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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE CULTURE WITHIN THE U.S.  
MILITARY THAT CONTRIBUTES TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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By  
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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Creighton University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in  
Interdisciplinary Leadership

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## Abstract

Sexual violence within the U.S. military has seen a rise in the number of reported cases since first being tracked 17 years ago by the Department of Defense. There is no clear understanding of why this problem persists and why it affects women more than men. Existing research consists primarily of quantitative studies of large populations with little to no studies on those directly impacted by military sexual violence. A qualitative, phenomenological study can lead to a greater depth of understanding of this problem. The purpose of this study was to explore the culture within the U.S. military as a woman veteran who had experienced sexual violence while serving in the U.S. military. This dissertation in practice aimed to describe the experiences women veterans had with sexual violence while serving on active duty to create a comprehensive sexual violence strategy that seeks to eliminate sexual violence from within the military. The literature review paints a complete picture of the impact of military culture, social patterns, working behaviors, and repercussions of sexual violence faced by servicewomen. The results and findings corroborated the literature review and also revealed positive aspects of military service the participants cherished. The proposed solution to address the prevalence of sexual violence within the military is a cultural reformation that takes these five actions: (1) take an honest look at the military and at oneself within the military, (2) be transparent and show equal respect for all people, (3) increase the number of women in the military to equal numbers, (4) reform military training, services, and the military judiciary system, and (5) reduce the power of hierarchies.

*Keywords:* Military sexual violence, military culture, cultural reform, women veterans, sexual assault, sexual harassment

## Dedication

This journey of mental, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth would not have been possible without the loving support of my family, especially my two children, Taylan and Skylar, who supported mom during countless nights studying, reading, and writing. My mother, Maria, was my rock through it all, and I could not have done it without her. I love my home-tribe trio with all my heart!

To my military family, you make this journey worthwhile. I think of you each day and how I can help make military service better for you. Our military women need a tremendous amount of understanding and support as they navigate an imperfect military culture. Military service is excellent, but it can be better. I did all of this work from deep love and commitment to the betterment of our military.

To my Creighton classmates and professors, I am a better version of myself thanks to the lessons you have taught me, both inside and outside the classroom. If I could rewind the clock, I would choose Creighton all over again.

Last, but most certainly not least, to the brave nine women who trusted me with their personal stories to make this dissertation possible. I honor you today and always. It has been an incredible journey because of you!

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 2004, United States (U.S.) military servicemembers reported 1,275 sexual assault cases; that number climbed to 6,053 in 2018 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a). Sexual assault within the U.S. military continues to increase each year with no clear understanding of why (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a). Sexual assault in the military happens to both men and women, but men-on-women perpetration represents the overwhelming majority of cases. An estimated 13,000 military women versus 7,500 military men have experienced unwanted sexual contact (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a). Sexual assault is not a new problem for women in the military. Women were experiencing sexual assault by military members since before the integration of women into the Armed Forces in 1948 (Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948). Standardized statistical tracking of sexual assault cases did not begin until the founding of the Department of Defense (DoD) Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) in 2004, which is responsible for executing policies that aim to eliminate sexual assault in the military (SAPR, 2020a). From 2004 to 2018, there has been an overall upward trend in the number of reported cases of sexual assault (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a).

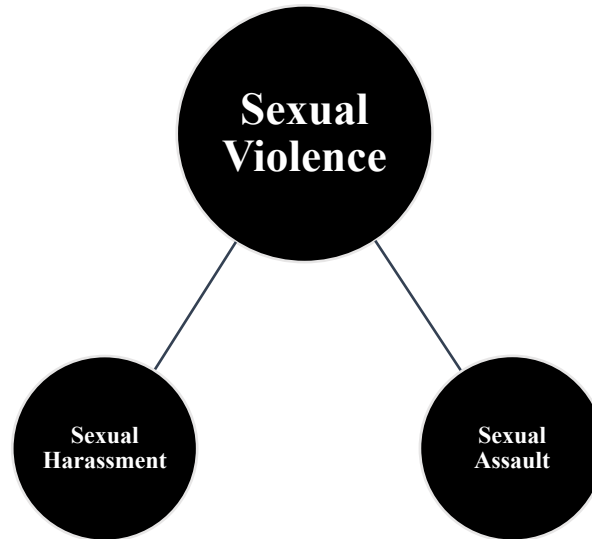
Numbers only tell us the story of sexual assault from a distance. There is much more to the story when one looks closer. Each person that was sexually assaulted experienced trauma, which means sexual assault impacts military fitness and readiness. The numbers clearly show sexual assault is a big problem; looking closer at the people the problem affects will help demonstrate the impact this persistent problem has within the military.

Existing research consists primarily of quantitative studies of large populations with little to no studies on the individuals directly impacted by military sexual assault. A qualitative, phenomenological study can lead to a greater depth of understanding of the military culture that makes sexual assault possible, as told by women veteran survivors (van Manen, 1990). This dissertation in practice (DIP) has helped fill in the gaps of our collective understanding of sexual assault in the military so that appropriate improvements and changes can be made to address this problem better.

This chapter described the reasons for embarking on this journey into the lives of women veterans who have suffered from sexual assault. The elements covered in this chapter are the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research question, the aim of the study, definition of relevant terms, methodology overview, and reflections of the scholar-practitioner.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Sexual assault is defined as intentional sexual contact that is unwelcome and involves the use of force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and offensive sexual comments or gestures that impact the workplace (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). For the purposes of this DIP, the term “sexual violence” was used to describe both sexual harassment and sexual assault. Figure 1 below is a visual representation of the definition of sexual violence.

**Figure 1***The Definition of Sexual Violence*

*Note.* This illustration depicts the definition of sexual violence. Both sexual harassment and sexual assault represent forms of sexual violence.

Sexual violence within the military has seen a rise in reported cases since first being tracked 17 years ago (SAPR, 2020b). Sexual violence undermines mission readiness due to the harmful effects on the physical and mental health of the victims, which are overwhelmingly women (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a; 2019c). Such impairments in mission readiness impact the successful execution of military missions while simultaneously creating a working environment that is oppressive and discriminatory for women military members.

Over the same 17-year period as the increasing number of sexual assaults have been reported, the DoD SAPRO was tasked with eliminating sexual assault in the military (SAPR, 2020a). Each military branch executes their sexual violence training per DoD

policy on sexual harassment and sexual assault (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017a; 2017b; 2018). Each branch separates sexual harassment and sexual assault training except the U.S. Army, which combined the two into a *Sexual Harassment/Assault Prevention and Response Program (SHARP)*. Studies have shown that sexual harassment often precludes sexual assault, which is the reasoning behind the Army's decision to combine the two programs into a more comprehensive training program (U.S. Army, 2020). SHARP is a step in the right direction by taking a holistic view of the sexual violence epidemic.

Gidycz et al. (2018) and Holland et al. (2014) conducted studies to show that an interactive, comprehensive training program that addresses all the factors involved in sexual violence will yield a more effective training program. These factors include the Continuum of Harm (shows sexual harassment and sexual assault as interrelated), in-depth sexual harassment and sexual assault training, alcohol and drugs, and an under-reliance on click-through computer-based training (Gidycz et al., 2018; Holland et al., 2014). The missing link in restructuring the current military sexual violence training curriculum is greater insight into the military culture that leads to sexual violence. These would include topics/conversations around gender discrimination, military culture, history, and leadership involvement. Studies and reports show that sexual violence is overwhelmingly targeted to women (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a; 2019c). Hence, learning from the firsthand accounts of women veterans who experienced sexual violence will add to the body of research into these topics and help provide solutions to this growing epidemic.

The reasons the SAPRO and other scholars attribute to not achieving, indeed not even moving in the right direction, with reaching their goal of eliminating sexual assault vary. For example, Klein and Gallus (2018) believe the higher number of sexual assault reports is due to victims' confidence in the military justice system. While Groves (2013) believe there may be a greater incidence rate of sexual assault occurring over time. Groves notes the challenges in accurately measuring the prevalence of sexual assault because there are no standard metrics used within or across industries when reporting it. Similar to other social science indicators without common standardized metrics, like disability indices, high school completion rates, and the construction of race and ethnicity categories, the measure of sexual violence contains some uncertainty. However, given that the goal is to eliminate all sexual violence, any amount of reported sexual violence (no matter how it is measured) is a strong indicator that finding more, and better solutions are needed (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a; 2019c).

Leaders are charged with the care and safety of their soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and members of the Coast Guard. They must take up the mantle to provide actionable solutions to problems, including facing the ugly truth of the misogyny and patriarchal nature of the military that affirms gender discrimination and sexual violence among its ranks. If the military is to continue being a fighting force for good, then the leadership must change the culture that permits sexual violence.

What remains unknown about sexual violence in the military are the rich, in-depth perspectives of the victims. In this DIP, the victims provided descriptions of their experiences and the critical aspects of the environment they observed that provided the conditions that allowed sexual violence to continue in the military. With a clearer

understanding of the experiences of individuals with the first-person experience of this problem, solutions were developed that targeted the root causes of sexual violence within the military.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the culture within the U.S. military as a woman veteran who had experienced sexual violence while serving in the U.S. military.

### **Research Question**

What does it mean to experience the U.S. military culture before, during, and after a sexual violence event as a woman veteran who had experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service?

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this DIP was to describe the experiences women veterans had with sexual violence while serving on active duty. Once the experiences were better understood, the stories of these women were used to create ideas for change. From the examples provided by the women who participated in this study, a set of recommendations for the secretary of defense (SECDEF), director of SAPRO, and senior military leaders were developed to help them recognize what is happening when their military women encounter sexual violence. It is often when we hear the stories of others and see examples of the experiences of others, we can relate more closely with others and decide to work together to make progress. Everyone can benefit from learning about women's experiences and might find ways to be more aware of and anticipate challenges women face while serving in the military.

Recommendations were developed from the results of this DIP that can provide a deeper understanding of the experience of the military culture from the perspectives of women veterans who experienced sexual violence while serving in the military. The recommendations developed from the results of this study can be shared with the SECDEF, director of SAPRO, and senior military leaders to demonstrate how the military culture is used both for and against efforts to eliminate sexual violence in the U.S. military. A secondary aim was to drive change within the military in the form of changes in policy and a comprehensive sexual violence strategy that takes the goal to eliminate sexual violence within the military seriously.

### **Definition of Relevant Terms**

The following terms were used operationally within this study.

*Active duty*: “means full-time duty in the active military service of the United States” (10 U.S.C. §§101). It is also stated as the “regular” component of the military (10 U.S.C. §§101).

*Servicemember/servicewomen/servicemen*: “A regular or reserve component officer (commissioned or warrant) or enlisted member of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard (when it is operating as a service in the Navy) on active duty” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 22).

*Sexual assault*: “Intentional sexual contact characterized by the use of force, threats, intimidation, abuse of authority, or when the victim does not or cannot consent” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017a, p. 20). Examples of sexual assault include “rape, aggravated sexual contact, abusive sexual contact, forcible sodomy (forced oral or anal sex), or attempts to commit these acts” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017a, p. 20).

*Sexual harassment*: “Conduct that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and deliberate or repeated offensive comments or gestures of a sexual nature that impacts the workplace” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 9). It comes in two forms: “quid pro quo” (this for that) and “hostile work environment” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018).

*Sexual violence*: A collective term to describe sexual assault and sexual harassment. The Department of Defense recognizes sexual assault and sexual harassment as two distinct but related offenses. In this DIP, the term “sexual violence” will refer to both sexual assault and sexual harassment.

*Veteran*: “A person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable” (38 U.S.C. §§101).

### **Methodology Overview**

The chosen research approach to address this complex, real-world problem was a qualitative, phenomenological research method. A qualitative study was an appropriate choice to heighten awareness of this problem, open new lines of thinking, and serve as a mechanism through which a specific group of people, with specific life experiences, could have a voice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, a phenomenological study provided an opportunity to reach a deeper level of understanding that other qualitative methods might not achieve. Specifically, this study focused on the phenomenon of experiencing the military culture before, during, and after having experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service. A phenomenological design was ideal for answering the research question because it allowed women veterans to share their

individual experiences about the military culture. Based on guidance from van Manen (1990), in the process of analyzing the individual's experiences, I looked for a collective essence or meaning of the studied phenomenon.

The population of interest for this study were women veterans who experienced sexual violence within the past 10 years while serving on active-duty military service. The recency of these participants' military service placed the sexual violence experience closer to present times to demonstrate that they would be speaking about the recent military culture that still created an environment for sexual violence to take place. I aimed to recruit between 10 to 20 women veterans from across the U.S. to participate in this study. I anticipated this sample size to be appropriate for a phenomenological study to attempt to reach saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, I achieved saturation with six participants but recruited three more to have a good demographic mix. I recruited the women veterans using non-probability, purposive sampling via women veteran social media groups on Facebook and LinkedIn. There were many active women veterans in these groups, especially ones with recent military service.

Before data collection, I first obtained IRB approval for this study through Creighton IRB. During participant recruitment, I asked potential participants to complete a brief screening questionnaire to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. I invited participants who met the inclusion criteria to complete one, one-on-one semi-structured interview. A live transcriptionist transcribed the interviews. I employed hand-coding procedures to analyze the interview data. Descriptive and in vivo coding was used to thematically analyze the data to draw out the meaning and essence of the participants' experiences (Babbie, 2017; Saldaña, 2009).

To arrive at a robust level of data validity, I conducted member checks and used thick, rich descriptions of quotes directly from the participants. I protected the participants' identities by listing no identifying information in the study. They were assigned participant numbers and were addressed by those throughout the study and on all research documents. I provided each participant the informed consent letter that addressed confidentiality, information safeguards, information sharing, and how I maintained their identities confidential. Safeguards to protect participant data included storing data on the Creighton University encrypted and password-protected cloud drive to which only I had access. The Zoom Pro interview recording was stored on Zoom's encrypted servers. All data obtained, including interview audio, video, and transcriptions, were collected and handled solely by me and the transcriptionist.

### **Delimitations**

The focus was on women veterans for this DIP since they were more easily accessible than active-duty military members, who typically required DoD approval for researchers to recruit (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020). Furthermore, veterans were not at risk for career reprisal since they were no longer serving in the military and tended to speak their minds more freely, as a result. Also, women veterans who served within the past 10 years and reported an experience of sexual violence during their time as active-duty military members were included. Women veterans who may have experienced sexual violence but did not report it during their time as active-duty members or who served more than 10 years ago were not included in the study. There was no inquiry regarding specific incidents of sexual violence, but rather a focus on the cultural artifacts observed before, during, and after sexual violence events was the focus of this study.

### **Limitations**

The phenomenological research design presents challenges with replication since it is specific to the lived experiences of unique participants. As such, it is not appropriate to generalize or transfer the findings of a phenomenological study to other cases (Gibbs, 2007). Causality cannot be determined in this design because variables are not being manipulated or measured. There was also the possibility that participants would use differing terminology for the same word or phrase. For example, the term *RegNav* refers to *regular Navy*, which also means active-duty military service. I made no assumptions as to the participants' meaning with these terminologies. For the sake of clarity, I asked the participants what they meant.

The global COVID-19 pandemic placed limitations on in-person interviews. As such, I conducted all participant interviews via a web-based video platform. In addition, women veterans who volunteered to participate in the study comprised the sample group. Therefore, women veterans who were not interested in volunteering but may still have experienced sexual violence were not represented.

### **Personal Biases**

As a woman serving on active-duty military service, my DIP topic resonates with me on a deep level. The inspiration for this study arose during my time in the military having witnessed and been the sounding board for many women who have experienced sexual violence. These stories were shared in confidence among friends and co-workers and as my role as a supervisor. As such, these stories remained private and were not shared in any manner in this study.

I have witnessed the measures taken to address the sexual violence epidemic in policy creation, policy changes, training, and annual surveys of the military population. These methods seek to eradicate or reduce the occurrences of sexual violence, but none of these methods truly helps us understand the culture behind sexual violence. Nearly two decades of data have shown an overall increase in sexual violence, with no clear understanding of why. My bias stems from witnessing firsthand the lack of focus on the underlying causes of sexual violence. I did not know precisely what those cultural artifacts were, but my research revealed them so that SECDEF, the director of SAPRO, and senior military leaders can now become aware of the potential causes and work to find the best solutions.

Honest research and reporting are vital in limiting bias. Creswell and Creswell (2018) discussed procedures for reporting data that included permission needed to reprint work, using composite stories that did not harm participants, and using unbiased language in writing. My research did the talking and not my own internal biases. I owed it to those brave women who shared their stories and those who were willing to learn from this research study to deliver them honest and unbiased research.

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed bracketing as a means to mitigate bias. Bracketing means not letting past knowledge or experiences be engaged within the study and serving as a non-participant in the study. For example, during the interviews, I did not discuss my personal experiences, neither agreed nor disagreed with the participants nor steered the participants' stories. I mitigated bias by assuming the role of an active listener. Of course, one cannot forget their experiences, but bracketing in a study limits the researcher's bias and allows the participants' voices to resound. Bracketing continued

in other portions of the research to include the data analysis, data interpretation, and writing of the DIP document.

### **Reflections of the Scholar-Practitioner**

Anticipatory reflection has been a part of my life since before embarking on my DIP journey. I look forward to ways I can improve military service for women in any way that I can. Enrolling in a doctoral program that provided me the opportunity to hone my research skills, grow into a better person, and be the leader the military needs me to be, was one way I could help military women for years to come. I know I can be the advocate and voice of military women. I can do that by bettering myself first. In other words, bettering the world starts with improving oneself. The Mahatma Gandhi quote about changing oneself to change the world inspired me to look within myself. With its rich Ignatian tradition, my Creighton journey has bettered me to become that leader and advocate for military women, to be that agent of change and woman for others. In addition, keeping *magis* at the forefront by striving to do more for others is paramount (Creighton, n.d.). It means that my advocacy does not end with my DIP, for it is only the beginning of more to come.

As I reflect on the sexual violence plaguing the U.S. military, it fills me with great pride that I did something meaningful towards solving that problem. My DIP and the continued work after my degree is complete will help add to the body of knowledge about this epidemic in a meaningful and impactful manner by presenting an untold perspective on military sexual violence. There are limited qualitative studies on military sexual violence. The voices of the victims were loud and clear in my research. It was an

honor to interview women veterans and share their experiences and perceptions with military sexual violence. There is much to be learned from this population.

My Creighton journey has been a wondrous journey of knowledge and self-betterment. There is no doubt that I am filled with more knowledge and self-betterment from my DIP journey. I am very excited and blessed to have embarked on this journey, mainly because it has helped and benefited others. *Ad majorem dei gloriam* (Creighton University, n.d.)!

### **Summary**

Sexual violence within the U.S. military is a growing epidemic that merits a closer look to uncover the reasons behind this epidemic. A qualitative, phenomenological study provided a richness of depth into this problem that quantitative analysis might not. In addition, the voices of the victims—often subdued in quantitative studies—were best heard within qualitative research. There are limitations in qualitative research in replicability and that its results may not be transferable to the population at large, particularly with the delimiting factor of women veterans as the sample population. However, much can be learned from this study, and subsequent follow-on studies may be done to add to the body of knowledge on military sexual violence.

The next chapter is the review of literature that covered what was known about military sexual violence.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organized into six main themes synthesized from the current literature. Those six themes are (1) military history and culture; (2) gender discrimination; (3) femininity, masculinity, and a climate for sexual violence; (4) leadership and a climate for sexual violence; (5) sexual violence in the military; and (6) eliminating sexual violence in the military. These themes shed light on the culture and history of the military, the levels of sexual violence that existed within the U.S. military, and the impact sexual violence has had on military fitness and readiness.

### **Military History and Culture**

The U.S. military is an all-volunteer force primarily responsible for protecting and defending the United States and its interests. However, the military does so much more than just defending the homeland (What does the military do, 2020). The military is our country's largest group of ambassadors locally and abroad. Military members are taught that they represent their country each time they are in uniform. To misrepresent the United States would be a violation of its most sacred ethical principles and values.

The military conducts humanitarian assistance and disaster relief locally and abroad. Examples of this include hurricane relief assistance on our country's southern shores as well as with our fellow Caribbean neighbors. The military provides medical and food assistance to needy populations, and rescue operations, particularly to stranded vessels at sea. The military also provides security at the many U.S. embassies around the world and law enforcement. Lastly, the military maintains open lanes of commerce in the sea by combating piracy and preventing illegal drugs from entering our borders (What does the military do, 2020). Each military branch has a unique role to play in each of

these responsibilities. The Navy and Marine Corps operate mostly in and from the ocean, but they also operate on land, air, and space. The Air Force operates mainly in the air and space. The Army is primarily land-based. The Coast Guard operates primarily out of our country's waters, ensuring local maritime safety and security. The newest branch of the Armed Forces is the Space Force, which operates mainly in space.

Each military branch has core values that guide not just how each operates but also how each of their servicemembers live their lives (Halvorson, 2010). The Army values are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The Navy and Marine Corps values are honor, courage, and commitment. The Air Force values are integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. The Coast Guard values are honor, respect, and devotion to duty.

New military recruits receive initial training to become immersed in military culture and lifestyle. Recruits learn about the history and values of their respective branch of service, military customs and courtesies, military bearing, proper wearing of their uniform, how to follow orders and obey the chain of command, and other service-specific requirements like weapons training and warrior skills (Halvorson, 2010). Another critical aspect of the military is order and discipline. Servicemembers are expected to conduct themselves with emotional control and discipline at all times. In addition, focusing on mission priorities is crucial, primarily when operating under duress and for long periods. One unique aspect of military culture is the bond that servicemembers share with their comrades. This is learned early on in a servicemember's training and lasts throughout their careers and life.

The military is a hierarchal organization, which means concentrated power and control at the highest echelons of the organization (Halvorson, 2010). This hierarchal structure is called the “chain of command.” The military chain of command is about leadership and responsibility, where those who advance in rank are given greater leadership and responsibility. The military rank structure is comprised of officers, warrants, and enlisted personnel, in that exact order of seniority. This structure resembles a triangle, where the fewest and most senior personnel hold most of the power over the organization. Orders are issued from the top down, from senior personnel to junior personnel. Obedience and deference to the chain of command are expected of each military servicemember. Questioning superiors is generally frowned upon and viewed as insubordination.

The military serves a vitally important and crucial mission that other entities cannot supplant. It has a rich history, traditions, and heritage that continue to the present day. There are many great aspects to military service as described, but some aspects of the military need to change to make it even greater than what it is. Those aspects are described next.

Since its founding in 1775, the U.S. military has, historically, limited women serving in the military (Timeline, 2017). Women were mostly relegated to auxiliary roles within medical care to servicemembers and administrative assignments. Over time, the military slowly lifted restrictions against which roles women could serve in. It was not until January 2016 that U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter required all military branches to lift all gender-based restrictions. It meant that women could serve in any military role or assignment without any limits, even Special Forces. Nevertheless, the

U.S. military has existed and still exists as a male-dominated organization, even after 246 years of existence (Holland et al., 2014).

In 2015, the U.S. Navy faced an embarrassing scandal known as the Fat Leonard Scandal. This scandal involved U.S. naval officers accepting bribes from a Malaysian national named Leonard “Fat Leonard” Francis in exchange for docking U.S. naval ships in docking facilities owned by him (Fleming, 2017). The perks in question included prostitutes and sex slaves. It was probably the most embarrassing scandal for the U.S. Navy other than the Tailhook Scandal of 1992, where 83 women were sexually assaulted and humiliated by their fellow Navy and Marine Corps comrades (Browne, 2007). Rape has historically been used as a tool of power. The military, being an institution that has traditionally accepted violence as a part of its modus operandi, creates an environment where violent behaviors, such as rape, can perpetuate (Castro et al., 2015).

### **Religion**

Religion plays a significant and vital role in military culture and history. The military chaplain corps has existed since 1775 and forms a critical support role to servicemembers. Chaplains are embedded with various units to provide religious and spiritual guidance to servicemembers and serve as trusted advisors and confidential counselors to those seeking counsel (Chaplain, 2020). As respectable and valuable as religion can be to servicemembers, not all aspects of religion engender fairness and equality.

To this day, religion is used to subjugate women. One can see this across several religious and spiritual belief systems. The Bible, Torah, and Quran are rife with

misogyny, sexist beliefs, and gender inequality. Below are some examples from each major religion:

1. Christianity – “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (1 Timothy 2:12, New International Version).
2. Islam – “Men are providers [qawammuna] over women with what God has favored one over the other...as to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, (first) admonish them, (second) refuse to share their beds, (last) beat them lightly...God is most high and great” (Qur’an 4:34).
3. Judaism – “If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives” (Deuteronomy 22:28-29).

These three religions account for more than half of the world’s population of believers (Hackett & McClendon, 2017). Hence, more than half of the world, including military personnel, is exposed to these beliefs about women. The Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2010) estimates that around 66% of the active-duty U.S. military population identifies with a form of Christianity. At the same time, the assumption is that there are additional Islamic and Jewish military members as well.

### **Women and the Military**

The history of warfare has shown that women have often been regarded as part of the spoils of war along with money, land, slaves, and other items acquired during conquests. Women were to be used as sexual rewards for a battle hard-won or to be raped and pillaged if they were on the losing side. It is a common cultural practice in parts of

the world to provide women to U.S. military personnel as a sign of friendship (Castro et al., 2015).

Women have largely been regarded as inferior to men and even as property and objects. It does not help that most advertising, marketing, news, movies, and other forms of media reinforce the idea that women are only as valuable as their looks. The objectification of women and the expectation that women are relegated to their beauty are all around us every day (ChallengingMedia, 2012; Newsom, 2011). It is only natural that these influencers carry over into military culture and make it more challenging for women to overcome these ingrained expectations.

Throughout the years, women have faced obstacles with traversing outside of their historical and traditional gender roles. Kaiser and Spalding (2015) offer insight into the transition of women into male-dominated domains:

The underrepresentation of women in male-dominated domains is caused by many factors, including institutional structures, bias from male leaders, sex-based harassment, penalties for motherhood, and socialization away from high-status occupations that continue to prevent a wide flow of women from attaining these high-status positions. (p. 599)

Historically, women have been relegated to the kitchen, bedroom, and separated from manly occupations. Women were not allowed to attend a school or do much outside of their place in the home. As Kaiser and Spalding (2015) stated, women face a motherhood penalty as having to historically be the primary caregivers to children. Less than 20% of the U.S. population believes that women with school-aged children should work full-

time, compared with 70% who think men should (Posner & Cohen, 2018). For the women with children desiring a career, the threat of sexual violence still looms.

