Chapter Two  
Literature Review

In order to organize the literature, this chapter is broken down into three major areas: formal and informal levels of organizational culture, the relationship between organizational culture and sexual harassment and assault, and the relationship between hegemonic masculinities and sexual harassment and assault.

Formal and Informal Levels of Organizational Culture

To understand the relationship between organizational culture and sexual harassment and assault, examining what constitutes organizational culture is warranted. The author selected organizational culture models taught by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College due to this study’s short time frame, and the thesis uses Edward Schein’s and Linda Treviño and Katherine Nelson’s models of organizational culture to define formal and informal levels of Army culture.

Schein is a world-renowned social psychologist whose work implores researchers, leaders, academics, and other readers to understand that the concept of culture leads us to see patterns in social behavior.36 Because this thesis focuses on unraveling the pattern of sexual harassment and assault in the Army, Schein’s book Organizational Culture and Leadership serves as the framework to define its formal culture.

Schein describes culture in terms of three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. The levels of culture vary in their degrees of visibility to the observer.37

Artifacts are described as the visible, feelable level of culture. Artifacts can include language, values statements, emotional displays, rituals, and ceremonies. Organizational climate resides in the artifact level of culture. Climate is the feeling conveyed in a group by the physical layout and how members of the organization interact with each other, with customers, or with other outsiders. Artifacts are the most observable aspects of culture but are difficult to decipher. The meanings of artifacts only become clear when people explain why things are done a certain way, which will uncover the next level of culture.38

Espoused beliefs and values are what drive how a group or organization accomplishes its core tasks. Espoused beliefs and values can range from rationalizations on how to solve problems and operate to organizational value statements and behavior standards.39 For example, the Army’s “Soldier’s Creed” expresses the warrior ethos “I will never quit,” thus creating an espoused belief that quitting is unacceptable under any circumstance.

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36 Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership, xiii.
37 Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership, 17.
38 Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership, 3, 17.
39 Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership, 19.
Basic underlying assumptions are the deepest, most unconscious level of culture that ultimately determine organizational and individual behavior, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Basic assumptions are solutions to problems that have become so ingrained that alternative solutions are inconceivable. Another way to describe basic assumptions is that they are implicit, often unexpressed, ideas that are unconsciously and uncritically taken as true and factual that guide behavior by telling group members how to perceive, think about, and feel about things. Basic assumptions tend to be nondebatable until radical evidence proves a more effective solution to a problem. For example, it would be inconceivable for a couple to have a child before marriage in a religious society. The basic assumption is that marriage must occur to start a family. This assumption is so deeply engrained that most religious societies consider having a child before marriage a sin. This might appear to be a dated example, as many people in present times choose to have children before marriage, however, in many religions, such as Catholicism, it is considered a sin to have children before marriage. This example illustrates the psychology of basic assumptions and why culture has so much power over behavior.

Reexamining basic assumptions is an anxiety-inducing process, so people tend to perceive the world in cohort with basic assumptions, even if it means denying reality. Once culture prescribes a set of basic assumptions in terms of what to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to the world, and what actions to take in certain situations, a mental model or lens of how people view the world is formed. Mental models and lenses tend to become ingrained because individuals and groups are most comfortable with others who share similar views.

This highlights Schein’s key insight that culture’s power lies in the fact that assumptions are shared and mutually reinforced. This means that in most instances, it usually takes a third party with experience in different cultures to illuminate underlying basic assumptions within an organization.

Of important note, all basic assumptions do not necessarily remain unchanged. Rationalizations can be disproved using evidence. For example, some people used to think the world was flat. Global culture has since changed the basic assumption to the earth is round. Ideals, goals, values, and aspirations cannot be validated or invalidated in the same way and so are much harder to change. Recall the example of religious cultures that deem bearing children before marriage a sin. Even as society has accepted having children before marriage, most religious societies and cultures still consider the choice inconceivable and a sin because of the ideal that a marriage is the foundation of a strong family. This ideal cannot be proved or disproved using evidence the same way that a rationalization can.

