

MILITARY CULTURE CHANGE IN CANADA: MAINTAINING OR DISRUPTING THE STATUS QUO?

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Introduction

Amidst a sexual misconduct crisis involving Canada's most senior military leaders, culture change was declared a key priority for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in the spring of 2021. Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC), a new L1 unit, was established within DND/CAF to bring all internal culture change activities under one umbrella and act as a centre of expertise on culture and conduct (Department of National Defence, 2021). But culture and culture change are not new topics for the CAF, as organizational problems with culture have been long-standing. It is important to understand that today's discourse on military culture change exists within a longer history of calls for change and the military's responses to them. In this working paper, we trace the ways in which military culture and culture change have been understood. We ask: How have discourses of military culture and culture change historically evolved in Canada? How have these discourses been accepted, acted upon, and contested? What does this history teach us about the implementation of culture change today and into the future?

Discourses are the organizational and societal meanings given to concepts and terms that shape how they are enacted in policies, practices, and education (Lazar, 2005, 2017). For instance, the discourse of "marriage" is often contested, in that some believe marriage is the union of two people who are committed to love each other, and others argue that it can only be between a man and a woman. Expectations, norms, regulations, and laws are developed, enforced, and resisted depending on who has the power to promote which discourse. Discourse is therefore "a site of struggle, where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out" (Lazar, 2005, p. 4). We have found, through our work as co-directors of the Transforming Military Cultures (TMC) network, that the meaning of culture change has been differently interpreted, often contested, and revised over time. We therefore believe it is important to pay close attention to how culture change is discursively framed, represented in texts, and taken up by policy. This working paper examines how the discourse of military culture and culture change has shifted over the past four decades.

Culture describes the shared values, assumptions, and behaviours that exist within an organization. What is viewed as important and what is viewed as normative, particularly with respect to identity (Breede, 2019), are fundamental aspects of culture. Furthermore, especially in the military, power relations are a key element of culture, with respect to creating and policing organizational norms, policies, and practices, making decisions that impact the lives of personnel, and resisting or supporting institutional change. The military's culture is built on key tenets such as universality of service, unlimited liability, hierarchy, uniformity, obedience, and loyalty (Soeters et al., 2006; Taber, 2020). It is also rooted in social structures of inequality such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, white supremacy, colonialism, ableism, and classism (Eichler & Brown, 2023). The origins of the Canadian military's culture lie in British colonialism and the valuing of a particular male, white, heterosexual, colonial, able-bodied military masculinity (Eichler & Brown, 2023), with an overriding focus on operational effectiveness above all else (Taber, 2020, 2022). This military culture has increasingly come up against progressive developments in broader Canadian society related to ongoing legal, social, and demographic changes. Since the 1960s, the gap between the military's culture and societal values has grown (English, 2004; Okros, 2020; Winslow, 2004).

Our discussion in this working paper demonstrates that Canadian military culture has long been seen as something to preserve rather than change. In fact, historically, socio-cultural change was viewed as a threat to the military and its operational effectiveness—a sentiment that lingers to this day. Although culture and culture change are now running themes across DND/CAF policy and related documents, seldom have they been made central. Rarely have culture and culture change been defined, and often the focus has been on individual behaviour and changing mindsets, as opposed to institutional responsibility to enact structural change.

This working paper is organized into three time periods in which DND/CAF's approach to culture change shifted, ultimately giving rise

to a new official discourse on culture change: 1) From the 1980s to 2013: Culture is untouchable and must be preserved; 2) From 2014 to 2020: Culture may need fixing for the sake of operational effectiveness; 3) From 2021 to early 2024: Culture can evolve and be strengthened for the sake of operational effectiveness. Our analysis of military culture and culture change over these three time periods demonstrates that, overall, the cultural status quo is being maintained. Culture change discourse has been co-opted by the institution in the face of ongoing crises, especially those surrounding military sexual misconduct. While certain military values are permitted to be challenged, such as dress instructions that once mandated conformity and uniformity, the core tenets persist. In particular, the warrior ideal remains entrenched, with related policies and practices shielded from change.

The following three sections lay out the dominant discourse of each time period, discuss culture and culture change in selected key texts (DND/CAF policy documents, external reports, media reports, and academic research), and briefly assess the scope and depth of change. We demonstrate how CAF culture change was historically conceptualized through related concepts (such as gender, sexuality, and racial equality and equity; or sexual harassment and sexual assault, homophobia, and racism), detail how and when the focus specifically turned to culture and culture change, and discuss the various ways in which Canadian military culture change has been envisioned. The final section provides an overarching discussion of military culture and culture change in Canada, and a consideration of implications and recommendations for the future.

From the 1980s to 2013: Culture is untouchable and must be preserved

For much of the history of the Canadian military, culture was not named as an element of military life, but expressed through the military values of unit cohesion, morale, and operational effectiveness. These culturally expressed values were viewed as a core element of the military which needed to be preserved against pressures for change. Otherwise, it was argued, the military would be

unable to meet its mandate; change was viewed as anathema to the military's mission. While pressure for change was substantial, the military did not adopt culture change discourse but rather implemented only what it was legally obligated to while engaging in minor and superficial changes (Davis, 2013, 2022; Duval-Lantoine, 2022).

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The push for culture change has historically emerged from two directions: from outside the institution, as a result of growing societal and legal changes; and from the bottom up, through the advocacy of military members and veterans themselves, especially military and veteran women. Awareness of the need to end military gender discrimination began to grow with the publication of the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970. Out of its 167 recommendations, five specifically related to the military's discriminatory policies towards women. The Canadian Human Rights Act (1978) and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1985) lent further legitimacy to the cause of ending discrimination against women by the CAF (Dundas 2000; Winslow & Dunn, 2002). In response, and in efforts to continue to justify discrimination against women and their exclusion (Davis, 2013), the CAF initiated a series of trials (the SWINTER trials from 1979–1984, and the CREW trials from 1987–1989) to investigate the effects of mixed groups in military units, particularly on operational capabilities. While the Air Force lifted all restrictions on women's participation in 1987 as a result of the SWINTER trials, the Army and Navy maintained the ban on women in the combat arms (Dundas, 2000; Winslow & Dunn, 2002). Thus, the struggle over culture in the military was originally and primarily one over sex and gender privileges afforded to men, which the CAF aimed to preserve by maintaining policies and practices that continued to benefit men by inhibiting and preventing the movement of women into key occupations and leadership positions (Davis, 2013).