Military laws and policies have evolved slowly to allow for more fairness and equality across the services. It took 240 years for women to be fully authorized to participate in all military aspects, but the reality is far from equal. The need for women to enter a predominately male-centric organization was because there were not enough men serving to meet the needs of the military (Kamarck, 2016). This began with the permanent integration of women into the military in 1948 and the conversion of the military to an all-volunteer force in 1973. From there, the barriers to full service in all military occupations for women were gradual until all restrictions were lifted in 2016 (Kamarck, 2016). Since then, there has been a gradual increase in the number of women serving in the military.

Women currently represent only 17.3% of the total military population. While this percentage is much higher than 10 years ago, women still have an uphill battle with achieving equal representation within the ranks (Wood & Toppelberg, 2017). With so few women in the military comes very few women leaders. In fact, as of January 2021, only 7.9% of all 889 flag officers (senior military leaders) across the military services were women (DMDC, 2021). Women have a long way to go before achieving 50% of the military force, let alone 50% of all senior leadership positions. However, the accomplishments of women in the military throughout the years cannot be overlooked, starting from the founding of the U.S. military in 1775. Women have served in the military since its founding in 1775. Their earlier roles mainly consisted of support and auxiliary roles, such as laundresses, cooks, nurses, and the occasional spy (Timeline,

2017). Fast forward to the present, and women are allowed to serve in any military job or combat role with no gender restriction (Kamarck, 2016).

Women have shown they are just as capable as men in accomplishing the same tasks. The military needs women to fulfill its mission. Sexual violence and gender discrimination impede the effectiveness of women as part of a capable fighting force.

The following sections will look at gender discrimination and the underlying factors contributing to sexual violence against women.

### **Gender Discrimination**

More and more women are answering the call to serve their country. They swear an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. They take up arms and serve alongside men and women from all across America and the world. They do this for many reasons; for the challenge, travel opportunities, self-betterment, and even to escape a bad situation at home (Dichter & True, 2015). They do not do it to become victims of sexual violence.

Woolf (1981) said that gender equality would be achieved when “womanhood has ceased to be a protected occupation” (p. 40). Gender inequality posits that men and women are not equal. This inequality can take on sexist forms with disparate outcomes, where women tend to fare worse off than men. Disparate outcomes within the context of gender inequality mean that women face increased discrimination compared with their male counterparts. Sexist behaviors are where one gender is treated unfavorably over another. It is not limited to men against women but also comes from women against women. Sexist behaviors come in two forms: benevolent and hostile (Knoer, 2017; Glick & Fiske, 2001).

**Sexism**

Because of their low numbers across the military branches, women are often the sole woman in a given setting, unit, or command. A person becomes a token when their social group represents less than 15% of the total social group composition (Kanter, 1977). With tokenism often comes unfair treatment towards women in the form of sexism. Hideg and Ferris (2016) discuss sexism in two forms: (a) benevolent and (b) hostile. They stress the importance of making this distinction as there is an interplay between the two, and both are a form of gender discrimination and male domination over women. Becker and Wright (2011) conducted a quantitative study that revealed how benevolent sexism undermined collective action from women, where hostile sexism motivated it. The irony in sexism is that women are revered in one vein (benevolent) and ostracized in another vein (hostile).

***Benevolent Sexism***

Becker and Wright (2011) state that benevolent sexism comes in three forms: protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. Protective paternalism is the belief that women require a man to protect and take care of them. It is those behaviors that treat women as delicate beings or prizes to be treasured. Examples of these include holding the door open for women, helping a woman carry her bags, and paying for a woman's meal, but not doing this for other men. Complementary gender differentiation believes that women are the superior sex to men and possess more remarkable moral sensibilities and unique qualities that few men have. It places women on a pedestal to be revered. Heterosexual intimacy is the belief that women exist to fulfill

the romantic needs of men. It assumes heterosexual men need women to be fulfill physical, emotional, and sexual needs (Becker & Wright, 2011; Knoer, 2017).

Glick and Fiske (2001) state that benevolent sexism promotes inequality and prejudice among women by legitimizing benevolent sexist behaviors. For example, the *damsel in distress* archetype or the woman waiting for her *knight in shining armor* represents women at the receiving end of benevolent sexism, and both the men and women in those narratives accept and promote that treatment. Becker and Wright (2011) note that benevolent sexism is bestowed upon women who meet the criteria of gender stereotypes for women and is denied to women who do not, such as feminists and masculine women.

Benevolent sexism is embedded in certain aspects of the military. For example, benevolent sexist language is written into the *Department of Defense Law of War manual*, which states, “Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their *honor*, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault” (Knoer, 2017, p. 677). It implies that a woman’s honor is tied to her sexuality. No such mention of protecting a man’s honor is mentioned in this document because paternalistic benevolent sexism prescribes that a woman’s honor shall be protected from the harm that can come from hostile sexist behaviors of other men (Becker & Wright, 2011; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Hideg & Ferris, 2016; Knoer, 2017).

Benevolent sexism is intricately related to hostile sexism. Hideg and Ferris (2016) state that there is an interplay between these two concepts. Knoer (2017) states how this interplay can turn the prized woman into the punished woman and vice versa. This

concept is essential to note for women in the military for how benevolent sexism can morph into hostile sexism in the form of sexual violence.

### ***Hostile Sexism***

Hostile sexism is those negative attitudes and stereotypes about women that can take on more serious forms, such as sexual harassment and sexual assault (Knoer, 2017). Becker and Wright (2011) describe hostile sexism as being rooted in the belief that women are less competent and capable than men and, thus, men are worthier of more power and higher status. In addition, this corresponds with the fear of women leveraging their sexuality, feminist ideologies, and womanly power to usurp power from men (Becker & Wright, 2011). Throughout history, women have been punished for behaving in a manner counter to their prescribed gender roles within society. As such, women have faced hostile sexism from both men and women as punishment for divergence from their gender roles. Knoer (2017) argues that women can be punished for not adhering to their traditional gender roles and face punishment in the form of hostile sexist behaviors.

### **Femininity, Masculinity and a Climate for Sexual Violence**

Current understanding of what constitutes femininity and masculinity is culturally contrived and socially constructed. Priola (2010) states that femininity and masculinity are roles, behaviors, attributes, and values culturally associated with women and men. What constitutes femininity and masculinity does not necessarily describe women and men or femaleness and maleness, but the cultural understanding of these concepts becomes assigned to women and men (Priola, 2010). An example of femininity is epitomized in the Roman goddess Venus, who represents beauty, love, sex, and fertility (Garcia, 2013). Whereas the Roman god Mars represents war and masculinity

(Cartwright, 2014). Thus, gender becomes a means to distinguish between men and women based upon accepted criteria of femininity and masculinity.

Feminine qualities are described as empathetic, intuitive, submissive, receptive, emotional, supportive, and nurturing, whereas masculine qualities are characterized as competitive, rational, individualistic, and emotional control (Priola, 2010). These qualities are not bad in and of themselves. It is when they become toxic that problems arise.

According to Spence and Helmreich (1980), the ideal soldier is tough, heroic, assertive, and steadfast, which aligns more with masculinity than femininity (e.g., emotional, nurturing, and empathetic). When these characterizations clash within a given setting, say combat, unfavorable biases tend to surface, and these negative expectations translate into adverse treatment (Holland et al., 2014). Army Sergeant Sarah Scully commented, “In the Army, any sign that you are a woman means that you are automatically ridiculed and treated as inferior” (Benedict 2010, p. 5). A further example to emphasize the hyper-masculine and misogynistic nature of the military comes from Retired Navy Admiral James Webb, who felt that integrating women into the military would make men “feel stripped, symbolically and actually” (Vojdik, 2005, p. 343). Webb goes on further to say, “Where in the country can someone go to find out if he is a man? And where can someone who knows he is a man, go to celebrate his masculinity?” (Vojdik, 2005, p. 343). This statement implies that a man’s *rite of passage*, or masculinity, can be determined by serving in the military. Furthermore, women serving alongside men in the military would, in essence, rob the military man of his symbolic masculinity. The very presence of women in the military challenges the notion of the

military being a man's rite of passage where he can prove his masculinity. This cultural precedent concludes that women should be punished for stepping into a *man's world*.

This punishment takes on several forms, as noted in the Continuum of Harm in Figure 2.

### **Toxic Masculinity**

Posadas (2017) describes *toxic masculinity* as a masculine identity that harms society, including men themselves. Examples of this include adhering to stereotypes of male dominance, misogyny, and the promotion of violence in the form of sexual assault and domestic violence that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. Flood (2018) states that toxic masculinity is destructive for women because it engenders gender discrimination that harms women and benefits men. For example, toxic masculine men view themselves as superior to women and draw strength in their dominance over women. It justifies violence as a way to prove oneself as a man. In addition, Flood argues that toxic masculinity is destructive for men because narrow views of masculinity constrain a man's relationship with both men and women, their parenting relationship with their children, and their emotional and physical health. An example of this is the belief that men must be tough, aggressive, and dominant. They must be devoid of any expression of emotion like crying, being playful, or showing vulnerability because this will mean they are not manly enough. It is similar to that archetype of the male, macho war machine portrayed in the media. "High-stress environments mixed with a masculine culture of dominance create a situation in which soldiers are stigmatized for needing help" (Toxic Masculinity, 2018, para. 8). In a sense, one can argue that the military is replete with toxic masculinity, as evidenced by the rampant sexual violence against women in its culture.

Wood and Toppelberg (2017) state that hyper-masculine and misogynistic cultures are prevalent within informal settings and socialization. Within these cultures, sexual violence manifests as forms of hazing, group masturbation, and gender- and sexual-biased terminology like girls, pussy, bitch, and faggot, which contributes to the objectification of women. Often, gender-biased behaviors become part of male bonding, where diminishing femininity and women somehow boosts their sense of masculinity. Competent women and effeminate men pose a threat to hyper-masculine men, which causes them to constantly prove their masculinity through power and control in the form of harmful language and behaviors. Military women have reported feeling belittled, scrutinized, and judged as less competent by other men, which has subjected women to jealousy, anger, and sexist behaviors (Castro et al., 2015).

Carlson et al. (2013) noted that sexual violence in the military might be worse than in the civilian sector. It is based on several studies that showed a prevalence rate between 10%-63% in the military (Carlson et al., 2013). They also share a thought-provoking discussion of additional factors that play into the prevalence of sexual violence against women: “Factors in a male-dominated military culture that may help explain the high rates of sexual victimization include a general acceptance of violence, obedience to authority, and a masculine culture where women are still in the minority” (Carlson et al., 2013, p. 107). This sheds additional light on the impact leadership has on the prevalence of sexual violence among military personnel and how sexual violence is experienced differently among the genders.

### **Gender Differentiation**

Gender differentiation postulates a difference between men and women, where there is an expectation of prescribed gender beliefs and adherence to gender stereotypes. Knoer (2017) stated that men and women are rewarded for adhering to prescribed gender beliefs and stereotypes and punished for not adhering to them. Women and men have assumed these gender roles since the first recorded history. Military service was not considered a traditional woman's occupation, like teaching, nursing, social work, and various domestic duties, as evidenced throughout human history. Prescribed gender roles still prevail in many parts of the world today.

### **Gender Stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes are widely held fixed and generalized beliefs or ideas about people (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014). Some common stereotypes about women dictate they should be emotional, dependent, submissive, kind, weak, and relegated to domestic roles. On the other hand, stereotypes about men describe them as stoic, analytical, dominant, competitive, resilient, and ideal for leadership positions (Burns, 2014). Society applauds those who fit these constructs and ostracizes those who do not. What does it truly mean to be a *man* or a *woman* in our society? Flood (2018) answers this question with the following statement:

Gender is the product of social forces and relations. Perhaps the best-known example of this is how children are socialised [sic] into gender roles - through parental interaction, observation, toys, literature, and other media. However, gender also is produced through everyday interactions, family socialisation [sic],

media representations, the workings of institutions, law, policy, and so on. (para. 14)

The descriptions for men and women have existed since the earliest recorded history. But what about the outliers?

### **Outliers**

Halberstam (2004) notes that masculinity and maleness are separate constructs but get confused for one another. Both men and women can exhibit masculine traits, much like both can exhibit feminine traits. When women exhibit masculine characteristics or men exhibit feminine characteristics, they are considered outliers in society and tend to face hostility for not conforming to the norms of society. So, who are these outliers? These outliers are those who identify and call themselves tomboys, butch women, transvestites, queers, and transgender male or female. These individuals challenge the very notion of gender identity (Halberstam, 2004; Vitolo-Haddad, n.d.). Vitolo-Haddad (n.d.) showed how gender identities could vary greatly. An example of this is the Guevedoce of the Dominican Republic. They are born as females at birth until they hit puberty, at which time they develop a male phenotype, including male genitalia.

Outliers are not uncommon in the military. Each outlier described has served or is currently serving in the military, and many have gone on to have fulfilling careers. This is despite the fact that studies show how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, including in the military (Lee & Ostergard, 2017; Schuyler et al. 2020).

### **Leadership and a Climate for Sexual Violence**

What constitutes a great military leader varies for each military branch. For example, the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson promoted integrity, accountability, initiative, and toughness (U.S Navy, 2015). The U.S. Army promotes character, presence, and intellect (U.S. Army, 2019). Every military branch develops its leaders to become ethical men and women based upon guidance from the Secretary of Defense. A prime example of the promotion of ethical behavior came from Secretary of Defense James Mattis, who authored the *Ethical Standards for All-Hands* (all DoD personnel) in 2017. He aimed to ensure all DoD personnel conducted themselves in an ethical manner where they did the right things when no one was watching (Mattis, 2017). Unfortunately, the reality of this is not always the case, as evidenced by the scandals that have plagued all of the military branches over the years (U.S. Department of Defense Standards of Conduct Office, 2019).

In every organization, some leaders are influential, and some leaders are ineffectual, and then there are toxic leaders. The military defines a toxic leader as “commanders who put their own needs first, micro-managed subordinates, behaved in a mean-spirited manner or displayed poor decision making” (Fleming, 2015, p. 523). In 2011, the Center for Army Leadership conducted a large-scale survey among 22,000 Army personnel to gauge morale and leadership. The survey found that 80% of Army officers and sergeants had observed a toxic leader, and around 20% had worked for one (Fleming, 2015; Jaffe, 2011). These findings highlight a shocking reality into toxic leadership in the military that affects personnel retention, morale, and productivity. Additionally, half of the soldiers that worked for toxic leaders expected those leaders to

promote to the next rank. The survey concluded by stating there was no indication the toxic leadership problem would correct itself if the current climate in the military continued.

Victims of sexual violence have noted the impact leaders have had on the prevalence of sexual violence within their units (Cheney et al., 2015). Cheney et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study using Fredrickson's and Robert's (1997) objectification theory as a theoretical framework to understand how servicewomen within a male-dominated military environment are socialized. They noted that leadership behaviors were a significant risk factor for sexual violence happening to women. Specifically, when ranking officers made condescending and demeaning remarks toward women under their leadership. Snyder et al. (2012) noted in their study of military academy women that the vast majority of sexual violence victims at the various military academies had a more negative view of their leaders and believed them to be responsible for the sexual violence. Sadler et al. (2018) argue that a leader's action or inaction is directly responsible for the outcomes of sexual violence that occur within their units. Leaders are charged with making decisions that directly impact others under their charge, and, thus, they serve as a crucial part of fostering a climate that thwarts sexual violence.

### **Women Leaders**

Women leaders are instrumental in serving as mentors and role models for junior servicewomen. They can be the key to thwarting sexual violence against their personnel, including other women, especially the higher ranking. Studies have shown that senior ranking military women tend to fair much better than junior ranking women with experiencing sexual violence with little to no women officers experiencing sexual

violence, and the vast majority of sexual violence occurring among junior ranking women (Cheney et al., 2015; Holland et al., 2014; Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Schmid, 2010). Being a high-ranking woman leader in the military means that the token woman has survived and navigated her way up the hierarchical, male-dominated organization. It can be empowering for junior women seeking to emulate the senior woman's success. There are many examples of great women mentors and leaders. However, there are also some bad examples of women leaders that, sadly, contribute to sexual violence against women.

### ***Queen Bee Phenomenon***

There is a dark side to women leaders worth discussing in this literature review, called the queen bee phenomenon. It is where women leaders integrate into male-dominated organizations by distancing themselves from other women. The queen bee is a woman in power who does not help other women and sometimes thwarts another woman's success (Biewin & Headlee, 2018). Derks et al. (2016) argue that the queen bee phenomenon is a by-product of the discrimination women face at work and is not how other women would naturally comport themselves toward women in different settings. In essence, queen bees represent women trying to assimilate into a male-dominated organization by reproducing the discriminatory behaviors rather than trying to combat them. What is most disappointing is that organizations where queen bees are in top-level positions, see fewer opportunities for junior women than in organizations with no queen bees. In addition, when people from an underrepresented group (women in this instance) achieve success, others assume the floodgates have opened for other women (Kaiser & Spalding, 2015). It is, sadly, not the case with queen bees.

### **Sexual Violence in the Military**

The *FY18 DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military* describes the DoD making progress with reducing sexual assaults against men but indicates they are not making progress with reducing sexual assaults against women. This report showed 13,000 women versus 7,500 men are estimated to have been sexually assaulted in FY18. However, those numbers are likely much higher due to underreporting. In FY18, nearly one in four active-duty women (24.2%) reported experiencing sexual harassment, and 6.3% reported being sexually assaulted in the year before being surveyed. Compared to the previous report in FY16, this was an increase from 21.4% of all active-duty women (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a).

The *2018 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active-Duty Members*, a survey conducted every two years that estimates the prevalence of sexual violence in the military showed that certain climate risk factors were prevalent before a sexual assault. These risk factors include a climate where sexual harassment persists, gender discrimination, hostile work environments, and low unit cohesion/morale (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a). This research shows that sexual harassment often leads to sexual assault. 46% of women experienced sexual harassment by their alleged offender before or after the sexual assault incident, and one in five women who experienced sexual harassment also experienced sexual assault (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a). This research touches on a concept called the *Continuum of Harm* in sexual violence, which is discussed in the section on eliminating sexual violence in the military.

### **Underreporting of Sexual Violence**

The *FY18 DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military* represents women who reported sexual violence and do not account for the countless other women who have experienced sexual violence but have not reported it. The same report acknowledges the likelihood of underreporting. An estimated 70% of sexual violence victims do not file a report (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016b; 2019d). Lehner (2017) states that fewer than a third of rape victims in the military report the crime to the police either because they choose not to or because of some external obstacles that make it futile. One example is how law enforcement treats rape victims in a biased manner leaving victims to feel helpless. McWhorter et al. (2009) state that between 64%-96% of all rapes go unreported, leaving perpetrators free to commit sexual violence over and over again. Simister (2012) notes that the sensitive nature of a sex crime does not lend itself to reporting, especially when the victim feels no one will believe them.

The number of studies covering underreporting of sexual violence is staggering and highlights how little the official numbers reveal in uncovering the true expanse of sexual violence. The evidence points to a culture that not only makes reporting sexual violence difficult but indirectly encourages sexual violence to take place. In addition, retaliation in peer group exclusion, career repercussions, and abusive behaviors has occurred among victims who reported sexual violence. These behaviors lead to victims' unwillingness to report sexual violence (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002).

The following statistics, taken from Appendix B of the *FY18 DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, provide greater clarity on the prosecution rates of

military sexual assault and may explain why reporting rates are so low. Of the 7,623 total reports of sexual assault filed in FY18, military servicemembers filed 6,053 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019b). 5,805 sexual assault reports were eligible for an investigation. The number of cases initiated or ongoing in FY18 was 5,024 plus 1,786 from previous years (6,810 total). Out of 6,810 cases, only 2,854 could be considered for disposition by DoD commanders, of which only 1,845 had sufficient evidence to support some form of disciplinary action for sexual assault or other misconduct. Only 668 of these cases had court-martial charges preferred (initiated) for sexual assault, and 203 total cases resulted in a sexual assault conviction or another offense. It is not clear how many of the 203 cases had sexual assault convictions.

### **Impact of Victimization on Military Fitness and Readiness**

Schmid (2010) stated that women are more likely to be raped by a fellow servicemember than killed by an enemy combatant, as told by women veterans seeking treatment from the Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare System. The stories of these women were shared as part of a testimony from Congresswoman Jane Harman in 2008 on sexual assault in the military. In addition, Schmid stated that military women who have been sexually assaulted are nine times more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than women who have not been sexually assaulted, primarily because of the psychological harm and trauma created by the sexual assault. It is a detrimental blow to military fitness and readiness, as is victimization.

Victimization is defined as “the action of singling someone out for cruel or unjust treatment” (Victimization, 2019, p. 1). Sexual violence victimization in the military primarily occurs among women (Bell et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a).

Bell et al. (2018) also note that perpetrators of sexual violence are more likely to target those with lower sociocultural power, younger in age, less educated, and unmarried.

According to the *FY18 DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, victims of sexual violence were more likely to be women from the junior enlisted ranks, ages 17 to 24, and unmarried. It aligns with the findings Bell et al. uncovered in their study. There were mixed findings in the literature on whether race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation factored into sexual violence victimization in both the military and civilian sectors.

Victimization happens when perpetrators target victims based on certain criteria, but other forms of victimization come from non-perpetrators. This is known as secondary victimization.

### ***Secondary Victimization***

Secondary victimization is defined as behaviors and practices engaged in by legal and medical personnel, such as victim-blaming, which exacerbates the trauma experienced by victims of sexual violence (Campbell & Raja, 2005). These negative experiences have been termed “the second rape,” “the second assault,” or “secondary victimization” (p. 97). Secondary victimization takes on many forms, as evidenced in the sources cited, and victims’ perceptions show a singular trend in that they are less inclined to seek help from either military or civilian legal and medical system personnel.

Campbell and Raja’s (2005) study concluded that secondary victimization from both military and civilian legal and medical system personnel towards sexual assault victims was high, and the guilty and hopeless emotions felt by the victims of sexual assault were equally high after reporting it to legal and medical system personnel within both the military and civilian sectors. As a result, most victims of sexual assault felt more

reluctant to seek further help. The study also showed a strong positive correlation between secondary victimization and PTSD. The *FY18 DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military and the Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force Findings* report highlighted similar findings. These findings suggest that victims face a strong possibility of experiencing harm for seeking help after a sexual assault (Campbell & Raja, 2005).

### ***Victim Perceptions***

Snyder et al. (2012) conducted a study that examined sexual violence and victimization, and leadership perceptions among cadets and midshipmen at the three U.S. military academies. The study showed that 60% of the cadets and midshipmen surveyed experienced sexual violence (85% of females and 45% of males). As a result, the sexual violence victims had an increased negative perception of their respective academy's leadership morality and intolerance for sexual victimization than non-victims.

Watts and Zimmerman (2002) give the 50,000 ft view of sexual violence. Their study assessed the scope and magnitude of sexual violence against women from around the globe. The study concluded that sexual violence worldwide was grossly underreported due to the subject's sensitivity. Furthermore, Watts and Zimmerman found that millions of women worldwide are experiencing sexual violence and living with its consequences. These consequences include the mental health issues that arise among victims of sexual violence.

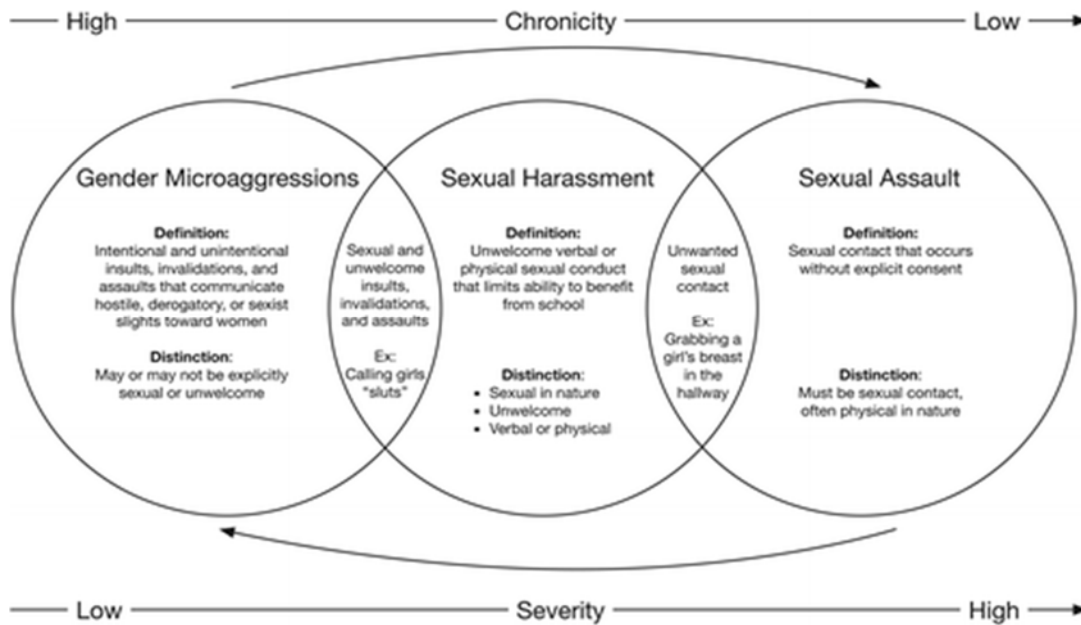
Wolfe et al. (1998) touch on victimization in their study that analyzed the likelihood that female Persian Gulf military personnel may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to the perpetration of military sexual violence against them. They

also showed a positive correlation between victims of sexual violence developing PTSD after victimization. Mental health issues are prevalent among veterans who experienced sexual violence while serving in the military, which is detrimental to military fitness and readiness (Wolfe et al., 1998).

