Chapter 2
The Military Rape Subculture Hypothesis

“It was an astounding admission when Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., confessed that he had advised the mother of a young woman interested in joining the military that he couldn’t in all good faith tell her it was the right career path for her daughter. McCain wasn’t faulting the military for lack of opportunity, or for gender discrimination, but for something far more basic, the continued inability to protect service women, and men too, from sexual assault, and to give those who are the victims of assault or sexual harassment a fair hearing without fear of retribution.”

(Protect our uniformed women, 2013)

The political attention of military sexual trauma (MST) experiences a kind of “episodic amnesia” within the American discourse (Herman, 1992). This “amnesia” means that, despite a long and pervasive history of MST within the US military, political and military leaders have consistently chosen to ignore the issue or only act when scandal or media scrutiny creates tremendous pressure to do something. Sexual assault in the military is rampant and widespread. A review of 21 studies found that MST—the government’s official title of harassment, abuse, and assault on military service members by military service members—has rates of sexual harassment from 55 % to 70 % and rates of sexual assault from 11 % to 48 % (Goldzweig, Balekian, Rolón, Yano, & Shekelle, 2006). Despite increases in government funding and shifts in the educational practices of the military, the sexual trauma epidemic continues. This chapter will discuss both the intended and unintended consequences of a warrior culture. That is, when you train young people to be the best fighting machine, they can be in an atmosphere of hierarchical domination and control; what results is the abuse of power among those that feel powerless. The chapter will explore the author’s hypothesis for how elements of the military create a subculture that both allows and perpetuates sexual violence.
2.1 Military Rape Politics

As discussed in Chap. 1, violence and sexual victimization of women extends for centuries and can be found in any major war in history. An early example of military rape in the United States is during the Civil War (Murphy, 2014). Court documents from the Civil War era show an apathetic legal atmosphere toward women victims, often allowing the accused rapist to cross-examine the victim herself during trial (Murphy, 2014).

Unfortunately, similar examples continue into modern history, with numerous instances in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Perhaps the most famous military rape scandal is the Tailhook conference in 1991. The scandal occurred at the Tailhook Navy Carrier Pilot Convention at the Las Vegas Hilton, where one hundred US Navy and Marine aviation officers were accused of sexually assaulting at least 83 women and seven men at the Las Vegas during a retreat. There were reportedly over 175 drunk officers involved in the assaults, which included incidents where female sailors were forced to walk crowded hallways or “gauntlets” where male service members would grope or pinch the women, often going as far as tearing clothing off. When news of the scandal was reported in the media, politicians and military administration demanded an end to the problem.

On September 14, 1992, approximately 1 year after the Tailhook Conference, a Congressional investigation ensued, and a report was given to the Military Personnel and Compensation Subcommittee and the Defense Policy Panel of the Committee on Armed Services in the House of Representatives. The report found the Tailhook incident occurred because of a “failure” by senior leadership to regulate the party atmosphere while maintaining professionalism. The report also acknowledged attitudes, “that permitted it to occur” that are not isolated. Rather, they are so widespread in the services that basic, cultural change will be necessary to remedy harassment… Given the prevalence of these attitudes, the office Department of Defense investigation of specific activities at Tailhook must not be allowed to serve as a substitute for the vigorous and whole-hearted effort necessary to eliminate sexual harassment toward women in the military. (p. 1–2, U.S. Committee on Armed Services, 1992)

Three days later, Evelyn Monahan found herself testifying before Congress on the issue of women veterans receiving equal medical and psychological services in the Veterans Administration. Ms. Monahan was President of the National Association of Women Veterans at the time. She describes an “attitudinal virus” that permeates the leaders of the military that make sexual equality difficult. She states,

The attitudinal virus, which causes sexual harassment has at its roots the basic disrespect and lack of esteem for women in general. It is an attitudinal virus, this basic disrespect, this lack of esteem that creates and fosters the myth that women have yet to prove themselves in combat situations in the military, when thousands of military nurses and female soldiers have served daily in combat zones from World War I through Desert Storm. It is an attitudinal virus that has caused an en masse denial of the contributions of military women throughout history, and an en masse evaluation of military women as major contributors to the peace of this nation. (p. 16)
The governmental leaders and women advocates of 1992 did their best to understand the problem and attempted to change the culture to make women be seen more equal, and thus, they believed, decrease the rates of sexual victimization and discrimination. Congressional leaders launched efforts to study and understand the issue of sexual violence in the military in the form of Congressional inquiries. It was not until 1992 that the Department of Defense began to acknowledge sexual assault as an offense, and initially only female victims were recognized (Ellison, 2011). However, despite all the efforts from the government, the issue of military sexual trauma experienced a silence in the popular press until the new millennium.

Twelve years later, however, reports of military-on-military rape emerged in the new wars of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). In 2004, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ordered an investigation of sexual abuse in the military shortly before leaving office. He allocated money for the purpose of creating a reporting office for victims of sexual violence in the military. By doing this, the office hoped to increase the number of reported assaults by providing victims with increased reporting options, as opposed to just to their immediate supervisor.