The struggle to end discrimination against women in the military was advanced by the founding of the Association for Women's Equity in the Canadian Forces in 1985 (Robinson, n.d.). This grassroots organization was instrumental in supporting the landmark Canadian Human Rights Tribunal case that led to the lifting of the combat ban on women in 1989. Throughout the hearings of the tribunal case, which was brought forward by four Canadian Forces members/veterans (three women and one man), the military maintained that the integration of women would have detrimental effects on operations (Simpson et al., 1979; Davis, 2009). The CAF leadership resisted women's full integration into the combat arms, arguing that women were not up to the physical demands of combat operations and their presence would undermine unit cohesion and morale (Cowen, 2008; Robinson, 1985). The CAF's reasoning for this was that, ostensibly, "human stresses are compounded by the added complexities of mixed-gender groups" (Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, 1989, p. 17). The CAF used implicitly gendered arguments about cohesion and operational effectiveness to support its case. However, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled: "Emphasis on equality ... can strengthen the cohesion which is so highly valued by the Forces. Operational effectiveness is a gender-neutral concept" (1989, p. 34). The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal concluded that "there is no risk of failure of performance of combat duties by women sufficient to justify a general exclusionary policy" (1989, p. 31). As a result of the tribunal ruling, all occupations were immediately opened to women, with the exception of submarine service, opened to women in 2000 (Dundas, 2000), and the Roman Catholic Chaplaincy.

The final report of Chief of Review Services that was written a decade after the 1989 Human Rights Tribunal order showed that women's integration had been "piecemeal" and "uncoordinated" (as cited in Duval-Lantoiné, 2022, p. 62). The Minister's Advisory Board on Canadian Forces Gender Integration and Employment Equity (MABGIEE) report (National Defence Minister's Advisory Board, 2001/2006) rated the CAF Employment Equity Plan as a "pass" but its implementation as a "fail" (Report Card), noting that "embracing

equity will require a major educational process so that members will recognize, respect, and value diversity through the organization. It will require a dramatic change in the ‘mindset’ shared by many Canadian Forces members” (National Defence Minister’s Advisory Board, 2001/2006, The Board’s Analysis of the CF Employment Equity Initiatives, Culture, para. 1). In his Foreword to this document, the then Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Gen. Baril, stated that such changes will “force us to review many policies, systems, and practices—many of which have never before been questioned” (para. 2).

While certain military values are permitted to be challenged, the core tenets persist.

The question of the integration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) members was another core culture issue during this period. From the 1950s to the early 1990s, the Canadian government led a campaign, carried out primarily by the RCMP but also the Military Police, to identify, interrogate, and remove gays and lesbians from the public service of Canada (Kinsman, 1995; Poulin et al., 2009). The argument—driven by Cold War anxieties—was that closeted “homosexuals” were a threat to national security because they could be blackmailed by foreign agents. While there was no evidence to suggest this was true and there was never a single documented case of it in Canada, this logic of justifying harassment and persecution of gays and lesbians on the basis of security concerns informed state policy for close to five decades (Kinsman, 1995; Poulin et al., 2009). At its core, discrimination against and exclusion of LGBT military members was also about the fear of compromising the military’s culture, which was entrenched in heterosexual warrior masculinity (Jackson, 2004; Kinsman, 1995). This alleged fear was rooted in arguments that LGBT members would hinder operational effectiveness, which was once again disproven by research (Belkin & McNichol, 2000; Okros & Scott, 2015). In 1992, a legal case by former military member Michelle Douglas ended the Purge of LGBT military members, though social discrimination against them continued (Gouliquer, 2011; Lopour & Deshpande, 2020).

The 1990s brought attention to the issue of culture through the media in two more ways. When news broke of Canadian soldiers torturing and killing Somali civilians in 1993, a multi-year inquiry (Somalia Inquiry) followed (Winslow, 1999). The inquiry revealed racist practices in the Airborne Regiment, leading to its eventual dissolution (Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia, 1997; Whitworth, 2004). The Somalia Commission of Inquiry recognized that the military's distinctive culture and its sub-cultures were defined by a sense of "separateness" from the rest of society (1997, chapter 5). The Somalia Affair led to the development of the Standard for Harassment and Racism Prevention (SHARP) training program and an ethics program. While these responses recognized the need to train military members in ethics and the military ethos, as well as increase their awareness of individualized racism and sexual harassment, they did not specifically call into question the military's culture (Taber, 2020).

In 1998, the mishandling of sexual assault cases in the military was brought to the fore with the publication of three cover stories by *Maclean's* (O'Hara, 1998a, b, c). The "rape crisis," as *Maclean's* called it, highlighted the limitations to women's integration in the Canadian military as well as the problems with the military justice system. The *Maclean's* stories examined the military's culture through its problematic treatment of women and of victims/survivors of sexual harassment and assault. It is noteworthy that O'Hara (1998a) used the term culture only once while discussing the nature of the military and its systemic problems. Throughout her articles, O'Hara depicted the military as an organization in which hostility, harassment, and assault against women is common, while speaking out about these issues is discouraged. Further, she demonstrated that the patriarchal nature of the military intensifies women's vulnerability to sexual assault by reinforcing hierarchies that position women at a disadvantage based on gender, rank, and recency of joining the military. The assaults against women were followed by adverse experiences, including the mishandling of their cases by the military and subjection to a culture of intimidation and humiliation for those who spoke out about their assault. The *Maclean's* series clearly showed the problems with

military culture and the need for culture change through an examination of values, assumptions, and behaviours, even while only sparingly using the terminology of culture.