### ***Gender Microaggressions***

Gender microaggressions are defined as a form of gender-based violence characterized as the “intentional and unintentional insults, invalidations, and assaults based on gender that is most frequently perpetrated against women and girls” (Gartner & Sterzing, 2016, p. 492). Gender microaggressions come in three forms: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Sue, 2010).

Sue (2010) states that gender microaggressions represent a covert form of violent behaviors because they can operate under the conscious realization of both victims and perpetrators. Sue also noted that gender microaggressions resulted in mental health problems such as depression, lowered self-esteem, anxiety, and trauma. Attaching *micro* in front of assault, insult, and invalidations assumes the actions are subtle enough not to be considered “high severity” forms of gender-based violence like sexual harassment and sexual assault (Gartner & Sterzing, 2016, p. 492). Gender microaggressions are intricately related to sexual harassment and sexual assault as, typically, a precursor to these two violent behaviors.

**Figure 2***The Relationship Between Sexual Violence*

*Note.* This illustration shows the relationship between gender microaggressions, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and the impact each has on chronicity and severity. From "Gender Microaggressions as a Gateway to Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault: Expanding the Conceptualization of Youth Sexual Violence," by R. E. Gartner, & P. R. Sterzing, 2016, *Affilia*, 31(4), pp. 491–503, (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109916654732>).

Brownstone et al. (2018) notes that stereotypes about women can justify unfair treatment as they are perceived as incompetent and not as intelligent as a man. On the far end, Caldara (2018) notes that stereotypes feed into rape myths in that hyper-masculine and toxic masculine men believe that only women and gay men can be raped. It goes back to language written in the *DoD Law of War Manual* that explicitly calls out rape against women and not men (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016a).

### **Impact of Health Consequences on Military Fitness and Readiness**

A prominent theme cited among the sources of this literature review centered around the impact of sexual violence on mental health of victims of sexual violence. The

National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2010) created an informational pamphlet for victims of sexual violence detailing the impact of sexual violence, particularly on mental health. The studies showed that sexual violence led to victims suffering mental health issues, such as PTSD, depression, suicidal ideations, suicidal actions, substance abuse, and comorbidity (two or more chronic conditions present).

Gerard et al. (2018) conducted a study that discussed the impact of military sexual trauma (MST) on veterans and how social workers could best address the needs of that population. MST is defined as: “A psychological trauma, which... resulted from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment which occurred while the veteran was serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training” (38 USC §1720D). Gerard et al. stated that 26.9% of women and 1.4% of men receiving services through the Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system reported experiencing MST while serving in the military. The additional concern raised in this study was the long-term effects of the mental health issues that arose among the veterans affected by sexual violence. This posed concerns among social workers about how to care for veterans with particular mental health issues properly.

Campbell and Raja’s (2005) study examined victims’ post-assault help-seeking experiences and the degree to which they encountered secondary victimization. Part of the analysis was looked the mental health impact secondary victimization had on victims of sexual violence. They found that the victims experienced a variety of mental health issues along with feelings of guilt, shame, distrust, and anxiety (Campbell & Raja, 2005).

### **Eliminating Sexual Violence in the Military**

The road to eliminating sexual violence in the military has been long and slow. The military scandals of the last few decades have drawn attention to the sexual violence plaguing the military, prompting Congress to take measures that aim to reduce the incidents of sexual violence occurring within the military. These measures were guided by the DoD and implemented by each military branch to include policies, programming, and reporting procedures.

#### **Policies**

The DoD recognizes sexual assault and sexual harassment as two different offenses that are governed under separate policies (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017a; 2018). Sexual assault policy is governed under the *DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program Directive* describing how the SAPR program is to be implemented within the DoD. From there, each military branch has its respective policies that derive from this overarching directive. The sexual harassment policy is governed under the *DoD Harassment and Prevention and Response in the Armed Forces Instruction*, a catch-all policy manual to address various forms of harassment, including sexual harassment. The DoD views sexual harassment as a separate but related offense to sexual assault, which is why the policies on each remain separate. It presents a problem with victims knowing which policy governs the sexual offense they experienced. It is worth noting that there are several policies on sexual assault, as referenced throughout this document, and only one DoD policy on sexual harassment, which is a small chapter within a more extensive policy that addresses different forms of harassment. It is fair to

conclude that more robust policies and programming have been developed on sexual assault than sexual harassment.

### *The Role of the Commander*

Commanding officers or commanders hold the most power in deciding how sexual violence cases are handled (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017b). For instance, they have the power to convene a court-martial, a military trial; non-judicial punishment; administrative discharge, removal of the offender from military service; other administrative actions or punishments; and pursue action against the offender and victim for other offenses, such as fraternization, adultery, and underage drinking. Commanders only have authority over military personnel subject to the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), the federal law that delineates the military justice system. It means that civilians, contractors, and anyone else who fall outside of UCMJ authority cannot face disciplinary action from commanders.

Commanders also have the final say in victim safety or expedited transfers (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017b). Commanders are required to conduct safety assessments in sexual assault cases to determine whether or not the victim is safe. The commander can have the victim moved or reassigned to get them out of a dangerous situation. There is another instance where victims can request an expedited transfer if they feel safe but uncomfortable. It can take up to 30 days or more to complete if the commander approved. In both sexual harassment and sexual assault cases, the perpetrator is treated as innocent until proven guilty. The commander also has the discretion to transfer the perpetrator instead of the victim if the perpetrator is a military servicemember. Any actions taken by

the commander are dependent on whether the sexual violence case is credible as delineated by policy and the commander's judgment.

### **Programming**

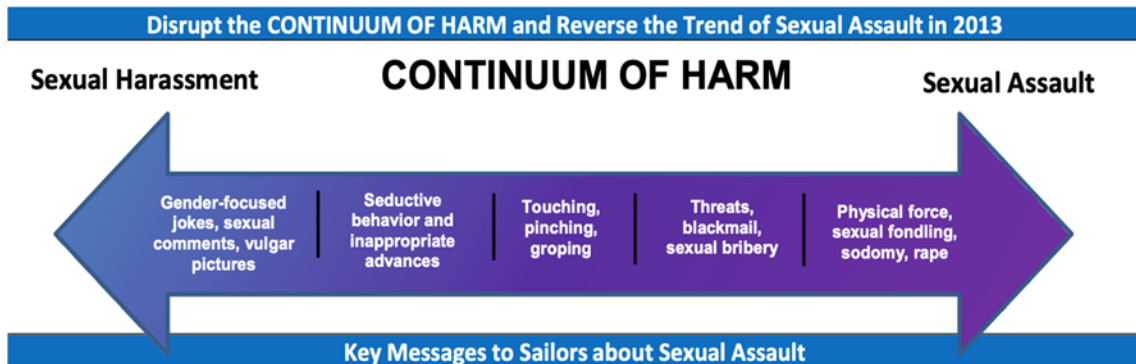
Each military branch administers sexual violence training per DoD guidelines. The DoD requires all military personnel and DoD civilians who supervise military personnel to receive SAPR training that incorporates "adult learning theory, which includes interaction and group participation" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017b, p. 82). The *DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program Procedures* lists all of the elements required in an effective SAPR program but leaves it up to the individual military branches to execute these training requirements.

The training must be commensurate with the servicemember's pay grade and level of responsibility because responsibilities and expectations differ among the pay grades. For instance, a junior enlisted servicemember will not receive the same level of training as a senior officer because the junior enlisted servicemember will not be responsible for the same amount of personnel and resources that a senior officer would. However, all pay grades will receive some form of general training annually that explains the definition of sexual assault, the meaning of consent, legal ramifications, reporting options, bystander intervention standards, available resources, and timelines for training requirements (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017b). As previously mentioned, each military service conducts its sexual assault training differently. For example, the Navy and Army conduct sexual assault training as instructor-led, all-hands training. For those who cannot attend the all-hands training, there is the option to complete it as self-paced, computer-based training.

Gidycz et al. (2018) describe how sexual violence falls on a continuum of milder behaviors, such as innuendos and gender jokes on one end that progress to more aggressive and hostile behaviors, such as rape and physical force on the far end.

**Figure 3**

*The Sexual Violence Continuum of Harm*



*Note.* This illustration shows how sexual harassment can lead to sexual assault with examples of each along the Continuum of Harm. From “Sexual Assault Prevention and Response,” by U.S. Navy Personnel Command, 2020, ([https://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/support/21st\\_Century\\_Sailor/sapr/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/support/21st_Century_Sailor/sapr/Pages/default.aspx)).

The Continuum of Harm has been adopted DoD-wide and used across the military services in their sexual violence training (Gidycz et al., 2018). Currently, only the U.S. Army combines sexual assault and sexual harassment into one type of program called the *Sexual Harassment/Assault Prevention and Response Program (SHARP)* (U.S. Army, 2020). The Army’s SHARP aims to prevent and eliminate both sexual harassment and sexual assault (U.S. Army, 2020). The Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force maintain sexual assault and sexual harassment as separate training programs.

Gidycz et al. (2018) noted that refocusing military sexual violence training to a more comprehensive training program that includes the Continuum of Harm, in-depth

sexual harassment and sexual assault training, alcohol and drugs, and other elements that factor into sexual violence will result in a more effective training program. Holland et al. (2014) conducted research that also supports this assertion. They state that a comprehensive training program has shown more positive results in reducing sexual violence than limited-focused training plans.

### **Reporting Procedures**

With separate programs on sexual assault and sexual harassment come distinct reporting requirements, which often leads to confusion for victims seeking to make a report, if they even decide to make a report. Sexual harassment falls under Equal Opportunity policies and SAPR-specific policies govern sexual assault. However, as noted by the research on the sexual violence Continuum of Harm and the legal definition of sexual harassment and sexual assault, these behaviors can be confused for one or the other with victims pursuing the wrong avenue in attempting to report sexual violence committed against them (Farmer, 2018; Gidycz et al., 2018; Holland et al., 2014). Reporting options and procedures are standardized across all military branches of service to be the same.

### ***Sexual Assault Reporting Procedures***

In the case of filing a sexual assault report, victims must choose between submitting an (a) restricted or (b) unrestricted report (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). A restricted report is only available to servicemembers and their adult dependents. It allows them the opportunity to file a more confidential report that does not trigger an official investigation, the command/unit leaders are not notified, and they still have access to counseling and medical services (SAPR, 2020c). An unrestricted report is

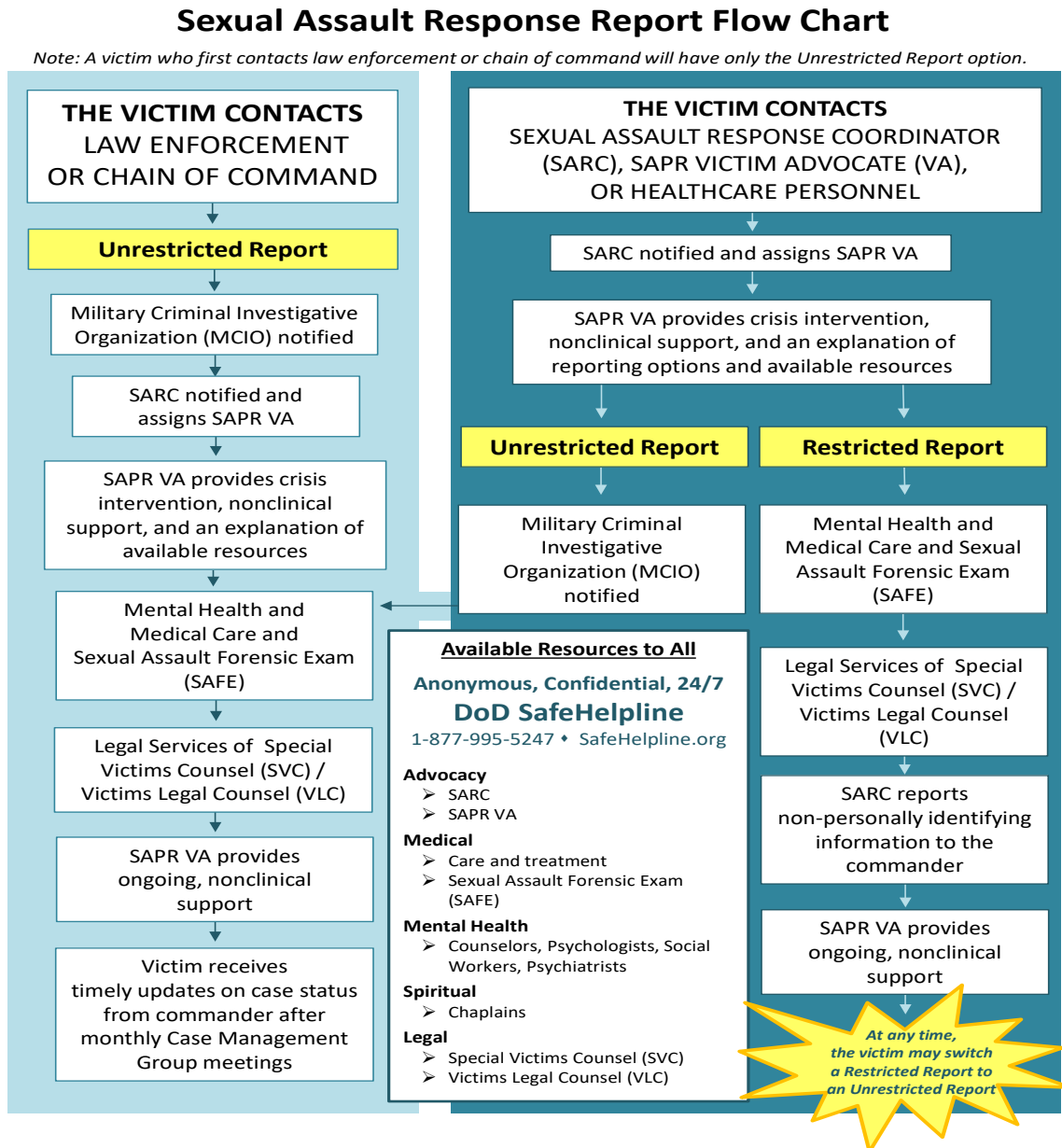
available to servicemembers, their adult dependents, and certain DoD civilians and their adult dependent family members (SAPR, 2020d).

The process for filing either a restricted or unrestricted report rests solely with the victim. The victim must have familiarity with how each option works to file the correct report and can contact only certain individuals and entities. In either case, the victim can always contact the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC), SAPR Victim Advocate (VA), or any healthcare personnel. The SARC is responsible for coordinating sexual assault victim care services for those who qualify. If the SARC is contacted for assistance, they will assign a SAPR VA to work one-on-one with the victim to help them through the process of filing the appropriate report. Contacting law enforcement or the victim's military supervisors will automatically trigger an unrestricted report.

Filing either report requires completing DD Form 2910 with a SAPR VA, which documents the victim's reporting preference. The form contains a series of statements that the victim must initial and acknowledge to proceed with filing a report. A victim can file a restricted report and later convert it to an unrestricted report but not the other way (SAPR, 2020c; 2020d).

**Figure 4**

*Sexual Assault Reporting Procedures Flow Chart*



*NOTE: These steps are based on DoD Directives 6495.01, 1030.01, and Directive Type Memorandum 14-007, and DoD Instructions 6495.02 and 1030.2. The response procedures may vary by Service or installation but must still comply with the requirements in these policies.*

*Note.* This chart illustrates the difference between restricted and unrestricted reporting options. From “SAPR Flowchart,” by U.S. Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR), 2020e, ([https://www.sapr.mil/public/docs/policy/SexualAssault\\_sample\\_response\\_flowchart.pdf](https://www.sapr.mil/public/docs/policy/SexualAssault_sample_response_flowchart.pdf)).

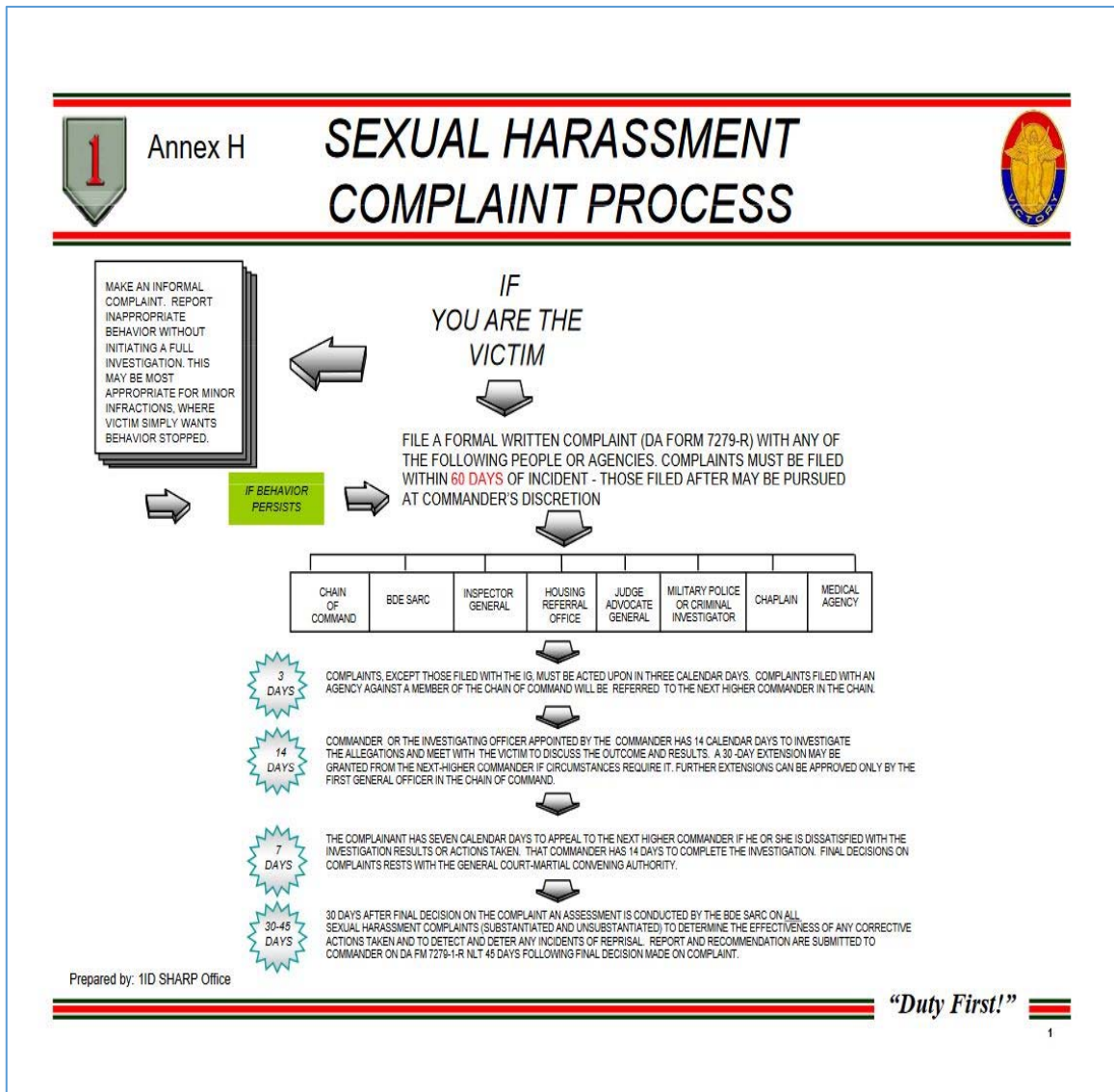
***Sexual Harassment Reporting Procedures***

A sexual harassment complaint is filed in one of two ways: (a) informal or (b) formal (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). An informal complaint involves handling or resolving the incident amongst the lowest levels of responsibility (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 13). The DoD left this for the military services to interpret, which typically involves the complainant and alleged perpetrator coming to a resolution by discussing the incident amongst themselves, requesting training, or asking someone to intervene as a mediator.

A formal sexual harassment complaint requires filing an official form that triggers an investigation by the unit commanding officer and mandatory reporting requirements that can take anywhere from 14 days or longer. Each military branch has its version of the sexual harassment complaint form. The form asks for the complainant's demographic info, the nature of the complaint, and the requested remedy. Other sections for other entities to complete include the agency receiving the complaint, investigation results, actions taken to resolve the complaint, and any appeals desired by the complainant.

**Figure 5**

*Sexual Harassment Complaint Process*



*Note:* The above graphic from the Army 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division SHARP Office illustrates the sexual harassment complaint process, which is very similar across the military services. From "Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention," by U.S. Army Fort Riley, 2020, (<https://home.army.mil/riley/index.php/my-fort/all-services/sexual-harassment-assault-response-and-prevention-sharp>).

Included are the two charts for the sexual assault reporting procedures and the sexual harassment complaint process to show how confusing the reporting process can be. Many servicemembers reported not knowing the difference between the types of

reports to file (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019d). This could discourage victims from reporting any sexual violence committed against them.

Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2014) offer additional insight into what strength in numbers offer to prevent of sexual violence.

### **Strength in Numbers**

Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2014) conducted a quantitative study on gender harassment across three distinct domains: academia, the court system, and the U.S. military. They found that women across all three of these domains experienced a higher rate of gender harassment than their male counterparts. Kabat-Farr and Cortina discuss the *glass escalator effect* for men working in traditionally feminine professions such as nursing, teaching, and social work. This term refers to workplace benefits, such as promotions, increased financial compensation, and decreased propensity for different forms of harassment for men who work in female-dominant professions (Williams, 1992). The perception is that men are viewed as more competent than women, even from other women. Studies have shown that men tend to benefit from being the minority in a workplace setting where women tend to struggle in similar circumstances. Kabat-Farr and Cortina also note that women experienced less gender harassment working in environments with equal representation of genders or where women were the majority.

Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2014) and Schmid (2010) argue that more women in the military will reduce or eliminate sexual violence within the military. In other words, strength in numbers. Their research showed that the greater the amount of representation from one gender significantly reduces or eliminates sexual violence by the other gender.

### Summary

There is no question that there are many wonderful aspects to serving in the military. Based on the information presented in this literature review, the vast majority of military personnel seem to honor their core values and represent the military in a positive light. However, a significant downside to military service, especially for women, is the lingering sexual violence and gender discrimination still plaguing the ranks. The military is great, but it can be better.

The literature shows many concepts and beliefs that play into military sexual violence. These behaviors stem from a hyper-masculine military culture, gender discrimination, and toxic leadership. Also, the low prevalence of women serving in the military puts them in a minority status within a traditionally patriarchal institution.

Understanding the cultural artifacts within the military is not enough to fully understand the sexual violence epidemic. It is also important to understand the repercussions that sexual violence has on women, especially victimization and health consequences. These repercussions affect unit morale and cohesion, military fitness and readiness, and often last a lifetime for the victims (Bell et al., 2018; Burns et al., 2014).

This literature review paints a comprehensive picture of the impact of military culture, social patterns, working behaviors, and repercussions of sexual violence faced by women who have served in the military. The literature shows an interrelation between these factors. For example, how sexual violence can lead to health consequences for the victims and how a toxic military leader can create or tolerate a culture that breeds sexual violence. Toxic masculinity and the subjugation of women have a historical and cultural

context that plays out in the contemporary military culture. Toxic leadership permits sexual violence.

Lacking in the current literature are the stories of the victims of sexual violence. There are commonalities among some of the studies on sexual violence in the military to the civilian sector in sexual violence research compared across industries and specific examples of similar settings where women are the minority. Those situations can be seen in other institutions such as police departments, fire stations, construction firms, and other male-dominated institutions. However, victims of sexual violence appear to be universal, as noted in the literature, and therefore, their voices should be heard across all industries.

This literature review shows the need to understand better the military culture from the perspective of sexual violence victims. What did they experience? What did they observe? What impact did it have on their personal and professional lives? Some questions require answers. The most important question being: What does it mean to experience the U.S. military culture before, during, and after a sexual violence event as a woman veteran who had experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service?

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This methodology section describes the method and procedures used in this research study. The research design overview highlights the rationale for choosing a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore the U.S. military culture that allows sexual violence against women. The participant section discussed the selection criteria and recruiting strategies used in this study. The data collection procedures and tools described the interview protocol, transcription process, and validity procedures. The data analysis section detailed the coding process and how methodological integrity in the study was achieved, which foreshadowed the final section of the chapter. Finally, ethical considerations are described, including participant confidentiality, anonymity, and the mitigation of researcher bias.

#### **Research Question**

What does it mean to experience the U.S. military culture before, during, and after a sexual violence event as a woman veteran who had experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service?

#### **Method**

The following sections described the methods used in this qualitative, phenomenological study, including the reasons for selecting the approach and research design, how the research was conducted, and ethical considerations in the research project.

#### **Research Design Overview**

A qualitative study was an appropriate choice to heighten awareness of this problem, open new lines of thinking, and serve as a mechanism through which a

marginalized population had a voice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, a phenomenological study provided a depth of understanding of a specific phenomenon that other qualitative methods might not achieve. This study focused on the phenomenon of experiencing U.S. military culture before, during, and after a sexual violence event while serving on active-duty military service. A phenomenological design was the ideal choice to answer the research question because it allowed women veterans to share their individual lived experiences that formed a collective essence or meaning of the phenomenon studied (van Manen, 1990).

This phenomenological study aimed to arrive at a common meaning based on the collection of individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of the women veterans who experienced sexual violence while serving on active duty. A multistep approach was used to achieve this. Data was collected primarily through participant interviews. These interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed, which yielded themes that formed clusters of meaning detailing what the participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). These clusters were developed into a “textural description” that described what the participants experienced and a “structural description” that described how the participants experienced it. Together, the textural and structural descriptions formed the essence of the participants’ experiences, collectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I anticipated learning about the participants’ experiences with the military culture surrounding their sexual violence event while serving on active-duty military service. As described in the literature review, the military organization has been shown to be a male-dominated, patriarchal organization (Wood & Toppelberg, 2017) that fosters gender

discrimination and sexist behaviors (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014). However, I understood that each woman's story was unique, and new information and perspectives were gleaned from the participants in this study. I understood that I had to apply bracketing techniques around everything I thought I knew about the military culture. It was essential for me to bracket my personal experiences and all of the information I had researched about sexual violence in the military. Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed bracketing as a means to mitigate bias. I meant that I could not allow past knowledge or experiences be engaged within the study. This ensured that I fully heard what each participant shared about her experience. However, if the participant willingly shared her experiences of sexual violence, I did not pursue further disclosure of that event but allowed the participant to speak freely. I then respectfully and tactfully redirected the participant to focus on the cultural artifacts surrounding the event. I also had readily available the phone numbers of sexual violence counselors for the participants.

