Women, Peace, and Security in Professional Military Education

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Chapter 5
Conclusions and Recommendations

The major finding of this thesis indicates that there is a potential link between the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and behaviors in the Army that contribute to a culture that allows sexual harassment and assault. More research is required to prove a definitive link. The FHIRC report did not go far enough by failing to recommend further examination of the culture at Fort Hood and the Army as a whole. The FHIRC likely did not have the time or expertise necessary to examine the problems at Fort Hood from the perspective of organizational culture. However, analyzing the FHIRC report through the lenses of organizational culture and hegemonic masculinity brought to light the influence of hegemonic, competitive masculinity on Army culture and warrants greater examination. The patterns of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and assault documented in the FHIRC research indicate that more research and analysis of culture is required to understand the attitudes and belief systems driving the behavior.

While a direct correlation between gender integration, hegemonic masculinity, and sexual harassment and assault could not be substantiated within the FHIRC report, unit cultures that promote inclusion, freedom from sexual assault and harassment, and adherence to the Army Values are necessary for both men and women to thrive as soldiers and leaders in the Army. The culture at Fort Hood was not conducive to support gender integration, trust, and inclusion. This led to a climate of mistrust in which victims did not trust the leaders to act on the statements or policies put in place to investigate and prosecute these crimes. The culture of Fort Hood reflects the depth of the problems of sexual harassment and assault that have existed within Army culture for decades.

To stop sexual violence, the research findings of this thesis strongly indicate that the Army requires an understanding of hegemonic masculinity’s influence on the basic assumptions, attitudes, and belief systems at the deepest levels of organizational culture within the Army. This understanding will bring the productive and counterproductive beliefs, norms, and behaviors associated with hegemonic masculine ideologies to the attention of Army leaders. By creating awareness of the counterproductive and abusive social norms and behaviors driven by hegemonic masculinity, the Army can identify what systemic biases exist within the organization’s culture.

A holistic understanding of systemic bias driven by hegemonic masculinity or other problematic ideologies is critical to facilitate the culture change the Army must make to confront organizational patterns of sexual assault and harassment. Without this understanding, all efforts to drive culture change will fail. One could argue that the most significant reason the Army fails at preventing sexual harassment and assault is because of a failure to understand the problematic ideologies embedded in current
Army culture before implementing programs like the former SAPR Program, Equal Opportunity (EO), and even the SHARP Program.

While these programs are all well-intentioned and designed to support victims and respond to sexual assault and harassment incidents, effective prevention requires a separate and dedicated approach. Both the FHIRC report and research findings of this thesis noted that effective prevention requires data-informed modification of cultural norms to improve group dynamics and social mechanisms by first acknowledging attitudes and beliefs that promote instances of sexual harassment and assault.

In summary, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that more research is required to understand the role of hegemonic masculinity and other ideologies that may contribute to patterns of sexual assault and harassment within the Army. Further, the analysis suggests that a deeper understanding of problematic attitudes and belief systems within Army organizational culture will provide the data necessary to understand underlying assumptions within organizational culture that ultimately drive abusive, violent, and dehumanistic behaviors like sexual assault and harassment. Once Army leaders acknowledge and understand these underlying assumptions, that understanding must inform the design of prevention programs focused on reducing and eliminating sexual assault and harassment.

The first major implication of this research is that the Army will continue to struggle with preventing sexual harassment and assault until senior leaders, the majority of whom are male, understand how and why certain aspects of Army culture must change. While women are not exempt from leading or supporting cultural change in the Army, men still outnumber women by a large percentage, and they hold the largest proportion of leadership positions at the brigade level and below. The narrative surrounding sexual harassment and assault in the military and society generally frame the problem as a women’s issue rather than a problem for everyone. This narrative is problematic because it is not correct. Men are also victims of sexual assault and harassment. The narrative that it is a women’s issue sends a subconscious message to men that they do not need to pay attention to sexual harassment and assault. Men absolutely must pay attention to issues like sexual harassment and assault in order to effectively change the culture at the root level—the level of underlying assumptions about who belongs in the military and what type of person is tough enough to be on the front line.

A stronger way the Army can leverage men’s support to combat sexual harassment and assault is to leverage the Army Values and to have leaders reward actions that build trust and promote a climate of physical and psychological safety. By rewarding soldiers for listening to each other, cooperating with and caring for each other, and raising concerns over safety or cultural norms that make them uncomfortable, leaders can create a climate of psychological and physical safety, resulting in a reduction of sexual harassment and assault incidents. Further, a climate of psychological safety will create opportunities for both women and men to more openly discuss counter-
productive workplace issues that affect everyone, as well as issues that are unique to women and minorities. This dynamic creates opportunities for both men and women to exercise empathy toward one another and will likely decrease aggressive, abusive, and dehumanizing behaviors such as sexual harassment and assault, because soldiers will be conscious that certain behaviors do not promote a climate for teamwork and mission success.