Thus, the 1980s and 1990s brought public attention to the problems of military culture and put pressure on the military to engage in culture change, even if not named as such. Questions of culture were at the core of the issue of women's and LGBT integration into the military and also at the core of the issue of military sexual violence. Until legally forced to change, the military maintained discriminatory policies against women (until 1989) and LGBT members (until 1992), largely on the (erroneous) grounds that their exclusion was necessary for cohesion and national security. The military did not acknowledge the need for any systemic change to its culture during this period, instead introducing new training and programs in the face of public pressure that focused on individual behaviours, not structural inequities. Rather than proactively change its culture, the military adopted a policy of neutrality toward gender and sexuality (Davis, 2013; Lopour & Deshpande, 2020). However, such an approach places expectations on women and LGBT members to fit into the norm of military masculinity, not for the norm to be changed; therefore, a gender and sexuality neutral approach allowed the military's masculine and heteronormative culture to remain essentially unchanged (Brown & Okros, 2019; Davis, 2020). Similarly, the military's response to military sexual violence during the 1990s and 2000s was one that described the problem as individual ("a few bad apples") rather than linked to institutional culture. The response showed that the status quo was maintained, demonstrating that, historically, culture, has been something to be protected and not challenged in the eyes of the military. Even in view of legal changes, and training and policy initiatives, the underlying message throughout this period was that military culture remained untouchable and needed to be preserved.

The war in Afghanistan (2001–2014) reinforced the warrior ideal and the idea that culture does not need changing within the Canadian military. Allan English has argued that CAF conceptualizations of

combat motivation during this time continued to rely on a belief that homogenous and long-serving groups of soldiers are more cohesive and have higher morale, justifying the exclusion and marginalization of those who do not fit the historic norm (English, 2020, p. 17). The significance of warrior culture in the CAF was upheld during the war in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the war marked the first time that a significant number of Canadian women served in frontline combat arms positions and that a female CAF member was killed in battle. In addition to a focus on gender neutrality, the war brought about a new discourse which emphasized women's potential contribution to operational effectiveness as part of counterinsurgency warfare in Afghanistan (Chapman & Eichler, 2014; Tait, 2015). This shift toward justifying women's inclusion through their utility for operational effectiveness, conceptualized within a warrior framework, foreshadowed the discourse on culture change that emerged next.

From 2014 to 2020: Culture may need fixing for the sake of operational effectiveness

In the period of 2014-2021, change was once again led by a combination of internal pressure from below and external pressure. In 2014, the story of Stéphanie Raymond, who alleged that a superior raped her and the military forced her out after she reported the assault, was highlighted by publications in *Maclean's* and *L'actualité*. These articles brought the issue of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military to the forefront of public attention once again (Mercier & Castonguay, 2014a, b). Based on interviews with Raymond and other women who had experienced sexual assault while serving; details of sexual assault complaints and court martials; and the lack of concerted action on the part of the military, the articles showed that sexual assault and sexual harassment were still persistent problems within the CAF.

The publicity of Raymond's case and her search for justice after her sexual assault led to the first external review into sexual misconduct in the military. The review was conducted by former Supreme Court Justice Marie Deschamps, who published her review on sexual

harassment and sexual misconduct in the CAF on April 30, 2015 (Deschamps, 2015). The report documented a sexualized culture within the CAF that is hostile toward female and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) members. Deschamps found “a prevailing sexualized environment characterized by the frequent use of sexualized language, sexual jokes, innuendos, discriminatory comments with respect to the abilities of female members of the military, and less serious but unwelcome sexual touching” (Deschamps, 2015, p. 14). The Deschamps report was significant because it introduced the term “sexualized culture” and gave credence to the idea that sexual misconduct was a systemic cultural problem. Deschamps explicitly linked the military’s sexualized culture to the challenges surrounding women’s integration and women’s low representation among the leadership in the CAF. She argued that increasing women’s representation, especially among the senior leadership, would be one of the key strategies for achieving culture change. Giving strength to this argument, Deschamps referenced sociological research that showed “the ideal of the combat male warrior concept has [negatively] impacted on the integration of women into the military” (Deschamps, 2015, p. 19).

The reaction of the most senior military leadership to the report was initially dismissive. Then CDS Tom Lawson commented that sexual misconduct is the outcome of “biological wiring” (as cited in CBC News, 2015). After growing public pressure, not to mention the damning description of CAF culture in the face of sexual misconduct, the military was forced to respond. This was not the first time that the military leadership had been compelled to publicly acknowledge that military sexual misconduct was a problem, but this time it was difficult to maintain that it was only “a few bad apples.” Within a few months of the report’s release, and in response to the recommendations, the next CDS, Jonathan Vance, announced Operation HONOUR (CDS, 2015), which represented the CAF Action Plan on Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour and set up a Sexual Misconduct Response Centre. With Operation HONOUR, the military’s official recognition of and response to sexualized culture

and harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour was positioned as an order, and framed in the language of operational effectiveness. As the order explained: “harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour involving members of the CAF is an operational readiness issue, incongruent with our ethics and values, and wrong” (Department of National Defence, 2015). Operation HONOUR recognized the “underlying sexualized culture” (sec. 1), yet the focus of the order was on individual behaviour. Furthermore, it invoked the idea of “strengthening culture” and making change “to the extent possible” (sec. 13c). Rather than a wholesale acknowledgement of the need for culture change, it emphasized the need to “uphold the Profession of Arms” (sec. 16b), limiting the idea that what was needed was transformative change. That change would be limited was also indicated by the way Operation HONOUR quickly became ridiculed in some circles within the military by use of the phrase “hop on her” (Pugliese, 2015; Taber, 2020).