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40 Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership, 20.
41 Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership, 22.
42 Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership, 22.
43 Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership, 24.
So how do leaders influence and change organizational culture, considering how difficult it is to influence basic, underlying assumptions? Schein’s research proposes that leaders must use primary embedding mechanisms to teach their organizations how to perceive, think, feel, and behave based on the conscious and unconscious convictions held by the leader.\(^\text{44}\) Within Army organizational culture, a leader’s conscious and unconscious convictions are expected to be linked to the Army Values. Drawing on Schein’s primary embedding mechanisms, Army leaders integrate the Army Values and tenets of the SHARP Program into organizational culture through what they pay attention to; how they react to crisis and allocate resources; and through deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching.\(^\text{45}\) Leaders must consistently employ these tools because if their pattern of attention is inconsistent, subordinates will use other signals or their own experience to decide what is important, leading to more diverse assumptions and more subcultures within larger organizational culture.\(^\text{46}\) This cursory understanding of primary embedding mechanism helps identify opportunities for Army leaders to use these tools to ensure that organizational values align with behaviors.

Sexual harassment and assault are certainly unethical behaviors, so a discussion of ethics in organizational culture requires inclusion in the literature review. In their book *Managing Business Ethics: Straight Talk about How to Do It Right*, Linda K. Treviño and Katherine A. Nelson present a framework of ethical culture within the context of the broader organizational culture. The main idea they present is that ethical culture is an aspect of organizational culture that represents the way employees think and act in ethics-related situations. Treviño and Nelson propose that ethical culture and decisionmaking are primarily driven by employee socialization: the process of learning the way the organization does things. Employee socialization can occur through various means, such as formal training and mentorship, but also through daily interactions with peers and superiors, which establishes behavioral norms. The broad theory of socialization is that generally people behave in ways consistent with culture because they are expected to.\(^\text{47}\) Treviño and Nelson also propose that individual behavior within an organization can also be driven by internalization, where individuals adopt cultural standards as their own.\(^\text{48}\)

Socialization and internalization are important in understanding ethical and unethical behavior because employees can be socialized into behaving unethically, especially when they do not have the life experience to know the difference between ethical and unethical behavior.\(^\text{49}\) For example, if a young soldier hears everyone

\(^{44}\) Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 183.
\(^{45}\) Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 183.
\(^{46}\) Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 188.
around them using profanity in daily communications, they will likely do the same, even if they feel uncomfortable, because if they do not partake, they would likely be ostracized within the group. This thesis uses Treviño and Nelson’s Multisystem Ethical Culture Framework to understand how ethical culture is created and sustained.

The Multisystem Ethical Culture Framework (figure 6.1) illustrates that ethical culture is balanced between the interaction of formal and informal organizational culture systems. For organizations to send a clear message of what constitutes ethical culture and behavior, both the formal and informal organizational cultures must be aligned.

Revisiting the previous example of a young soldier being immersed in a unit where all the leaders use profanity, according to the Army’s values, excessive use of profanity is certainly disrespectful and contrary to the Army value of respect. Performance evaluations within the U.S. Army require all officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to be evaluated on their compliance with Army values. If all the leaders using profanity and disrespectful language are given a substandard evaluation for their failure to act in accordance with the Army Values by using profanity, then the unit senior leadership would be demonstrating a clear ethical alignment with formal and informal cultural systems. This action would send a message that profanity is not acceptable in accordance with Army values and behavioral expectations. However, if the unit senior leadership does the opposite and gives spectacular evaluations to the leaders using profanity, then an ethical misalignment of culture occurs. This ethi-

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50 Treviño and Nelson, Managing Business Ethics, 162.
cal misalignment sends the message that leaders can behave in ways that are not in accordance with the Army Values and still receive strong performance evaluations. While the use of profanity may seem like a minor issue, the example illustrates a serious point: leaders create ethically aligned culture by sending formal and informal messages about what behavior is and is not acceptable. Army leaders can undoubtedly benefit from applying the principles of ethically aligned organizational culture to address the current challenges with sexual harassment and assault.

**Impact of Culture on Sexual Harassment and Assault**

This section describes the relationship between organizational culture and sexual harassment and assault by reviewing themes and patterns of organizational culture and behavior closely linked to sexual harassment and assault. The first article that warrants discussion is Juanita Firestone and Richard Harris’s article from the *Armed Forces and Society* journal, “Changes in Patterns of Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Military: A Comparison of the 1988 and 1995 DoD Surveys.” While this article was published in 1999, it offers relevant historical insights applicable to current challenges with sexual harassment and assault faced by the Army.