### **Participants**

The population of interest for this study were women veterans who experienced sexual violence while serving on active duty in the U.S. military in the last 10 years. The reason for focusing on this population was because they had the experience with the phenomenon of interest of this study. The recency of these participants' military service placed the experience with sexual violence closer to present times to gauge whether this was still a recent and ongoing problem within the military. Additionally, sampling veterans did not require Department of Defense (DoD) research ethics approval as it does for active-duty servicemembers (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020), which made this a more viable population to study for a dissertation in practice. Research on human subjects

in the military is governed by DoD Instruction 3216.02, which states that any researchers seeking to use active-duty servicemembers for research purposes must obtain approval from the DoD. In addition, a conflict of interest or participant discomfort could have arisen if I, being an active-duty servicemember, interviewed another active-duty servicemember. Lastly, there were no potential career repercussions for veterans participating in the study as there could have been for active-duty servicemembers.

Researching human subjects requires IRB approval from Creighton University. After receiving IRB approval for this study, I proceeded with recruiting the participants for this study using non-probability, purposive sampling via women veteran social media groups on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and through women veterans' organizations. Between 10 to 20 participants were the target for recruitment in this study.

Sampling 10 to 20 participants in a phenomenological study was an appropriate target range to attempt to reach saturation. Creswell and Poth (2018) described saturation as the point where no new information is garnered from data collection. Experts differ on the number of participants needed to reach saturation because it is a determination that is made by each researcher based on the individual context and situation of the specific study being conducted. Creswell and Poth recommend between three to 33, Fusch and Ness (2015) recommend at least six, and Guest et al. (2006) discussed between five and 25 for a phenomenological study. I determined that I achieved saturation after interviewing and analyzing the data from six of the participants. This was evident in the similarity of responses by the participants. I pursued three more participants to have a good mix of women from more than one military branch.

In line with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) suggestion, I wrote an introduction letter (Appendix A) tailored to each social media group and veteran organization describing the nature of the study, potential impact, time requirements, and outcomes. I included the link to the screening questionnaire (Appendix B) in the letter. This survey was used to screen participants for the inclusion criteria for participation in the study. The survey asked for the following information (1) gender, (2) age, (3) periods of active-duty service, (4) military branch(es), (5) last pay grade held, (6) if they filed a report of sexual violence, and (7) any personal experiences with sexual violence while serving on active duty. That last question was listed as: "Have you personally experienced a traumatic incident(s) while serving on active duty? If yes, briefly state what type of incident(s)." This phrasing provided the prospective participant space to list any sexual violence that might have caused the trauma she experienced without coming off as too direct. Finally, I asked the participants if they were willing to participate in an interview and provide their contact information to schedule their interview.

I thanked those who completed and returned the questionnaire and notified them within one week if they met the inclusion criteria. I notified participants by electronic correspondence of their selection for the study and gave them the option to participate in the study or decline participation. I notified those who did not meet the inclusion criteria by electronic correspondence of their non-selection and referred them to a Facebook group where they could share their story. The nine participants who chose to participate in the study were given an informed consent form, which is explained in the next section.

### **Data Collection**

This section discusses the data collection procedures and tools and interview

protocol that were used in this study. Information about the methodological integrity of the study is also included in this section.

### ***Data Collection Procedures and Tools***

Data collection came from one interview via Zoom and one to two written follow-ups with each participant. Once the participant completed the screening survey, met all the screening criteria, and agreed to participate, I sent them the informed consent and the participant Bill of Rights (Appendix C). The IRB removed the signature requirement on the informed consent after formal board review determined the study to be exempt. The informed consent and Bill of Rights explained the expectations of participation, including a right to withdraw from the interview, an assurance from me that their identities were protected, and their confidentiality was maintained throughout the process. After I received verbal consent from the participant, I scheduled the interview date with the participant. During the interview, I offered each participant the opportunity to provide their names if they wished not to remain anonymous. All nine of the participants chose to share their names and not remain anonymous.

Each interview lasted between 45-75 minutes. I conducted one, and sometimes two, subsequent email follow-ups to clarify information from the initial interview and conduct member checks for data validity. I recognized the difficulty in talking about sensitive experiences; hence only one interview per participant was done. I did more listening than speaking in the interviews, which allowed the participants to express themselves. Building rapport with the participants was crucial to helping them feel at ease and becoming comfortable enough to share personal details about their experiences with the cultural artifacts before, during, and after their sexual violence experience. In

addition, I practiced interviewing non-participants before conducting the participant interviews. The practice allowed me to make any adjustments to the wording of the questions and to practice using the technology, using the prompts, and taking notes all at the same time. A notetaking section was included in my interview protocol to annotate follow-up questions and memorable details. In addition, the interviews with the practice participants outside the research and area of expertise served as a form of bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2010) that allowed me to uncover and become aware of internal biases that subtly arose for me.

Before commencing the interview protocol, I had some peers, and research professionals, review the questions to ensure that none of the questions contained bias or anything unethical. During the interviews, I took great strides to ensure that the questions were not leading into any biased views I might have held. Bracketing was vitally important in the interview protocol, just as it was in the data analysis. I maintained an open-mindset and did more listening than speaking. All interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom Pro, a web-based video platform, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. This ensured the safety of all parties. Additionally, Zoom Pro was more secure and safer than the free version of Zoom.

The interview protocol in Appendix D outlined the questions and prompts used in the participant interviews. The template contained an initial script I read to each participant at the start of the interview that briefly described the purpose of the interview, notified them of the interview being recorded, reminded them that their confidentiality was maintained, offered them the opportunity to pause or stop the interview for whatever reason, and stated they could ask questions at any time. The interview protocol contained

10 open-ended questions. These questions were about their military experiences, perceptions of their time served, the incidents/actions they believed led to sexual violence against them, descriptions of their experiences, and perceptions of the military culture surrounding their experiences with sexual violence before, during, and after. The protocol also contained prompts/probes that I used to help clarify statements made by the participants or invited them to add additional details. Lastly, the last page contained a notetaking section where observations such as body language, facial expressions, eye contact, voice tone and inflection, and posture were annotated.

Another critical aspect of the study was to ensure data validity. First, Zoom Pro was used to record the interview. Initially, I had planned on using Zoom Pro's transcription services. However, the software created inaccurate transcriptions that caused me to spend too much time correcting the inaccuracies. Instead, I used a professional transcriber for all transcriptions, which yielded fast, accurate, and satisfactory transcriptions from which I completed the coding. This ensured accuracy in the transcribed interview and subsequent data analysis. The live transcriptionist is a professional who maintains confidentiality of anything they hear or read. The recordings provided to the transcriptionist contained no identifying information traceable to the participants. I checked each transcribed interview for accuracy. After the coding was done, I conducted member checks with the participants to ensure their responses were captured accurately in the coding process. Lastly, I used rich, thick quotes in the results to demonstrate using the participants' own words and their experiences.

I used bracketing to mitigate bias by assuming the role of an active listener and not as a participant in the study. For example, during the interviews, I did not discuss my

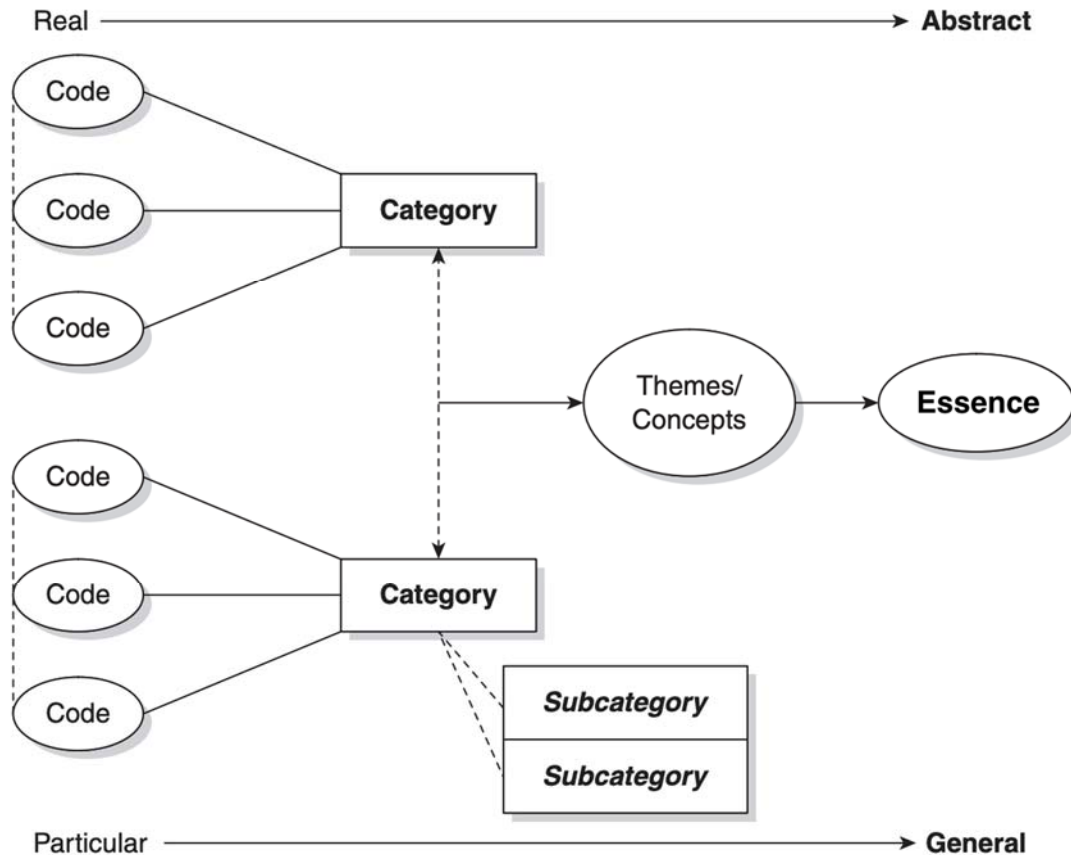
personal experiences, neither agreed nor disagreed with the participants nor steered the participants' stories. Of course, one cannot forget their own experiences, but bracketing in a study limits the researcher's bias and allows the participants' voices to resound. This entails reflexivity, which Ahern (1999) describes as the researcher examining their convictions, values, feelings, and beliefs and understanding how they influence what they do. It was an iterative process that allowed me to understand and mitigate my experiences rather than eliminate them. Reflexive journaling was a pivotal technique to incorporate reflexivity in mitigating bias. I conducted reflexive journaling prior to each participant interview to document feelings and expectations, and document outcomes and any biases after each interview. These methods helped mitigate any biases I might inadvertently have brought into the data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Each interview was listened to at least once to check for accuracy in the transcription. After achieving an accurate transcription, I conducted hand-coding procedures to analyze the data from each interview. The first round of coding consisted of open coding using descriptive and in vivo coding (Babbie, 2017; Saldaña, 2009). This took two to three looks for each interview to fully and more accurately open code the data. The next round of coding was axial coding, where the open coding was further narrowed down and categorized by interview question, across all participant responses. This next round of coding took three to four looks to ensure the categories and subcategories made sense. Afterward, the axial coding was further narrowed down into overarching themes using selective coding (Babbie, 2017; Saldaña, 2009). I combined the

selective coding across all participants and each of their interview questions to derive the final themes.

The final themes yielded clusters of meaning detailing what the participants experienced and how they experienced it. These clusters were developed into a “textural description” that described what the participants experienced and a “structural description” that described how the participants experienced it. Together, the textural and structural descriptions formed the essence of the participants’ experiences collectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Visual cues were checked against the coding data to see any trends between the spoken and visual communications from the participants I had noted during the interviews. Member checks were done after the first round of coding to ensure the accuracy of the codes that emerged. Some of the participants provided feedback during the member check process that I incorporated into the subsequent round of coding.

**Figure 6***Thematic Coding Process*

*Note:* The above diagram shows how the coding process was done in the data analysis. From “The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers,” by J. Saldaña, 2009, Sage Publications, Inc.

***Methodological Integrity***

APA (2020) discussed criteria for methodological integrity within seven areas: “adequacy, researchers’ perspective, groundedness, meaningfulness, context, coherence, and consistency” (p. 102). Adequacy was achieved by recruiting a diverse array of women veterans from each military branch, different pay grades, recency of military service, and length of military service. It ensured a diverse mix of experiences and stories

in support of the research question. Bracketing techniques were used to manage my perspective throughout the study and limit bias. Groundedness was achieved by ensuring data was captured in its truest form as told by the participants by using transcriptions. In vivo coding was a technique used to emphasize the actual words spoken by the participants in the coding process, which helped preserve the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2009). Meaningfulness in this study was garnered from the firsthand experiences of sexual violence victims, which was ensured through participant recruitment, screening, and the specific questions asked of the participants. Context in a recent time period was essential to capture the recency and prevalence of military sexual violence. Each participant selected for the study had served on active duty within the last 10 years. There were no anticipated contradictions with meeting the coherence criteria in the study. However, coherence can only be determined after the data have been analyzed. In this study, coherence was achieved in the reporting of the results and findings of the study. Lastly, consistency in the study was met by adhering to the same interview protocol and data analysis for each participant. Additional means of ensuring methodological integrity were accomplished through participant feedback and member checks on the data collected and analyzed (APA, 2020). Ethical considerations used in the study are addressed in the next section.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The nature of the interview protocol involved asking questions about a sensitive topic. This raised concerns with how it would impact the participants' state of mind. I paid close attention to the participants' visual and verbal cues during the interviews that might have indicated discomfort or uneasiness. I was prepared to mitigate any unease by

asking if the participants needed a few moments to gather their thoughts or if they needed a break. I also had ready the phone numbers of hotlines where the participants could call and get in touch with someone immediately, if they requested those or deemed it necessary to offer the numbers based on the visual or verbal cues. Naturally, sensitive information came forth in those interviews that had to be protected. Most veterans are also entitled to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) services, including counseling services. I had the phone number of the VA hotline immediately available. This hotline and the associated website were listed in the Informed Consent document, as well.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' identities were of paramount concern in this study. I did everything in my power to ensure participants' records and identities were kept confidential. This study did not require identifying information; hence, no identifying information was requested of the participants unless they consented to remain anonymous. I took great care to limit the amount of information that could be used to identify any of the participants. For example, no racial/ethnic information was linked to any one participant. No mention of specific unit names or military installations were used. No specific towns or cities were identified; only general geographic descriptions were used (e.g., Korea, overseas). No mention of specific family members or friends. No other individuals linked to the participants were named or identified.

The informed consent letter addressed confidentiality, information safeguards, information sharing, and how their identities and confidentiality were maintained. Safeguards to protect participant data included storing data on the Creighton University encrypted and password-protected cloud drive that only I could access. The Zoom Pro interview recording was also stored on Zoom's encrypted servers. All data obtained,

including interview audio, video, and transcriptions, was collected and handled solely by me and the transcriptionist. The research data will be retained for five years, per Creighton University's Retention of University Research and Compliance Records policy, then permanently deleted per Creighton University's information technology (IT) protocols (Creighton, 2018b). The IT protocols state that all deleted data will be unrecoverable after 30 days. Participants will be notified of research findings being presented at professional meetings or published in relevant journals, and their identities will remain anonymous unless they consent to not remain anonymous. I will revisit consent for this with each participant. In the data reporting, honest reporting that does not portray the participants negatively is crucial. Creswell and Creswell (2018) discussed procedures for reporting data that included permission needed to reprint work, using composite stories that do not harm the participants and using unbiased language in reporting. Ultimately, I had to earn the participants' trust. It was understood that this was achieved by gaining the participants' full cooperation and participation in the study.

As a recap, I obtained IRB approval before commencing field research. Informed consent from the participants was received. I minimized and prevented harm to the participants throughout the study. I maintained the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. I avoided deceptive practices in the study and gave the participants the right to withdraw from the research at any time. These steps were necessary to ensure Creighton's ethical standards and criteria of *beneficence* and *do no harm* were met (Creighton, 2018a).

### Summary

The qualitative approach was the best approach to use for this study to address the complex, real-world problem of military sexual violence. This approach can bring much needed attention and, perhaps, a different perspective on the epidemic of sexual violence to affect positive change and solutions. The phenomenology method provided a richness of depth to the problem from multiple victims' experiences that shed light on the military culture present before, during, and after the perpetration of sexual violence on women. The participants were women veterans who experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service. Data collection procedures and tools included conducting interviews. Data analysis included coding transcribed interviews, bracketing, and accounting for bias and methodological integrity in the study. Lastly, I took into account ethical considerations to ensure Creighton's ethical standards and criteria of *beneficence* and *do no harm* were met.

Chapter 4 presents the results and findings of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the culture within the U.S. military as a woman veteran who had experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service. In this chapter, the results and findings are presented that answer the research question: What does it mean to experience the U.S. military culture before, during, and after a sexual violence event as a woman veteran who had experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service?

This chapter commences with a description of the participants, then the research results and findings are presented. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a discussion and summary.

### **Participants**

A total of nine women veterans volunteered for this study. All participants were recruited from online social media women veterans' group pages or through women veterans' organizations. All prospective participants completed an online screening questionnaire to screen for the required inclusion criteria for the study. Out of 80 individuals who completed the screening questionnaire, 20 individuals fully met the screening criteria. All 20 prospective participants were invited to participate in the study, from which nine individuals fully participated.

Women veterans were recruited from the three largest military branches, but I experienced difficulty finding women veterans from the two smaller military branches: Marine Corps and Coast Guard. Demographic information showed some variability among the participants. The following table illustrates the demographic data collected for each participant.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>#1</b>	<b>#2</b>	<b>#3</b>	<b>#4</b>	<b>#5</b>	<b>#6</b>	<b>#7</b>	<b>#8</b>	<b>#9</b>
<b>Age</b>	40	38	31	38	40	33	45	36	55
<b>Military Branch</b>	Navy	Air Force	Air Force	Navy	Army	Navy	Navy	Army	Air Force
<b>Last Pay Grade Held</b>	E-7	O-3	E-5	E-5	E-8	O-4	E-9	E-4	E-8
<b>Last Year on Active Duty</b>	2020	2018	2013	2014	2020	2019	2020	2015	2013
<b>Length of Active Duty Service</b>	20+	10	4	11	20+	2	20+	4	20+

The following section describes the themes that emerged before, during, and after the participants' sexual violence events.

### **Results**

This section is broken down into three subsections based on the participants' responses regarding the cultural factors present before, during, and after their sexual violence events. The participant essence statements for their experiences before, during, and after their sexual violence events are listed in Appendix F to further understand and comprehend these cultural factors. The themes and subthemes for each subsection are described in a narrative reporting format and amplified with textural descriptions and excerpts from the participant interviews. Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the themes and subthemes present for each subsection.

**Table 2***Themes and Subthemes Before, During, and After Sexual Violence Events*

<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>
Anticipating a marvelous journey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences and opportunities</li> <li>• Self-betterment</li> <li>• Community and belonging</li> </ul>	Striving for personal satisfaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships and connections</li> <li>• A unique military experience</li> <li>• Personal growth and impact</li> <li>• Equality in job performance</li> <li>• Strong-person archetype</li> </ul>	Altering mental, physical, and emotional dispositions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in normal behavioral patterns</li> <li>• Physical illnesses</li> <li>• Relationship struggles</li> <li>• From positive to negative perceptions</li> <li>• Developing coping mechanisms</li> <li>• Enduring through the pain</li> <li>• Inadequate mental health support</li> </ul>
Experiencing negative cultural aspects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personnel issues</li> <li>• Environment tolerant of sexual violence</li> <li>• Risk factors within the environment</li> <li>• Poor leadership</li> <li>• The new girl</li> </ul>	Tolerating systemic failures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disparate standards</li> <li>• Gender discrimination</li> <li>• A military blind to its faults</li> <li>• Sexual violence can happen anywhere</li> </ul>	Encountering glimmers of hope <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-improvement/self-betterment</li> <li>• Not all military members are bad</li> <li>• Being courageous</li> <li>• Benefits of military service</li> <li>• Mentoring other women</li> <li>• Chaplain support</li> </ul>
Working in a good environment	Putting up with leadership deficiencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems with leadership</li> <li>• Empowered perpetrator</li> <li>• Silent observers</li> </ul>	Suffering from cultural defects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The burdens of being a woman in the military</li> <li>• Military lifestyle and culture breed sexual violence</li> <li>• Mishandling of sexual violence cases</li> <li>• Secondary victimization</li> <li>• A culture of fear</li> </ul>
		Enduring bad leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The leader as the perpetrator</li> <li>• Failure to act appropriately</li> <li>• Adverse treatment</li> <li>• Rank has its privileges</li> <li>• Unethical behaviors</li> </ul>

### **Experiencing the Military Culture Before Sexual Violence**

The participants reported that experiencing the military culture before sexual violence meant that they were anticipating a wondrous journey in their military careers, experiencing negative cultural aspects of the military culture, and working in a good environment.

#### *Anticipating a Marvelous Journey*

**Experiences and Opportunities.** The participants raved about their military careers for various reasons. They were looking forward to the experiences and opportunities the military offered, such as travel, military benefits, and sense of patriotism. Participant #7 captured this best by stating, “There are a lot of opportunities for those of us who served in the military. And of course, the Navy offered the romance of ‘join and see the world’...but I also was attracted to the ability to do something productive.” Some were escaping a bad home life, and the military provided a way out. Participant #3 stated,

I felt like I was going to get myself in trouble if I just sat around with the same friends, doing the same things that we had been doing since we were 13/14 years old, and so, I joined the Air Force.

**Self-Betterment.** Similar statements about self-betterment were made by most participants, such as, wanting a better life, getting a sense of direction, and being successful.

**Community and Belonging.** Community and belonging were also important, such as Participant #2 who said, “It seemed like it would just help to give me a sense of

community that I was looking for and being part of something when I otherwise didn't know, really, where I fit in the world.”

### *Experiencing Negative Cultural Aspects*

The negative cultural aspects were also experienced by most of the participants soon after joining the military. Some shared how they expected to experience gender discrimination, but this was not fully realized until they were part of the military.

**Personnel Issues.** The principal negative cultural artifact was regarding personnel issues, whether it was working in an understaffed department, being one of the few women in their unit, working in the “good old boys club,” or working with unhelpful co-workers. Participant #3 shared her experiences with personnel issues before her event as follows,

It was very stressful. We were very understaffed, so I was just trying to learn the ropes and get spun up. Overall, the culture was pretty negative and a lot of people, more or less, were helpful to an extent, but just a lot of disconnect. People were stressed out. Some people were willing to help when others wouldn't if you asked them. Some didn't have information; it was hard to find where to get questions answered and learn expectations.

**An Environment Tolerant of Sexual Violence.** Most of the participants shared their negative experiences with an environment that was tolerant of sexual violence. The cultural artifacts presented here were sexual jokes and innuendos, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual nicknames. Participant #5 expressed just how common the sexual jokes were by stating, “Innuendos, sexual talk, jokes, I think that just goes overall within

the military.” Participant #9 shared her experiences with unwanted sexual attention by saying:

If you’re slightly pretty, there is a spotlight on you. At my first duty assignment, my supervisor used to call me “Hollywood” just because I made sure I didn’t look like a man or I wore a little bit of lipstick and stuff. Looking back, I was like, “Oh, that’s cool.” And now I’m like, “Shit, that wasn’t right.” As it evolved, I noticed I would get compliments in uniform like, “Wow, you have the most beautiful brown eyes,” out of the blue, or “beautiful long hair, I’ve never seen you with your hair down.” I didn’t think anything of it at the time.

Participant #3 shared her experiences with being called a sexual nickname by stating, “The pilots had nicknames for everyone, and they called me ‘Tits McGee’ because I had large breasts, but I didn’t complain because at the same time you think, ‘Well, it could be worse.’” It is important to note that nicknames or callsigns are common within the military aviation community. Not all callsigns are appropriate, as in the case with Participant #3 being assigned a callsign based upon certain physical attributes. In addition, most of the participants served within or for the aviation community in some capacity and expressed concerns over the toxic cultural factors of the military aviation community. The callsigns are one factor; some other factors mentioned were the relaxed atmosphere, hands-off leadership, and aviators got special treatment because the military invested so much in them. This ties into the Tailhook scandal that was described in Chapter 2 (Browne, 2007).

**Risk Factors Within the Environment.** Another negative cultural aspect was related to risk factors within the environment. Participant #7 had this to say, “The culture

was male-dominant, and it was objectifying women. People were getting drunk; there was like a college atmosphere; people slept with whomever they wanted this weekend and went and got drunk.” Most of the other participants identified risk factors within the environment that raised concerns and contributed to sexual violence, such as alcohol use, mixed genders within the dormitories/barracks, being on deployment or overseas, no restrictions or oversight, and fear of reporting wrongdoing. Three participants stated that being overseas or on deployment was a risk factor for sexual violence because they were in a new environment, and people tended to consume larger quantities of alcohol, which led to sexual violence. Multiple participants noted that when alcohol was restricted, there was almost zero incidents of sexual violence.

**Poor Leadership.** Under this theme, poor leadership was discussed that centered around leaders tolerating a toxic environment and endorsing sexual violence. Participant #4 expressed her experiences with a toxic environment caused by poor leadership as follows,

Within a month of being at my new duty station, one of my direct leadership, he didn't like to be told “no.” All the leadership at that time was male. We had a couple of females, but they were males. His thing was, “you don't tell me ‘no,’ regardless of what it is because I rule your life,” and that was his overall way of being. I ruled your life because you're a female, and that's it... he had a very dominant personality, and he was very domineering when it came to the females, especially when I would tell him “no.”

Participant #3 described her experiences with witnessing leadership endorsing sexual violence by stating the following: “If the commander hears it (inappropriate sexual

comment), they either pretend they don't or sometimes they laugh with it. Sometimes they'll go, 'Hey, let's not do that,' and they just walk out, but that's it." The other participants stated similar responses, such as leadership endorsed sexual violence by ignoring it, not addressing it, or participating in it.