While organizational attention was at this point officially focused on eliminating sexual misconduct by changing sexualized culture, the enactment of this change remained individualized and continued to be resisted. Partially as a result of this resistance, survivors of military sexual trauma began to formally organize. Marie-Claude Gagnon founded It’s Just 700, a group whose name alluded to the dismissal of the Deschamps report in some online circles as being based on interviews with “just” 700 people. It’s Just 700 became the leading force behind the Heyder-Beattie class action lawsuit on sexual assault, sexual harassment, and discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation in DND/CAF. The government of Canada resisted negotiating with the plaintiffs and their lawyers, and disputed that it had a duty of care for those impacted by sexual misconduct (Syed, 2017). The Heyder-Beattie class action lawsuit was finally settled in 2019. The final settlement agreement included compensation, two schedules (Schedule N and Schedule O), restorative engagement, and other initiatives related to culture change (Fothergill, 2019; Schultz-Nielsen et al., 2023).

Another corollary of the Deschamps report was that DND/CAF contracted the first external survey of sexual misconduct. The Statistics Canada survey, conducted in 2016, found that 4 in 5 military members “saw, heard or experienced inappropriate sexual or discriminatory behaviour” in their workplace. It also noted that women in the Canadian military experience sexual assault at higher rates than military men, and both women and men in the military experience higher rates of sexual assault than civilians. The survey found that in Canada, close to one in three women in the military was sexually assaulted during her military service, compared to four percent of men. More than 10% of younger women in the Regular Force (aged 24 and under) reported having already experienced sexual assault, and more than 50% reported being “targeted by sexualized or discriminatory behaviour” such as sexual jokes or gender discrimination (Cotter, 2016). The Statistics Canada survey was significant because it provided evidence for the claim that sexual misconduct was a systemic and widespread problem in the military, and therefore a problem of the military’s culture, as Deschamps had argued. The survey was repeated in 2018 and 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2019; Cotter & Burczykca, 2023), and an additional survey was done at Canada’s military colleges in 2019 (Maxwell, 2020), with the results of all three continuing to highlight the problem of military sexual misconduct through an external lens.

In parallel to Operation HONOUR, DND/CAF developed a Diversity Strategy in 2016. The focus of the Diversity Strategy was increasing diverse representation to better reflect Canadian society and values as well as to be able to better respond to the strategic environment. The Diversity Strategy stated that “possessing personnel with diverse backgrounds better facilitates interfacing with civilian populations, non-governmental organizations, and other actors within the operating environment” (p. 3). Diversity was herein defined as “respect for and appreciation of differences in ethnicity, language, gender, age, national origin, disabilities, sexual orientation, education, and religion. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing, celebrating, and integrating the rich dimensions of diversity within each individual” (Office of the

Chief of the Defence Staff, 2016, p. 1). While culture and culture change were not explicitly discussed, culture change was implicitly assumed to equal increasing diversity and having greater inclusion and respect for different people. In this document, diversity was constructed as operationally advantageous—as in the idea of strength through diversity.¹

Another key document related to culture and culture change in 2016 was the CDS Directive on 1325 (CDS, 2016) about the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (first passed by the UN in 2000). The directive committed to, among other things, integrating gender perspectives into all planning and execution of military operations (para. 2), even though gender-based analyses had become required for DND/CAF policymaking and training much earlier, in 1995, as part of the Canadian government's commitment to the UN's Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The focus of the 2016 directive was outward looking, centred on DND/CAF's work in countries outside of Canada, with no acknowledgement of aspects of DND/CAF's culture that are harmful to women and men who are othered in the military (Johnstone & Momani, 2022). The defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, released in 2017, also incorporated a commitment to UNSCR 1325 and to GBA Plus (Department of National Defence, 2017). Furthermore, *Strong, secure, engaged* acknowledged some concerns with CAF's culture such as lack of diversity and representation, problematic workplace behaviour, and inadequate supports for survivors/victims, including legal support. The policy committed to better supporting military personnel and their families and developing a total health and wellness strategy. While culture was mentioned in this document, it was not defined or dealt with systematically (Department of National Defence, 2017).

The 2018 Auditor General (AG) report highlighted the lack of change that had occurred in response to the Deschamps report (Office of the

¹ This discursive positioning of diversity as strength is also reflected in the title and content of the later 2023 Culture evolution strategy (discussed in section below), *Together – stronger: Diversity of service – unity of purpose* (Department of National Defence, 2023).

Auditor General of Canada, 2018). It drew attention to the lack of survivor supports and the lack of clear terms of reference for the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre (SMRC). It recommended a review by the CAF of the Strategic Response Team on Sexual Misconduct (CSRT-SM) (first established in response to the Deschamps report) and the SMRC; an integrated approach to victim support, and to make victim support a “top priority,” with clear guidance on duty to report; prioritization of the Respect in the CAF workshop and related training and education; performance measurement for Operation HONOUR; expanded use of subject matter experts; and the creation of clear policy with effective education and training. While the AG report called out DND/CAF for the lack of action taken on the Deschamps report, especially regarding survivor supports, it did little to centre problematic aspects of DND/CAF’s culture except to say that, “camaraderie, trust, and cohesion among members is fundamental for the Forces to carry out its operations and missions,” (sec. 5.2), and is harmed by “the issue and impact of inappropriate sexual behaviour” (sec. 5.3). The report thus reinforced the notion that the problem of culture is a problem for operational effectiveness and did not acknowledge the need for transformative change of the culture itself.

The 2019 report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, *Sexual harassment and violence in the Canadian Armed Forces*, highlighted some of the limitations of Operation HONOUR and made recommendations to strengthen the military’s response to sexual misconduct (Boniface et al., 2019). It included testimony by the authors of this working paper and other academics before the committee that centred the importance of addressing and transforming culture: “Another criticism raised by a number of witnesses was the need to go beyond HISB [Harmful and Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour] prevention and complaints handling in order to change the organization’s culture more deeply” (Boniface et al., 2019, p. 22). As such, the committee’s recommendations highlighted the need for the CAF to engage in structural change to policies and practices, which had been heretofore lacking.