The continued rise in the number of sexual assaults led some lawmakers to express disgust and dismay with the military’s lack of progress on this issue. In 2008, Representative Jane Harman (D-California) wrote an op-ed article titled “Rapists in the Ranks”—and later that same year testified to Congress—that “women serving in the U.S. military are more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire in Iraq” (p. 1). Shortly after a scandal at Lackland Air Force Base, where 30 young female trainees were sexually assaulted by six officers, California Congresswoman Jackie Speier addressed the floor of the US House of Representatives stating that nothing has changed in the sexual misconduct of the military culture despite various public scandals. Speier decried the continued epidemic of sexual violence, stating:

Most of the members of the military today are in it as a career. So what’s happened historically is they’ve just sucked it up and moved on. It is unacceptable, it is a violent crime and the military needs to take it more seriously. (BieryGolick, 2012, p. #)

Despite these Congressional discussions, the abuse has not slowed. As this manuscript is being written in 2014, the highest ranking officer to ever be accused of sexual misconduct in the military, Jeffrey Sinclair, was accused of adultery, sodomizing, raping, forcing oral sex, and harassing various young female enlisted soldiers (Blinder, 2014). Additionally, the Air Force Academy implicated 32 cadets, including 16 football players and several other athletes, after an investigative report found that the athletes administered date rape drugs rampanty, hosted wild parties, and used illegal drugs, often with special permission of [coaches/school officials] because of their athletic positions (Sisk, 2014). The headlines of military sexual assault, harassment, and abuse continue to be reported and statistics continue to climb.

Since that time, the number of reported sexual assaults has increased from 1,700 in calendar year 2004 to 3,374 in 2012 (Sexual Assault in the Military, 2013; U.S. Department of Defense, 2013). This report also acknowledged 26,000 instances of
unreported sexual assault in the military during the same period (U.S. Department of
Defense, 2013). Studies on MST incurred in recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan
found rates for women from 15 % to 42 % and rates for men from 1 % to 12.5 %
(Katz, Cojucar, Beheshti, Nakamura, & Murray, 2012; Kimerling et al., 2010).

On June 13, 2013, another hearing titled, “Sexual Assault in the Military” was
held in front of Congressional leadership. Alice Titus, a member of the House of
Representatives from Nevada, announced a call to action about the pervasive culture
that creates the epidemic of sexualized violence. She states,

We must establish a culture in our military that has zero tolerance for sexual assault; a cul-
ture that protects, not intimidates, victims; that prosecutes, not excuses, perpetrators; and
that denounces, not ignores, sexual violence. We must make it a priority to end this unfath-
omable crime within our military and provide victims with the care that they need and
deserve. (p. 3371)

2.2 How Military Culture Creates a Military Rape Subculture

The battalion commander requested that I come and see him. I remember going into his
office. He was sitting in a huge chair, smoking a cigar, and he said to me I know about you.
You’re trouble. You don’t want to be trouble. Moving here you have a reputation. You’re
either a slut or you’re a dyke. You’ve got to choose your friends wisely. I’m watching you.
(p. 120, Hicks, 2011)

The term “rape culture” has been used to describe the college university sexual
assault epidemic, but no published work has ever compared it to military culture.
The notion of rape culture within college institutions speaks to the pervasive culture
that allows coed college rape crimes to occur with increasing frequency (Burnett
et al., 2009; Ullman, 2010). Historically, sexual assault is prominent in cultures that
endorse the domination and objectification of women. “As an act of sexual violence,
rape reflects the masculine role as dominant and controlling. A ‘rape culture’ exists
in which rape is often not acknowledged as a crime and its victims are frequently
blamed and held responsible for their own violation” (Vogelman, 1990, p. 222).

Military culture is one that is organized around a profession, prioritizing the job
first, and all other aspects of personal life such as dress and physical appearance. In
addition, a central tenet of the culture is the military code of honor, which empha-
sizes the values of sacrifice, obedience, and discipline. This culture produces men
and women who comprise perhaps the most powerful fighting force on Earth and
trains members to think and act quickly in dangerous and stressful situations.
However, this training also seems to produce a very negative by-product or a rape
subculture that allows for sexual victimization of its members.

This chapter will attempt to make an argument for how the military is also
responsible for its own rape subculture and how elements of military culture, such
as its training, familial structure, emphasis on aggressive masculinity, and laws, all
work to create an environment where perpetrators commit sexual assaults without
fear of punishment and victims are denied protection and justice.
2.3 Military Training Academies

My sergeant told me “This is what guys do” and “You put yourself here” so nothing, you know, you can’t go and tell some guy to control his mouth because you are a female. That is what the military is. (p. 54, Zaleski, 2013)

In 2013, approximately 30,000 new recruits entered a military training camp. In addition, reserve units added 25,000 new service enlistments (Department of Defense, 2014). The first aspect of the military culture that the new recruits encounter is the hierarchical structure and finite rules that will color their life as a service member. The purpose of the authoritarian lifestyle is to form a tight collective of individuals who look, think, and rage war like each other. Johnson (2002) describes military training as a “character development program” to promote the warrior mentality necessary to be a soldier.