**The New Girl.** Being the new girl emerged as a notable element in this theme because most of the events happened to the participants within the first few months at their new duty station. In addition, the perpetrators often committed their offenses towards the end of their time at the duty station. Most of the participants stated that their perpetrators were either on their way out of the military or off to a new duty station. Oftentimes, within the last few months or weeks of their time at the duty station.

Participant #3 had this to say,

You realize that there has been a pool going on for two weeks, before you even got to your new base, of people seeing who can sleep with the new girl, and that's common. I got to my dorm, and I'd say for the first couple weeks, most nights a week, someone would knock on my door at two or three o'clock in the morning to introduce themselves because they saw there was a new girl.

### ***Working in a Good Environment***

On a more positive note, four of the participants mentioned positive things about the working environment before their sexual violence event. According to Participant #8, she worked in a small section and became close with her teammates. This is what she had to say about the working environment before her sexual violence event,

It was good. I actually enjoyed the people that I worked with. I said this before; you kind of become a family. My little shop, there were seven of us. We had our

male NCO and then the rest of us were all junior enlisted, but I was much older, because I joined later than my other counterparts. They called him the dad of the shop, and I was the mom of the shop. We were a little family. I enjoyed working with them. I would say we worked well. It was a great experience.

### **Experiencing the Military Culture During Sexual Violence**

The participants reported that experiencing the military culture during their sexual violence events meant that they were striving for personal satisfaction, tolerating systemic failures, and putting up with leadership deficiencies. To clarify, all of the participants experienced multiple sexual violence events and endured prolonged periods of sexual harassment. This subsection and associated themes captured their experiences during this time, and not just at the specific time of any given sexual violence event.

#### ***Striving for Personal Satisfaction***

Striving for personal satisfaction during the time of their sexual violence events meant that they were still trying to enjoy the relationships and connections they had forged with their teammates, living out unique military experiences, experiencing personal growth and making an impact, achieving equality in job performance, and appreciating the strong person archetype.

**Relationships and Connections.** These were notable in that all of the participants described this as the most enjoyable aspect of the military culture, particularly the camaraderie. The camaraderie was so important that it was one of the critical aspects that kept most of them serving long after their sexual violence events.

**A Unique Military Experience.** The subtheme of a unique military experience captured such things as the ceremonial aspects of the military, pride in serving, military

travel, and the military routine. Participant #4 described what she enjoyed most about her unique military experience as,

I've loved all the different countries I got to see and experience. All the different things that I've never thought in my life that I would ever be able to do, I did.

That's what was the most amazing thing about being in the military.

Most of the participants shared her sentiments and appreciated similar things. In addition, they remarked that they got to experience and do things they would not have been able to do outside of the military.

**Personal Growth and Impact.** Six of the participants explained how significant personal growth and impact were to them. Similar to their reasons of self-betterment for joining the military, personal growth and impact was a significant motivator. Participant #7 captured this best when she said,

I enjoyed the teamwork, the responsibility, and the leadership skills the military taught me...making decisions, leading people...I just think that when you see the results, like us helping in Haiti, doing humanitarian things; it is for the greater good of humanity that is done by being in the military.

**Equality in Job Performance.** This was a unique subtheme that emerged and is worth discussing. Participant #3 believed that everyone had equality in job performance and a fair shot at succeeding in the military. Here is how she described it,

I liked that it didn't matter where you were from or what your educational level was; if you could do the job, that's what mattered. No one cared if your parents were rich or if you grew up on welfare. There are always different societal

advantages, but for the most part, everyone had a fair shot; it felt like in the beginning.

According to the *DoD Military Equal Opportunity Policy*, all “servicemembers are treated with dignity and respect and are afforded equal opportunity in an environment free from prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), gender identity, or sexual orientation” (Under Secretary, 2020, p. 4). Such equal opportunity policies are taught throughout the military, but most participants felt they were not equally enforced.

**Strong-Person Archetype.** Participant #6 talked explicitly about that strong-person archetype that is a key part of the military culture,

It takes a certain type of person to be willing to sit in the seat, especially if you are a stronger person or if you are a little bit different than what the military is usually made up of.

This is a significant point that foreshadows the outcomes the participants experienced after their sexual violence events, which is discussed in the subsection about the themes that emerged after sexual violence.

### ***Tolerating Systemic Failures***

Tolerating systemic failures within the military meant experiencing disparate standards, gender/sex discrimination, and a military blind to its faults were part of the culture. The participants noted these elements during their sexual violence events, and how sexual violence can happen anywhere.

**Disparate Standards.** This subtheme centered around the aspects of the military culture that were unbalanced systemically, such as bias in the evaluation system,

favoritism, inequality, promoting the wrong people, and disparate standards for senior and junior personnel. For example, Participant #2 expressed the following,

The military is a very biased system...there's so much focus on awards and recognition and if you can write evaluations in a better way or not, and so there's a lot of injustice that's prevalent throughout. With so many checklists of items being stressed, there's a motivation to just check the boxes, saying "yes" when things aren't actually done. Skills haven't actually been accomplished, but it's just easier. I have witnessed checking the box "yes" and just moving things along to kind of keep the peace because I don't want to deal with the consequences; otherwise. I don't want to address the problem. So, there are lots of problems that get covered up and, so, things stay broken.

**Gender Discrimination.** Seven of the participants stated this subtheme as being a significant factor. Several of the participants mentioned the "good old boys club" in describing the unenjoyable aspects of the military culture. This describes preferential treatment to men over women. Participant #5 described her experiences with gender discrimination as,

I did encounter a lot of sexism or "you can't do that because you're a female"...sarcasm towards my gender...but in one way, that made me the person I am today because it gave me the willpower and the oomph to do much better.

Participant #3 offered her insight into the gender discrimination she experienced. She mentions that women are categorized as one of three things, "dyke, bitch, or whore." This same phrase was stated by most of the participants at some point in the study.

**A Military Blind to its Faults.** This subtheme centered around the aspects of the military culture that have been overlooked, ignored, and left fractured. Five participants mentioned such things as inadequate military programs, poor policy implementation, broken processes, outdated skillsets, an elitist culture that is not truly elite, and naivete in its self-image.

**Sexual Violence can Happen Anywhere.** It was important to note that the participants experienced sexual violence in various settings, such as a bar, a party, an after-party at someone's house, on the way home from a command event, dormitory/barracks, office, and aircraft hangar. The influence of alcohol was mentioned several times by the participants. Participant #3 had this to say, "Sometimes it's an order that you go to some of these parties, so you don't really have a choice. I've been ordered to drink by senior officials." Some of the participants mentioned something similar and called it "mandatory fun," or ordered to attend a party or command function and consume alcohol.

### ***Putting Up With Leadership Deficiencies***

This theme encompassed several different leadership deficiencies, including problems with leadership; empowered perpetrators; silent observers; and competition, manipulation, and bullying.

**Problems with Leadership.** This subtheme emerged as a significant unenjoyable aspect of the military culture, shared by seven participants. Problems with leadership included such things as abuse of authority, leaders' egos, leaders not standing up to wrongdoing, leaders lacking common sense, the exclusion of women in leadership

positions, and leaders who fostered a toxic environment. Participant #7 provided a specific example with the following statement,

I think there's a lot of abuse of authority in the military. The higher in the ranks, the more things are permissible...rank has its privileges. So, the same offense committed by an enlisted [servicemember], if you were a captain, then you can get away with it. If you're a master chief, you can get away with it. So, there are a lot of inconsistencies there. And of course, the exclusion of females in leadership positions was also something that I observed.

Similarly, Participant #1 shared her experiences with leaders who fostered a toxic working environment. She also mentions how her leadership participated in the manipulation and bullying of subordinates. Here is her complete statement on these aspects,

I didn't like the competitive culture in my community; and when I say competitive, I mean people taking pleasure in other people's failures because it meant that they were better. I really didn't like the whole power struggle; where people who are attracted to power—once they found power—they took pleasure in bullying people. I didn't like the manipulative aspect of what I like to call the “old guard.” The old guard are the senior enlisted within my community who have been around a while. They really like to make comments to tear you down; and then later on, when you're about at your wit's end, they'll make a comment to build you back up. They make us all addicted to praise, which I think is difficult, especially if you have a personality like myself that seeks to make everybody happy.

Participant #1 highlights second and third-order effects to leaders who foster a toxic work environment. Based on her observations and work from Fleming (2015), these toxic leaders create or tolerate environments that inspire unhealthy behaviors in their subordinates, such as teaching subordinates to be dependent on the leader for praise and recognition or fostering a punitive environment where subordinates are constantly on edge for fear of getting in trouble.

**Empowered Perpetrator.** An empowered perpetrator was a common subtheme because the perpetrator was someone in leadership or higher ranking in most cases. From the participants' perspective, the perpetrator felt empowered to commit sexual violence because they had the power as someone in a leadership position or they were highly favored and supported by more senior leaders. The empowered perpetrators abused their position, and some carried out quid pro quo sexual harassment. Participant #9 had this to say about her experience with an empowered perpetrator who abused his position:

This was when I was a First Sergeant. I had a commander tell me, "I'm so glad I hired you because you're really pretty in my front office." I was like, "Huh?" And he did try to kiss me. First sergeants and commanders are supposed to work closely together. We had a lot of closed-door events talking about airmen. In one instance, he did try to kiss me and then I punched him because I was tired. I said to him, "Look, I am serving in the military. I'm not a pretty statue that you can just look at." I just got tired. I was an E-7 at that time, and then I resigned. I said, "I'm not going to be your First Sergeant anymore," and then I moved to a new duty station.

The Oxford dictionary defines quid pro quo as a favor or advantage given in exchange for something (Quid pro quo, 2021). Three of the participants mentioned being put in a quid pro quo situation by their perpetrator for either a desirable career assignment or a better grade in a school assignment. Participant #4 had this to say about her quid pro quo circumstance,

He (supervisor and perpetrator) booted me out of the office onto the deck, and he kept making random comments insinuating that I got where I got because I slept my way there, and if I wanted to get better jobs or more, then I should do that with him. I declined, and then after that, once he booted me to the top of the deck outside, he just treated me like garbage.

As mentioned, sometimes the perpetrator was favored by leadership, which earned them a pass of sorts to commit sexual violence acts. Participant #6 shared her experience with a general, who was close friends with the perpetrator who violently sexually assaulted her for over a half-hour, as follows,

We had to go talk to the general, and the general literally had a script of paper and was like, “Do you have chaplain support? Do you have this?” Then he was like, “All right, good. Why didn't you stop my friend (the perpetrator) from drinking?” I was like, “I’m sorry, what, sir?” Then he was like, “Why didn't you stop my friend from drinking?” So, I left. I excused myself and left.

In this instance, the general, a senior military leader, showed no concern for the victim and simply read a standard script created for sexual assault victims. As described by Participant #6, when those scripts are simply read word for word, it comes across as insincere. She recommended instead, the script should be tactfully and compassionately

communicated, not simply read. The general was more concerned for his friend, the perpetrator, and even blamed the victim for errors in judgment committed by the perpetrator. Some of the other participants made similar observations.

**Silent Observers.** An important final subtheme to discuss is on silent observers, also known as bystanders to wrongdoing, or people who observe wrongdoing and do nothing to address it. They are neither perpetrators nor victims (Maiuro, 2015). Six of the participants mentioned the existence of silent observers at the time of their sexual violence events. Participant #3 had this to say about silent observers,

We'd all been drinking, and we were all hanging out. You don't want to believe that someone in your family is a bad person. So, when he (perpetrator) was like, "Oh, [Participant #3] is drunk, let me get her back to the barracks safely," everybody was like, "All right, we'll see you later." I will say that following that, once everybody knew that that was the night that it happened, it changed the way a lot of people reacted in those situations. Then it became, "If you're going to get her home, I'm going to walk with you and make sure she gets there." But I have also seen that situation happen in other units with other women, and it did not go that way.

### **Experiencing the Military Culture After Sexual Violence**

The participants reported that experiencing the military culture after sexual violence, meant that they were altering mental, physical, and emotional dispositions; encountering glimmers of hope; suffering from cultural defects; and enduring mistreatment. The most prevalent and robust themes of the study emerged in this subsection. Taking a step back, one can see just how profound the impact of sexual

violence is, not just on the victims but on the military as a whole. Former Defense Secretary James Mattis said, “By its nature, sexual assault is one of the most destructive factors in building a mission-focused military.” This is evident in this subsection by the range of subthemes that emerged.

### ***Altering Mental, Physical, and Emotional Dispositions***

This theme was the most prevalent, affecting all of the participants in various ways. Mentally, the participants suffered such things as anxiety, trauma, and behavioral changes. Physically, illnesses manifested that affected their ability to serve faithfully. Emotionally, sexual violence affected their ability to connect with others, which led to relationship struggles and interpersonal conflicts. Collectively, this resulted in the participants changing their perceptions of military service from positive to negative, developing coping mechanisms, and feeling the need to endure through the pain they were feeling to make it through their military service.

**Changes in Normal Behavioral Patterns.** Six of the participants described episodes of anxiety that ranged from mild to severe. Participant #9 described the severe anxiety she experienced,

It was the first time in 20 years that I had to go to behavioral health because I did not feel safe. In fact, I was sitting in my car, and an acorn fell on my car, and I thought I was getting shot at. That's how emotional I was. That day, I drove myself to behavioral health because I was losing it, I was sexually harassed, I was sexually assaulted...I was not in a good place, and I needed help right away. It was very difficult because I had to decide between losing my job, because how could you have somebody who's [in her particular position] have a nervous

breakdown and get that help? I was diagnosed with anxiety. My anxiety was triggered by that event [sexual assault].

Seven of the participants described suffering trauma from their sexual violence events. These often came in the form of military sexual trauma (MST) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Participant #5 shared how she sometimes cannot fill up her car at a gas station because the smell reminds her of the perpetrator. Performance issues at work arose for four of the participants. These stemmed from behavioral changes at work that impacted their performance on the job due to PTSD. Participant #3 shared her personal experience,

The PTSD definitely led to me, ultimately, not being able to do my job anymore.

The combination of the PTSD with the lupus. My anxiety level was raised so much, and you definitely don't want to be anxious while you're controlling aircraft and trying to get them landed safely. So, it definitely had me more on edge, and I think that affected my work. I mean, everyone was still safe; I didn't have any accidents or anything like that. But I do think it affected my efficiency and my ability to think through things because my brain was just completely fogged up.

Participant #3 described postponing seeking help to try to salvage her career.

Although she was the only one who mentioned it, specifically, it was implied by several of the other participants. Here are Participant #3's words,

Mentally, I have treatment-resistant PTSD. They've tried pretty much everything they can, but it was so long before I was able to really go get help because I was afraid of losing my flight clearance. So, it was years and years before I was ever able to even start getting any kind of therapy or anything for it.

Seven of the participants described some sort of change to their normal behavior patterns. Participant #4 described how she became more callous to military service and cautioned other women interested in military service to have realistic expectations about people. Participant #1 shared her struggles with finding her true identity. She described losing her personality and sacrificing her values. Several participants experienced diminished energy and motivation, paranoia, the development of phobias, anger, bitterness, and suicidal thoughts. Participant #6 described spacing out in the middle of conversations and suddenly desiring to drown at the bottom of a pond. Most of the participants became startled when someone or something touched them.

Participant #6 echoed what the other participants felt regarding losing hope that the military would be equitable. Some participants mentioned something along these lines in other parts of the interview, but she specifically said,

My patience with trying to get to a more equitable Navy is non-existent. I was asked to lead a diversity training, and to be clear, I took it as far as I possibly could. I basically said, "In this training, we're going to value minority voices. So, if you're white, let's be part of the conversation, but your voice doesn't matter most. Let's give our black and brown community a chance to talk and to value those voices more." They were like, "Oh, you can't say that." And I was like, "So we're doing another whitewashed diversity training, is what you're telling me."

Participant #5 shared her reasons for losing faith and motivation to continue serving in the Army, along the same lines. She no longer felt compelled to fight for policies she no longer believed in, and she even passed up the opportunity to promote to sergeant major.

While Participant #5 lost faith and motivation, others like Participant #6 developed negative motivation.

Negative motivation encompasses those negative factors about the military culture that generated motivation or a call to action within the participants (Suchotzki & Gamer, 2018). Participant #6 said,

I think there are two leaders that we have in the Navy: One are leaders who are like, “this went really badly for me; it's going to be even worse for you because that's how I cut my teeth.” I am not in that category. I think the other type is, “this was really bad for me, I’m going to work to make the process better for other people, and I’m going to try to grow you to the same outcome in a better and safer way.” I hope I fit into that category.

This commentary is also noteworthy because Participant #6 had described her view of Navy leadership. She took her bad leadership experiences as an opportunity not to emulate those negative characteristics and strive to be a better leader herself.

**Physical Illnesses.** Participant #2 shared her experience with developing a migraine disorder around the time of her sexual violence event that was aggravated by stress. Other participants had experienced seizures, insomnia, lupus, physical pain, and cancer. Although these physical illnesses cannot be proven to be caused by the sexual violence event, the appearance of these illnesses after the sexual violence event is notable.

**Relationship Struggles.** Six of the participants shared the relationship struggles they faced as a result of their events. Participant #9 said, “Mentally, I thought I was strong enough. Basically, it affected my relationships. I was non-trusting. I felt all I had

was my career, and I figured that having a relationship just wasn't worth it." Relationship struggles extended beyond the workplace and into their personal lives, affecting relationships with their significant others, children, and family members. Some of the participants made unhealthy relationship choices that resulted in divorce and unintended outcomes. The erosion of trust, a key element in developing relationships, happened to most participants, which led to such actions as avoiding others, limited connections, and being overprotective of their children. Three of the participants experienced issues with their teammates as a result of their sexual violence events. Participant #6 remembered when she started working at a new unit and felt ostracized from her teammates because she could not connect with them initially. She also shared how she lost the desire to attend large military gatherings and purposely tired herself out before meetings to avoid panicking.

**From Positive to Negative Perceptions.** All of the participants experienced a shift in their perceptions of the military culture from positive to negative. This took on the form of feeling disgust for the military and the shattering of the "hero halo." Regarding disgust for the military culture, Participant #5 had this to say,

I was disgusted. I was like, "There's no way that we have people like this." I said, "There can't be. People can't be this bad or this mean. Where do we get people like this? Not everybody can be like this." I said, "This can only happen to me; this is not happening anywhere else. This just happens to me." But gradually, throughout the years, as I heard little by little, things happening like this.

Participant #3 had envisioned all military servicemembers as honorable people before joining the military. Her experiences had caused that “hero halo” to shatter. Here is what she had to say,

When you first enter, you kind of have this idea that all the people you serve with are good people, even the ones who make mistakes, right? Because everyone here volunteered their life to help someone else. And then after that, it changes because now you're like these are other people, and they can be just as evil as anyone else can. But now, they have skills that make them better at doing it. So, I think definitely it warped my perception, not necessarily in a negative way, as much as it warped it into a more realistic way. That “hero halo” light that you have around other military people fell away.

**Developing Coping Mechanisms.** Seven of the participants described developing a coping mechanism to help them deal with the fallout from their events. Participant #8 said, “During my downward spiral following my assault, I was self-medicating, drinking very heavily. I was blackout drunk four or five nights a week. I ended up pregnant.” Alcohol was the most common thing used as a coping mechanism. Participant #5 turned to running and fitness as her coping mechanism. Participant #9 turned to God and focusing on her career.

**Enduring Through the Pain.** Enduring through the pain was a mindset all of the victims took on after their sexual violence events because they felt this is what they needed to do to get through their military service. Some felt they needed to remain silent, while others felt they needed to show resilience and strength. Participant #6 stated,

Nobody could question me. I still did social things. I refused to back down from command events because it was not usually about me, it was about setting a standard for other people. You should be allowed to go out with senior leadership and drink if it is a command function. If I drink, I mean don't be an idiot because I wouldn't be anyway, but if I'm going to go to a command function and have a beer, I want to be seen doing it. I want my behavior and my character to be seen so that there is never any question that this isn't something I asked for. Like, "I've deployed one-on-one with (Participant #6). I've seen her in sketchy situations, and she always handles things with grace." That was really important to me too that I wasn't some high and mighty person. I was still a normal person that they saw in normal situations that still handled herself well.

Five of the participants described being a silent victim. In other words, they did not initially report the wrongdoing committed against them. Participant #8 explained the reasons why she remained silent, "Initially, I didn't report. I kept it to myself...I didn't want to become "that girl" in the unit." She describes being labeled "that girl," in other words, singled out as a woman in a negative manner. She adds that being that girl is worse than being either a bitch, slut, or lesbian, as mentioned previously.

**Inadequate Mental Health Support.** Once the victims were finally in a place where they could seek mental health treatment for trauma, anxiety, and many other things that they suffered as a result of their sexual violence events, they were often faced with a mental health system that was overburdened, understaffed, and poorly executed treatment. Participant #8 shared this about her experiences with mental health providers,

The first one (mental health provider) I went to in Korea told me I just needed to breathe – just breathe – and sent me home with a book on breathing techniques. I was like, “This is fucking bullshit.” I don’t need to breathe. I was raped. I’m not okay. I need more than breathing techniques. I tried to get another provider, but none were available. So, I waited until my next duty station. The first mental health provider there just wanted me to draw. The second provider was more helpful, but abruptly left. My commander had to intervene to get me a decent provider.

### *Encountering Glimmers of Hope*

Despite the profound effects sexual violence has had on the victims, it was amazing to see that they still held on to hope for a better tomorrow. All of the participants experienced positive outcomes both internally and externally. Internally, they became stronger, learned to stand up for themselves and others, found purpose, developed greater awareness, became more compassionate, and sought help for themselves. Externally, unit members who were present during some of these sexual violence events became more cautious and aware of the dangers of certain scenarios, which led to them taking action in future events to prevent sexual violence. In some instances, the perpetrator was held accountable for his wrongdoing.

**Self-Improvement/Self-Betterment.** Seven of the participants reported experiencing some form of self-improvement/self-betterment. Like their reasons for joining the military, this was also something the military culture provided most of the participants. Participant #5 had this to say,

The military provided me a way of living. I was definitely not able to do this where I grew up. I look at the people that I grew up with. I go back home, and I'm definitely more well-off than they are, education-wise. I'm pursuing my master's, and I have two bachelor's degrees. I'm more diverse in culture, I've traveled the world and had lots of opportunities. So, I am very thankful for the military because I'm a very well-rounded person overall.

Other examples of this include learning leadership skills, becoming more well-rounded, understanding different types of people and cultures, and pursuing passions.

**Not All Military Members are Bad.** Participant #3 believes that not all military members are bad. This is important to note because it is implied and noted throughout this study that there are good aspects of the military, including many servicemembers. The other participants alluded to this as well. Here is what Participant #3 said, "I mean because not everyone in the military is bad. Not everyone's a rapist. There are some really nice guys." This also includes protectors looking out, which were those military servicemembers who felt it was their duty to protect others, especially those in need. Five of the participants described such individuals. Participant #3 stated,

Some of them [fellow servicemen] really do view you as their sister-in-arms.

They're there to protect you. And so, I had to be very careful about how I said things. I was afraid of a couple of my friends getting in serious trouble because they had confronted him (perpetrator) at one point, and it came to blows.

**Being Courageous.** Four of the victims became more courageous after their events by reporting the events, confronting others who committed wrongs, or standing up

to the perpetrator. Participant #7, a member of the Navy's Chief's Mess, recalled a time she confronted her fellow chiefs,

I said, "I don't believe that's appropriate because if they (victims) are still coming to you that they were raped and you're making fun of that behind closed doors, how do I know you're going to take them seriously? This is why people don't report because you open your freaking mouth and tell the entire Chief's Mess.

This is a need to know." It's a mess. That's why it's called a Chief's Mess.

The Chief's Mess refers to the enlisted members of the Navy in the E-7 to E-9 pay grades. These are the senior enlisted members of the Navy who underwent Chief's initiation in order to become a part of the mess. They are expected to be the subject matter experts of the Navy and are often referred to as the important link between the enlisted and officer ranks. Exemplary behavior is expected of a Navy Chief at all times (Delbert D. Black, n. d.; Welcome to the goat locker, n. d.). Two of the participants were a part of the Chief's Mess and both had positive and negative things to say about the mess.

Participant #1 raised the point that women should stand up to the perpetrator and not accept sexual violence because it will continue to be perpetrated,

I think hindsight's 2020, and honestly, every woman should be standing up and burning down the careers of any guy who perpetrates any of this stuff if that's what it takes because these men are going to continue on and do things to other people.

**Benefits of Military Service.** Travel and culture and the military connection comprise this subtheme. Participant #3 described why she loved travel and culture. "I

grew up in a very small town, and so I got to see other cultures, and I got to see other places. I got to see the world from a different point of view.” Participant #2 shared why the military connection was important for her.

I’m still a veteran, and so I still have that bond when I meet other veterans. When that’s revealed, it’s like “me too.” That’s just a very positive note...being part of that military club. I think that connection is the main thing that it provided me.

**Mentoring Other Women.** Two of the participants took their negative experiences and sought to mentor other women. This was touched upon with Participant #4 in a previous question, when she mentioned that she speaks with women about joining the military and cautions them on having unrealistic expectations of others. Participant #1 also shared how she believes women are not going to continue putting up with sexual violence in the military,

I pulled her aside, and I told her, “You don’t have to do this (flash her breasts at a group of male teammates at a party) for them. This is not the way to earn their respect. They might like you more, but they’re not doing you any favors. They definitely don’t care about showing you any respect.” Whether or not she kept doing it, I don’t know, because I never went to the parties after that. But yes, there’s definitely a culture, and it needs to go away because honestly, women in this next generation are not going to put up with it. I really don’t think they will. I mean, people talk about how sensitive they are and how easily triggered they are, and how it’s all political correctness. But the truth is, people may think millennials will quit a job and move on to something else just because of a whim; they’ll also quit a job because they don’t feel like they’re being treated right. I think that is

why there's a culture now building, or I could just say a fight building because women are fed up, and then they're finding out that everybody else is fed up too, and they are using the power of social media to voice their anger.”

