

# **Uprooting the Culture of Sexual Assault of the Armed Forces through a Gender Aware Perspective**

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**Abstract:** According to the Department of Defense's own research, 26,000 sex crimes were committed in the military in 2012 (over a 30% increase from 2010). While one would expect that the military, which prides itself on its virtue of discipline, honor, and integrity, would be the last institution we would find an epidemic of sexual assault, year after year the armed forces demonstrates that the environment of the military continually fosters a culture of sexual violence. These increased rates of sexual assault in the military call for an answer to the following question: what is it about the military that perpetuates a culture of sexual assault? I argue that the hyper-masculine culture of the military perpetuates attitudes and practices that normalize a culture of sexual assault. Thus, in order to eradicate the epidemic of sexual assault within the Armed Forces, the military should be prepared to reevaluate and challenge the culture of hyper-masculinity which is responsible for uncontrolled violence and aggression. Until the military's culture of dominance, aggression, and violence is directly challenged, we cannot expect to eradicate the toxic climate of the military.

## **I. Introduction: The Problem**

It is no secret that sexual assault is rampant throughout the United States Armed Forces. According to the Department of Defense's own research, 26,000 sex crimes were committed in the military in 2012 (over a 30% increase from 2010) (Department of Defense 2012). While one would expect that the military, which prides itself on its virtue of discipline, honor, and integrity, would be the last institution we would find an epidemic of sexual assault, year after year the armed forces demonstrates that the environment of the military continually fosters a culture of sexual violence. These increased rates of sexual assault in the military call for an answer to the following question: what is it about the military that perpetuates a culture of sexual assault?

I argue that the hyper-masculine culture of the military perpetuates attitudes and practices that normalize a culture of sexual assault. Thus, in order to eradicate the epidemic of sexual assault within the Armed Forces, the military should be prepared to reevaluate and challenge not

only the formal and informal practices that take place within a military context that perpetuate, allow, and (explicitly or implicitly) condone, a culture of sexual assault, but also the culture of hyper-masculinity which is responsible for uncontrolled violence and aggression. Until the military's culture of dominance, aggression, and violence is directly challenged, we cannot expect to eradicate the toxic climate of the military.

## **II. "Solutions" from SAPRO, the Pentagon, and Congress**

In response to the rampant rates of sexual violence in the United States Armed Forces, the military has recently increased its efforts to prevent sexual harassment and assault. In 2005, The Pentagon established a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) which is the DOD's single authority on sexual harassment and assault, tasked with the responsibility for eradicating the culture of sexual assault and ensuring that all branches of the military comply with the Department of Defense's (DoD) Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Policy. Likewise, instruction was provided to approximately 1,200 sexual assault response coordinators (SARCs), chaplains, lawyers, and law enforcement to create a cadre of trained first responders. In addition, the Military Services trained more than 1,000,000 Service members and established sexual assault program offices at all major installations.

Furthermore, the Department of Defense and various Service branches conduct comprehensive annual sexual assault assessments and issue annual reports based on these surveys. The 2012 Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the military presented the following troubling statistics: 26,300 sex crimes (which range from unwanted touching to rape) occurred in 2012 (a 34.5% increase from 2010), while only approximately 3,000 of these crimes were reported (Department of Defense 2012). Of those, only 302 of the crimes were actually prosecuted (with a .9% conviction rate).

In response to these unsettling statistics which indicate: (1) that sexual assault is on the rise, and (2) there is an unsettling phenomenon of underreporting, SAPRO released its 2013 DoD SAPR Strategic Plan which “employs a multidisciplinary approach in prevention, investigation, accountability, advocacy/victim assistance and assessment.” Of particular emphasis in this plan include the following: enhanced commander accountability, encouragement of by-stander intervention, improved response and victim treatment, and close assessment of the military justice systems. In addition, the Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, released a memorandum in August of 2013 demanding a call for action, which includes: improved victim legal support (special advocacy programs for each branch of the military), expansion of victim rights (legal services), enhancing protections, standardized policies across all branches, elevating certain oversight capabilities to higher ranking officers, enhancing pretrial investigation, and ensuring investigative quality (Hagel 2013).

In response to the military’s apparent inability to effectively respond to the sexual violence and assault epidemic, congressmen and women have made it a priority to propose their own bills which attempt to limit, or even completely remove, command authority in the decision making process of whether or not to criminally prosecute cases of sexual assault. As it currently stands, when a sexual assault complaint is filed, the commander has the decision to either: drop the charges, convene a court martial, or impose a nonjudicial punishment on the accused. In addition, the commander is also able to throw out a sexual assault conviction if the case ends up going to a court-martial. Just recently, in February 2013, Air Force Lieutenant General Craig Franklin dismissed the sexual assault conviction of Lieutenant Colonel James Wilkerson who was found guilty, by a jury, of “abusive sexual contact, aggravated sexual assault and three instances of conduct unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman.” This here demonstrates: (1) the

troubling amount of authority granted to commanders (who have no legal expertise), and (2) the environment of the military which discourages victim reporting (Baldor 2013).