During military training camps, service members are trained to be a part of the team, obey orders, and learn discipline through rigorous physical and mental exercises. This results in graduates who can act and think quickly and effectively in stressful situations, as well as create strong bonds of loyalty and brotherhood.

Though the military participates in peace-related missions, the primary focus of having a military is for the purpose of war or the ability to complete an objective through the use of violence. The US military prides itself on the training for wartime and is one of the largest military institutions in the world. War involves many strategies to win and often involves killing those that “we” are “against” and accepting the casualties that were not intended to be targeted such as women and children. As a result, new cadets will be trained on warfare, how to demand power and obtain control over another person, and how to learn to view “the enemy” as an object to dominate.

Aiken (2009) describes the “dehumanization” of others as a key tactic in military training. These tactics in training are essential to warfare training so the young person will not hesitate to pull the trigger in a warzone. The training is focused on the mind and body to fully indoctrinate them into a fighting machine. Thus, military training creates members specifically trained to use violence against those who are deemed outsiders. It also has the effect of depersonalizing the identity of victims, meaning some members may place less value on the feelings, boundaries, and agency of others. Unfortunately, these attributes can rapidly turn into rape-supportive attitudes if a victim is seen as “not a part” of the collective group and therefore an acceptable target of violence. Thus, military training, while creating an effective fighting force during times of war, might also create a culture that also allows for unspeakable acts of sexual violence on its own members.

Being part of the collective group is something that military training emphasizes immediately on newly enlisted recruits. That is, being different is wrong, and a new service member must figure out how to fit in. Gieni (2012) sees the military as a patriarchal culture where those who are vulnerable are marked as “others” and “targeted with abuse and violence. The violence perpetuated and expressed in patriarchal culture targets all those who appear vulnerable and weak. This includes individuals who do not conform or fit into the narrow constraints of the binary structures of gender and sexuality” (p. #).
Callahan (2009) describes military training dynamics as rules for how cadets act within a culture. Callahan asserts that “this process creates dialectic between the individual sense of self (psyche) and the sense of collective (socius)” (p. 1158). Socius, the new recruit is told, is their new military family. Their fellow comrades are brothers and sisters in the fight against “evil.” The new recruits take an oath that includes protecting one another. Johnson (2002) examined those oaths and believes that religious and symbolic elements are rooted in the military culture.

The implicit symbolism is family and brotherhood. You trust your fellow comrade with your life. You do not harm one another, you are military family. The important idea of how a new recruit is indoctrinated into the military family is described next.

2.4 Military Family

The first unit that I ever went to was a great unit. It had a lot of great teamwork. We actually acted like a family. The way that a family, like a unit, should actually act. We should act like a family no matter what. (p. 35, Fayazrad, 2013)

Wertsch (1991) wrote an autobiographic exploration into the military culture after speaking to children of service members, social workers, and other personnel. She identified the idea of “the fortress” that is innate to military culture. It is not a democracy, like the country they have sworn to protect (Hall, 2008). As a result, the culture promotes strict rules and hierarchies that most have never been acquainted with before. Military training indoctrinates the new recruit to this authoritarian system and teaches them the many rules, from dress code, physical fitness, to meal times, that must be obeyed quickly and without question. “Every ‘dysfunction’ that is reported becomes a potential career blemish, to say nothing of being a sign of personal weakness in a strength-centered environment” (Trueheart, 1991). While these cultural traits can place great demands on soldiers, they also create powerful bonds of shared experience and interconnectedness, as these rules and hierarchies provide a clear delineation between who is “in” the family and who is “out” (e.g., civilians).

The importance of this family issue is essential to the severity of trauma that service members experience as a result of MST. Many young recruits are leaving their family homes for the military barrack or dorm. The chain of command becomes the role model that the high school football coach once was. When sexual assault happens, it is a profound betrayal as if your family member had just violated you. The military family is not supposed to harm you. They are to take a bullet for you.

Some academics have likened sexual trauma in the military to incest within the family (O’Neill, 1998; Hunter, 2007; Kimerling, Gima, Smith, Street, & Frayne, 2007; Street Stafford, Mahan, & Hendricks, 2008; Haaken & Palmer, 2012). This feels particularly true when considering how the military teaches the new service member that their colleagues are their “brothers” in arms. There is an implicit teaching in military indoctrination that creates a felt sense of security, for the purpose of having the service member fight in combat with the belief that their fellow comrade will protect them, just like a family member. Haaken and Palmer (2012) further
elaborate on this metaphor stating, “The MST survivor, like the incest survivor, is forced to continue to interact with the perpetrator on a daily basis and is pressured to keep the ‘family secret’ to protect both the perpetrator and the military unit as a whole” (p. 331). The family attributes can create an atmosphere that discourages victims from reporting a sexual assault, because to report the assault might threaten the group. Thus, like a family, the military culture can create an insular atmosphere where personal boundaries are not respected and individuals are expected to keep painful secrets in order to preserve the sanctity of the group.