**Chaplain Support.** Participant #9 was the only one to mention chaplain support, but they are always available as a resource—not just to sexual violence victims—but also to all military personnel. Here are her words, “I have to tell you; the chaplains have saved my life. That’s the first person I went to, and they’re good to talk to. They have that kind of training where they listen, and it’s confidential.” It is important to note that there is currently a shortage of chaplains across the military, particularly in non-Christian denominations (Lopez, 2020). This could pose a challenge with sexual violence victims seeking chaplain support.

### ***Enduring Bad Leadership***

**The Leader as Perpetrator.** All participants experienced sexual violence from someone in leadership, whether it was the most senior enlisted leader or officer leader. Most experienced it directly from someone in their chain of command. Participant #7 shared this as one of her experiences: “I was a master chief, and my CMC [Command Master Chief] was detached for cause for sexually harassing me and sexually harassing other women...he wanted to be my ‘fuck buddy.’”

**Failure to Act Appropriately.** Multiple participants mentioned that often, leaders do nothing, i.e., inaction, to stop wrongdoing; this is best captured by Participant #5 who said,

I mentioned it to my [staff] sergeant. I said, “Hey, I have something to talk about,” and he was like, “Go ahead, talk to me.” I told him, “I think I want to file

a report because somebody's been harassing me.” And he looked at me dead in the face and said, “You don't want to open that can of worms.” I said, “What are you talking about?” He repeated, “You don't want to open that can of worms.” And I'm like, “I just want to tell you in case something happens. I want to let you know because I think somebody touched me in my sleep.” And he says, “I'm not listening, I'm not listening,” and he was like (gesturing covering her ears), and I was like “Okay,” and that's all, I didn't say anything else.

This lack of inaction from leadership was enough to cause the victims to feel discouraged in reporting sexual violence, as expressed by Participant #5 and several of the other participants. The inaction or poor action to sexual violence was a chief contributor to the victims' altered mental, physical, and emotional dispositions. In short, the victims believed that they would not get justice or that nothing would be done with their sexual violence cases. Participant #4 had this to say,

When I talked to the division officer about him [perpetrator], he was like, “Well, just stay away [from the perpetrator].” So, I was always trying to stay away from him, but it was too hard to get away from him being on such a small ship. And he (perpetrator) was the guy who wrote my evals.

Participant #7 was sexually assaulted and continually sexually harassed by someone in her chain of command. Her commander failed to see that keeping her in the same working environment as her perpetrator was not the right thing to do. Instead of separating them, he decided to send them on an assignment overseas together for a few weeks where they would have to work together closely, eat together, and share a rental car. At the time of this assignment, her case was under investigation pending the outcome

of the case. Her commander justified these actions because the case was not yet substantiated. Here is what Participant #7 shared,

The judicial system says we're innocent until proven guilty. So, I totally understand the cognitive decision of saying, "Well, nothing has happened; we don't have an investigation result just yet." I mean, I'm working with this guy (the perpetrator) every day and that connection was never made by my leadership. This was a three-star admiral that I really have respect for, but the connection was never made that you don't put a victim in that position (to still have to work with the perpetrator and travel with them overseas on an assignment together). Just because the complainant doesn't bitch about it or doesn't say, "Hey, I'm not going, you need to find somebody else," doesn't mean that it's okay. So, I think connecting the ramifications of the allegation and how it impacts the workplace, the higher ranking the person is, the worse it is. But there's no connection, no empathy to say if it was my daughter, my wife, or my mother who went through this, would I want her to go 11 weeks with this guy overseas to save money? It's ridiculous.

**Adverse Treatment.** All of the victims experienced negative treatment from various individuals, including peers, co-workers, the perpetrator, and leadership. Adverse treatment includes a range of behaviors to include passive-aggressive treatment, being gossiped about, harassment, and retaliation. As mentioned previously, in most of the participants' cases, the perpetrator was someone in leadership. Participant #8 experienced adverse treatment from her perpetrator, who continually harassed her after assaulting her. Others in her workplace noticed this but took no action to stop it. It ended when the

perpetrator left the unit with praise and accolades since he was favored by leadership.

Participant #5 shared her humiliating story of adverse treatment from leadership after she reported being sexually assaulted and harassed,

When I told the staff sergeant, the next day, when I couldn't sleep, he made me stir poop. I was the shitter NCOIC (Non-commissioned officer in charge); that's what he called me, and they made me a shirt that said, "Shit NCOIC, poop NCOIC." That was very degrading. I think that was what made me feel even worse for reporting it to my command. I thought they were treating me that way, that I was being punished because I said something.

**Rank has its Privileges.** Most of the participants agreed that the higher ranking someone was, the more wrongdoing they seemed to be able to get away with committing. Participant #2 shared her thoughts on this,

Eventually, as one ranks up, you start becoming untouchable. So, there's no way to get rid of them unless they do something just really terrible and get removed from command. But if they're doing it (wrongdoing) to just a few people, here and there, and no pattern can be drawn, they get away with it because nobody's tracking them.

**Unethical Behaviors.** These negative behaviors also fall into the realm of unethical behaviors. The military has invested abundant resources in training the military on proper ethical behavior. Participant #1 shared her sentiments regarding her commander, who failed to behave ethically,

When you get debriefed on an evaluation, and your skipper (commander) doesn't let you have somebody in there with you, and he tries to give you his phone

number so that we can stay in touch after I leave the command because he thinks I need male mentorship. And he calls me things like “sweetheart” and “baby.”

You're just like, “How could you have just debriefed me on my eval and read me so wrong?”

### *Suffering from Cultural Defects*

This last theme comprises those defective areas of the military culture that impact sexual violence. This includes the burdens of being a woman in the military, military lifestyle and culture, the mishandling of sexual violence cases, secondary victimization, and a culture of fear. Participant #9 observed that the military recruits from society but that the U.S. culture sets the military up to have the culture it does. Here are her words, “We recruit from a pool of people from society. Therefore, the same problems that we have in society, we have in the military. The issue is that we have a bit of a different culture.”

**The Burdens of Being a Woman in the Military.** The burdens of being a woman in the military are about the participants’ experiences with the trials and tribulations of simply being female in a male-dominated culture. Perceptions of women from a male to female perspective were discussed, double standards for men and women, and times when women harm other women.

Most of the participants mentioned during their interview that women are viewed as either one of three things: bitch, slut, or lesbian. Participant #8 added that being “that girl” is the fourth category and is far worse than the other three. Participant #9 said, “You want to be stoic and hard, but then people say, ‘Why are you being such a bitch?’ Then there’s, ‘Oh, she must be a lesbian.’ Or ‘she’s a slut.’ I heard those all the time.” Aside

from these four categories of being, there was the view that being feminine, or exhibiting feminine qualities, equated to weakness. Interestingly, this applied to both men and women, with men exhibiting feminine qualities receiving worse treatment than feminine women because the expectation is that being a woman means being feminine. This was observed and stated by two of the participants. Additionally, they concluded that military men could not exhibit feminine qualities within the military culture. This segues into double standards for men and women.

Several of the participants mentioned how they had to work twice as hard as the men to receive respect or be viewed as a valued member of the team. Participant #1 said, “The culture of women was that women had to ‘man up.’ We had to work twice as hard, no drama. If we have any problems, it’s our own fault.” So, then it became working twice as hard as necessary to survive in a “man’s world.” Six of the participants believed this to be the case. For instance, Participant #4 believed that the men had it easier operating in a man’s world and women had it harder. This made it easier for the men to get away with bad behaviors such as making sexual jokes and sending pornography to each other. She said, “The military is, or can be a ‘good old boys club.’ It does help a lot of them get away with it (sexual violence) because I feel that they protect the perpetrator more than they protect the victims.” She thinks that because it is a man’s world, the men tend to protect the perpetrator, who is frequently a man.

What was even more shocking to the participants was when women did not show support for other women. They did so in two main ways: by accepting sexual violence and encouraging other women to do so and by taking part in deliberately harming other women. Participants #7 and #3 saw firsthand how women accepted sexual violence as

part of being in the “good old boys club.” These sentiments were echoed recently by Air Force Officer Lt. Col. Betsy Schoeller, following the Vanessa Guillén tragedy. She remarked, “You guys are kidding, right? Sexual harassment is the price of admission for women into the good ole boy club” (Gray, 2020). Participant #7 had this to say,

One of the things that really concerned me about the women is they would say, “Well, if you don't want to be sexually harassed, then you should stay at home; that's how it is. You have to develop thick skin; you got to suck it up. If you complain about the boys, then you don't belong with the boys.” It's very concerning, but that was the culture. If you report this, either you're going to be ostracized or you're going to be harassed afterward.

Women harming other women takes it a step further than simply accepting that sexual violence happens to women in the military. It involves women who actively discourage other women from reporting sexual violence, women who undermine the victims, and women who even endorse sexual violence committed against other women. Participant #3 shared her experience with a woman who discouraged her and other women from reporting sexual violence,

I had a female master sergeant flat out tell me, “I don't think girls should report things like this, because when you do, all it does is it makes it to where neither one of those people can be on the flight line to work and then we all have to suffer.” And she said that in front of a room of 50 low-ranking females.

**Military Lifestyle and Culture Breeds Sexual Violence.** All of the participants believed that the military lifestyle and culture breeds sexual violence. The reasons cited were that the military is blind to its faults, there is no trust in the military system, and

moving around often and starting over at a new duty station made people vulnerable.

Participant #6 captured why the military is blind to its faults by saying,

We are supposed to be an elite fighting force, and we're decades behind on so many things. Our technology is decades behind. How we man, train, and equip is decades behind. The fact that I use 'she' and 'her' in my signature block, and I'm not kidding, probably 70 or more people in the last three months have been like, "Oh, why do you do that?" Not in a bad way, but they're like, "Oh, I don't get it, is that like a thing?" We are so far behind in every single element that we are supposed to set a standard and excel at, and it is infuriating to fight that every single day. If I transfer to a corporate job, they're going to laugh at me because I've been a government civilian for so long, and I'm not really that competitive. They'll be like, "Oh nice, you're a woman, that's cool. We'll hire you for that, but not for your skills because you're just outdated, you don't know how to do things. So, I think the military culture believes itself to be elite, but it doesn't really know that it's not. One of the things that I've learned working for commanders overseas is that we really believe what we do, but we turn a blind eye to the things we don't do well. Nobody trusts the U.S. military overseas. It's just this grandiose idea that we have that we're the number one fighting force in the world, and everybody loves us, and everyone wants to be our friend. That's not the case. It's funny because the thing I love the most—the sense of camaraderie and who we are as this tight-knit group—is also the thing I hate the most because it keeps us blind to the things that we need to change and get better at. It seems to be a lot of talk all the time.

Participant #2 explained why she has no trust in the military system and how the military lifestyle contributes to sexual violence. She felt that because military personnel move around so frequently, every two to three years, it makes it hard to have connections you can depend on before arriving at a new duty station. Not being able to find people you can turn to and trust is hard, making you very susceptible to harm. She also shared a fact that applies to most of the participants: that they could have had a different experience in another unit. She said that it mostly comes down to where one ends up, what happens there, and the leadership you have. It is like a game of chance; sometimes one gets assigned to a great duty station or a not-so-great one.

**Mishandling of Sexual Violence Cases.** Six of the participants described those cultural aspects that led to their sexual violence cases not being handled appropriately. Many of the participants expressed disappointment in the outcome of their cases, how they were treated throughout the process, and the prevailing mindsets of leaders regarding sexual violence. Another frustrating aspect about the mishandling of sexual violence cases, was that there were no real consequences to the perpetrators. Participant #3 talked about how some of her friends wanted to take matters into their own hands because they believed the military system did not hold perpetrators accountable. Participant #5 felt that leadership did not do anything to hold perpetrators accountable and was instead told to stop talking about it. She shared, “Something's got to be done. Perpetrators have to be held accountable. If not, then we're going to be in the same place. If we don't do something about it, and people don't start talking, then nothing's going to happen.”

The participants also noted some other flaws in the military system regarding sexual violence, such as it being a broken process, the need for taking jurisdiction of sexual violence cases away from the chain of command, ineffective training, disparate consequences, and victim-blaming (secondary victimization). Participant #6 described the broken process as follows,

It's not our people that I think get it wrong; I think it's a process that's been embedded in our systems for so long that you can't have the current cast of characters relearn what justice looks like. I mean because all of their experience has led to this point. Like I said, the people who sat my trial, I think, were great people and really thought they did well, and they did do well in the confines through which they were working, but that process is broken. The problem is the process and what they know isn't what right looks like.

Participant #6 conveyed that it is not the people who get sexual violence cases wrong, but rather the longstanding broken process for how sexual violence cases are conducted. The players are simply trying to do right within the confines of a broken process. Similarly, Participant #8 described why jurisdiction for sexual violence cases must be taken away from the chain of command and why the SARC needs to be someone removed from the chain of command too,

First and foremost, remove it from the chain of command. If I had reported this to the police, he would be in jail. I think the thing that bothers me is that the chain of command has that control. They decide whether or not it's a viable case to take to their court system. They decide what the punishment is. They decide everything. Two, I do think that the SARC needs to be a third-party civilian who didn't take a

one-week class at the brigade so that they can get the check that says, “Yep, you can talk to sexual assault survivors/victims.” It needs to be somebody who is educated, knows all of the options, and who can notify the victim of all their rights. Like, “Hey, you have the right to go to JAG and get your own representation that isn’t the command. You have the right to move him or her, the perpetrator. You don’t have to leave your unit if you’re comfortable there. Or if you’re not, you have the right to move.”

This is also something that has been highly discussed at the Congressional level and proposed in bills such as the I am Vanessa Guillén Act of 2020 that takes jurisdiction of sex-related offenses out of the chain of command as well as establishes an independent entity where active-duty servicemembers can report sexual harassment and sexual assault. This bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives following the Vanessa Guillén tragedy in April 2020, where SPC Guillén was brutally murdered by the man who was sexually harassing her (Diaz, Cramer, & Morales, 2020).

Ineffective training appeared several times in the participant interviews.

Participant #9 said this about military sexual assault and sexual harassment training, “We get so much training, to start. That sexual harassment/assault training, death by PowerPoint, nobody listens to that. They didn’t care about that.” Her comments were echoed by other participants who stated that people haphazardly completed this training just to be compliant and that it was not effective.

In addition, the participants described how there were disparate consequences between senior ranking and junior ranking personnel. For instance, a senior military officer accused of sexual violence would likely experience little to no repercussions for

their perpetration than a junior enlisted servicemember. Another point to add is the type of assignments and accomplishments a servicemember achieved, such as being a combat veteran. Six of the participants observed within the military the importance of career success over protecting the victim. Participant #6 summed it up as follows,

I think that we just have this god complex as veterans. “Well, you're a veteran, so you can't fail. You're a combat veteran; you led marines,” who gives a shit! I think it's that weird culture about being a veteran that matters more than anything else. Leading marines or leading sailors, being a commander, being a combat veteran matters so much more than any one sexual violence incident. So, how do you fight it? Say you're Senator Gillibrand, how do you go to the Senate floor and say this actually doesn't matter. The fact that you're a combat veteran doesn't matter. Thanks, but no thanks.

Participant #6 touches on an important observation shared by all of the participants: that leaders at the highest levels will only hold perpetrators accountable up to a certain point. However, if the accountability action might affect career success, then the sexual violence is more likely ignored.

What is also disturbing about how sexual violence cases are handled, is how the victims are viewed. Participant #8 discussed being labeled “that girl” and not receiving the accommodations she needed as someone diagnosed with PTSD due to MST. This was due to sexual assault being on a victim’s record and visible to the command leadership. Similarly, Participant #6 talked about how there is a caricature of a sexual violence victim prevalent in the military, which describes them as broken and weak. Participant #4 offered another perspective on how sexual violence cases are handled by sharing, “There

needs to be something that takes away from the stigma of sexual violence in the same way that they took away the stigma from mental health issues.” She also added that more training could take away the stigma or greater female representation in the military.

**Secondary Victimization.** Secondary victimization, also known as victim-blaming, was mentioned by several participants in this study (Campbell & Raja, 2005). Participant #1 shared how a healthcare provider questioned her about the clothing she was wearing at the time of her sexual violence event and how her roommate assumed she was assaulted for being promiscuous. Participant #9 shared how she was grilled in court about what she was wearing at the time of her rape and how it was believed the event did not affect her too much because she did not seek counseling. Participant #7 captured her experience with victim-blaming as follows,

The first question they (leadership &/or investigator) are going to ask you, “Well, did you tell him that you were offended?” Excuse me, you're grabbing my ass cheeks. Can you let them go? I mean, that's inappropriate; who does this? No one. That's the thing, there's a lot of victim-blaming when they (victims) finally come forward to report.

**A Culture of Fear.** Living and operating within a culture of fear was expressed throughout the study, mainly after the participants’ sexual violence events. Leading by fear is about leaders who lead others by instilling fear into them. Participant #1 had this to say about her experiences with such leaders,

I used to think I was in awe of them (leadership) because of how much respect I had for them. Now, I realized that it was really just out of fear that I was going to misstep around them and get a different version, which I was told by my mentor

that is actually preferred by them. They would rather you have a healthy amount of fear for them than respect because fear is a powerful tool, and I think that is so opposite. I feel like respect will make you go to the ends of the earth for somebody. Fear is a thing of stress and sloppy work, potentially.

Fear of reprisal or retaliation was a reoccurring theme throughout this study. Many participants expressed fear of reprisal, while five participants shared that they experienced some form of retaliation. Participant #4 had this to say, “He (perpetrator) was really trying to ruin what I had, and then my evaluations were just meeting standards, were just very minimal to low.” Other participants expressed similar comments. Fear of reprisal was a key reason some of the participants mentioned that led them not to report their sexual violence event.

Participant #7 believed that the environment people are placed could inhibit their ability to openly complain about things that bother them, especially if they will experience reprisal or retaliation. Participant #9 had this to say about fear,

I really couldn't talk to anybody about it (sexual violence event) because of fear of repercussions on my end. So, I just let it go and stayed out of the office as much as I could. There's still a fear of the victim losing their career, and if they bring it out, then they're going to have a bull's eye on their chest, and they may not get promoted, they may not get an assignment, or they may not get to go to school. There's still that climate that exists, and there's a fear. There is a fear in that victim. They'd rather just suppress it than pursue justice.

### **Findings**

As described in chapter 3, the final themes presented in the results section yielded clusters of meaning detailing what the participants experienced and how they experienced it that helped to answer the research question: What does it mean to experience the U.S. military culture before, during, and after a sexual violence event as a woman veteran who had experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service? Essence statements before, during, and after sexual violence events were developed for each participant based on what they experienced and how they experienced it.

The participants all shared similar experiences before, during, and after their experiences with sexual violence. The final themes revealed a mix of positive and negative aspects to sexual violence, a greater emphasis on the negative effects of sexual violence, and defective environmental and cultural factors. The participants believed that the military system failed them. Nevertheless, through this flawed system, they were able to enjoy camaraderie, personal growth, and a unique military experience that cannot be found outside the military. All would agree that the military culture made them into better versions of themselves. This is an interesting duality to note about the military culture because it shows that it was both profoundly negative and positive on the victims.

What is important to note is that all of the participants found enjoyment in military service. These are the same things that both men and women enjoy. It shows that military service is for all genders, but not all genders derive the same experience. What needs to change are the hearts and minds that believe in denigrating women, clinging to power/control/ego, the “good old boys club,” leading with fear, and the lingering bias and favoritism that is still prevalent within the military. These cultural factors create

empowered perpetrators who thrive in a disparate system that favors them over the victim. Add to that the fact that more than 95% of perpetrators get away with their offense, and many become repeat offenders (Tilghman, 2016).

The women victims are left to pick up the pieces of a life shattered by sexual violence committed against them. They leave the military service disheartened, disappointed, lost, dejected in an organization that is touted to do good by protecting and defending. However, it fails so horribly in doing the very thing it was designed to do—protect and defend. The victims did not always have the protection of others, and often found just the opposite—attacks, retaliation, and issues with peers and leaders. Some protectors within the ranks felt compelled to protect victims, however, there was a sense of benevolent sexism (Becker & Wright, 2011; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Hideg & Ferris, 2016; Knoer, 2017) that pervaded the stories of these experiences, rather than true equality of personhood and dignity for all personnel. The chief complaint about leadership was the leader's unwillingness to address sexual violence. It is a major problem when leaders—those who are charged with the care and protection of those under their charge—fail in the basic duty of their position. In the case of Participant #6, one of the bystanders watching on as a senior military officer violently assaulted her for over 30 minutes was more afraid of what would happen to him for confronting a senior officer instead of helping the junior ranking victim. This leading by fear undermines psychological safety, which believes that one can speak up freely with ideas, questions, concerns, or make mistakes without being punished or humiliated (Edmondson, 2018). Though not explicitly mentioned, it was a prevalent theme woven among the themes. Unfortunately, too often in the military, it is safer to remain silent than to speak out

against wrongdoing, especially when it rocks the boat. In other words, not drawing attention to a rampant problem that is only getting worse is considered success rather than addressing the rampant problem. Multiple examples shared by the participants demonstrate that sweeping it under the carpet, the commander hoping it does not happen under their tour of duty, or improper action when it does happen, are actual outcomes with sexual violence. Another concern is punishing the victim for collateral wrongdoing, such as fraternization. Participant #8 was punished for fraternization and her rape case was used against her because she was “that girl” to her commander. It was easier for the commander to punish her rather than help her. However, that same participant had a different female commander who was helpful and compassionate. Unfortunately, the female commander departed, and the new commander was the one who punished her.

The main takeaways from a military culture that allows sexual violence to occur are the adverse effects of sexual violence on the victims. These adverse effects are still being dealt with to the present day by each participant through therapy and treatment. Most of the participants have endured long periods with inadequate treatment or no treatment. Participant #1 noted that the veterans service officer, who reviewed her military health record, told her that every woman veteran who files a Veterans Administration (VA) claim asks about MST, even though they do not always receive it. In order to receive a VA disability rating for MST, the woman veteran has to prove that she was sexually assaulted or sustained prolonged sexual harassment (Veterans Affairs, 2020). This is usually documented in their military medical record. If it is not, then there has to be substantial other proof such as a report of sexual violence, statements from doctors, unexplained health ailments not linked to another health concern, or journal

entries written during the time of trauma. If there is no substantial connection per VA standards, then the likelihood of getting compensation for MST is slim to none. Not all women have filed reports or shared their experiences with anyone. In other words, the statistics do not fully represent the number of women who have truly experienced MST.

Composite essence statements were developed to capture the full essence and meaning of experiencing the military culture before, during, and after sexual violence events from the combined perspective of the participants. Table 3 lists these composite essence statements.

**Table 3**

*Composite Essence Statements Before, During, and After Sexual Violence Events*

<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>
Experiencing the military culture before sexual violence means basking in the positive cultural aspects the military has to offer but also quickly noticing and experiencing those negative aspects that lead to sexual violence.	Experiencing the military culture during sexual violence means living within the negative cultural aspects of military service that made sexual violence happen while simultaneously trying to thrive and have a fulfilling career.	Experiencing the military culture after sexual violence means awakening to the realization that the military culture is flawed and continues to allow sexual violence to occur. It also means dealing with the pain and consequences of sexual violence with little to no help from leadership or service providers. Despite this, positive aspects were still derived.

*Note.* These statements were composed by the researcher based upon the results and findings of this study.

## **Discussion**

The results and findings revealed apparent similarities between the literature about military sexual violence. The following topics were highlighted in the literature

review that aligned with what the participants shared: gender discrimination, poor leadership, the cultural defects within the military culture, and the health consequences. What differed was how much the victims suffered mentally, physically, and emotionally and the multitude of positive experiences they valued. When one thinks of sexual violence, it is typically the negative aspects that come to mind, so it was interesting to see how the participants found ways to make lemonade out of the lemon of an experience they had.

Similar to previous research on gender discrimination (Becker & Wright, 2011; Brownstone et al. (2018); Caldara (2018); Dichter & True, 2015; Gartner & Sterzing, 2016; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Hideg & Ferris, 2016; Knoer, 2017; Sue, 2010; U.S. Department of Defense, 2016a), the current study found that the military culture contained gender discrimination. The participants described it as a “good old boys club” and how men received preferential treatment over women. Similar to previous research on poor leadership (Biewin & Headlee, 2018; Burns, 2014; Cheney et al., 2015; Derks et al., 2016; Fleming, 2015; Holland et al., 2014; Jaffe, 2011; Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Kaiser & Spalding, 2015; Sadler et al., 2018; Schmid, 2010; Snyder et al., 2012), the current study found significant systemic leadership issues, which included abuse of authority, leaders’ egos, leaders not standing up to wrongdoing, leaders lacking common sense, the exclusion of women in leadership positions, and leaders who fostered a toxic environment. Similar to previous research on the known cultural defects within the military culture (Benedict, 2010; Carlson et al., 2013; Flood, 2018; Holland et al., 2014; Lee & Ostergard, 2017; Posadas, 2017; Schuyler et al., 2020; Toxic Masculinity, 2018; Vojdik, 2005; Wood & Toppelberg, 2017), the current study found the military had

personnel issues, an environment tolerant of sexual violence, risk factors within the culture that contributed to sexual violence, disparate treatment of personnel based on rank and gender, and the mishandling of sexual violence cases. Similar to previous research outlining the health consequences of sexual violence (Bell et al., 2018; Campbell & Raja, 2005; Gerard et al., 2018; National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2010; Schmid, 2010; Snyder et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Defense, 2019a; Victimization, 2019; Watts & Zimmerman (2002); Wolfe et al., 1998), the current study found that victims of sexual violence suffered from trauma (PTSD and MST), behavioral changes, physical illnesses, and relationship and interpersonal conflicts. This caused the participants to develop coping mechanisms and endure through the pain they were feeling to make it through their military service.

The findings from this study diverged from the findings of previous research in two ways. First, previous research had focused on secondary victimization (Campbell & Raja, 2005), however, in this study, it was found that victims of sexual violence suffer mentally, physically, and emotionally for many years after the event and are often retraumatized by secondary victimization. Second, previous research has mainly focused on the negative aspects of sexual violence (Brownstone et al., 2018), however, in this study, the participants regularly shared about the positive experiences they had after their sexual violence event and continued to find value in their military experience even after experiencing trauma.