It is often pointed out that if the commander is part of the harassment problem, sympathetic with the accused, or a member of the “good ‘ole boys club,” it is unlikely that he/she will take negative action against the accused (Nelson 2002). In fact, it is often the case that females who report sexual assault are in turn investigated and found to be guilty of violations under UCMJ for adultery, underage drinking, conduct unbecoming, and so forth (Nelson, 2002: 128). In 2012, 60% of victims who reported their assaults experienced some form of retaliation from their command (Department of Defense 2012). This is perhaps why approximately 90% of victims do not file reports: they are discouraged by the command climate, intimidated, or feel the threat of retaliation against their command (Department of Defense 2012).

When a commander fails to take action against the accused, it perpetuates an attitude of toleration which, as Iskra (2010, 103) points out, is the same as condoning the behavior. Kilmartin points out that “if a commander tolerates sexual harassment, it is 6 percent more likely that a sexual assault will occur under his command” (Estes 2013). Likewise, data from the Defense Manpower Data Center’s 1988 survey indicates that poor leadership promotes or exacerbates sexual assault while progressive attitudes toward harassment and assault increase the likelihood that it will be reported (Pryor, La Vite, and Stoller, 1993).

In response to the liberal amount of authority entrusted to commanders, who are not required to have legal or law enforcement training, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand has introduced and proposed the Military Justice Improvement Act of 2013 which aims to remove commanders from decision making in the handling of sexual assault cases and, instead, place that authority in the

hands of impartial, independent, and trained military prosecutors. The hope is that victim reporting will increase once soldiers no longer feel threatened or dismissed by their supervisors throughout the reporting process.<sup>1</sup>

### **III. The wrong direction: Do we need structural or cultural change?**

While I applaud these efforts to combat sexual assault in the military, I could not help but notice the one thing all of these “responses” have in common: they only address what to do *after* an assault has occurred (encouraging victims to report their assaults, encouraging bystander intervention, prosecuting wrong doing, holding commanders more accountable, challenging the justice system, and so forth). What is missing from the discussion is any mention of *why these assaults are happening in the first place*.

This builds upon my second concern: the expectation seems to be that we can correct the rampant problem of sexual assault in the military by implementing structural changes, justice reforms, and written policies. Yet, focusing on structural changes, justice reforms, and written policies diverts the attention away from the fundamental problem stemming from the toxic culture and climate of the military itself. If we really are to effectively eradicate the culture of sexual aggression in the military, we must be prepared to challenge the overall culture of the military, affording specific attention to the vices the military indoctrinates in soldiers. This is to say that the military needs to focus on sexual assault **prevention**, rather than sexual assault **response**. While making structural changes is a commendable goal, it is not, by any means, the solution to the epidemic of sexual assault.

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<sup>1</sup> Senators Levin and McCaskill have also presented a weaker proposal, which would require commanders to consult with the Staff Judge Advocate regarding all sexual assault complaints.

Now, one might argue that these sexual assaults are occurring at such a rampant rate because there is an attitude of tolerance within the military. Thus if we challenge the attitude of tolerance by taking the authority away from commanders and consequently begin to prosecute more cases, we will correct the very problem. Yet, we might pause to question whether there is a more complex cause of this sexual assault epidemic that needs to be addressed, beyond the military's climate of toleration.

If we argue that we can eradicate the culture of sexual assault within the military through reporting and punishment, then we are committed to the view that the key to preventing sexual assault is through punishment. Yet, this seems to suggest the essentialist position that males, in general, have a propensity or proclivity to commit sexually abusive behaviors and if they are given the opportunity to do so without punishment, they will inevitably commit such offenses (Pryor, Giedd, and Williams 1995: 69). In avoiding this "essentialist" position regarding the male sex, this project is motivated by a constructivist view of sex and gender (Kovitz, 2003) which assumes that both females and males are capable of defining themselves in a number of different ways, although societal influences will play a major role in character development. Thus, as Kovitz puts it, "military masculinity is neither universal nor inevitable"; the fact the military, as it currently stand, is a male-dominated institution, does not entail that it is destined to be a hypermasculine institution that breeds rape, assault, and harassment of women if unchecked by formal sanctions. Rather, there is an alternative option: a military that challenges the hypermasculine culture which is primarily responsible for sexually problematic inclinations. In promoting a new military culture that challenges the traditional military virtue of hypermasculinity, we will not only eradicate sexual harassment and assault within the military, but we will also redefine the military soldier: a soldier who does not have base inclinations. We will

encourage the military to train soldiers to foster a respect for human beings in all circumstances, regardless of whether the possibility of punishment presents itself.