In addition to the cultural sense of family, developmental factors contribute to the creation of strong bonds between service members and also create risks for individual members who are victimized. Specifically, there appears to be a psychological mechanism (attachment) in young adults that transfers the trust they had with their parents to their new mentors. This is true for college professors as much as it is for the new recruit’s chain of command. Mayselssonx (2004) studied Israeli male soldiers entering service and leaving their parents’ home. The finding suggests that the attachment relationship is transferred from the parent dyad to romantic partners and peers in military service. Feeney and Van Vleet (2010) reviewed research on the attachment dynamic of early adulthood and support the idea that a young adult finds safety and security within the new adult attachments, transferring that attachment from their parents to their social supports. The creation of familial bonds between soldiers and units promotes a powerful sense of brotherhood and a commitment to the group. For instance, in Band of Brothers, the story of a company of Army paratroopers in World War II, the men stated that they were able to tolerate living in foxholes for months, in subzero temperatures with no winter coat and little food, under constant attack from German forces because it was intolerable to contemplate “letting down their buddies” (Ambrose, 1992, p. 289). As one soldier noted, through shared training and combat experiences, they found “…the closest brotherhood they ever knew…men who loved life would give their lives for them” (p. 289).

This transfer and creation of strong bonds of attachment is an important part of military culture that can provide powerful motivation to soldiers to sacrifice and serve together under challenging situations. However, the creation of such strong ties can have a negative effect, namely, if the group becomes central, then the collective becomes important and individual needs become secondary. In addition, anything that threatens the group cohesion is viewed as a tremendous threat, and will likely be vigorously attacked.

The leadership on base, and how much the leadership tolerates or prohibits sexually demeaning comments, marching songs, etc., is important in whether the culture tolerates sexual harassment on female service members. Street Stafford, Mahan, & Hendricks (2008) contacted 558 women on the phone who had served from Vietnam or subsequent eras since then. They state,

Our results indicate that the leadership behaviors of officers are a powerful risk factor for violence towards servicewomen. Behaviors included officers making sexually demeaning comments or gestures, thus providing an implicit sexualized environment… Our findings also demonstrate the key role of leadership or supervisory behavior in contributing to an environment that tolerates or even encourages behaviors that directly or eventually result in sexual violence towards military women. (p. 271, Sadler et al., 2003)
The authoritarian structure that takes hold of the new recruits’ daily life is important here. The chain of command and new peer relationships become the new family (or using clinical language, the working models of attachment) for new service members. The new family will dictate everything the new recruit does and demand compliance. The leadership cocreates the new culture the recruit will begin to live and work within. The new recruits will model the behavior of their leader.

Daily life choices are also taken away. No longer will this new service member decide what to wear or eat or even when and where to sleep as long as they are serving their country. It is a total loss of control in a way most have not experienced as adults. This loss of control can be troubling for new recruits. Callahan (2007) finds that male trainees in military academies deal with this loss of control through substance use and finding avenues of power and control that is allowed in the hierarchical structure (such as hazing or participating in physical altercations with other service members). Females have been found to control their bodies, subsequently developing eating disorders.

This loss of individual autonomy, and the actions that new recruits must often take to remain a part of the group, is where the rape subculture begins to take hold, that is, like incest or abuse within a family or church community, when bad things happen, and no one talks about it. As a result, nothing is done to prevent future assaults or punish those who prey on group members, allowing the cycle of violence to continue.

2.5 Aggressive Masculinity

Oh boy, to be a female soldier. At times it’s very trying, it can be extremely frustrating, but it can also be extremely rewarding. I think one of the things that I hate the most about being a female soldier is that every new unit you go to, you have to re-prove yourself that you’re a soldier. When males go from one unit to another, they – solely on their MOS and their rank – they’re already assumed to be good. When a female shows up at new unit, the first thing is ‘oh my God, we’re getting another female. I wonder if she’s going to be a whore. I wonder if she’s going to be any good or is she going to be somebody looking for a husband or is she going to be somebody who can do the job.

(p. 116–117, Hicks, 2011)

Another aspect of military culture that promotes a rape subculture is the domination of masculine traits and values within it. Feminist authors have described military training as the indoctrination to “aggressive masculinity” (Jeffreys, 2007) where sexual objectification and humiliation become a part of normal culture. As explored in Chap. 1, the military often values “masculine” values such as strength, toughness, and restricted emotionality. Attributes contrary to this, such as empathy, emotionalism or weakness, are associated with femininity or homosexuality and are therefore mocked and denigrated. Dunivin (1994) describes how the “masculine warrior mentality” must experience a paradigm cultural shift in order to prevent discrimination of women and gays in the military. The military culture, Dunivin argues, has a combat-masculine-warrior (CMW) mentality that is taught as part of
the indoctrination process from civilian to service member. Keats (2010) suggests, “this combat-masculine-warrior (CMW) paradigm is the central force that governs military socialization and acculturation by shaping members’ cognitions and perceptions of meaning, reality, and sense of belonging” (p. 293). Many new female trainees report a need to adapt to the masculinized culture to survive and begin to hide their femininity. For some, this becomes a short haircut, others begin birth control that does now allow menstruation, and others create male-only social groups and participate in the “gendered” harassment that is common in military culture.

