went through with it. But what's not up for debate is that Grimes knew about McQueen's scheme and did nothing to stop it; his defense attorney, Daniel Conway, has said Grimes also refused a plea deal that would have required him to testify against his colleague. Grimes's part in the drama raises the classic question: How much guilt do we assign to the bystander (if that, indeed, is what Grimes is)? And when it comes to the military's corrosive gender culture, bystanders may be the bulk of the problem.

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"It's the peers who don't blow the whistle who are the biggest problem in the whole culture," said Tony Manning, a former

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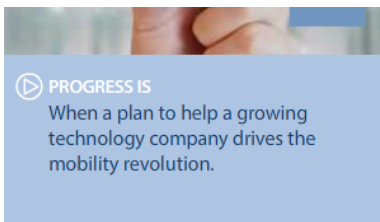
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culture," said Lori Manning, a former captain in the U.S. Navy and a director of the Women's Research and Education Institute. "When you're talking about a serial rapist, his friends—and I say he intentionally—generally know what's going. It's a huge issue in the military and it's not much talked about, and nor are

the peers held responsible for not informing the command."

On that last point, at least, the Fort Hood case may represent the slow march of progress: Conway claims it's precisely Grimes's refusal to squeal that has landed his client in court. "At the end of the day, Master Sgt. Grimes chose to do the right thing and not have sex with that young lady," Conway [told](#) the *Statesman*. He disparaged the prosecutor for trying "to charge [Grimes] in hopes of a conviction and using [Grimes] to testify against McQueen." If Conway's theory is correct, this is a rare case of the military cracking down on an officer for keeping mum.

Last spring, another high-ranking member of the military was punished for tacitly advancing the institution's culture of silence. When [Lt. Gen. Susan J. Helms](#) was nominated for vice commander of the Air Force's Space Command (she became first military woman to go to outer space in 1993), Democratic Senator Claire McCaskill scuttled the promotion based on information that Helms had once overturned the conviction of a captain who, evidence suggests, was guilty of aggravated sexual assault. The Pentagon has estimated that of 19,000 sexual offenses committed in a year, one in six are reported, and one in ten of those go to trial—and, in the rare event of a conviction (*The Washington Post* [reported](#) in May that the Air Force had only recorded 327 convictions in the past five years), clemency can be granted by a commander looking after his, or her, own.

In the case of Helms, it was the Senate, not the military, that punished her complicity in a culture of discrimination—and in the Fort Hood case, only the most salacious episode seems to have jolted the military to action. "What's worrisome is that you need a scandal to make sure the military is holding its people accountable," said Service Women's Action Network executive director and former Marine Corps captain Anu Bhagwati, a vocal supporter of a bill by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand that would overhaul the military's legal system surrounding sexual assault. "We've entered a new era in which officers in the military are highly visible, in which their behavior is publicly scrutinized. But there needs to be an institutional change. Eventually, the media is going to move on to a different story."

Of course, real accountability grows not just from a top-down insistence on good laws and policies, but from a bottom-up willingness to turn in those who betray them. On that score, even if the Grimes case turns out to be a tentative first step, the military still has a long way to go.

*Update: A military jury convicted Grimes of conspiring to patronize a prostitute and solicitation to commit adultery late Tuesday. He has been demoted.*