The second major implication of this thesis is that leaders within the Army have the greatest power to reduce and prevent sexual harassment and assault. Building on the previous implication and supported with the researching findings of this thesis, the most powerful way Army leaders can foster a culture free of sexual harassment and assault is by publicly upholding the norms and behaviors they want to see. Leaders must support soldiers who report or correct offensive behavior or SHARP violations and recognize soldiers who promote and exemplify the Army Values, to include the tenets of the SHARP Program. Leaders who pay attention to subordinates who do the right things to promote a climate of psychological safety will encourage others to do so as well and will create a healthy, professional work environment.

Further, leaders must openly and consistently dispel soldier misconceptions that everyone endorses norms such as offensive, disrespectful, and dehumanizing language. When norms are publicly upheld that contradict Army values and leaders fail to address them, subordinates will not address the behavior either, likely out of fear of being ostracized from the team. This fear causes soldiers to comply with norms that counter the stated Army Values because those soldiers believe the majority of the group is comfortable with the behavior, consistent with the basic theory of socialization presented in chapter 2. To stop this vicious cycle, officers and NCOs must not engage in and must publicly reprimand offensive behaviors and comments to consistently ensure unit culture and climate is consistent with the Army Values. Additionally, leaders must ensure that soldiers who speak up to report SHARP violations or problematic organizational behavior are not ostracized or retaliated against formally through subpar evaluations or being barred from opportunities or informally through social exclusion and isolation or even bullying.

Building on the major finding of this thesis, Army leadership must initiate cultural studies at Fort Hood and other larger installations, such as Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Fort Bragg, and Fort Campbell, focused on understanding the influence of hegemonic masculinity and other ideologies that may be contributing to patterns of sexual assault and harassment. A large-scale cultural study will provide the Army with the data necessary to understand the attitudes and belief systems driving disrespect between genders and expand on the work of the FHIRC. Further, such a study would provide the Army greater insight in understanding systemic cultural issues contributing to sexual assault and harassment. Additionally, it may even serve as an opportunity to identify installations with successful practices to reduce and prevent sexual harassment and assault. Lastly, in designing such a study, a helpful start may be to seek out
research studies on sexual harassment and other dysfunctional workplace behavior conducted in comparable, male-dominated industries such as oil and gas, policing, or finance. It could serve as a frame of reference to inform analysis of Army culture and even provide some validated strategies to address systemic issues.

Another recommendation for future study is for the Army to consider employing Rand to develop and conduct unconscious bias assessments throughout the officer, NCO, and junior enlisted career cycle to provide soldiers and leaders an opportunity to see their own specific biases. The majority of Army leaders across all levels are unaware of their implicit bias tendencies when dealing with different genders, races, or sexualities. Integrating unconscious bias testing across the force would provide the Army with two important opportunities. First, it is highly probable that by simply making leaders aware of their biases and the harm of those biases, leaders will adjust their leadership style to overcome their shortfalls. Second, employing Rand to develop and conduct unconscious bias assessments will allow Rand to aggregate the data to understand systemic bias across the entire Army. Once systemic bias is understood, Army leadership and experts can employ a data-informed approach to design holistic unconscious bias training for integration across the Army. This strategy would provide Army with a twofold approach to address unconscious bias at both individual and organizational levels, which gives the organization a greater chance of successful culture change.

Following the release of the FHIRC report on 8 December 2020, the secretary of the Army addressed the media to discuss the major findings of the report. One quote in particular from his speech captured the heart of the challenge Army leaders must face if they wish to grow following the fallout of the tragic events of Fort Hood:

The tragic death of Vanessa Guillén and a rash of other challenges at Fort Hood forced us to take a critical look at our systems, our policies, and ourselves. But without leadership, systems don’t matter. This is not about metrics but about possessing the ability to have the human decency to show compassion for our teammates and to look out for the best interests of our soldiers.  

The longstanding mission of the U.S. Army is to deploy, fight, and win the nation’s wars by providing ready, prompt, and sustained land dominance by Army forces across the full spectrum of conflict as part of the Joint Force. The Army’s mission cannot take priority as long as damaging norms and behaviors associated with sexual harassment and assault and other dehumanistic behaviors infect unit cultures. Leaders must be meaningfully committed to confronting challenges within informal unit cultures. They must persist in long-term efforts to build and sustain a culture of inclusion, diversity, dignity, and respect until this culture is universal across the force. This type of

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commitment is required for the Army to not only prevail and win against internal ene-
mies and corrosive behaviors such as sexual harassment and assault but to build and
sustain the diversity of thinking and expertise necessary to prevail and win against all
enemies of the United States in close combat.