Sadler et al. (2003) describe a host of “defensive behaviors” that their military participants described when acculturating to the new military culture. Out of 558 women interviewed, almost 50% reported becoming “less friendly and not looking people in the eyes” and 28% of their participants reported “deliberately making themselves look more masculine or unattractive” (p. 266).

Vocabulary is also a new indoctrination process for new recruits. Soon, each branch of the military will have their own language, order of rank, and other new words they have never had to use in their life as a civilian. Along these lines, the language of sexual harassment can often intercede. Jeffreys (2007) offers how the dichotomy of the military’s language is gendered, which creates a world where being feminine is suggested to be weaker. She states, “masculinity and the othering of women and homosexuality, gendered female, are used in training as soldiers are insulted with female epithets” (p. 18). A service member can insult another when they use words to insult, comparing each other to “girls,” “ladies,” or “pussies.” This is also extended to homosexual identity when a service member insults another by stating they are “faggots” or “gay.” This creates a world where to be tough is to be a man; if you are not a man, you are not part of the collective socius.

The consequence of “aggressive masculinity” is that members are taught that the endurance of pain and suffering is required to prevent being seen as weak. During military training for new service members, for example, there is a widely shared mantra of “suck it up and drive on.” From as early as the first few months of training, new service members, both male and female, acculturate to a belief that pain makes them stronger and the weaker ones will not prevail. This style of thinking helps young recruits become conditioned to rigorous physical exercise and prepares them for a difficult life in the field. Weakness, on the other hand, is when the recruit can no longer endure the pain. For some service members, this “suffering” includes reporting when sexual and physical boundaries are violated. As a result, this creates a culture that discourages the reporting of sexual violence. It also creates a culture of silence that allows those that perpetrate such violence to continue victimizing while others “suck it up and drive on.”

For a woman, acculturating to the masculine culture and having male friendships encourage greater mental health. Weatherill et al. (2011) studied 658 female US Marine recruits, and their results “indicated that sexual harassment, performance stress, and unit cohesion mediated the relationship between egalitarianism and mental health symptomatology” (p. 348). In other words, the more the women found themselves as equals among their male counterparts, the happier they were. Their findings are controversial; however, as they found that the more a Marine female
cadet felt capable of succeeding in a male-dominated environment, the less likely she was to report an incident of sexual harassment (p. 355). This finding could mean that these women were harassed less because the men saw them as objectified less than other women or these women could have been downplaying or ignoring the sexual harassment so they could focus on their work, thereby avoiding conflict and potential punishment while moving through the training program.

A qualitative study conducted by the present author (Zaleski & Katz, 2014) found that before MST occurred, female soldiers reported a prolonged state of fear regarding the harassing culture in the first 18 months of military service. Qualitative themes from interviewing MST victims supported the military rape subculture hypothesis in that many of those interviewed felt “no one was listening” when they would complain about working in a sexually charged atmosphere. The women described a common belief that the harassment was “happening to everybody” and you had to “learn to dissociate” from the constant sexual attention in order to do their job. In a similar study by Fayazrad (2013), similar themes were found among the female victims of MST. Those included sexual harassment, betrayal, gender discrimination, and trust violations before the assault. Further, after the assault, Fayazrad (2013) found that the participants felt blamed by the culture for the sexual victimization.

This seems to support that the military rape subculture creates an environment where women learn to cope the best they can, despite constant fear of being raped or harassed by their colleagues. As a consequence of the subculture, they give up on authorities protecting their safety and, when victimized, do not believe they could receive help (Zaleski & Katz, 2014).

A by-product of the military rape subculture in the US Armed Services is a culture of denial on behalf of those who choose to participate in the rape culture as well as a dissociation from the fear of being attacked on the part of victims. Living in a sexually charged and victimizing society creates stress and fear on behalf of those who are targets. Their bodies respond much like under the threat of constant combat. There are few places to feel safe and relax. This will be discussed, in further detail, in the chapter that follows.

As noted above, some women adjust to this subculture by adopting a more masculine appearance or demeanor as a form of self-protection or “fitting in.” Other women seek protection from the abuse by becoming sexually involved with a service member that has respect and authority. For some female service members, this involves becoming promiscuous as an attempt to align themselves with men in a way that they can participate in. It is an attempt to gain control over their bodies, while creating a closer relationship with male colleagues. However, some studies show that this can create a conflict with other female service members and create a greater sense of isolation (p. 57, Fayazrad, 2013). Hannagan and Arrow (2011) found that 27% of female veterans reported a time when they become intimately involved with a male service member to prevent sexual harassment or assault. That is, if the person in charge of your unit is your boyfriend, the relationship has protective capacity to prevent sexual predation and harassment from colleagues.