Firestone and Harris’s main purpose was to compare and contrast the 1988 and 1995 DOD sexual harassment surveys. While the comparison of surveys showed very little change over a seven-year period, Firestone and Harris offer several keen insights on organizational patterns of behavior. Firestone and Harris argue that sexual harassment will persist until the DOD stops conceptualizing sexual harassment as individual behavior while ignoring organizational norms that tolerate sexual harassment as acceptable behavior.\(^1\)

The article emphasizes that organizational norms within the military have traditionally focused on male bonding rituals designed to build group cohesion, which is a highly valued aspect of military culture. Firestone and Harris then suggest that women and men who do not emulate hypermasculine traits are generally thought to be unaccepting of male bonding rituals, which causes the dominant group to shift focus by finding ways to exclude those groups from being a part of unit cohesion. This basic assumption allows environmental harassment to become a covert method to restrict women and some men’s acceptance to the dominant group while also working to undermine credible reports of sexual harassment as “false accusations.” Firestone and Harris end the article with a stark warning that to make real progress in decreasing workplace sexual harassment the DOD must work immediately to confront the hypermasculine military culture creating a hostile climate toward women and men who do not conform to those ideals.\(^2\)


\(^2\) Firestone and Harris, “Changes in Patterns of Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Military,” 617, 625–27.
Interestingly enough, a similar theme of a hypermasculine culture and organizational norms that exclude women surfaced in Stephanie Switzer’s doctorate thesis “Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault in the Military.” In it, Switzer highlights several themes that influence sexual harassment and assault in the military:

1. A masculinized culture where gender hostility is pervasive and sexually aggressive behaviors are tolerated;
2. Men outnumbering women;
3. Unit cohesion that protects perpetrators and punishes women for reporting through various forms of retaliation and blaming;
4. The abuse of rank and power to perpetrate abuses or ignore abuses completely; and
5. Organizational climate that takes a laissez-faire approach to responding to formal and informal reports of sexual harassment and assault.\(^{53}\)

Switzer’s dissertation was written to help military leaders recognize and modify personal biases and beliefs that contribute to an organizational culture that sustains high rates of sexual harassment and assault. Her work is incredibly relevant to this study in identifying similar themes within the U.S. Army.

Another 2007 study titled “Attitudes Toward Women and Tolerance for Sexual Harassment Among Reservists” revealed that attitudes and beliefs about women’s abilities and the overall acceptance level of women serving in the military were independently related to tolerance for sexual harassment and assault.\(^{54}\) Essentially, if those surveyed conveyed the attitude that women could and should serve in the military, they were much less tolerant of sexual harassment and assault than people who conveyed the attitude that women did not possess the capabilities to serve and should not do so. The study’s findings, which were drawn through original survey data conducted among veterans of the U.S. military, continue to draw on previous themes that gender hostilities within organizational culture promote an environment tolerant of sexual harassment and assault.

The most recent study available that addresses sexual harassment and assault in the context of organizational culture is a 2017 Rand study, *Improving Oversight and Coordination of Department of Defense Programs that Address Problematic Behaviors Among Military Personnel*, to assist the DOD with developing a framework to prevent and modify six problematic behaviors: sexual harassment, sexual assault, unlawful discrimination, substance abuse, suicide, and hazing.\(^{55}\) The report conducted a

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behavioral analysis presenting significant empirical evidence that attitudes seem to predict problematic behavior best when organizational culture also supports the behavior. In other words, someone is more likely to engage in problematic behavior, such as sexual harassment, if that person perceives that peers and leaders explicitly or implicitly condone those actions. Conversely, people who might be initially inclined toward problematic behavior can be dissuaded if the organizational climate is clearly opposed to such behavior. The report also notes that few academic studies exist examining the relationships among problematic behaviors, establishing a clear need for this study and others proposing organizational and cultural approaches to improve servicemembers’ well-being.

**Impact of Hegemonic Masculinities on Sexual Harassment and Assault**

Next, this study wants to understand previously identified themes of sexual aggression, masculinized culture, and gender hostility to further characterize sexual harassment and assault within the context of Army organizational culture. Foundational knowledge of gender order theory is required to understand the root cause of sexual aggression, abuse, and violence. Recall in the previous section that a theme of hypermasculine culture was identified multiple times as a contributing factor to organizational sexual harassment and assault. So, what exactly is masculine culture, and what is the role of masculinities in sexual harassment and assault?