If we do not address the root cause of sexual violence, we risk devoting our energy to a band-aid solution for an inherently complex and embedded problem that stems from the overall character development of soldiers within the military culture. The proposed solutions offered by the military, pentagon, and congress overlook the fact that the overall culture of the military needs to change. It is not just better leaders or justice we need; we need better soldiers. As Iskra points out, changing the overall culture of the military is not an easy task, but it is one that “must be led from the top and bought into at all levels of leadership in the military from the lowest recruit to the most senior officer” (Iskra 2010, 116).

#### **IV. Masculinity and Violence**

In attempting to explain *why* the troublesome number of **violent** crimes of rape and sexual assault occur within the military (as opposed to explaining how we should respond to them after the fact), it is important to explore what would motivate violence against one’s own fellow service members in the military. The answer, I will argue, lies within the toxic environment of the military which encourages a particular form of masculinity (which I will refer to as hyper-masculinity), which inspires a desire for domination and power, often expressed through violence and aggression.

In exploring the effects of hypermasculinity on the culture of the military, this paper will address the problem of sexual assault in the military through a *gender aware perspective*. Since masculinity stems from society’s expectation of males, we must first pause to consider the impact of societal expectations on males which are identified as *gender roles*. Gender role is

often defined as a “set of expectations for behaving, thinking, and feeling that is based on a person’s biological sex” (Kilmartin 1994, 17). Masculinity describes the set of gender role behaviors and personality traits expected of “real men”: strong, independent, achieving, hard working, dominant, heterosexual, tough, aggressive, unemotional, physical, competitive, forceful (Kilmartin 1994, 7). Masculinity also describes what a “real man” does not do: cry, express feelings other than anger, perform “women’s work,” back down from confrontation, or get emotionally close to other men (Kilmartin 1994, 7).

The idea that masculinity is responsible for violence, including sexual assault, is rarely disputed. As Kilmartin points out, the vast majority of violent acts are committed by males and sexual assaults are almost exclusively perpetrated by males, leading us to conclude that there is a high correlation between masculinity and aggression (Kilmartin 1994, 211-212). According to the FBI (2011), approximately 90% of violent crimes in the United States are committed by men while three to four million U.S. women are physically beaten by their male partners each year (Pellegrini 1992).

In addition to the connection between masculinity and violence, masculinity is assumed to be responsible for sexual violence, since “sexual assaults are almost exclusively perpetrated by males” (Kilmartin 1994, 212). In her cross-cultural study on rape, Sanday (1981) reports that societies with a high incidence of rape “tolerate violence and encourage men and boys to be tough, aggressive, and competitive.” Likewise, Kilmartin (2005, 1) suggests that “men’s socialization to be aggressive and to be sexual initiators, their disproportionate social and organization power, and their ability to intimidate based on greater size and muscle mass” can explain the phenomenon of male driven sexual assault. Hunter (2007, 42) also notes that, “certain attitudes related to masculinity have been found to be associated with increased

propensity to sexual assault. A view of masculinity that emphasizes dominance, aggression, self-sufficiency is correlated with a propensity to rape.”

The moral of the story, then, is that, as Kilmartin (2005, 1) puts it “masculinity is one of the most powerful contexts within which sexual assault occurs,” and bringing attention to *a gender-aware perspective* is absolutely fundamental to understanding the issue at hand. In understanding that men are subjected to cultural pressures to behave in “masculine ways,” we can better understand what is driving the rampant rate of sexual assault in the military.

## **V. Militarized Masculinities**

While society itself is responsible for gendering males into “masculine” personalities, the military promotes an especially toxic, extreme, and exaggerated form of masculinity: **hyper-masculinity** or “military masculinity.” The military masculinities emphasize polarized gender roles, acceptance of stereotypical gender roles, and an obsession with tolerating pain, control of one’s emotions, violence, and power.

### **Bodily Strength and Dominance**

Hyper-masculinity, in a military context, is often described as a certain kind of stoicism, emphasizing bodily toughening and suffering caused by physical exertion, lack of sleep, and exposure to climate variation (Hockley 2003, 16-17). From the first day of basic training, soldiers are told that “pain is weakness leaving the body” and they are likewise forced to perform physically grueling activities regardless of exhaustion, pain, or injury (Hunter 2007, 38). A focus on overcoming and dominating one’s own bodily weakness through mental toughness is thus engrained in the mind of all soldiers.