Overall, there was more in common between the literature review and the results and findings than there were not in common. This research may help readers have a better understanding of the experiences of women veterans who experienced sexual violence

while serving on active duty. This research may also assist other researchers seeking to conduct original studies into sexual violence or follow-on studies.

### **Summary**

Military service is like a funnel. People from varied backgrounds join the military for various reasons, but as their careers progress, the funnel cone narrows, and more commonalities can be found among servicemembers. This was true for the nine participants of this study who had more similarities in their experiences as servicewomen than dissimilarities. It was evident they all enjoyed serving their country but felt disappointed in how their peers and leaders treated them after experiencing sexual violence, how the military system failed them, and how they continue to live with lingering mental, physical, and emotional pain. Much can be gleaned from these women's stories to better inform solutions to the military sexual violence epidemic.

Chapter 5 addresses these proposed solutions and implications.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study looked at cultural artifacts that contributed to sexual violence in the military, as told by women veterans who experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service. This study was critical in amplifying the voices of those women and hearing, firsthand, everything they experienced. Their experiences and recommendations significantly contributed to the creation of this chapter, which proposes solutions aimed at eliminating sexual violence from within the military. It is important to note that greater notice is being taken into military sexual violence ever since the Vanessa Guillén tragedy in 2020. The administration of President Biden, particularly the new Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Lloyd J. Austin, III, is vowing to create more significant reforms that aim to eliminate sexual violence from within the military.

Taking into account the themes that emerged in chapter 4, in conjunction with the participants' feedback, yielded a host of recommendations to help turn the tide against sexual violence within the military, a complex, real-world problem that has persisted for so long. This chapter will address the study's aim by recommending proposed solutions, describing procedures for implementation, and discussing practical, research-related, and leadership-related implications. The chapter will close with a final summary and conclusion of this dissertation in practice.

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this DIP was to describe the experiences women veterans had with sexual violence while serving on active duty. Once the experiences were better understood, the stories of these women were used to create ideas for change. From the examples provided by the women who participated in this study, a set of

recommendations for the secretary of defense (SECDEF), director of SAPRO, and senior military leaders was developed to help them recognize what is happening when their military women encounter sexual violence. It is often when we hear the stories of others and see examples of the experiences of others, we can relate more closely with others and decide to work together to make progress. Everyone can benefit from learning about women's experiences and might find ways to be more aware of and anticipate challenges women face while serving in the military.

Recommendations were developed from the results of this DIP that can provide a deeper understanding of the experience of the military culture from the perspectives of women veterans who experienced sexual violence while serving in the military. The recommendations developed from the results of this study can be shared with the SECDEF, director of SAPRO, and senior military leaders to demonstrate how the military culture is used both for and against efforts to eliminate sexual violence in the U.S. military. A secondary aim was to drive change within the military in the form of changes in policy and a comprehensive sexual violence strategy that takes the goal to eliminate sexual violence within the military seriously.

### **Proposed Solution: Cultural Reformation**

One proposed solution to help resolve the prevalence of sexual violence within the military is to embark on a journey of cultural reformation. This is based upon the research in chapter 2 and the findings in chapter 4. In essence, cultural reformation is about the steps one takes to change behaviors, beliefs, and habits. To carry out cultural reformation in the military it will take at least five actions: (1) take an honest look at the military and oneself within the military, (2) be transparent and show equal respect for all

people, (3) acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of all people by increasing the number of women in the military to equal numbers, (4) demonstrating a commitment to reformation by reforming military training, services, and the military judiciary system, and (5) strengthen weaknesses while maintaining strengths by reducing the power of hierarchies.

### **Take an Honest Look at the Military and Oneself Within the Military**

The military, as a whole, needs to evaluate itself in an honest manner and recognize what it indeed does well and what it does not do well. The findings revealed that the military is excellent at fostering a unique military experience, personal growth and impact, and a military family connection. What the military is not good at are mitigating defective environmental and cultural factors embedded within the military system, preventing or curtailing the negative effects of sexual violence on its victims, modifying problems with leadership, and preventing bias towards women. The remaining actions address these identified non-strengths.

One concrete step leadership could take is to require all military members to read the statements of victims of sexual assault. This dissertation in practice provides nine such statements. When all individuals are required to read the truth, the honest truth, about what happens in the military, they might be better prepared to stop it from happening again. This concept of truth and reconciliation has been used in other areas of social justice reform with success.

### **Be Transparent and Show Equal Respect for all People**

Cultural reformation involves demonstrating respect for all people regardless of gender. This study has shown how women are not treated as equals in the hearts and

minds of many serving in the military, as evidenced by the research and participant testimonies. The disparities between men and women in uniform are numerous, from end-strength numbers, fewer women in leadership roles, disparate treatment of men and women, negative views of women, and sexual violence mainly happening to women. The military could do more to honor and respect its women. Actions speak louder than words. Some ways to do this include recruiting more women, promoting more women, appointing more women to leadership roles, and recognizing that men and women are equals with much in common. Military service is meant for all. The warrior spirit is not just relegated to men. Women warriors have existed throughout history (Redmond, 2021). Support for the military woman must start at the highest levels of leadership.

The participants described a specific type of person who joins the military. One mention was the strong-person archetype, and another was someone who was always on and ready to face challenges. There are clearly qualities in a servicemember that are desired for military service and necessary for success, such as confidence and courage (Roberts, 2018). The focus should be on recruiting this type of person with the desired qualities, regardless of gender identity or phenotype. These are qualities that are prevalent in both men and women (Roberts, 2018), but because so few women serve in the military as compared with the men, more emphasis should be on recruiting women with these desired qualities.

### **Acknowledge the Strengths and Weaknesses of all People by Increasing the Number of Women in the Military to Equal Numbers**

This study has shown that the military is not making significant progress with sexual violence reform. In chapter 2, Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2014) and Schmid (2010)

argued that more women in the military, or strength in numbers, would reduce or eliminate sexual violence within the military. Their research showed that the greater the amount of representation from one gender significantly reduces or eliminates sexual violence by the other gender. This ties into increased recruiting and suggests that improved recruiting numbers for women could serve as a solution to eliminating sexual violence from within the military. In fact, recruiting numbers for women are woefully lacking when compared with average civilian employment numbers. There is a large gender imbalance that is not changing fast enough. Women still comprise around 17.3% of military end-strength numbers (DMDC, 2021). There is something to be said for strength in numbers, but this alone is not enough. There are other areas to reform in order to reduce/eliminate sexual violence.

### **Demonstrating a Commitment to Reformation by Reforming Military Training, Support Services, and the Military Judiciary System**

#### ***Military Training***

Another area of cultural reformation is military training. Training reform centers around the content and delivery of military training. The research and findings in this study showed that military training is ineffective regarding its content and delivery. Some of the participants shared how they felt the training was not effective or not taken seriously. For a topic as sensitive as sexual violence, click-through, self-paced training, and PowerPoint presentations fail to deliver a lasting message to the recipients. Consideration should be given to modify how this training is delivered. Training focused on shaping behaviors is essential. The military does small group huddles within sections to pass down training or focus groups to gather more specific information. These are

effective methods that are not new to the military. These methods could be used in lieu of computer-based training, and not just for sexual violence training, but for other types of sensitive training topics, such as suicide, alcohol and drugs, and PTSD. Role-playing and interactive training is something that has been done in the military, but not with as much consistency.

It is important to remember that sexual violence is a symptom of other issues, so the audience must understand what those root causes are. The findings from this study showed gender bias is prevalent, and poor leadership, and silent observers. These additional topics should be incorporated into a training platform in order to dispel prevailing gender myths and challenge military personnel at all levels to stand against sexual violence. Perhaps more emphasis on the behaviors that will root-out the negative and persistent cultural factors will have positively impact reducing the number of actual acts of sexual violence. The proposed solution regarding to training content, is to focus both on what not to do and on the desired positive behaviors, such as showing respect for all people, embracing diversity, and rejecting extremist behaviors. The military should keep both sexual assault and sexual harassment training but not separate them into two separate trainings. Both are related, and sexual harassment often precludes, and follows, sexual assault, so it is important not to separate the two. The Army is the only military branch that does not separate sexual harassment and sexual assault training.

Lastly, leadership theories and practices are not widely taught in the military. For instance, incorporating training on the dangers of toxic leadership and the benefits of servant leadership would be beneficial in leadership development. This could also include leadership assessments designed to show servicemembers the diversity of leadership

styles used in different types of situations. It is part of knowing oneself better in order to be better for the team.

### *Support Services*

The findings showed that support services are inadequate and insufficient, not just for sexual violence victims, but also for anyone seeking help. With an insufficient number of mental health providers within the military, leveraging outside organizations and civilian providers can help fill in the gaps. Also, the sexual assault response coordinator (SARC) is not always separate from the chain of command. Ideally, the SARC would be a fully trained civilian who knows the ins and outs of sexual violence healing processes and is separate from any military chain of command to avoid undue influence. Support services reform would also include training on psychological topics such as trauma and stress, encouragement to seek help, and investment in additional support services. Part of support reform includes increasing chaplain support. Participant #9 mentioned how the chaplain saved her life by helping her heal from her rape. The military overall is short on chaplains (Lopez, 2020).

### *Military Judiciary System*

Judicial reform is also necessary as part of the cultural transformation. As mentioned previously, the I Am Vanessa Guillén Act of 2020 is currently before the House of Representatives, awaiting further action. This Act proposes taking jurisdiction of sexual violence cases away from the chain of command, which is a big step in the right direction. Most of the participants in this study favored not just taking sexual violence cases out of the chain of command, but also out of the military jurisdiction. Doing this will create more trust in the military judicial system. The participants also hope this will

increase the prosecution rates of perpetrators. These steps would empower military leaders because the pressure of being judge and lawyer in sexual violence cases will be gone, leaving this process to the professionals trained in litigation, evidence gathering, and investigations.

The military follows the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), which currently contains no articles for sexual harassment. Making sexual harassment punishable under the UCMJ is a significant step forward in properly addressing sexual harassment. Other judicial reforms include removing career protections for those convicted of sexual offenses and requiring that they register as a sex offender. The participants felt that how well one did in combat should not matter more than the sexual perpetration committed against their fellow sister-in-arms.

### **Strengthen Weaknesses While Maintaining Strengths by Reducing the Power of Hierarchies**

Another finding from this study was that military leaders do not value their subordinates enough. Putting people first means listening to what they have to say, valuing their feedback and contributions, and making the workplace safer and better for them. Reforming the military hierarchy is a big step in cultural reformation that can help transform senior-subordinate relationships for the better.

The military is known for its hierarchical structure or strict chain of command structure. This worked great during the days of calvary and battle formations of the American Revolutionary era through the Civil War era when marching orders were needed to maintain order and discipline on the battlefield. Today's military operates very differently from how it did during the Civil War era because of the different sets of

challenges it faces. The enemy is faster, more calculated, more covert, and better equipped than in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The information age that we live in feeds us mega doses of information faster than we have ever experienced. Military personnel are forced to work with this old structure and get caught in the sway of it. A hierarchical structure is outdated and does not meet the challenges and needs of these new dynamics. It is time the military revisits its power structure to meet the needs and challenges facing its personnel and new battlespace.

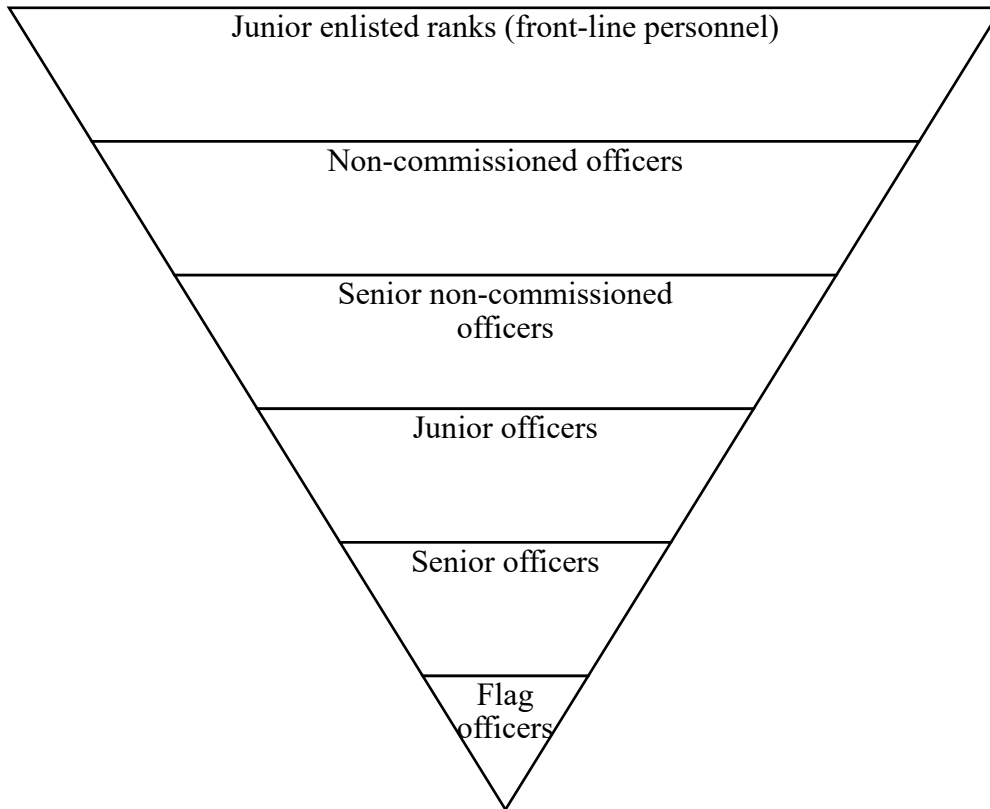
One way to do this is to lessen the hierarchical structure that puts power in the hands of only a few by using a networked system structure to redefine the military power structure. This involves adopting a systems thinking approach to the military. “Systems thinking is also based on contextual patterns of organization rather than specific content. For example, systems thinking balances the focus between the whole and its parts and takes multiple perspectives into account” (Cabrera et al., 2008, p. 301). In Eisler (2015), Peter Senge, the foremost proponent of systems thinking, says that hierarchies are not the problem, but rather dysfunctional hierarchies, also known as hierarchies of dominion. Hierarchies of dominion are about subordinates rigidly following orders from the top levels of leadership with little to no say, which is not empowering. The goal should be to have a hierarchy of actualization, which means that those in higher positions of authority are fully dedicated to well-being of those under them as well as dedicated to the realization of shared aspirations that come from the collective instead of from one or two individuals (Eisler, 2015; Senge, 2002). This would empower those who lean forward each day and serve as the face of our military. When we think of a servicemember, a general or admiral is not the first person to come to mind. The everyday junior enlisted

servicemember is who comes to mind. This is the group that comprises the largest population in the military. For every flag officer, 643 servicemembers are serving in the E-1 to E-4 pay grades. Empowerment to junior personnel is what is needed to foster trust among teams and build psychological safety.

Through the context of servant leadership, the hierarchical pyramid should look something like an inverted triangle that reflects dedication to the wellbeing and empowerment of people. The Navy says, “Mission First, Sailors Always,” but does it always have to be that way? The mission will always be there, but the people who carry out this mission will not always be there if they are not treated right. Hunter (2012) discussed the inverted pyramid model as inspiration from Greenleaf’s servant leadership model. This inverted pyramid is opposite the traditional, hierarchical, top-down pyramid that has been seen in the workforce from the last century until the present day. Taking this model and applying it to the military is shown in Figure 7 below.

**Figure 7**

*Depiction of Power by Numbers of Servicemembers Through the Lens of the Servant Leadership Model*



*Note:* The above diagram shows how the military can lead from the perspective of the servant leadership model. These categories can vary somewhat, depending upon the military branch and the level of responsibility within an assignment/job. The junior enlisted ranks are generally comprised of personnel in the E-1 to E-4 pay grades. Non-commissioned officers range from the E-5 to E-6. Senior non-commissioned officers range from E-7 to E-9. Junior officers range from O-1 to O-4. Senior officers range from O-5 to O-6. Flag officers range from O-7 to O-10. There is another category called Warrant officers. However, they are not factored into this pyramid since their purpose is to serve as technical experts within their fields of expertise.

This inverted triangle does not imply that junior military personnel are to lead the military and the senior military personnel are to be led. Instead, this model shows how our more senior leaders could lead from the position of a servant leader—to serve first, lead second (Greenleaf, 1998). This allows our larger population group, junior enlisted

personnel, who are also our front-line workers, to be more empowered from the layers of leaders behind them, supporting them and developing them into servant leaders.

Becoming a senior military leader should require more than just putting in time and service to the military. It should require a clear demonstration of strong ethical character, creating positive outcomes, and not creating negative outcomes. Currently, the military promotion system relies on a board of superiors reviewing the records of those for promotion consideration. One can claim to be a leader of others without clearly demonstrating how they have created direction, alignment, and commitment (DAC ontology) (Drath et al., 2008). It simply has to be documented in their performance evaluations. No interviews or further validations are done. The idea of a 360-degree feedback evaluation was discussed within the military but has yet to be implemented. It involves getting feedback from peers, subordinates, and superiors. This is much more comprehensive than the senior-subordinate rating system in place currently.

Drath et al. (2008) posit that the currently accepted leadership ontology that encompasses leaders, followers, and shared goals (tripod ontology) is limited and argues that the DAC leadership framework will help us better understand leadership within the context of collaborative environments. Leadership understanding within the military centers around the tripod ontology, which is more limited than the DAC ontology.

Senior leaders' lasting presence and influence can be used for good to empower, motivate, develop, and inspire those more junior to them. A focus on DAC can lead to a wider range of positive outcomes than simply a narrow focus on shared goals. Someone will need to replace that general or admiral someday. A positive lasting legacy is essential for our current leaders to impart on those who will succeed them.

### **Implementation of the Proposed Solutions**

Operating within the constraints of the military is part of the challenge with implementation. The military is part of the U.S. government, which is not known for expeditious policy changes. Due to its bureaucratic nature, adopting new policies and procedures can take years or never happen. However, because of its hierarchical nature, a mandate from the SECDEF to all the military services would yield faster results, which is one good thing about a hierarchical structure. The key is SECDEF determining the benefit outweighs any costs to mandating a change. In February 2021, the SECDEF mandated an independent review commission (IRC) on sexual assault in the military. This is incredibly promising because it signals that he might be seeing that the costs of not addressing the military sexual violence epidemic are building and that the benefits of doing something about it far outweigh any costs. He is doing this with the full support of the new U.S. president. There are four lines of effort to this IRC: accountability, prevention, climate and culture, and victim care and support (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021). This aligns well with the five actions for cultural reformation presented as a solution to this problem.

Because this IRC is still in progress, it is unclear how the IRC's findings will be used to make changes. The woman leading the IRC, Deputy SECDEF Kathleen H. Hicks stated that the IRC will evaluate military sexual assault policies, processes, and programs, and best practices from entities outside of the DoD, such as academia, industry, and other countries like Israel and European countries. When complete, the IRC will propose recommended policy changes and procedures that will improve sexual assault prevention in all of the services. SECDEF will decide which recommendations to implement and

task the military services to carry it out. I plan to share my proposed solutions and recommendations with military leadership, the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, and SECDEF to incorporate into plans to address sexual violence within the military. My research will cost nothing for leadership and key decision-makers to consider; thus, the benefits will outweigh any costs associated with tackling this problem.

## **Implications**

### **Practical Implications**

This research adds to the body of research on military sexual violence for a variety of reasons. First, my study allowed the voices of the participants to resound. They shared what they enjoyed and did not enjoy about the military. This revealed the positive and negative aspects of the military culture that they cherished. Most studies on sexual violence focus on the negative aspects of the topic (Bell et al., 2018; Brownstone et al., 2018; Burns et al., 2014; Burns, 2014 ). As a researcher, it was important to let the voices of the participants be heard and to express what they were feeling, thinking, and believing. Second, there are limited qualitative studies on military sexual violence and no phenomenological studies. As stated in chapter 1, a qualitative, phenomenological study can lead to a greater depth of understanding of the military culture that makes sexual assault possible, as told by women veteran survivors (van Manen, 1990). Lastly, my research revealed results and findings that may not have been known previously or fully understood. For instance, according to the participants of this study, putting up with and enduring poor and toxic leadership (Jaffe, 2011) has a meaningful impact on the culture that is created within an environment that can tolerate and lead to sexual violence.

A good frame of reference on how this dissertation in practice contributes to the greater good, is through the lens of the Jesuit charisms (Creighton University, n.d.). *Magis* means more. Leaders should strive for excellence. For me and the women who volunteered to participate in this study, having a love for military service means helping to make it better every day. Because the participants in this study did more by volunteering to share their experiences, I can share these recommendations that can have a practical impact on improving the military.

The Jesuit charism of *women and men for and with others* means showing concern for others through our actions such as pursuing justice and acting on behalf of a marginalized population like military women. My research helped achieve this by allowing the voices of a marginalized population—military sexual violence victims—be heard. The Jesuit charism of *cura personalis* means care of the individual or taking care of the entire person. This dissertation demonstrated this charism by focusing on a very important issue and problem that women, particularly within the military face. Through doing so, change can happen that would provide a better future for women in the military. *Unity of heart, mind, soul*, another Jesuit charism, is about developing the whole person and understanding who we are as leaders. This journey of seeking knowledge through conducting and writing the literature review, asking and answering my research question has shaped my understanding of leadership and helped me become a better version of myself. This dissertation helps readers understand the military's leadership issues and enables them to look within to better understand themselves as leaders. A more holistic view of unity of heart, mind, and soul as it applies to the U.S. military means that the

military's mission to protect and serve the country should be aligned with how the military culture should protect and serve its military members.

*Ad majorem dei gloriam* is doing things for the greater glory of God, which is what this dissertation sought to accomplish. Lastly, *forming and educating agents of change* is about increasing awareness of a problem and inspiring responsible action to effect positive change. This last charism is what I hope to instill in others seeking to make a difference in life by challenging them to address wrongs and make a concerted effort to resolve problems within their professions (Creighton University, n.d.).

### **Implications for Future Research**

There are many directions follow-on studies can take based on the research conducted in this study. This qualitative dissertation leaves room for future studies on military sexual violence. The beauty in qualitative studies is that theories and hypotheses can be generated for follow-on studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, a quantitative study that tests the following hypothesis: Leadership is correlated with the perpetration of military sexual violence. This would be a fascinating study since the impact of leadership on the perpetration of military sexual violence was a significant finding. It would be interesting to conduct a quantitative study to test this hypothesis. A follow-on qualitative study could be done on sexual violence from a veteran man's perspective, who experienced sexual violence. Here is an example research question: What does it mean to experience the military culture as a veteran man who has experienced sexual violence while serving on active duty? Male-on-male and female-on-male sexual violence perpetration was touched on in this study and could serve as an interesting follow-on qualitative study.

### **Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice**

This dissertation was critical in showcasing the leadership issues that are prevalent in the military. Sexual violence in the military is a leadership problem. The findings in this study showed that toxic leadership behaviors contributed to sexual violence. For instance, when leaders failed to act, ignored problems, poorly handled problems, or contributed to the problems. In the instances where leaders acted appropriately and showed care and concern for the victim, the outcome was more favorable for all parties involved. In order to carry out the proposed solution introduced in this chapter to address the complex problem of sexual violence in the military, one leadership theory comes to mind: servant leadership. In this chapter, I referenced servant leadership in regard to describing the power structure based on numbers of people in the military. It is not just in that instance that servant leadership principles could be applied, but in how the military leads on a regular basis.

Greenleaf (1998) says that servant leaders serve first, lead second. That can be a complex concept to grasp in a military that values the power of leadership, or it can be completely misconstrued to mean being subservient. Greenleaf notes that being a servant leader does not mean settling for mediocrity or being subservient. On the contrary, servant leaders have a low tolerance for mediocrity. A leader first mentality and a servant first mentality are at two opposite extremes. According to Greenleaf (1998),

The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?

Applying this to military personnel, how can military leaders ensure that those under their charge pass Greenleaf's best test? One can look at other industries to have an idea of how the best test is applied. A similar industry to the military is the police force. Russell et al. (2018) conducted a case study at a police department located in the Southwestern U.S. that practices servant leadership. The study was conducted to see how members of the organization understood their own wellbeing within an organization that practices servant leadership. The results revealed that the participants believed their police agency offered opportunities for their growth, was committed to their mental and emotional health, promoted healthy living and physical fitness, and built a culture of belonging. Building a culture of belonging within the military culture is at the heart of the military sexual violence epidemic.

These examples from other industries can be used within the military to ensure military personnel, particularly military women, feel like they belong and have the psychological safety to be fully valued members of the team.

### **Summary of the Dissertation in Practice**

I embarked on this dissertation journey in the fall semester of 2017. I knew then that I wanted to do what I could to address the complex, real-world problem of sexual violence within the military. As time passed, more attention was brought to this problem. Then, in April 2020, the Vanessa Guillén tragedy happened, and it accelerated the actions needed to combat sexual violence within the military. The right people now had this problem squarely on their radar. At the time of this writing, a new presidential administration came into power who sees the benefits of addressing sexual violence in the military. The SECDEF is actively taking strides to assess the military's sexual

violence problem and find solutions. It is promising to have the highest levels of leadership engaged in finding solutions. This makes this dissertation all the more value-added and meaningful as part of the strategy to combat sexual violence within the military and pave a better path forward for our men and women in uniform, but mostly our women.

In this dissertation, I stated why this complex, real-world problem was important enough to research and find solutions because it is still rampant and ongoing.

Experiencing the military culture before sexual violence means basking in the positive cultural aspects the military has to offer, and also quickly noticing and experiencing those negative aspects that lead to sexual violence. Experiencing the military culture during sexual violence means living within the negative cultural aspects of military service that made sexual violence happen while simultaneously trying to thrive and have a fulfilling career. Experiencing the military culture after sexual violence means awakening to the realization that the military culture is flawed and allows sexual violence to occur. It also means dealing with the pain and consequences of sexual violence with little to no help from leadership or service providers. Despite this, the participants still derived positive experiences from the military culture.

