

# Prevalence of rape culture in the military



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## Thesis

This paper will be analyzing the prevalence of rape culture in the military as well as dissecting the reasoning behind its existence and will discuss measures that can be taken to prevent it.

## Rape in the Military

One of the contributing factors to sexual assault in the military is the massive difference in gender populations and age groups. “ Men are 49. 2 percent of the US population but comprise 85. 5 percent of those serving on active duty. Women, who have a slight majority in the larger US demographic (50. 8 percent), make up only 14. 5 percent of the DOD active duty force. Women serving as officers have increased since 2000 from 14. 4 percent to 15. 9 percent in 2011, but the number of enlisted women has fallen . 5 percent in the same period. The DOD is also overrepresented by young people. The population of the United States “ grew at a faster rate in the older ages than in the younger ages” from 2000 to 2010, but the number of young people entering military service relative to the general population grew disproportionately in the same time period. The military got younger from 2000 to 2010 as the US population got older, thereby exacerbating the demographic difference of the military service member from his or her civilian counterpart. As such, the US population of ages 18-24 years as of 2010 was 9. 9 percent, up 0. 4 percent from 2000. The average age of a military service member in 2011 was 28. 6 (34. 7 for officers and 27. 4 for enlisted). 15 Of this aggregate, members of the enlisted corps less than 25 years old made up almost half—49. 3 percent—of the entire force. For the

sake of comparison, the number of officers the same age comprised only 13.3 percent of the officer corps. However, even 26–30-year-olds made up only an additional 22.5 percent of military active duty officers. In fact, the largest number of active duty officers are 41 or older, totaling 25.1 percent of the officer force (Lee, 2016).”

The military brings many people from many different cultural backgrounds together. It encourages them to become tight knit groups equitable to a sports teams or fraternities or any group of people that are encouraged to work together to increase synergy. In the process of becoming close knit, cultural knowledge is advertently and inadvertently passed on from one person to the next. They are encouraged to be accepting of the people around them because these are the people who will protect or ignore them in life threatening situations. A good chunk of people possess what are sociologically considered good morals and a large chunk have flawed ideology as to what is considered good. “ Fifteen percent of the people will always do the right thing. Fifteen percent will do the wrong thing. We were fighting for the 70 percent in the middle (Lee, 2016).”

Masculine culture based on stereotypes is one where men feel superior, dominate, assertive and competitive. The woman’s role in this dynamic is to be nurturing and submissive. “ In the military, soldiers are often lauded for displaying stereotypically “ masculine” characteristics, such as aggression and strength, because society associates war with male-ness and violence. Equating violent behavior with what it means to be a “ man” has led to the popularization of the “ macho man” within the military: a set of personality characteristics that have been found to positively correlate with the display

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of aggressive sexual behavior. Additionally, the military encourages soldiers to display conventionally “masculine” characteristics such as dominance, assertiveness, independence, and willingness to take risks. Conversely, the military has historically discouraged “feminine” qualities, such as compassion and compromise (Cernak, 2014).” We are all shaped by cultural beliefs it is unavoidable and can be a great thing but can also be detrimental if the wrong ideologies are passed on. “ ‘ A major part of who “we” are has to do with the emotive connections made with whom we identify. “We” comes from identifying primary groups, a common sociological phrase that describes a phenomenon in which the central emotive driver to the individual is the identity of the group itself (Lee, 2016).’ ”

When a person joins the military, they are essentially leaving behind what they know to be normal. In many cases it is an entirely male training unit. They are taken away from their cultural norms and forced into a new one which can be mentally jarring. Basic training is meant to build a person up and equip them what they need to survive in a combat situation, but that also means they tear them down first. This environment consists of primarily young men with different backgrounds both good and bad but are expected to call each other brothers in arms. This causes an issue because these men are easily influenced and will follow whoever is leading, that is what they are taught. Drill sergeants will often tell them that whoever is waiting for them at home is cheating and to expect a letter with this sentiment or a dear John letter. This is just tough love to the Sergeant but can have psychologically damaging effects to the trainee. The military has changed with the addition of female soldiers and I think this train of thought is no longer being

hammered into basic trainees. It was driven into us in order to prepare us for the worst, but I feel it did more harm in terms of the mindset soldiers have towards women. It formed this group of men who were angry with the women in their lives. Then offer them no release for these internal confictions, then throw alcohol into the mix and a female and you have a really toxic environment. It is especially bad when lower level enlisted see their leadership participating in sexual assault. " Most sailor and marine victims of sexual assault are assaulted by another person in uniform usually someone they know. Alleged offenders usually have similar enlisted rank or 1-2 grades senior. Most assaults begin in social settings, both on and off base, and both in CONUS and OCONUS. Alcohol is a pervasive co-factor. In some cases, offenders use alcohol as a weapon to incapacitate potential victims. Experts tell us many offenders are skilled predators who carefully select the most vulnerable targets--often those least likely to be believed if they report it. They know what they are doing and have gotten away with it before (Department of Navy, 2013)."