### **Dehumanization and Dominance**

Not only are soldiers encouraged to embrace masculine traits through a focus on physical strength and dominating their own weaknesses, soldiers also learn to be masculine through training specifically aimed at molding soldiers into individuals who are able and willing to kill other human beings in order to protect the nation (Connell 1995; Ehrenreich 1997; Enloe 1990, 2000, 2007; Goldstein 2001; Higate and Hopton 2005; Morgan 1994; Pin-Fat and Stern 2005; Price 2001; Stern and Nystrand 2006; Stern and Zalewski 2009; Whitehead 2002; Witworth 2004).

Although one of the primary jobs of soldiers is to kill, in his revolutionary book, Marshall (1947) pointed out that only 15 to 20% of riflemen in World War II actually fired their weapons at an exposed enemy soldier. Marshall's conclusion is that the great majority of soldiers throughout history were psychologically unable or unwilling to kill. In response to this strong resistance to killing, the military became determined to overcome this empathetic tendency of human beings in order to ensure effective fighting. As Trivigno (2013) points out, the military's solution was to successfully desensitize soldiers, turning them into killers through psychological techniques "which are aimed at disabling empathetic responses and overcoming the resistance to killing." These techniques are often referred to as "mechanisms of moral disengagement" (Bandura 1999) which include dehumanizing the enemy so that soldiers perceive the enemy as less than human, or better yet, not even human (Grossman 1995). Soldiers are trained using psychological distancing, such as using terms such as "target acquisition" to refer to the enemy. Furthermore, derogatory names such as "gook" "zit" "towel-head" and "faggot" are words used to reduce the enemy from someone to something (Hunter 2007, 20). In this way, soldiers are conditioned to act in uber-masculine ways, emotionally detaching themselves from the enemy by "conceiving of them as non human or less than human in order to normalize killing them"

(Trivigno 2013, 88). The military essentially severs the empathetic response of soldiers in killing, reinforcing the gender norm that a “real man” is without emotion.

### **Violence and Dominance**

In addition to desensitizing soldiers to killing, the military furthermore encourages soldiers to perceive the domination and destruction of the enemy as exciting and enjoyable while instilling in them a desire to manifest this desire to dominate through aggression and violence. In basic training, soldiers are handed a bayonet, and are told to run around with it in hand screaming out “kill, kill, kill,” essentially glorifying the act of killing through simulations of aggression and violence. Another common basic training custom is when drill sergeants yell out “What makes the green grass grow?” to which soldiers are required to respond, in unison, with: “Blood, blood! Blood makes the green grass grow! Kill kill kill!” In addition, during basic training and almost all other training events throughout their career, soldiers are forced to march or run around reciting cadences (also referred to as “Jody Calls”) that glorify violence, sex, or both (Hunter 2007, 17). Consider the lyrics from the following cadences:

#### ***Captain Jack:***

I'm gonna be a killin' man  
A cuttin' man  
A shootin' man  
A stabbin' man  
The best I can  
For uncle Sam.

#### ***Down by the River:***

Down by the river; took a little walk; ran into the enemy; we had a little talk;  
I didn't like their attitude; didn't like the way they walked;  
So I pushed 'em; I shoved 'em; I threw them in the river; laughed as they drowned.

#### ***Bodies Bleeding Bodies:***

Load another magazine, in my trusty M16.  
Cuz all I ever wanna see is bodies, bleeding bodies.

Throw another hand grenade!  
Should have seen the mess I made.  
Cuz all I ever wanna see is bodies, broken bodies.

Stab em with the bayonet!  
If he squirms you're not done yet!  
Cuz all I ever wanna see is bodies, cut-up bodies.

These cadences are just a few examples of military chants that soldiers are required to sound off to throughout their military career at virtually every training event. The lessons soldiers internalize from these cadences promote the thrill and glory of being violent, aggressive, and a killing machine, while also encouraging soldiers to dominate inferior or different beings for the heck of it (pushing/shoving/drowning the enemy because they don't like the "way they walked"). As Hunter (2007, 19) points out, "the acceptance of violence as a legitimate method for obtaining one's goal, whether with an enemy or with a comrade, creates a psychological environment where sexual abuse is likely to occur."