In addition to masculinizing herself or trading sex for protection, some women believe that to succeed in military environments, she must be perceived as a bitch. Hicks (2011) has described the culture’s “bitch/slut/dyke” trichotomy as a symptom
to the “sexual agency” that becomes implicit in a male-dominated culture. She defines “sexual agency” as “the ability to make decisions about sex according to one’s own will” (p. 89). Many female service members report having to constantly compete against the men to earn respect and dignity within the community. This competitive atmosphere also inhibited more intimate relationships with other females. Hicks states,

The negotiation of gendered expectations was especially influenced by perceptions about women service members’ sexual agency. That is, the will of women was often interpreted in reductive and exploitive ways. Women consistently spoke of the bitch/slut/dyke trichotomy and reported that negotiating this gendered expectation was especially impactful. Women stated that gendered expectations about their sexual agency made it more difficult to develop close relationships with males, contributed to feelings of isolation, and were used to keep women in competition with each other. (p. 89)

To reference the Congressional speeches quoted earlier in the chapter by Ms. Speier and Ms. Titus, the consequence of aggressive masculinity is to suck it up and move on with your life when you are victimized. That is, to minimize, ignore, and intimidate those that complain the culture is offending them. To be a soldier is to be tough and not be a victim. The opposite of being aggressively masculine is to be docile and feminine. Who wants to admit they were victims of another when that will only open them up for further victimization and intimidation? Further, surviving in the military culture for many women involves not being yourself and instead subscribing yourself within the bitch/slut/dyke trichotomy. This is yet another way that personal agency is removed by being a part of the culture.

The Department of Defense doesn’t discuss the personal agency issue explicitly, but does acknowledge how the “social forces” develop a collective sense of identity with the added symptom of complacency against interpersonal violence (U.S. DOD, 2013). The report states,

The same social forces that give cadets and midshipmen a collective sense of identity and purpose at a military academy also work to maintain the silence or complicity of peers when a few misbehave. When no one is challenged by peers, the few individuals engaging in the problem behavior set the new social norm, allowing the misbehavior and misconduct to perpetuate. (p. 11, U.S. Department of Defense, SAPR, 2013)

To be vulnerable and report your sexual assault in military service, other service members could construe you as being weak. “Reporting fellow troops for sexual misconduct can also be interpreted as disloyal; it can lead to the humiliation and punishment of the military offender and cause great damage to the public image of the armed forces” (p. 106, Hillman, 2009).

Stated simply, the same conditioning that develops a young person into the greatest fighter in the world is also the conditioning that contributes to a culture of silence, suffering, and for some, sexual exploitation. For young people to begin military training at a time when they are leaving home for the first time and developing an adult identity, this training can impact their prolonged sense of self-esteem and identity. For those who acculturate well, they leave the military with pride and integrity. For those who could not acculturate or were victimized as a part of the acculturation of others, they leave the military with a distorted view of themselves, their identity, and the world they live in.
2.6 How Military Law Shapes Military Culture

I was raped, they said, ‘It’s her fault. Let’s get rid of her.’ So, I was raped on January 1st, and 30 days later I was officially out of the Army.

(p. 40, Fayazrad, 2013)

Culture is not only a group, it is also demonstrated in its norms and values. These are commonly found in groups laws, as these shows what the group expects, or will not tolerate, from its members. As we will see, how these laws are also enforced (or not enforced) also demonstrates the group’s cultural priorities. The military has a separate set of laws called the Uniform Code of Justice (UCMJ) which covers all aspects of military life, including how crimes are punished. How the military deals with crimes informs us on how military culture views the seriousness of such behavior.

Under the UCMJ, sexual assault is prohibited and specific reporting protocols are established (cite). Unfortunately, there is a staggering gap between the number of reports of sexual assault and the very small number of investigations or court-martials (court cases) in the military. For example, in 2012, only 302 sexual assault cases saw a courtroom, where over 26,000 were reported (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011). Further, 50% of female victims interviewed stated they did not report the crime because they believed that nothing would be done with the report (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012). Further, Marine Corps General James F. Amos stated in 2014 that victims don’t come forward because, “they don’t trust their chain of command” (Fuentes, 2012). Thus, the current statistics indicate that victims do not trust how the military laws are enforced, meaning the culture devalues the stories and experiences of these victims.

Another aspect of military law that creates a culture hostile to victims of sexual violence is the “court-martial” (process or the procedure used to find guilt or innocence in an accused service member). Like civilian court, the accused must be proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. And, like civilian courts, few accused rapists are convicted of the crime of sexual assault. Consequently, when a victim has the courage to report an assault, there is lack of commitment within military culture to take it seriously and/or follow up with a proper investigation and hold assailants responsible for their acts of violence.