The proposed solution was a cultural reformation that invited five actions, i.e., take an honest look at the military and at oneself within the military, be transparent and show equal respect for all people, increase the number of women in the military to equal numbers, reform military training, services, and the military judiciary system, and reduce the power of hierarchies by empowering others. Through the frame of the Jesuit charisms, this dissertation was created for the greater glory of God, the military, military

women, and the individual servicewoman looking to serve with honor, dignity, and respect. Leaders owe it to their servicewomen to provide them with a meaningful, rewarding, and safe place to serve their country. Military woman, I honor you today and always!

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## Appendix A

### Study Recruitment Letter

Hello! My name is Evita Salles, and I am a doctoral candidate with Creighton University's Interdisciplinary Leadership program. I am respectfully seeking women veterans as participants for my doctoral research study that I am conducting on U.S. military culture. The focus of the study is to learn more about the culture within the U.S. military that allows sexual violence (sexual harassment and/or sexual assault) to occur. Specifically, the culture before, during, and after having experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service.

The study involves interviewing women veterans (no longer serving in the military) who have experienced sexual violence while serving on active-duty military service. Participation in this research will involve only one interview and one to two follow-ups lasting no more than 60 minutes each. This study will last no greater than 12 months.

Participation is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time with no consequence. Confidentiality will be maintained unless explicit consent is given by the participant to not remain anonymous. Any data collected will be secured and stored on the Creighton University encrypted and password-protected cloud drive.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the following screening questionnaire located at this link:

[https://blueq.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6omztKpxI9IF0O1](https://blueq.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6omztKpxI9IF0O1)

Participation in this study may be of great importance in driving positive change towards eliminating sexual violence from within the military.

Any questions about this study can be directed to me at [salles.em@gmail.com](mailto:salles.em@gmail.com), (732) 962-5223 or Dr. Constance Fuller at [constancefuller@creighton.edu](mailto:constancefuller@creighton.edu), (630) 988-9877.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,  
Evita Salles  
Doctoral Candidate  
Creighton University

## Appendix B

### Screening Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Other
2. What is your age? (Choose from the drop-down option)
3. Did you serve on active-duty (regular) military service?
  - a. No (If the respondent answers “no” then the survey will end here with the following message: “Thank you for participating in this survey!”)
  - b. Yes
4. How many years of active duty did you serve? (Choose from the drop-down option)
5. What was your last year of active-duty service? It must have been within the last 10 years to qualify for this study. (Choose from the drop-down option)
6. In which military branch did you serve? Please select all that apply.
  - a. Army
  - b. Marine Corps
  - c. Navy
  - d. Air Force
  - e. Coast Guard
  - f. Army/Air National Guard
7. What was the last pay grade you held during your most recent period of active-duty service? (Choose from the drop-down option)
8. Have you personally experienced a traumatic incident(s) while serving on active duty? If yes, briefly state what type of incident(s).
 

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9. Have you ever filed a sexual harassment and/or sexual assault report while serving on active duty?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
10. Are you willing to participate in a series of interviews regarding military culture?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No (If the respondent answers “no” then the survey will end here with the following message: “Thank you for participating in this survey!”)
11. Please type in your email address and phone number where you can be reached. You may provide your name, but it is not required for this study.
 

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## Appendix C

### Creighton University Research Informed Consent

Protocol Title: Sexual Violence in the Military Research Study

IRB project number: 2001521

Principal Investigator's Name and Department: Evita Salles, Creighton University  
doctoral candidate in the EdD program in Interdisciplinary Leadership

Principal Investigator's Telephone Number: (732) 962-5223

24-Hour Telephone Number: (732) 962-5223

#### Study Summary

The purpose of this research project is to learn more about the culture within the U.S. military that allows sexual violence to occur. Specifically, to learn more about the culture surrounding a sexual violence event and not the event itself. The term "culture" will be used throughout this study and that refers to the characteristics, patterns, shared behaviors, and ways of being of a group or organization. The phrase "sexual violence" will also be used, and that is a collective phrase for both sexual harassment and sexual assault. I invite you to participate in this study as someone who has experienced the military culture surrounding your sexual violence event.

Important things to know:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.
- If you choose to withdraw, your choice will not affect your relationship with the investigator of this study. There will be no penalty to you.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- The duration of your participation in this study will be a maximum of 12 months.
- One semi-structured interview will be conducted to document your personal narrative on the military culture surrounding your sexual violence experience while you served on active-duty military service. This interview will be recorded and transcribed using Zoom Pro, a more secure version of the Zoom platform.
- One to two subsequent follow-ups are required to ensure your experiences are accurately captured, clarification of information, and member checks.
- The interview and subsequent follow-ups will last no longer than 60 minutes each.
- No monetary compensation is associated with this study.

#### Benefits of Participating in the Study

This study presents the opportunity to share your personal story about your experience(s) with the military culture surrounding your sexual violence experience while you served on active duty. Your story may be beneficial to the countless women who have experienced sexual violence and to those who are seeking to better understand the cultural artifacts surrounding sexual violence. In addition, your story may contribute to a body of research into the topic of sexual violence from which current and future

generations can learn. It may also serve as a mechanism for growth of knowledge on this topic.

### **Risks of Participating in the Study**

The potential risks of this study are minimal. Specifically, no more risk is expected than what is encountered every day in life. As you will be asked to reflect on your experience with sexual violence, it is possible you could experience some emotional stress. If you should do so, you can get assistance at <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/> or call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality and anonymity are of paramount concern in this study. I will do everything possible to ensure your records and identity are kept confidential. This study does not require identifying information; hence, no identifying information about you will be released. However, if you choose to share your name associated with your story, please send me an email at [salles.em@gmail.com](mailto:salles.em@gmail.com). All data obtained, to include interview audio, video, and transcriptions, will be collected and handled solely by me, as the researcher. Those will be stored on my university's encrypted and password-protected cloud drive that only I have access to. The Zoom Pro interview recording will also be stored on Zoom's encrypted servers. All records linked to this study will be maintained and stored for five years, after which they will be permanently deleted in accordance with Creighton University's Retention of University Research and Compliance Records Policy. The IT protocols state that all deleted data will be unrecoverable after 30 days. Research findings may be presented at professional meetings or published in relevant journals.

### **Contact Information**

For questions about this research study, please contact the principal investigator, Evita Salles at [salles.em@gmail.com](mailto:salles.em@gmail.com) or Dr. Constance Fuller at [constancefuller@creighton.edu](mailto:constancefuller@creighton.edu).

The Creighton University Institutional Review Board (IRB) offers you an opportunity (anonymously, if you so choose) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; or offer input about this project with an IRB administrator who is not associated with this particular research project. You may call or write to the Institutional Review Board at (402) 280-2126; address the letter to the Institutional Review Board, Creighton University, 2500 California Plaza, Omaha, NE 68178 or by email at [irb@creighton.edu](mailto:irb@creighton.edu).

For the Research Investigator—I have discussed with this participant the procedures described above and the risks involved; I believe she understands the contents of the consent document and is competent to give legally effective and informed consent.

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### **Bill of Rights for Research Participants**

As a participant in a research study, you have the right:

1. To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.
2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.
3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.
4. To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.
5. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.
6. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in the study.
7. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.
8. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research participant.

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol: Semi-Structured Interview of Woman Veteran

Time of Interview: TBD

Date: TBD

Place: Zoom Pro

Interviewer: Evita Salles

Interviewee: Woman Veteran (PI will ask if the participant would like to provide her name if she wishes to not remain anonymous.)

*(Read to participant)*

The purpose of this research project is to learn more about the culture within the U.S. military that allows sexual violence to occur. Specifically, to learn more about the culture surrounding your sexual violence event and not the event itself. The term “culture” will be used throughout this interview and that refers to the characteristics, patterns, shared behaviors, and ways of being of a group or organization. The phrase “sexual violence” will also be used, and that is a collective phrase for both sexual harassment and sexual assault. The questions I will ask you focus on the culture you observed and experienced around your sexual violence event. As you ponder over the questions, think specifically to what you observed or experienced within your working environment, with your coworkers, with your supervisors or leadership team. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research project. I want to remind you that your comments will remain anonymous. You can pause or stop the interview at any time, take a break at any time during the interview, and ask me questions at any time. Shall we get started?

#### **Questions/Prompts:**

1. What inspired or motivated you to join the military?
2. During your time serving on active duty, please describe the things about military culture that you enjoyed.
3. Were there any things about the military culture that you did not enjoy? [Could you describe those?]
4. What did the military culture provide you with? Said another way, what outcome was possible for you because the military culture is the way it is?  
*--Now I would like to transition to questions about your experience with sexual violence while you served on active duty that you indicated you had on the screening survey. I am **not** going to ask you to describe the specific event. Instead, I am going to ask you a series of questions about the different aspects of the culture or environment around the specific event.--*
5. Think back to the time before the event, what was the working environment like for you prior to the event? During the event? After the event?
6. Did you continue to work in the same work environment after the event? If so, for how long? What was the working environment like for you after the event?
7. What, if any, changes did you experience in your perceptions of the military culture after the event? [Use probes as needed to help them describe their perceptions of the

culture before and their perceptions of the culture after, for example, did you notice different things about the culture after the event that you had not noticed before?]

8. What, if any, impact did the event have on your mental, physical, or emotional abilities to serve faithfully in the military?
9. What, if any, impact did the event have on your military career?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about the culture of the military related to your experience of sexual violence while serving in the military?

**Additional questions/probes for depth and breadth to the above questions:**

Would you expound on that?

Tell me more.

I would like to hear more about that.

Would you clarify that for me?

What was the effect of that incident?

What else would you like me to know about this experience?

**Field Notes**

Length of interview:

Descriptions/Observations	Reflective Notes

**Appendix E****IRB Approval Letter**

# Creighton UNIVERSITY

Office of the Provost  
Research Compliance

DATE:	23-Nov-2020
TO:	Salles, Evita
FROM:	Social / Behavioral
PROJECT TITLE:	A Phenomenological Study on the Culture Within the U.S. Military that Contributes to Sexual Violence Against Women
REFERENCE #:	2001521-01
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Initial Application
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	23-Nov-2020
EXPIRATION DATE:	09-Nov-2021
REVIEW TYPE:	Full Board

Thank you for your submission of Response to IRB Requests materials for this project. The following items have been reviewed with this submission:

- Creighton University HS eForm~

You have satisfied the concerns of the Board as expressed in the letter dated 10-Nov-2020 from the IRB. Therefore, this project is fully approved. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The consent documentation has been waived as, per 45 CFR 46.117, this research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

- Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.
- Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

- All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.
- All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.
- If this project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk (risks no greater than one would encounter in daily life) project it will require continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. The Annual/Continuing Review/Project Termination form must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 402-2802126 or [irb@creighton.edu](mailto:irb@creighton.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

## Appendix F

### Participant Essence Statements Before, During, and After Sexual Violence Events

	Before	During	After
<b>P1</b>	<p>My experience with the military culture before my sexual violence events was filled with excitement at the opportunities and travel that awaited me, as well as belonging to something bigger than me. However, I was getting unwanted sexual attention as the new woman within my unit and being targeted by a perpetrator who more senior to me appearing to be a good person in order to gain my trust. It did not help that there were limited personnel around who could help me.</p>	<p>Around the time it happened, I was enjoying all that the military offered: the camaraderie, travel, new experiences, new cultures, and a sense of accomplishment. What I was not enjoying was the inequality, men versus women mentality, and divisiveness. The bullying and manipulation I experienced from the “Old Guard,” or senior members of my community, was intolerable. Right before I was raped, my perpetrator escorted me to a party where I believe my drink was drugged because I blacked out and do not remember what happened. No one intervened probably because they were too drunk to.</p>	<p>I would say the aftermath of my events were worse than before or during the events. Everything that one could possibly experience as a negative consequence, I did. I mean everything that you probably already heard or know about. I will say that the good that came out of all of this was that I used my experiences to mentor other women and become stronger myself. I definitely am not the same person I was. I used to be a goody two shoes, but now I am struggling with lingering health consequences and finding out who I am now that I am no longer serving. I know I want to use my experiences to help others in some capacity.</p>
<b>P2</b>	<p>I came into the military motivated at the unique opportunities it offered as well as the chance to get a solid education. I wanted to gain a sense of direction in my life and be a part of something bigger, a community. My first duty station after training was a stressful environment that was understaffed, had a negative vibe, and lots of disconnect. It was hard to find answers because some people were helpful, some were not, and leadership was disengaged. My perpetrator was my supervisor and he quickly befriended me.</p>	<p>When the military worked well, it was great. I mean the camaraderie, connectedness, and the unique common bond shared by all servicemembers. We were encouraged to take leave and practice self-care. The mandatory fun and unique military experiences were good when it went well. The things I did not like were the bad leadership, injustice, and biased and disparate system. There was too much focus on awards and recognition, maintaining a status quo, and no real learning. People were simply “checking boxes.” Problems were not getting addressed and things stayed broken. My supervisor and perpetrator</p>	<p>After my event, I became more closed off. I felt no reason to believe anything would change with the military culture. I have seen too many leadership and systemic failures to believe otherwise. I just wanted to finish my time, but that was cut short because I was forced out of the military by the same leadership who supported my perpetrator. I was left to live with the consequences of my event, and I had no support. I am thankful for my time served and that military connection that I will always have, but something’s got to change with the military culture.</p>

		gained my trust. We went out one night and he raped me.	
<b>P3</b>	<p>My reasons for joining the military stemmed from my family legacy of military service coupled with trying to avoid trouble at home. I knew it would be a different experience, an alternative to college, and offer attractive military benefits. At my first duty station, I noticed the guys targeting new women arrivals. I even had uninvited late-night visits to my dorm room by these guys. Sexually harassing behaviors were tolerated within my unit, such as making jokes, not taking the SARC serious, assigning sexual callsigns (nicknames), and leadership endorsing such behaviors. My callsign was “Tits McGee” because I had large breasts. What also bothered me was that it was evident that it was a “good old boys club” and a “man’s world.”</p>	<p>I enjoyed when the military worked correctly such as the equality in job performance and that everyone had a fair shot at success. I felt pride in serving along with my brothers and sisters in arms. The camaraderie was strong. I even enjoyed the routine and ceremonial aspects of military service. I did not enjoy the gender disparities and gender resistance within the culture. Commanders got to decide punishments as the single decisionmaker. I felt like I was constantly at the mercy of others. One night, I went out with a few others to a bar. There were supervisors present encouraging mandatory fun and ordering us to drink. At some point, ketamine was slipped in my drink and I remember waking up in my wingman’s bed. I felt so dirty that I washed with bleach.</p>	<p>The health problems that arose for me after my events are things that I am still dealing with till this day. It has been very hard. There are so many things I can say that went wrong after my event. For starters, leadership was not supportive of me. That “hero halo” I had for military servicemembers definitely faded away. Women were encouraged to be mean to each other and not all of them were helpful to each other. It didn’t help that we were viewed as either a bitch, whore, or dyke. The military culture makes bad people more skilled and dangerous at being bad because of the training they receive. It is definitely a performance culture that makes getting help hard. It is all about performing or you’re no good. However, there were some good things that came about, such as fellow military men wanting to be protective and look out for others who have been hurt, like me. It made me realize that not all military men are bad.</p>
<b>P4</b>	<p>9/11 and that patriotic call to defend our nation inspired me to join the military. I was the new arrival at my first duty station, and I noticed some concerning behaviors from my immediate supervisor. He was domineering and did not like taking “no” for an answer. He also displayed a bias toward women and violated boundaries both physically and verbally.</p>	<p>The people aspect for me was very strong, especially the camaraderie and meeting people from different backgrounds. I also enjoyed the travel, seeing new countries, and experiencing new things. I did not like the discomfort I felt being around mostly guys. It felt like a good old boys’ club. The leadership did not stand up against wrongdoing and played favorites. Some military wellness programs were better</p>	<p>One big change I noticed after my events was that I became more callous to military service. This was after observing how my perpetrators just continually got away with things because they had favor from leadership. Not to mention the fact that leadership did hardly anything to stop the behaviors. Leadership does not want to do anything to stop sexual violence. It is a good old boys club, and I</p>

		than others. At work, I was constantly experiencing sexual harassment, particularly quid pro quo harassment. My perpetrator, who was my supervisor, was constantly singling me out.	caution women who want to serve to not expect that everyone is good. Till this day I am struggling in my relationships and living with lingering trauma from my events.
<b>P5</b>	I had a difficult home life, particularly with my overbearing and macho dad who pressured me to marry someone I did not want to marry in order to “save my honor.” He later disowned me. I knew I had to leave home and seek out a better life, and the military offered me a way out. On my second deployment, I was one of five women out of 300+ personnel. It was a normal work environment, but people did make sexual jokes and innuendos.	The camaraderie and teambuilding were very strong for me. I got to develop real friendships for the first time in my life. However, that was overshadowed by the negative aspects of the military culture such as the good old boy system, racism, sexism and gender discrimination. Women were viewed with perceived limitations. One night while I was asleep in my bunk in the hangar bay, someone wrapped me in my sleeping bag and sexually assaulted me.	I served a long career, so the aftermath of my events was not all bad, but wow did I struggle! The health consequences are what I struggle with most till this day, especially the anger, trauma, relationship issues, PTSD, etc. I could go on and on about all of my issues. It came to a point where I just lost faith in serving. I just did not believe in the military anymore. I was an E-8, and I did not care to promote to E-9. I was just so disheartened. I could not believe military people could behave that way and hurt people the way I was hurt. It was an eye-opening and life-changing experience for me.
<b>P6</b>	I’ve always been inspired by American patriotism. I remember at a young age opening my Encyclopedia Britannica and happily reading about Francis Scott Key. I would even write patriotic-themed plays that my sister and I would put on each year for family and friends. So, it was natural that I join the military. I went on a mobilization assignment where I was one of a few women on staff. I was excited to be there in my role. The environment was good.	My enjoyment of the military culture stemmed from being a part of a community and something bigger. I think there is this strong-person archetype that characterizes a military servicemember, and I truly admire that. In my role, I was able to have influence because I had my boss's ear. This allowed me to put people first. I loved the camaraderie, but it was also something I loathed because it made us blind to seeing our faults as a military. I could go on and on about the things in the military culture that I did not like. It is definitely a good old boys club where women are harder on women. We have this elitist culture in the military where we think we are #1 but we really are not.	I was and still am not the same as I used to be. I definitely lost myself. After my event, I felt like I needed to show everyone that I had it together, that I could do normal things and handle myself. The relationship struggles began taking a toll. I could not relate to others in the same manner as I used to. This was evident in all of my relationships. Not to mention the health issues I am still experiencing. What was most disappointing was how broken the military is. The military cannot get the basics right when it comes to people. In my sexual assault case, I think the deliberators did their best to do what they knew was right. The problem is the military has the wrong

		<p>We are decades behind in how we man, train, and equip our force. We are grossly behind the things we should be excelling at and setting a standard for. Our skill sets are outdated in the civilian sector. No one overseas trusts us even though we think everyone wants to be our friend. That's not the case. I was violently sexually assaulted for over 30 minutes on my way home from a command event. My perpetrator was in my chain of command and very senior. There were four others present in close proximity who did very little to stop what was happening because they were more afraid of confronting a senior officer than helping a more junior victim.</p>	<p>idea of what right looks like. Is it right for my perpetrator to walk away with his full military retirement and benefits just because he served a long career in combat? This is despite the fact that he violently assaulted me for over half an hour. The military is blind to its faults and has this God complex. Veterans are put on a pedestal. There is a difference in how junior personnel and senior personnel are treated. The military should be setting the standard for things and excelling at them, but it is just not the case.</p>
<p><b>P7</b></p>	<p>The military was appealing because it offered opportunities, travel, education, and the chance to do something productive. My training unit right after bootcamp had a strict and structured environment, but despite this, there was a college party atmosphere with lots of freedom, casual sex, and drinking. It was clearly a male-dominant culture where women were objectified. The culture was too hands-on with the women. There was a lot of quid pro quo going on and people were afraid to report wrongdoing. My aviation unit was not much better. It had a very open environment where people felt comfortable enough to secretly videotape each other.</p>	<p>I enjoyed how the military has shaped me. It provided me the opportunity to lead people, make decisions, and take responsibility. It also provided me the opportunity to work with different kinds of people, enjoy teamwork, and work for the greater good of humanity. Those aspects of the military culture that I disliked were the abuse of authority, the privilege of rank, and the disparate standards for senior and junior personnel. In addition, I noticed how women were objectified and excluded from leadership positions, especially senior leadership positions. This all made serving unfair and unbalanced. I remember when the lead instructor at my training command used his position to sexually assault me. He told me he needed to measure me in private and used that occasion to touch</p>	<p>I have observed a lot throughout my career. My events have taught me that perpetrators are like octopuses with their tentacles reaching out looking for opportunities. Victims are not reporting in high numbers because they are afraid of losing their careers and fear retaliation from their peers. The military is a good old boys club. You have to develop thick skin to thrive in that culture. As a Chief Petty Officer, I have observed the mess that is the Chief's Mess. I have had to confront my fellow Chiefs for their bad behaviors. Being a part of the mess should not mean we excuse bad behaviors from others in the mess. Personally, I experienced harassment from my perpetrator after he assaulted me, and my leadership was not helpful or</p>

		me inappropriately. In another instance, my crewmates solicited me for sex, and the last incident involved the most senior enlisted at my command sexually assaulting me and asking me to be his fuck buddy.	understanding. I struggled so much with trauma that it became a reason for my separation from military service. I am still struggling with lingering health effects, but I am grateful for my time served and how it has shaped me.
<b>P8</b>	Before I joined, I was a military spouse. After divorcing my husband, I realized how much I missed being around the military, so I joined myself. 9/11 also inspired me to join. My unit working environment was good. I worked in a small section and became close with my teammates. They viewed me as the mother of the den.	What I enjoyed most during my time serving was the camaraderie and lasting friendships that I forged. The military also provided me unique experiences. The gender imbalance and gender discrimination were definitely the unenjoyable aspects of military service. It was a masculine culture that was harder for those who were more feminine. Women also got discredited. We were labeled either a bitch, dyke, or slut or we were considered too pretty to be in the military. I was on board less than one month before I was raped. My perpetrator was an NCO in my platoon. We were all out drinking one night when I passed out drunk. The perpetrator took me out of there under the guise of helping me back to my room. He instead took me to his room and raped me.	After my rape, things did not get better, but it made me realize a lot of ugly truths about the military. There's this stigma associated with being a rape victim. I became "that girl," and that girl is much worse than being either a bitch, slut or whore, which are what military women were categorized as. Sexual harassment and assault are ways of putting women in their place. My perpetrator continued to harass me afterwards. I was afraid to report it what happened at first, but I eventually did. I went through the investigative process and it was not easy. The SARC, another member of my platoon, assigned to my case spilled the beans about my case to others within our platoon while my case was still a restricted report. People began gossiping about me and treating me poorly. My first commander was a woman who was compassionate and understanding. The commander that replaced her did not like me and used my rape case as evidence against me for a separate and unrelated fraternization case. Not only that, but the fact that I was a rape victim followed me to my next duty station since it was in my record. I received no

			<p>accommodations to help me deal with my diagnosed PTSD that was brought on by MST. I became “that girl” all over again. These experiences made me realize that the SARC needs to be a civilian who is not affiliated with any unit, and the jurisdiction for sexual assault cases should not be left in the hands of the chain of command. Two good things came from my time in the military: the opportunity to pursue my passions and the bonds I formed with other women veterans.</p>
<p><b>P9</b></p>	<p>My dad was always my hero. He served in the military, and I remember how sharp he looked in his uniform. He was my inspiration for joining, but it was also something that I’ve dreamed of doing since I was a child. I wanted to be successful, and I also needed structure and discipline in my life at the time. I was serving overseas in an environment that was tolerant of sexual jokes and naked calendars hung around. Being an attractive woman meant that a spotlight was on me. My supervisor would call me “Hollywood,” and I would constantly get compliments about my looks. The guys far-outnumbered the ladies, and there were mixed genders living in the dorms. The crowd was immature and liked to drink. We also had no restrictions. I definitely had a false sense of security.</p>	<p>What I loved most during my time serving was the camaraderie and military family connection. Those shared experiences with my comrades were special to me. The travel and benefits were great too. However, what frustrated me was my leadership lacking common sense and just not being smart. They led with their egos and did not want to listen to the junior enlisted. Leading up was severely lacking. One night, I was awoken from my sleep by a loud knock on my door. It was my suitemate's boyfriend who pretended to need help. He was drunk and forced his way into my room and raped me. My suitemate heard everything but did not intervene or report it. Later, I had another incident where my commander told me I was pretty for his front office and tried to kiss me. I punched him and resigned from the position. The last event was when my senior enlisted leader tried to get me to sleep with him for an upcoming school slot. I punched him too.</p>	<p>After my rape, I knew I had to report what happened, so I did. The lawyers told me I’d lose my career if I pursued the case, yet I still went through the court-martial proceedings with no help from my command. I was questioned about what I wore and why I was not going to counseling. I was scared, but I knew God was on my side. Thankfully, the perpetrator received a bad conduct discharge, but it took over a year. I forgave my suitemate for her behavior that night. I went on to have a long and successful career, but it was not without its challenges. I learned to take care of myself and suppress my emotions, but my relationships suffered. I developed coping mechanisms to help me through the pain and effects of PTSD. The military is not doing anything right when it comes to sexual harassment and sexual assault. It is still a good old boys club, there are fear of repercussion, and rank is power. Women are</p>

		<p>either a lesbian, bitch, or slut, and leaders sweep sexual violence cases under the rug. Through all this, I learned to have a positive attitude, humility, and a change in psyche. I turned to the chaplain to help me deal with the adverse effects and boy were they a lifesaver. We don't have enough of them or enough mental health providers. There is a stigma with having mental health issues. I am in a much better place now. I am mentoring my son on military service and I am receiving treatment for my trauma. It was only after receiving treatment that I was able to truly heal, but I still live with the effects of my sexual violence events.</p>
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*Note.* These statements were composed by the researcher based upon the participants' interview responses.