### **Power and Dominance**

This attitude of encouraging soldiers to dominate others is apparent not only in how the military conditions soldiers to perceive the enemy, but it is also experienced in the military's hierarchical structure. The military is often described as having a top-down authoritarian structure which fosters a master/slave dynamic between subordinate soldiers and superiors who have unlimited authority that subordinates must accept without question. This hierarchical dynamic which demands an unquestioning obedience grants superiors the power to dominate their subordinates without question. This master/slave mentality begins immediately in basic training, where soldiers are broken down, and are at the mercy of their drill sergeants who they must obey, without question, while being stripped of any power whatsoever (Nelson 2002, 266). Through this model of leadership, leaders are granted absolute authority and complete control over their

subordinates as opposed to shared power or shared leadership (Nelson 2002, 267). While this hierarchy empowers superiors, it leaves subordinates utterly powerless and constrained.

## **VI. Consequences of Militarized Masculinities**

The above mentioned “militarized masculinities” are viewed to be the quintessential traits of the modern warrior: physically tough, emotionally detached, and dominating through violent and aggressive ways. In other words, these are the military “virtues” necessary for effective fighting (Parker 1985, Fallows 1981). Yet, encouraging soldiers to embrace a hyper-masculine character by internalizing a drive for absolute authority, power, and dominance has disastrous consequences. Ultimately, soldiers are indoctrinated with the same lesson that motivates sexual aggressors: a *real* man has power and control, a *real* man dominates; a *real* man is on top. Furthermore, those who are not real “men” should submit to the power and demands of the truly masculine.

### **Disdain for the Feminine**

While masculinity is defined as an ideology justifying male domination (Goldsetin 2001, 38), the unfit are labeled as unmasculine (Hockey 2003, 16). Hockey points out that a “failure to perform is often linked with being feminine and thus deemed to be the antithesis of infantry behavior” (2003, 17). Lack of physical strength or aggression is then correlated with femininity, which in turn is defined as inadequacy. Thus, as Harrison (2002, 75) points out, the patriarchal dichotomy between “tough warrior” men and “supportive dependent women” emerges and soldiers grow to be obsessed with eradicating their feminine qualities. The feminine, then, is equated with something to be conquered.

We see this disdain for the feminine realized when soldiers use female-associated words to demean and derogate both “unfit” males and the enemy. “Weak” males are called “pussies” while the enemy is commonly referred to as “bitches.” Scarce (1997, 47) remarks that, in the military, “men's gender roles become more rigid and narrow, heavily scrutinized for any behavior that might seem the slightest bit feminine, and, therefore, considered weak and unfit for military service.” Goldstein (2001, 356) writes that, “in war’s coding, the inferior and hated enemy is feminine,” as evident by soldiers who brag about how they “cold smoked the bitch.” Masculinity and disdain for women, then, go hand in hand while the feminine is viewed as something to be conquered. As Kilmartin (2010) points out, “Violent men nearly all adhere to toxic definitions of masculinity. In gender-based violence—rape, intimate partner violence, etc.—these definitions of manhood include an especially strong dose of dominance and woman-hating.” Since hyper-masculinity is opposed to anything that departs from or threatens the ideal of masculinity, men thus learn to dominate, demean, and humiliate those who embody the feminine: *women* and *effeminate men*.

In a sense, masculinity teaches men to objectify those who do not embody masculinity: men are taught to treat other “inferior” beings as objects, as seen with the desensitizing techniques used to teach soldiers how to effectively kill the enemy. As Kilmartin points out “it is easier to aggress against someone if he or she is not accorded the status of a real person” (Kilmartin 1994, 216). While the military’s hierarchy privileges certain members, i.e. the fierce, brave, hypermasculine combat soldier, it engenders the view that those who fail to meet that status quo of masculine are second-class warriors: they are objects that are subordinate to real men and they should be controlled and manipulated.

### **Achievement through Aggression: A Recipe for Sexual Assault**

Thus far, I have illustrated that the military promotes a hypermasculine culture, which: (1) promotes achievement through aggression and dominance, and (2) devalues those who are perceived as “inferior” or “feminine.” The “feminine,” then, become the targets of masculine aggression and dominance. Essentially, the military culture has bred a military of hypermasculine driven soldiers who foster callous sexual attitudes, misogyny, and hostility toward anyone perceived as feminine, soft, or nonconforming to the masculine ideal (Mosher & Thomkins 1988; Archer & Rhodes 1989; Smeaton & Byrne 1987; Mosher & Anderson 1986). As Nadelson explains, “because aggression and domination form the soldier’s group ethos, the inept or incapable soldier is also an enemy” (Nadelson 2005, 43). By viewing effeminate soldiers as subhuman, it becomes easier for “masculine” soldiers to aggress against them since “it is easier to aggress against someone if he or she is not accorded the status of being a real person” (Kilman 1994, 216).