Partially in response to the AG report, and partially in response to the continuing external criticism about the lack of addressing culture in relation to sexual misconduct, *The path* (Department of National Defence, 2020) was developed in 2020. Its official description reads, “*The Path to Dignity and Respect: Sexual Misconduct Response Strategy (The path)* is a bespoke culture change strategy created by the CAF to align behaviours and attitudes of CAF members with the ethical principles and core values expected of all persons who practice the profession of arms in Canada” (p. 9). In *The path*, sexual misconduct was defined as “a wicked problem” (p. 7) that lies in the disconnect between the desired culture and the existing culture. Influenced by business organizational change and change management literature, *The path* described the solution as eliminating the bad aspects and strengthening the good aspects of the existing culture. The document declared a need for “cultural alignment” rather than transformative culture change (pp. 11–26).

This period in the history of military culture and culture change discourse was characterized by some reform in response to pressure from victims and survivors of military sexual misconduct (from Raymond’s public story, the founding of It’s Just 700, to the Heyder-Beattie class action) and a series of external publications (e.g., Deschamps report, Statistics Canada surveys, and Auditor General and Senate reports). While attention was given to culture change for the first time in this period, the internal reports and documents discussed above show the limited ways change was constructed, such as by foregrounding how problems with culture can undermine operational effectiveness and emphasizing the need to strengthen and align the existing culture. Thus, DND/CAF’s discourse on culture change once again centred institutional needs and decentred the needs of those negatively impacted. Despite the huge potential of a shift in the broader Canadian conversations on military culture and culture change, the official discourse analyzed here demonstrates that institutional efforts aimed to constrain the meaning of culture change and thus what culture change might entail in practice.

From 2021 to early 2024: Culture can evolve and be strengthened for the sake of operational effectiveness

In 2021, allegations of sexual misconduct against several high-ranking male CAF officers, including two Chiefs of Defence Staff (CDS), two Chiefs of Military Personnel (CMP), and the officer named to assume command of the Army, were reported in the Canadian media. The Commander of Canadian Special Operations Forces (CANSOFCOM) was criticized for his professed support of an officer accused of sexual assault and concomitant lack of support to the alleged victim and her spouse, who was under the CANSOFCOM's command. Notably, these officers had formal leadership responsibilities, in their various capacities, for eliminating sexual misconduct in the CAF (Pugliese, 2021). In particular, the CDS had launched Operation HONOUR, while CMP played a critical role in the implementation of the Heyder-Beattie Final Settlement Agreement. The incumbent CDS and CMP responsible for these initiatives were accused of obstruction of justice and conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline, respectively, due to inappropriate communications and relationships with female subordinates (Pugliese, 2021). These allegations demonstrate the ongoing pervasiveness, at the highest ranks, of CAF's sexualized culture.

In response to these allegations, which were brought to the fore by news media, the Canadian government and DND/CAF took several steps to address sexual misconduct in the military, demonstrating once again the reactive nature of their response to accusations of sex and gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. In April of 2021, the CDS and Deputy Minister jointly released a directive that established CPCC, stating that the CAF's "current culture does not universally reflect a shared understanding and compliance with our values and ethos, including a recognition that diversity, inclusion, and equity must be fostered if we are to maximize the Defence Team's operational effectiveness" (Department of National Defence, 2021, sec. 7). With these words, the directive established two points: one, that the CAF's values and ethos are inherently supportive of an equitable culture, it is simply that members do not have a "shared

understanding and compliance” with them, similar to *The path’s* discussion of “cultural alignment”; and two, that the overall aim is not equity for equity’s sake, but for the larger concerns of “institutional credibility and operational readiness/effectiveness” (sec. 7). The Initiating Directive of CPCC promised “a fundamentally new approach to address the root causes of systemic misconduct” (Department of National Defence, 2021). The Initiating Directive acknowledged the limitations of past approaches that focused on symptoms and mandated that members behave differently. The Government of Canada (2021, Apr. 29) released a statement announcing that retired judge Madame Louise Arbour was being appointed to conduct yet another external review, this time to “take a broader look at how and why our existing workplace dynamics enable harmful behaviours, and make recommendations on preventing and eradicating harassment and sexual misconduct” (para. 2).

In the meantime, in June 2021, the House of Commons Canada Standing Committee on the Status of Women released its report, *Eliminating sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces* (Gladu, 2021). The report acknowledged that sexual misconduct has been a “longstanding issue” in the CAF (p. 3) and cited the allegations against “high-ranking officials in the CAF” (p. 3) as a reason for the committee’s study on the topic. Recommendations included establishing an Office of the Inspector General of the CAF and the DND as well as to “fully implement all recommendations of Justice Deschamps’ 2015 report” (p. 5). The report gave further support to arguments that DND/CAF must proactively work to address and eliminate sexual misconduct, move toward meaningful culture change, and increase accountability. Nonetheless, even at this time, there was resistance from senior military officers to further change efforts with Brigadier-General Andrew Atherton stating to the committee that “the CAF believes that it has succeeded in implementing all recommendations of the [Deschamps] report,” which the report clarified was “a statement with which witnesses [to the Standing Committee] disagreed” (p. 18).

During this time period, two sets of consultation groups for the Heyder-Beattie Final Settlement Agreement (Fothergill, 2019) were set up and began their work: Schedule N-Survivor Support Consultations and Schedule O-Gender and Diversity Representation Consultations. These consultations were comprised of DND/CAF representatives, class members, and subject matter experts. *Schedule N summary report* was completed in October 2021 and released soon after. The Report argued there were inadequate and incomplete supports for survivors, as well as little inclusion of survivor voices in a military context, which “creates particular challenges with respect to reporting incidents of sexual misconduct and seeking and accessing support” (Survivor Support Consultation Group, 2021, p. 39). Forty-five recommendations were made that emphasized themes of engagement, partnerships, and research; support, training, communication, and information; and accountability. While not specifically about culture change, the recommendations were placed within its broader goal, as demonstrated by the following statement:

Our position is that the approach we have set forth in this Summary Report—one that emphasizes the need to undertake broader, more holistic, inclusive, and collaborative engagement—is an important step towards building better support for survivors. We acknowledge, however, that the opportunity could easily be lost if appropriate leadership is not exercised, if deep dialogue and listening do not happen, and if the community as a whole fails to both expect and fully mobilize real and transformative culture change (p. 19).