For instance, Montgomery (2014) reports how a victim in the Air Force was told to “work it out” with her assailant by the commanding officer who did not file an official report of rape. Nine years later, the victim decided to report her assault again, and the case went to trial with a conviction of rape. A 2011 Newsweek article showcases Michael Harding’s assault 20 years ago at age 17. He reports being repeatedly raped by his drill sergeant at basic training. When he tried to report his assault, he states he was ignored. “When he reported the attack to unit commanders, he says they told him, ‘It must have been your fault. You must have provoked them.’” The conclusion of the Newsweek report acknowledged the arrest of the drill sergeant that raped Michael for sexually assaulting multiple underage cadets at a junior ROTC program (Newsweek, 4/11/11).

Another aspect of military law that creates a rape culture is the reporting procedures for crimes, which sometimes provides commanding officers with tremendous power.
over whether a crime is investigated or prosecuted. For example, a commanding officer may make a determination to pursue an Article 32 hearing if a victim reports a crime. That is, if the commanding officer to whom the victim reports the assault to does not believe him/her or finds that the accusation will interfere with the overall mission of the team, he or she can choose to ignore the complaint. Unless the victim continues to advocate for himself/herself through other personnel channels, most sexual abuse reports end here. If an article 32 hearing takes place, the revictimization of the rape victim begins. Thompson (2013) wrote a *Time Magazine* editorial about the latest military rape scandals and described an Article 32 hearing as where a thorough and impartial investigation into a charge is decided if it should lead into a court-martial. Thompson (2013) describes a case where a woman was drugged and sexually assaulted by three fellow navy midshipmen. During the hearing, the defense lawyers attacked her with graphic, repetitive questions, the accuser sometimes gripped her meditation beads, a gift from her sexual-assault counselor. The lawyers wanted to know if she wore underwear to the party, how wide she opens her mouth during oral sex and if she “grinds” when dancing. They asked her if she “felt like a ho” the morning after (although Commander Robert Monahan Jr., the hearing officer, drew the line when a defendant’s lawyer asked if she carried condoms in her purse). “This is harassment,” Susan Burke, her civilian attorney, told military prosecutors during a break. “It has to stop!” (p. 1)

Many soldiers do not report assaults because they believe that no one will believe them—or that the commanding officer to whom they would report the assault already has knowledge of the abuse and has done nothing. Furthermore, there appears to be no formal training for how commanding officers can go about investigating a rape case. Often, “guilt” is decided by the higher-ranking official, who has the power to disregard the charges and never officially record it. For instance, the Associated Press reported in May 2011 that victims and Congressional leaders were complaining that “the military too quickly destroys records from the hundreds of rapes and sexual assaults reported confidentially each year” (p. 1).

Mulrine (2011) reported on a lawsuit filed against the Department of Defense, stating the DOD creates a military culture that fails to protect victims. Specifically, the lawsuit identified Robert Gates and Donald Rumsfeld as running institutions in which “perpetrators are promoted and where military personnel openly mocked and flouted the modest congressionally mandated institutional reforms” (p. 3).

In 2014, Senator Gillibrand (D-NY) led the way for reform in military reporting procedures. Among many suggestions, she advocated for taking the reporting duty out of the hands of the chain of command and into the hands of legal authorities within the military. The issue continues to be debated among members of Congress, with no definitive change in the military rape investigation practices at the time of this writing.

### 2.7 The Consequence of a Military Rape Subculture

And there was just a lack of, a breakdown of trust, in that. You know. You hear it from the other ladies. The other ladies talking. I don’t know what happened to them but I know they had their own set of problems. You know, you are in a male dominated field what do you
expect? Not to have the jokes being made and all of that? So then you just get sensitized and say to yourself, okay, I am in a male dominated field you know, I’m in nuclear weapons, me and my roommate were the only other females and there were twelve other females at that time on the post around you know, all these men, so then you start to think, okay, maybe I’m supposed to have a little bit of this because I am just a, we are such a small group compared to everybody else and yes, I set out, I didn’t set out to be a nurse where I was going to be surrounded by other women, you know, I picked a field—I didn’t know it was going to be so small, just me and my roommate, but I picked a field that okay well, maybe it’s, maybe it’s partly me. (Zaleski & Katz, 2014)

Sexual assault is prominent in all aspects of military life, from training academies, athletic schools, and even deployment. Sidoli (2005) reported on a poll administered at military academies, noting that 1,906 women were surveyed, and 302 incidents of sexual assault have occurred since they enrolled in the last few months. In the same survey “50% of female respondents and 11% of male respondents indicated experiencing some type of sexual harassment since entering the schools” (p. 14). Fifty-five of the men polled said they had experienced incidents of sexual assault since they entered the school.

The recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan showcase the prominence of sexual victimization among US soldiers from the beginning of the conflict. The Miles Foundation, a victims’ advocacy group based in Connecticut, testified to a Senate Committee early in the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) conflict that it had received reports of 68 cases of sexual assault in the first 18 months of fighting (Jeffreys, 2007). Women who deployed to a combat zone were significantly more likely to report sexual harassment and sexual assault than those who did not deploy (LeardMann et al., 2013).