As it is pointed out, institutions, like the military, that endorse masculine norms are found to have higher rates of sexual assault and harassment than other organizations (Gutek 1985; Gruber 1997). Furthermore, numerous studies report that men who endorse hypermasculine norms are more likely to foster rape-supportive attitudes and commit acts of sexual violence as opposed to those men who have less extreme masculine values (Malamuth & Sockloskie, Koss & Tanaka 1991; Mosher & Anderson 1986; Quackenbush 1989; Riedel 1993; Tieger 1981).

The question, then, is how masculinity is connected to sexual assault. In answering this, we might explore what typically motivates sexual assault in the civilian sector, where we find that sexual assault, including rape, is rarely about sexual gratification; it is not even about women (Kilmartin 1994, 228). In fact, the perpetrator often does not derive sexual pleasure, achieve an erection without masturbating, have orgasms, or ejaculate (Kilmartin 1994, 228).

Rather, sexual assault is usually motivated by violence and a desire to conquer and control the victim (Groth 1979; Hunter 2007, 19). Furthermore, as Kilmartin points out, sexual assault is often a response to a feeling of powerless: society has defined a “real man” in such a masculine way that certain males suffer from doubt or despair trying to achieve this masculine identity without success (Groth 1979; Brannon 1976). As a result, men attempt to overcome their inadequacies and express their masculinity through means of sexual aggression: finally they are able to control at least one thing in their life, namely, their sexual conquests. As Groth (1979, 25) points out, sex is used to compensate for “underlying feelings of inadequacy and serves to express issues of mastery, strength, control, identity, and capability. As one aggressor reports: “with rape, I felt totally in charge, I’m bashful, timid. When a woman wanted to give me normal sex, I was intimidated. In the rapes, I was totally in control, she totally submissive” (Scully and Marolla 1995).

Sexual aggressors, then, are often insecure, men who are motivated by a desire to dominate or exert power over another being (Lisak 1991, 248). Yet, if sexual assault and rape in the civilian sector is often motivated by a feeling of inadequacy in response to masculine ideals, consider, then, what consequences this would have for the military, which esteems not just masculine traits, but *hypermasculine* traits. A soldier cannot possibly completely emotionally detach himself from killing. A soldier cannot always master his body through the grueling physical challenges and conditioning he is subject to through military training. A soldier, if he is not in a position of power, feels emasculated when he is constantly belittled and demeaned by his superiors and leaders, to whom he must unreflectively and obedient answer “yes sir” or “yes ma’am.”

As with sexual aggressors in the civilian sector, when soldiers are unable to live up to the often unobtainable hyper-masculine ideals of military combat soldiers, they experience a sense of masculine inadequacy and anger. The inadequacy felt is often painful, yet a soldier is unable to cope with his emotions since he has been conditioned to repress his emotions in an attempt to live in accordance with the military masculinities. Thus he is left in desperation, wanting to prove how much of a “real hypermasculine man” he is. He thus resorts what he is predisposed to do through military training: using means of violence and aggression to assert power and domination over another “weaker” being. This attitude of masculinity which emphasizes dominance and aggression thus increases the likelihood of sexual aggression as a response to inadequacy. As Mazur and Booth (1998) point out, this response is inevitable when we consider the typical attitudes of hypermasculine men to constraining environments, such as the military which is authoritarian in nature: with such a rigid structure, subordinates are prone to foster anti-social behavior in order to protest such a constraining environment.

### **Redirecting attention to Virtue and Character**

The military, then, confronts an interesting dilemma in that it seemingly has two options: (1) promote certain “military virtues” which are seemingly necessary for successful fighting, yet which, at the same time, engender anti-social behavior and sexual violence, or (2) refuse to promote anti-social character traits, but in doing so, fail to effectively train soldiers in preparation for successful fighting. Since war ultimately is the business of killing, if soldiers are to fight effectively, it seems that some amount of masculinity, dominance, aggression and ruthlessness is needed. As Carl von Clausewitz (1832) points out, soldiers must be fierce, aggressive, and merciless: mistakes that come from kindness are the worst. Thus, traits of masculinity, violence, and aggression seemingly are the quintessential traits of the successful

modern warrior, and if we do not encourage soldiers to foster such traits, we will march them directly to their death. The question, then, that we must ask is the following: how do we eradicate the hyper-masculine culture of violence, aggression, and dominance which is responsible for the pervasive problem of sexual violence, while still training soldiers to fight and kill effectively?