Due to the difficulty of investigating sexual assault cases a lot of them go unpunished, it is estimated that 60% never even get reported which means there is little to no deterrence. " Sexual assault cases are difficult to investigate. Close coordination with law enforcement and legal is essential for successful prosecution. In many cases, the key challenge is to provide evidence supporting the victim's non-consent to and undisputed sexual contact (Department of Navy, 2013)." Another reason these cases go largely unpunished is because it is often times left to the commanding officer and when you have numerous individuals that have taken part in a sexual assault

it is difficult to place blame or to condemn an entire squad of men. I am aware of two individuals whom were victims of gang rapes in the military. One was a male member back in the Vietnam War and one was a female in Korea in both cases lower ranking squad leaders were involved. It looks bad for the unit as a whole and replacing every soldier in a squad is not a realistic goal especially during war time scenarios. " In 2013, a total of 2, 870 men and women filed reports of service member on service member incidents of sexual assault or rape in the U. S. military. These reports represent only approximately 10 percent of actual incidents of sexual violence that occur within the military. For the crimes that are reported, the decision whether to pursue a sexual assault accusation has historically been left largely to the discretion of a suspected perpetrator's commanding officer (Cernak, 2014)." The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office maintains and tracks year by year statistical data on intra military rape cases. " According to SAPRO, there were 2, 947 alleged assaults in 2006. This number reflects a 24% increase from the 2005 alleged assault rate of 2, 374; while notably, the 2005 rate reflects a 40% increase from the 2004 alleged assault rate of 1, 700. For sexual assaults occurring in the 2006 calendar year, action was taken against offenders in a mere 289 cases, and the majority of such action consisted of non-judicial punishment. Additionally, 143 cases were dismissed because the offender could not be identified. However, a non-identifiable offender was not the most frequent reason cited for dismissal. A staggering 566 cases were dismissed in 2006 and 641 cases were dismissed in 2005, because the claims were found to be unsubstantiated, not supported by sufficient evidence, recanted by the victim, or the alleged offender died (Cornett, 2007)."

Sexual assault is not isolated to the United States military either, this is a pervasive issue that spans militaries around the globe. “ First, approximately 23 countries currently allow women to serve as soldiers in their national militaries. As discussed infra, the presence of women in the military has been linked to a greater prevalence of gender discrimination in the armed forces and intra-military sexual assault (Cernak, 2014)” Statistical numbers for foreign militaries is sparse and difficult to get. However, these stories are not rare to come across nor is it hard to imagine the problems of toxic masculinity being issues for other countries where there is likely even less accountability than in the US military.

To combat the issue of sexual assault in the military we need to combat the culture in the military. This cultural change must begin with leadership. In order for change to take place you must first challenge the norms, first you must present a problem then using evidence demonstrate the positives that can come from the change. “ Some young service members will thrive on the newfound structure and meritocracy, while others will find the challenges to their ego a source of profound resentment. This will be especially true when individuals begin with “ inflated or unrealistically positive self-appraisals” (Bennett, 2018).” Learning anxiety will be a constant obstacle and can cause fear amongst the leadership, fear that they will somehow lose power or respect over their subordinates especially if that change is vastly unwelcomed and has no seemingly beneficial results for the subordinates. “ The role of the individual in organizations depends on the power of influence the person has over the organization, whether he or she is a leader or a follower. “ Deindividuation” is a phenomenon in which an individual subverts

his or her identity to the group's (Lee, 2016)." While I consider the cultural change to be the most important step to combating sexual assault, it would also help if we encouraged bystander intervention, even going as far as rewarding the bystander. A lot of sexual assault would be prevented if someone would simply go get help or demand that the illicit activity stops. Realistically getting help would be the best course of action as harm may fall on the individual trying to single handedly prevent it. It would also be helpful if there was a legitimate outlet for these men such as legalized and well-regulated prostitution. The act of mating is evolutionarily built in you can watch a nature documentary to see this. Humans are not much different than animals when it comes to hormones and instincts. Some humans lack the social skill or phenotype to win over a mate but if given the option to use money they would still find the same release helping to curb this animalistic instinct. Finally, I feel harsher punishments need to be doled out maybe even lower the standards of evidence required to prosecute someone. Men should be afraid of the consequences and right now we see the opposite, sexual assault hardly ever gets reported and when it does its either dismissed for lack of evidence is found and nothing is done about it. It seems rare that an actual prosecution comes of it. We also need to make it easier for victims to come forward, offer more protections even an immediate reassignment to get them out of the toxic environment.

In conclusion the Military has one of the worse rape cultures in existence it is regularly trivialized and kept "in house". The military cares about its public perception so a lot of what happens is not known by the public. One of the largest contributing factors to this is the leaderships lack of accountability in



preventing and dealing with offenders. They arguably even contribute to the problem, especially noncommissioned leaders who require no formal education and are simply your promoted average soldier as opposed to commissioned officers. They require a certain level of intelligence and education and are typically kept separated from noncommissioned outside of duty hours. Noncommissioned officers are apprehensive to escalate the issues or send them up the chain of command so they can be dealt with properly. A change in masculine culture is necessary to change the rape culture within. Educating members and encouraging or even rewarding bystander intervention is crucial in combating sexual assault in the military.

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