In a joint article titled “Hegemonic Masculinity: Re-Thinking the Concept,” R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt present the concept of hegemonic masculinity and discuss its impact and evolution within social science and gender study research over the past 30-plus years. Connell’s research on masculinities and social power relations is the most widely accepted framework within sociological gender theory studies. For this reason, this thesis utilizes Connell’s definitions of hegemonic masculinity and gender theory concepts as a theoretical framework to define and understand hegemonic masculinities within Army culture. The concept of hegemonic masculinity originated from research conducted by Connell throughout the 1980s focused on understanding social inequality. Connell’s research proved through empirical evidence that within all local cultures, a normative, dominant ideal of what it meant to be a man (masculinity) and a woman (femininity) existed. Further, Connell’s study identified the existence of gender hierarchies within a culture. For example, multiple forms of masculinity may exist within a culture, but one form of masculinity always serves as the dominant or hegemonic masculinity, and those that embodied hegemonic masculinity within a culture were the dominant group (figure 6.2).}

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56 Marquis et al., *Improving Oversight and Coordination of Department of Defense Programs that Address Problematic Behaviors among Military Personnel*, xi.
Connell and Messerschmidt define hegemonic masculinity as a distinguished form of masculinity that embodies the current, most honored way of being a man, and consciously or unconsciously, all other men position themselves to benefit from the social gains of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity also has a role within sociological power structures such as the military, governments, and private corporations. In political sociology, hegemonic masculinity is widely accepted as the pattern and practices within organizational culture (how things are done, i.e., artifacts and norms), which allows men’s dominance over women and subordinate masculinities to continue.

It is important to note that while only a small portion of men might enact hegemonic masculinity, a dominant form of masculinity is engrained and normative within every culture and often results in the construct of a patriarchal gender system. All men receive the benefits of patriarchy even when enacting subordinate masculinities, such as complicit, marginalized, and subordinate masculinities. Connell and Messerschmidt highlight that the subordination of alternate masculinities paired with compliance among heterosexual women is what makes the concept of hegemony so powerful. While hegemony is not synonymous with violence, it can be supported through force, but most importantly, enacting and/or compliance with hegemonic masculinity is required to ascend to the top of social and power structures within cultures and institutions.

Connell and Messerschmidt note that the harm of hegemonic masculinities is patterns of aggression and abuse enacted by individuals and groups to pursue dom-

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58 Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 832.
inance, power, and social ascendancy. The struggle for hegemony, not hegemonic masculinity itself, links hegemonic masculinities to violence and aggression. Further, the normalization of violent, abusive, and other dehumanistic and aggressive behavior of men and boys within cultures and institutions is the primary driver of highly visible social mechanisms such as oppressive policies, behaviors, and widely accepted practices directed at subordinate groups such as gay men, minorities, and women. Examples can range from the dismissal of school-age boys’ aggression through the “boys will be boys” mentality to criminalizing homosexual conduct.

More importantly, Connell and Messerschmidt argue the less visible mechanisms of hegemony often remove dominant forms of masculinity from the possibility of scrutiny. A major example of this is deeming domestic and sexual violence a women’s issue. Globally, women and men are harmed predominantly by men. Understanding what aspects of culture cause abusive and violent behavior in men is imperative to prevent violence. The role of men in and masculinities must be examined and restructured for change to occur. Still, stakeholders within societal institutions largely allow the ideals of hegemonic masculinities to go unexamined and unchecked, perpetuating vicious cycles of abuses, violence, and other counterproductive social ideologies such as gender discrimination, racism, and sexism.

So, what does hegemonic masculinity look like in the military? The article titled “Real Men: Countering a Century of Military Masculinity” by Joshua Isbell discusses the history of idealized masculinities in the context of military service and points out how the U.S. military, in particular, is struggling with discrimination and harassment in the ranks because of an idealized version of what it means to be a “real man.” Isbell traces the roots of hegemonic masculinities to Europe before World War I, reminding readers of the invocations of masculine pride that compelled the people of Europe to enter into the war.

Isbell reminds readers that 100 years ago, the nations of Europe challenged young men to prove their manliness, patriotism, and citizenship through military service. “Real men” achieved their status in society by fighting the nation’s wars, thus interweaving idealized masculinities and social status with military service. Isbell argues that this ideology created an unattainable version of successful manhood, creating a tension between the men struggling to achieve idealized masculinity within society and the contributions of other groups such as women, minorities, and men conscripted into service or fulfilling combat support roles in military service.