While pointing to the root cause of sexual assault in the military is an obvious enough task, determining the solution is not such a simple task because the solution requires us to rethink and challenge the overall structure, training, and environment of the military. Thus, what I will propose is by no means a sufficient condition for eradicating the culture of sexual assault in the military. It may not even be a necessary condition. But it is at least a step in the right direction that addresses the issue of how to **prevent** sexual assault without attempting to dismiss the epidemic as explainable in terms of a “hook up culture,” “out of control hormones,” “misreading sex signals,” or a “confusion over what consent means.”<sup>2</sup> It is a solution that attempts to honestly confront and correct the negative character traits responsible for the culture of sexual assault which the military indoctrinates in soldiers from the first day of training.

Furthermore, the solutions that I propose are realistic and concrete: they are ones that the military could directly implement into their training programs immediately. In response to the uncontrollable rates of sexual assault, scholars such as Iskra (2010, 104) have called for “leaders who are willing to make hard decisions about disciplining or discharging personnel who do not embody the concept that readiness= respect...peers to tell their friends when their behavior or

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<sup>2</sup> General Mark Welsh, at the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing in 2013, attributed the problem of sexual assault to the “hook up mentality” of the armed forces. Saxby Chambliss, a Republican senator from Georgia, blames the epidemic of sexual assault on the military as “out of control hormones.” In September 2012, one of the responses to sexual assault in the military was redefining sexual assault in the UCMJ to encompass those who are “incapable of consenting.” Another response to the issue is employing “Sex Signals” training-- a series of skits led by civilian actors from Catharsis Productions, which aims to remind soldiers about what consent really means. These solutions suggest that perpetrators just aren’t clear about the definition of consent and the epidemic of sexual assault can be informed by reinforcing the true meaning of consent.

comments are inappropriate... subordinates to speak truth to power when a supervisor is undermining stated DoD goals... Constant vigilance and holding people accountable for their actions.” While the reasonable person would not object to Iskra’s solution on the ground that she is wrong, one might question how practical of a solution this is. In proposing a solution, we need to provide the military with concrete actions they can easily implement into training which challenge, and hopefully eradicate, or at least soften, the hyper-masculine mentality engrained in the minds of soldiers which so often is an ideal that soldiers themselves struggle, at all costs, to live up to.

### **Solution #1: Minimizing harmful effects/ Recognizing “Burdened Virtues”:**

Given the fact that hypermasculinity has harmful effects and fosters a climate of sexual aggression, our first inclination might be to assume that the hypermasculine culture of the military should be eradicated altogether. Yet one thing I have continually acknowledged throughout this article is that these hypermasculine traits might actually be “military virtues”- character traits that are necessary for effective fighting. Thus we might describe these military “virtues” as burdened virtues: virtues that are seemingly required in certain military roles, but are otherwise harmful to embrace in standard situations.<sup>3</sup>

While Trivigno argues that since the military requires soldiers to embrace seemingly harmful character traits, we should embrace “a strong presumption against the use of military force,” I argue for a *strong presumption against training soldiers in hypermasculine ways*. This is to say that we can allow that certain military roles (specifically combat roles), require the vices

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<sup>3</sup> Tessman describes burdened virtues, such as anger, as those virtues which are necessary to help resist oppression and enable survival in oppressed states which otherwise would detract from the bearers well-being in normal conditions. I argue that “burdened virtues” can also refer to those virtues that are necessary for military success, yet otherwise detract from the bearers well-being in normal conditions.

of hypermasculinity, while acknowledging that not all soldiers need to be trained in hypermasculine ways; rather, only those soldiers who serve in jobs directly related to combat need to be indoctrinated with hypermasculine character traits, especially those attitudes related to violence and aggression. As Hunter (2007, 18) points out, although fewer than 25 percent of active duty personnel serve in combat roles, the “military culture aims to instill the combat value “Kill or be killed” in all personnel.” Yet it doesn’t seem necessary for a cook, administrative assistant, postal worker, truck driver, and so forth to run about, sounding off to cadences about blowing up bodies.

If we accept that training soldiers in hypermasculine ways fosters a culture of sexual assault, then it stands that we should minimize the number of those soldiers who are in indoctrinated with hypermasculine norms, thus at least reducing the incidents of sexual violence. Thus, we can concede that effective training requires “burdened virtues,” while considering that harm should be minimized: this unfortunate burden should be placed on as few soldiers as possible.