Schedule O summary report (completed in June 2021) focused on the structure of the CAF as a whole with respect to how the organization is designed to grant unearned privilege to some and marginalize others. It argued that this structure results in discrimination, harassment, and assault, requiring large-scale change in the form of “a redesign of the military workplace, critical appraisal of the CAF career cycle, and a standalone education program” in order to “assess and implement policies and programming that support equity-seeking groups” (Gender Representation and Diversity Consultation

Group, 2021, p. 1). It was not until November of 2023 that the report was deemed releasable, but as of the date of writing this working paper, DND/CAF itself has not publicly released it. The fact that a report resulting from Heyder-Beattie, which incorporated the voices of class members calling for structural change, languished for so long is telling. It seems to indicate resistance to any change to culture, norms, policies, practices, and education on the part of DND/CAF.

In 2022, four important reports related to culture and culture change were released. A key report related to culture change during this period was the *MND advisory board on systemic racism report* published in January 2022.² The report identified the legacy of colonialism in Canada as the root cause of problems with representation and culture in the Defence Team. It argued, “Recognizing that the health of the National Defence organization is hampered by the powerful constraints of its inherited colonialist culture is the first step in deliberately instituting meaningful change” (Minister of National Defence, 2022, p. 21). While culture change is only mentioned a few times in the report and is not its focus, the naming of structural forces such as colonialism and racism, as well as patriarchy, heteronormativity, and ableism, was unique compared to other documents. However, the report was limited in its focus on the Defence Team as a microcosm of broader society rather than as active agent and participant in structures of racial oppression and other manifestations of structural inequality (Minister of National Defence, 2022, p. 34).

The employment equity and diversity in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces report to the Minister of National Defence, was released by the DND/CAF Ombudsman (Department of National Defence/CAF Ombudsman, 2022). The report noted the “challenges to the provision of fair and equitable employment for employees and members” (p. 5) but took an individualized approach to the problem, attributing it to the lack of a

² This report responded to the January 2021 Clerk of the Privy Council “Call to Action”, see <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/corporate/clerk/call-to-action-anti-racism-equity-inclusion-federal-public-service.html>.

“culture of acceptance” of diversity in that a “majority of CAF members opposed accommodating cultural and religious differences” (p. 29) and that “women felt obliged to choose between career and family” (p. 29). The report did not acknowledge how the military culture contributed to this opposition or perception of obligations, thus once again sidestepping the harm caused by the CAF’s culture.

The Arbour (2022) report, however, was significant for being another external report, in addition to the Deschamps report, devoted to the issue of military sexual misconduct. The report presented a scathing assessment of the rampant nature of sexual misconduct within DND/CAF and the organization’s lack of response to it. Arbour’s 48 recommendations focused on improving legal responses to military sexual misconduct incidents; revising policies that contribute to, or fail to address, sexual misconduct; changing recruitment, promotion, and educational practices to attract and retain those who will engage in equitable practices; and ameliorating the poor treatment survivors often face when they report sexual misconduct. Her report supported key recommendations from Justice Fish’s (2021) independent review of the National Defence Act, which focused on the military justice system, particularly with respect to the need to move sexual assault cases to civilian courts. Arbour also argued that the military’s “toxic and sexist culture” is the “root cause” of sexual misconduct (p. 35) and a significant reason for the CAF’s inability to increase the percentage of women in its ranks. Although this report was an important contribution to the argument for culture change in the CAF, we (with TMC co-director Dr. Tammy George) identified several points that it did not satisfactorily address: the need to apply a feminist intersectional trauma-informed approach, consider women’s integration beyond numbers, question the warrior ideal, revise universality of service beyond that required for those experiencing sexual misconduct, re-envision education and military colleges through a critical lens, reassess civilian involvement to bring in critical voices, and foreground the health and wellness of military members (Eichler et al., 2023).

In August 2022, the *Elsie initiative barrier assessment report* was published (Department of National Defence, 2022a). This report reflected Canada's commitment to Women, Peace and Security as relates to UNSCR 1325. The Elsie initiative aimed to increase women's representation in United Nations peace support operations, stressing women's contribution to operational effectiveness and the importance of equitable career opportunities for women. The research behind this initiative aimed "to identify impediments to uniformed women's meaningful participation in UN peace support operations" (Department of National Defence, 2022a, p. 1). While culture and culture change were not a focus of the Elsie initiative barrier assessment report, it identified the culture of the CAF as one of the main barriers to women's deployment on international missions. It also noted that the lack of an inclusive and equitable work environment negatively impacted the recruitment and retention of women in the CAF (Department of National Defence, 2022a).

In addition to the four reports discussed, several important documents were also released in 2022 that relate to culture and culture change in the CAF. The *CAF retention strategy* (Department of National Defence, 2022b) positioned itself as "an enabler of the culture change that the CAF is pushing towards, engaging in measures to ensure that the concerns of all our members are heard and addressed" (p. ii) with respect to issues of diversity and inclusion. The strategy names "sexual misconduct, hateful conduct, discrimination, harassment and violence, employment inequity, and abuse of power" as problems with CAF culture, recruitment, and retention. This document is significant in that it recognizes these problems not only exist in the CAF but are inhibitors of culture change as well as recruitment and retention (Department of National Defence, 2022b).