In a revealing biography of MST and deployment by the New York Times Magazine, Corbett (2007) narrates experiences of women who were victims of MST during military service. Despite life-threatening heat that requires proper hydration, the women interviewed said they stopped drinking water to prevent the need to use the latrine after dark out of fear of being raped. “It’s no wonder some women in uniform try not to drink too much…the most dangerous place on base is often the secluded path to the latrines, where many assaults take place” (Carlson, 2013). In Kuwait, it has been reported that women carry loaded pistols to the latrines with them at night even though it is forbidden to have a loaded weapon (Jeffreys, 2007). Recently, command officers have started cracking down on the latrine rape problem by having escorts to the restrooms at night and some bases instituting “booty duty” around women’s dormitories and bathrooms to prevent the sexual predation. In some deployment stations, women are not allowed to leave their barracks at night unless they have a male escort with them (Jeffreys, 2007). Sadler et al. (2003) report that 25% of their sample (n=127) reported being armed and “ready for self-defense” when walking around base for fear of rape, violence, or sexual harassment (p. 266). In the same Sadler (2003) report, 1/3 of their sample (n=177) moved off base to prevent further sexual harassment and to feel safer than they did on base.

Chronic fear of personal safety can take a toll on the service member’s bodies and mental health. Psychological problems are being diagnosed at a greater rate than ever before. Women are twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with depression.
and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Some say this is because women experience more “internalization” (such as depressive symptoms) and men experience more “externalization” (such as using substances to cope) as a result of trauma (p. 1031, Luxton, Skopp, & Maguen, 2010). Others point to the high stress that a female service member endures both on and off base. She cannot find safety, even among her military family. The lasting effect of being “on guard” is a stress response illness, such as PTSD, depression, and other anxiety disorders.

According to one study of over 200,000 deployed veterans to Iraq and Afghanistan, 30% of the women who screened positive for a PTSD diagnosis also reported being sexually assaulted; of those who had PTSD, women were more often diagnosed with depression, an eating disorder, or anxiety (Maguen et al., 2012).

Men in the military are being assaulted at an alarming rate as well as women (this will be discussed in greater detail in Chap. 5). Men in the military outnumber women by at least 5 to 1. Despite the seemingly smaller number of 1% reporting MST and PTSD (Maguen et al., 2012), male sexual assault is at an epidemic. Some researchers believe that men outnumber women in total incidents of sexual assault but experience more resistance with reporting. “The Pentagon estimates that thousands of men experience unwanted sexual contact each year, but only 380 reported an assault in 2012” (Brown, 2013). Men who reports sexual assault are often diagnosed with substance abuse and depression. The issue of male sexual trauma is discussed in greater detail in Chap. 5.

2.8 Summary

Much, then, has already been done to attempt to reduce the prevalence of military-on-military rape. The military criminal code governing sexual assault has been overhauled, the policies that set the tone for the investigation and prosecution of rape have been rewritten, and the cultural norms that encouraged sexual exploitation and the degradation of women have been undermined with training and education. These efforts have attracted government and popular support; studies of ‘military sexual trauma’ captured massive funding from the Veterans Administration… The Department of Defense now boasts a web page that directs survivors of sexual assault to resources and information. Yet this generation of change has seemed to make little progress toward reducing the harms of military-on-military sexual violence. Both the root problem (sexual violence) and its military corollaries (bad publicity, compromised operations, poor physical and mental health among veterans and service members) seem invulnerable to even the most ambitious legal reform. (Hillman, 2009)

This chapter has attempted to show how the US military culture perpetuates sexual violence and often fails to protect the victims of sexual abuse. Culture is a word that has its Latin meaning traced as “to cultivate.” When considering how the military may cultivate sexual violence, the answer is drawn from the indoctrination in training new soldiers, the strong bonds created in a military “family,” the emphasis on aggressive masculinity, and how the cultivation of laws within military culture protects assailants and further victimizes their prey. The distinction between explicit teachings of military culture and implicit life lessons is important. The military does not openly condone the sexual assault of its uniformed members and insists that the
culture of sexual trauma, or any intertroop violence, should not be condoned. However, the implicit training that most new recruits find to be true is an honor code of silence, often at the expense of themselves and their own sexual boundaries.

Though new awareness of the problem has begun to enter the psyche of the military leaders, it appears that the efforts are without substantial changes in the system. Though the number of sexual assaults is increasing with each new fiscal year, the military denies that the increase is a result of the soldier culture, but rather the success of their efforts to get victims to report assaults. Neither can be proven at this point in time, but it does leave unanswered questions about how the culture of the military grooms its men and women to view such a problem and even worse to accept it as part of the culture itself.

The observer of traditional combat culture draws a conservative conclusion: Keep women out of combat units so as not to undermine male bonding and, ultimately, national security. Other researchers of military socialization, however, offer more challenging prescriptions. Integrate women thoroughly into basic training and change the paradigm of military culture from masculinist aggressivity to strength with compassion. (p. 442, Hynes, 2004)

References


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