### **Violence without Aggression and Dominance (Aikido and Martial Arts)**

This then leaves us to discuss the fate of those soldiers who seemingly need to be trained in hypermasculine ways: combat soldiers who are primarily responsible for engaging the enemy with weapons, knocking down doors, clearing buildings, raiding villages, and so forth. While I admit that successful fighting seems to require that combat soldiers be trained in hypermasculine ways, I argue that the negative effects of hypermasculinity might be mitigated by additional training, specifically, Eastern Martial Arts training, which is a codified system and tradition of combat practices which not only teaches individuals how to defend themselves against force, but

it also can promote good forms of character, non-violent attitudes and behaviors, and control aggression through conditioning the mind, spirit, and body in self-discipline.

A considerable amount of research substantiates the claim that certain martial arts practices have positive long-term effects, leading to positive psychosocial changes in the participants (Binder 2007). In particular, a decrease in aggression is a consequence of diligent training in martial arts (Rothpearl, 1980; Nosanchuk, 1981; Nosanchuk and MacNeil, 1989; Skelton *et al.*, 1991; Daniels and Thornton, 1990; 1992) while it also decreases hostility (Daniels and Thornton, 1992) and anger (Brown *et al.*, 1995). Many martial artists report that this study of combative arts has helped instill a greater sense of inner calm and peace within (Haffner & Vogel, 2010). Even amidst a world of uncertainty and despair, the study of martial arts transforms and calms the inner life by cultivating the emotional and spiritual centers of the artists as they focus on obtaining the state of *mushin*, which is said to detach the practitioner from violence and **eliminate aggression**. As Bäck and Daeshik Kim write (1982, 181): “A person engaged in this activity would have less motivation or need to be aggressive, although he might think it justified to fight on certain occasion.” Martial Arts is seemingly successful in eradicating or at least reducing violence and aggression because it allows people to “vent negative emotions in a healthy way, lest they are otherwise repressed and later manifest in even darker ways” (Haffner & Vogel 2010, 148). It is characterized as a “controlled violence”; a way to discipline, control, and express repressed instincts or urges in a healthy way.

One particular type of martial arts which promotes non-violence and aggression is Aikido, a martial art created by Morihei Ueshiba, who describes the way of the warrior as “preventing slaughter, while promoting peace and the power of love.” Yet, since Aikido is a form of fighting, it is not always independent of violence. Thus Aikido is famous for responding

to the paradox of violence: it aims at the task of reconciling harmony and love with violence, which seemingly are incompatible categories.

Since Aikido is an art which has a purely defensive purpose, it embraces a principle of “No First Strike.” It offers defensive techniques to counter someone else’s initiation of violence by blending the motion of the opponent and redirecting the force of the attack (Mortensen 2010, 161). Aikido attempts to control and neutralize an attacker without using strength, consequently abandoning the practice of responding to one’s enemy with brute force. It calls into question the idea that the “Way of the Warrior” is to kill and destroy others by eliminating techniques that are excessively violent and destructive, while emphasizing “soft techniques- the art of blending with an attacker’s vital energy, redirecting that energy in order to harmonize with it and so render it harmless” (Raposa 2003, 10-11). While Aikido still employs physical force and often results in damage to the other, the aim is nonviolence- the actions are grounded in attitudes of respect and compassion. While violence is often defined as “physical force exerted for the purpose of violating, damaging, or abusing others,” Aikido recognizes that damage may result as a foreseen consequence, but it is not the warrior’s fundamental aim or intention. The fundamental aim is to defend oneself, while respecting and having compassion for the enemy.

Aikido is often described as a “way of training oneself how to be in the world, in relation to other persons and things in the world” (Raposa 2003, 28). Since the goal of aikido is habit formation, we might expect that the practice of aikido enables soldiers to develop positive habits through lessons internalized through aikido, such as controlled aggression and violence. Aikido encourages practitioners to avoid violence and to approach conflict in a way that involves minimal force. The lesson a soldier might internalize from this practice may encourage him to

use violence only as a last resort, thereby preventing him from initiating demands for dominance or an act of aggression, like sexual violence, in the first place.

## **Conclusion**

The epidemic of sexual assault in the military cannot be explained independently of the military's toxic culture of hypermasculinity. An honest assessment will indicate that training soldiers in combat support and combat service and support roles simply does not require hypermasculine tactics, especially tactics that promote violence or aggression. But furthermore, training combat soldiers to fight, and even kill, can be done while at the same time reinforcing the value of controlled violence as opposed to uncontrolled violence. Aikido is a prime example of a combative training method that encourages combatants to fight respectfully and only as a last resort. Perhaps using a training method like Aikido which promotes humble fighting, as opposed to arrogant fighting, will not only help reduce the occurrences of sexual assault in the military by subduing the drive for dominance, but it will also encourage Soldiers to respect all human beings forever avoid atrocities like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.

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