During this time, the revised *CAF ethos: Trusted to serve* (Chief of Defence Staff, 2022) was also released, foregrounding the "need for reshaping military culture by embodying the CAF ethos" (p. 4). The

ethos reframes concepts deemed essential to military service (i.e., loyalty, service before self, uniformity, teamwork) in more inclusive and healthy ways. The document argues that the ethos is important for culture change in that it recognizes the “past inequities and exclusions in CAF history and traditions” (p. 5) although, as with previous iterations of CAF documents, it is framed in relation to operational effectiveness: “inclusion is a force multiplier because it increases our operational effectiveness” (pp. 23–24). In the ethos, there is mention of past inequities and a definition of inclusiveness that rejects racism, sexism, and homophobia, but these past inequities are not related to root causes. The focus is on leveraging inclusiveness for the good of the military and the content is centred on individual actions and beliefs, not structures that feed into those actions and beliefs. Furthermore, there is no definition of culture change or direct discussion of how it relates to the ethos (Taber, 2022).

Another key document released in this period was the revised *CAF dress instructions* (Government of Canada, 2022). The instructions acknowledge the principles of inclusion and changing societal norms as reasons to remove dress requirements based on binary gender ideals as well as to allow for diverse forms of cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs, so long as operational effectiveness and safety concerns are accounted for. This more inclusive approach to military dress, with a rethinking of the values of uniformity and conformity, is promising for culture change. What remains to be seen is how the new instructions work in practice, with respect to whether or not members feel safe in taking them up. Will the impact of these new instructions be transformative for military culture or simply performative? As dress regulations have changed over time to accommodate individual ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, largely in response to the Employment Equity Act, these revisions appear to be simply individual accommodations, without accompanying culture change.

The Defence Team culture evolution strategy *Together—stronger: Diversity of service—unity of purpose* was released in November 2023 to limited and privileged audiences. The aim of the strategy was to “unify the multitude of culture evolution efforts already underway across our institution, including the measures we are taking in response to external reviews” (p. i). The focus of the strategy is on evolution, which implies that, despite its historical roots being grounded in ableism, colonialism, homophobia, racism, and sexism, DND/CAF’s culture simply needs to evolve. The strategy speaks of “transforming our culture” in the context of “creat[ing] a healthier workplace,” stating that it is “not only the right thing to do, it will make us more operationally effective” (p. ii). Culture is described as having “positive and negative aspects.” The problem with culture is framed as being not the culture itself but “the way culture is expressed in our teams” in ways that do “not always align with our ethos and stated values” (p. ii). This sentiment is also evident in the individualist rather than structural approach taken that “each member of the CAF and each DND public servant is responsible for conducting themselves with integrity, honour, and in ways that align with our values as an institution” (p. ii). Examples of cultural improvements given are “being a positive role model, treating all people with respect, speaking and acting in an inclusive and empathetic way, and providing informed support to peers and subordinates when harm has occurred” (p. ii). Culture change is once again identified as a responsibility of individual behaviour, not wide-scale institutional change, despite recognition of “poor or inadequate systems, processes, and practices of the institution” (p. ii).

This time period included a concerted focus on military culture change, including the completion of a new external review, the establishment of CPCC, the release of several significant internal reports, and the development of new policies. It presented an opportunity for meaningful change and a disruption of the status quo as an important part of the process to achieve such change. But it was also a time period, once again, dominated by a reactive approach from DND/CAF, resulting from external pressures and pressures from military sexual trauma victims and survivors to finally

see meaningful change. As a whole, our analysis of key documents demonstrates the new limits that DND/CAF has placed on the potential for change in response to this latest push. Instead of transforming culture, the aim is to evolve and strengthen culture and maintain the status quo. It seems that a proverbial line in the sand has been drawn around culture change, at least temporarily: this far and no farther.

As we conclude the writing of this working paper in early 2024, the Government of Canada has released two key Defence documents: *Canada's third National action plan on Women, Peace and Security (CNAP 3)* and its long-awaited defence policy update, *Our north, strong, and free: A renewed vision for Canada's defence*. The new Canadian National action plan on Women, Peace and Security does not explicitly mention culture change in relation to the CAF (Government of Canada, 2024). However, in wanting to bridge the domestic and international divide, a gap seen as problematic in previous national action plans, *CNAP 3* states that it “targets efforts by the Canadian Armed Forces to foster an organizational culture that supports the recruitment, retention and career progression of women and continued operational effectiveness” (p. 13). The defence policy update, released in April 2024, pays positive if scant attention to culture change (Department of National Defence, 2014). While it has a subheading titled “Culture Change,” it does not use the term culture change in the rest of the text. Instead, it uses words such as “strengthen” and “improve” in relation to culture (p. 17) or refers to “changes to culture” rather than “culture change” (p. 32). The focus is once again on individual behaviour and operational effectiveness. In listing accomplishments since 2017, it states:

Strengthening an institutional culture of inclusion is not just the right thing to do, it is foundational to *operational effectiveness*—because diverse groups make better decisions. Since 2017 Defence has taken important steps to prevent or eradicate harassment in the military, modernize the military justice system, examine and address discrimination and hateful conduct, and institute permanent and long-lasting *changes* to organizational culture (p. 32, emphasis added).

The *CNAP 3* talks of fostering culture, while the defence policy update uses the language of strengthening rather than changing culture. Both these key documents avoid, or at minimum downplay, the language of “culture change” and emphasize the subservience of culture change to operational effectiveness, thus reinforcing the discourse on military culture in Canada we have described for this period.

Culture change discourses over time: Implications for today and into the future

What does this overview of DND/CAF culture and culture change over time demonstrate? What are the implications for the future? Harmful military culture is not a new problem that appeared during the 2021 sexual misconduct crisis. Calls for culture change in the Canadian military are long-standing, as is their contestation and co-optation by senior leadership. Culture has long been seen as sacred, in that it has been openly argued that changes to culture would undermine unit cohesion and operational effectiveness. An accepted piece of common sense within the organization is that demands for the culture to change threaten the institution and its operational imperatives. Change only began to happen when the military’s culture was contested from below and outside pressure for change grew. External pressures and advocacy from veterans, especially veteran women and military sexual trauma victims and survivors, were key in bringing about shifts—in 1989, in 2014, and again in 2021.