While striving to achieve the self and societal ideal of masculinity, men serving in combat roles minimize the contributions of women, minorities, and those serving in combat support roles. This climate reinforces unhealthy social norms within the mili-
tary that the “real men” fight and serve in direct combat roles and other contributions and roles do not matter in the same way. Isbell illustrates a few examples of inequalities driven by hegemonic masculinities, first citing the pervasive use of the term “position other than grunt” (POG) to describe the service and contributions of those not in direct combat roles. The use of this term is meant to reinforce a power dynamic that the service that matters is the service of men fulfilling direct combat roles. Being called a POG is not a term of endearment; its use intends to undermine the contributions of other servicemembers who do not equate to the social definition of masculinity.64

Additionally, Isbell attributes the perceived lack of deference from society to the status and ‘manliness’ achieved through military service to reoccurring outbursts of aggression and violence from men against women and minorities in both the military and society. Isbell believes many men, both military and nonmilitary, dissatisfied by this lack of societal deference are joining white nationalist organizations seeking to impose regressive race and gender hierarchies to validate their place in society. Isbell cites this example to implore readers to understand the danger of the ideals of hegemonic masculinities. Not only are the ideals unattainable, but the ideals of hegemonic masculinity fail to obtain the inclusiveness the military and society require to maximize performance. Isbell closes his piece by imploring leaders to stop making appeals based on unattainable masculine ideals but instead focus on the fact that military success has always relied on both men’s and women’s best contributions.65

To further understand the role of hegemonic masculinity in military culture, we next turn to *The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy* by Frank Barrett, which discusses the social construction of masculinities within the U.S. Navy. While the focus of this study is the culture within the Army, Barrett’s article outlines the inner workings of hegemonic masculinity within a militarized culture in great detail, which makes the concepts worthwhile to explore.

Through life history interviews with 27 naval officers who served in surface warfare, aviation, and supply, Barrett identifies that all groups of officers construct definitions of masculinity by highlighting the masculine characteristics necessary and unique to one’s career path and why those characteristics are more valuable than others. For example, the naval aviation officers identified themes of autonomy and risk-taking as masculine traits necessary to thrive as a Navy man, while the supply officers identified themes of technical rationality as the most important. Most interestingly, masculinity was constructed and “proven” through social accomplishment and achieved meaning by drawing a stark contrast to femininity. Essentially, all of the masculinities identified within the naval officer corps achieved meaning in contrast with definitions of femininity.66 Across all men’s interviews, wom-

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64 Isbell, “Real Men.”
65 Isbell, “Real Men.”
en are depicted as emotionally unstable, less physically capable, and unable to handle harsh living conditions, which is consistent with masculine socialization in Western culture. Essentially boys are taught from a very young age that being a man has no other definition than not being a woman—masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than what one is.67

Barrett proposes that within military culture, ritualistic displays of hegemonic masculinity often become a way to exclude women from social activities or “othering” women and normalize degrading behavior and language directed at women. The construct of masculinity essentially becomes an invisible, unconscious strategy that undermines women’s abilities to meaningfully contribute to the defense of the United States by depicting them as innately unsuited for military service.68

Like Isbell, Barrett argues that appealing to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity is a dangerous game for leaders in the U.S. military. Barrett’s study clearly identifies the existence of a competitive masculine culture within the U.S. military in which men and women must continuously demonstrate competence that many men in the military also equate to their status as men. This competitive culture constantly increases the threshold to demonstrate masculinity, which can result in violent or aggressive behavior, especially against others such as women and homosexual men. Competitive masculine culture reinforces dehumanizing language as socially acceptable, setting conditions for a climate tolerant of further abuses. Further, competitive masculine cultures are detrimental not only to women and subordinated masculinities such as minority and gay men but also to the men who feel the social pressures to participate in these masculinity contests. Competitive masculine culture encourages a cycle of continual defensive posturing, validating oneself through outperforming the team and negating the contributions of others.69 This type of environment is detrimental to teamwork, collaboration, and comradery necessary for the U.S. military to solve difficult and dangerous problems.70

Hegemonic masculinity and forced gender roles are ingrained in both men’s and women’s consciousness from a very young age. Acceptance of sexual aggression and other problematic behaviors such as racism, sexism, hazing, and bullying are direct results of hegemonic masculinities playing out in organizational climates. Further, the trained acceptance of the aggressive and abusive social norms of hegemonic masculinity by society, especially those in leadership, only perpetuates its vicious cycle.

**Summary**

A multitude of literature exists within professional, academic, and military institutions regarding the relationship between organizational culture and sexual harassment

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70 Isbell, “Real Men.”
and assault. While several military-specific studies hint at the idea of hegemonic masculinities as a challenge in combatting sexism, sexual harassment and assault, and other diversity and inclusion initiatives, most of the studies do not explore the ideology in great detail. A focused study attempting to understand and explain the relationship between hegemonic masculinities and sexual harassment and assault within U.S. Army organizational culture does not exist, making this project worthwhile.