At the same time, culture has also been a powerful analytical lens through which to understand and address ongoing issues such as sex and gender discrimination, sexual violence, racism, and homophobia in the military. Culture, while talked about implicitly for decades, became a powerful tool as a result of Deschamps’ (2015) naming of the military’s sexualized culture, which she saw as the root cause of widespread sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. The shift toward identifying culture as intrinsic to the military’s core problems of abuse and discrimination was a potential game changer. Even if met with denial and resistance, the

Deschamps report and the military's response to it represented a significant and noteworthy shift in the military's approach to culture and culture change. Eventually, military leadership came to officially acknowledge the problem of widespread sexual misconduct and the need to change the military's culture. However, military leadership also framed the elimination of sexual misconduct primarily in terms of its value to operational effectiveness. This presented a limited conceptualization of culture change and did not acknowledge the underlying root causes of the military culture problem.

It seems that a proverbial line in the sand has been drawn around culture change by DND/CAF, at least temporarily: this far and no farther.

The earlier need to argue against culture change because of its supposed detrimental effect on operational effectiveness has been cast aside in official DND/CAF discourse. But the shadow of that rhetoric still hangs over the military, as can be seen in the continued need to justify change for the sake of operational effectiveness. This was evident in the Operation HONOUR order, the AG report, the *CPCC initiating directive*, the new *CAF ethos*, the culture evolution strategy, and other documents. Change, it seems, can be justified only to the extent that it increases operational effectiveness. While the adoption of the language of culture change may seem like a radical shift, the focus on operational effectiveness as the number one priority still circumscribes what change can look like, as operational effectiveness continues to be precipitated on a warrior ideal (Davis, 2023).

Only three DND/CAF documents have explicitly named culture change as a central focus: *The path to dignity and respect: Sexual misconduct response strategy* (Department of National Defence, 2020), *Initiating directive for professional conduct and culture* (Department of National Defence, 2021), and *Defence Team culture evolution strategy Together – stronger: Diversity of service – unity of purpose* (Department of National Defence, 2023). In contrast to the *CPCC initiating directive* which promised a fundamentally new

approach, in *The path* and the culture evolution strategy, there is a reframing and co-optation of culture change with the use of terms such as cultural alignment and evolution rather than change and transformation. The shift toward evolution implies that transformative change is not needed, and a clear picture of what the culture should evolve into is lacking. While real gains have been made over the past four decades, the most recent discursive framing of culture change risks reinforcing the status quo by emphasizing the aligning and strengthening of the existing culture. Also, in the CPCC initiating directive as well as in the culture evolution strategy, there is a shift toward a focus on the whole Defence Team (comprised of military personnel and civilian workers), which makes the distinct experiences of military personnel less visible. This focus on the Defence Team is becoming more prevalent and was also reflected in the Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination. Such a discursive shift from a focus on the CAF to the Defence Team as a whole makes it more difficult to address the unique features of military culture that require change.

...the most recent discursive framing of culture change risks reinforcing the status quo by emphasizing the aligning and strengthening of the existing culture.

In contrast, what is required to achieve transformative culture change would be an explicit engagement with the underlying root causes of the military culture problem—sexism, racism, homophobia, colonialism, and ableism (Eichler & Brown, 2023)—rather than reframing culture change as subservient to operational effectiveness and redefining change as evolution. While the language of culture change has been expanded in some ways over the years, (for example, through the introduction of critical concepts such as patriarchy, racism, and anti-oppression) there remain serious contradictions and tensions between this more radical language and the official language of alignment and evolution being used with respect to the existing military culture. In the interest of current and

future potential for change, it is therefore important to keep in mind the long history of DND/CAF organizational and individual resistance to specific changes as well as to the idea that the culture needs to be changed at all. Resistance to culture change is endemic and historically rooted, continuously framed in juxtaposition to operational effectiveness—it is not just a recent response to calls for change.

Our analysis of DND/CAF culture change discourse over these past four decades demonstrates the dominant institutional message that the culture does not need to change, and indeed that it should not change. The CAF uses the concept of culture change to address individual instances of homophobia, racism and sexual misconduct, but does not intend to address the colonial, patriarchal, and white privilege underpinnings of the military structure itself. Our comprehensive analysis of key texts, including DND/CAF policy documents, external reports, media reports, and academic research, has resulted in several recommendations for DND/CAF:

- Decide to truly conduct meaningful culture change. If the goal is to challenge, rather than perpetuate, the status quo, follow the recommendations below.
- Be proactive, not reactive, in regard to culture change.
- Acknowledge that culture was historically used to obstruct change and maintain the status quo.
- Stop linking culture and culture change to operational effectiveness.
- Centre the needs of military personnel who are negatively impacted by existing cultural norms, values, and practices, not the needs of the institution, senior leaders, or others with institutional privilege.
- Name culture as a problem. Identify and address the root causes of the military's culture problem, which include sexism, colonialism, racism, heteronormativity, classism, and ableism.
- Commit to the structural transformation rather than evolution of culture.

- Emphasize structural solutions over individual ones in order to acknowledge and challenge how power relations are integral to organizational culture.
- Recognize how culture and everyday cultural practices that are informed by customs, traditions, oral histories, artifacts, and leaders' behaviours cause harm to military personnel and inhibit change.

The above overview of culture and culture change demonstrates an institutional preoccupation with DND/CAF's own needs over the needs of those impacted most negatively by its culture, further demonstrating a lack of serious internal commitment to change over the past decades. Although there have been limited reforms, these reforms have been accompanied by resistance and co-optation of culture change discourse, which inhibits true transformation and reveals a lack of commitment to change.

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