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## When Bullying Wears a Rank

Major Angela Hudson

**JCSP 48**

### Exercise Solo Flight

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**When Bullying Wears a Rank**

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## INTRO

Since landmark research in 1970 on bullying among children in school settings, research has expanded to include bullying among all ages and within many environments.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent studies indicate the prolific nature of the behaviour and the striking negative impacts such behaviour has within workplace environments. Bullying is also identified as a precursor to broader personal crimes and a predictor of criminal offences.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, within the military workplace, the prevalence and effects of bullying have not been as broadly studied. An organization comprised of individuals committed to the defence of Canada and its values, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is not immune to bullying. In fact, bullying, a precursor to harassment and misconduct, is abundant and a significant thread in the leadership crisis the CAF is facing today.

This paper will attempt to stitch together gaps in the application of bullying research by leveraging the civilian sector and other military research to extrapolate specifics of the problem within the CAF. Solutions to such negative behaviours cannot be constructed until the totality and manifestations of bullying in the CAF are thoroughly understood. Bullying behaviours in the CAF represent precursors to more destructive behaviours. They thrive in the military environment because of the systemic structures that allow them to do so, and<sup>3</sup> they have devastating impacts on members, families, and the institution. This paper attempts to combine behavioural science, psychology and organizational management methodologies to understand the bullying problem within the CAF better.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Olweus first began research into systemic bullying in schools among adolescence. The results of his studies was a book entitled "Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys" and was published in both Sweden and the United States throughout the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> Depeng Jiang, Margaret Walsh and Leena Augimeri, "The linkage between childhood bullying behavior and future offending." *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health* 21(2), (April 2011): 129.

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Plonien, "Bullying in the Workplace: A Leadership Perspective," *AORN Journal* 103, issue 1 (Jan 2016): 108. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1753396628/F2CD3292FE4F425DPQ/17?accountid=9867>

Falling below the threshold of criminal liability, bullying behaviours are often overlooked despite their prevalence in military environments. The Military Continuity Project in 2019 polled 470 US active duty service members, 50 percent of whom said they had experienced bullying during their time in the military.<sup>4</sup> Bullying in Canada is also a severe problem. Canada ranked 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> out of 35 countries on measures of bullying and victimization by the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>5</sup> Technology has emboldened a sense of unanimity of words behind a screen and disconnected behaviour from immediate consequences and feelings. Canadian teachers identified bullying, including cyberbullying, as a severe problem by 89 percent of teachers polled.<sup>6</sup> So students learn this behaviour at a young age as victims or perpetrators and carry these lessons with them into adulthood and Air Force squadrons, Army brigades, and onto Naval ships. Critical to the conversation as well is the fact that the CAF composition is a microcosm of Canadian society more broadly. Individuals come into the institution from various backgrounds and with a variety of beliefs, not all of which the CAF will or even aims to manipulate. Recently, a Naval Fleet School basic training course was cancelled because of a variety of sexually inappropriate comments made by students toward an instructor and other bullying and harassment incidents among students.<sup>7</sup> Thus the prevalence of bullying within the CAF can be partially predicated on a failure to eliminate such behaviours brought in by members as they join.

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<sup>4</sup> Gavin Crowell-Williamson, Martina Fruhbauerova, Christopher DeCou, Katherine Comtois, "Perceived burdensomeness, bullying, and suicidal ideation in suicidal military personnel." *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. (December 2019): 2152.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), "Health Policy for Children and Adolescents (HEPCA)," (2017/8). Accessed 22 Apr 22. <http://www.hbsc.org/publications/international/>

<sup>6</sup> Canada Red Cross, "Facts on Bullying and Harassment," last modified 21 Mar 22. <https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/violence-bullying-and-abuse-prevention/educators/bullying-and-harassment-prevention/facts-on-bullying-and-harassment>

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Duffy, "CFB Esquimalt training course terminated over allegations of sexual harassment, racism," *Vancouver Sun* (Mar 19, 2022). Accessed Apr 1, 2022. <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/cfb-esquimalt-training-course-shut-down-over-allegations-of-sexual-harassment-racism>

One of the limitations surrounding the study of bullying in the military is the lack of an applicable working definition to understand its place among other behaviours, such as lawful orders. Civilian researchers generally agree that a good description of workplace bullying involves four elements: negative acts, repetition, intention, and a power imbalance.<sup>8</sup> However, definitions of individual behaviours below that of harassment are not found within existing CAF regulations. A proposed definition of bullying within a military context is, therefore

***the arbitrary and repeated abuse of power and trust because one has been afforded the opportunity.***

This definition ties together several unique elements of the military environment that are worth exploring further. A bully in the military exists at any rank and wields just enough power to influence the work environment of those around and below them and often holds dearly the power that comes with their role or position. When approached with an issue/concern or innovative suggestion, bullies in the military enjoy the opportunity, by rank or position, to decide on the fate of a project or individual's dilemma as they see fit without additional questioning. In some instances, these individuals say "no" to a perfectly doable and acceptable accommodation request or recommended change by a member because it is easier and quicker to do so. Truthfully, they say "no" as retribution or because of a perceived threat to themselves personally. Regardless of the action or decision of the bully, the victim within the military context is often left with a loss of confidence and trust of superiors, which over time erodes their dedication to the organization and mission.

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<sup>8</sup> Justin Canty, Maria Stubbe, Denise Steers and Sunny Collings, "The Trouble with Bullying – Deconstructing the Conventional Definition of Bullying for a Child-centred Investigation into Children's Use of Social Media," *Children & Society* 30 issue 1. (Jan 2016): 48. <https://web-p-ebsohost-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=571b5c24-8543-4e7a-aebe-54c699ed0f1d%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=112339234&db=a9h>

## SPECTRUM OF TOXIC WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS

Bullying does not occur spontaneously. Such behaviours only occur in permissible environments. While bullying is a phenomenon that may occur both on an individual basis as well as within and by a group, the psychosocial parameters differ between the two.<sup>9</sup> While group bullying and hazing behaviours also exist within a military environment, this paper focuses on individual behaviours specifically. It is helpful to visualize bullying's progressive nature on a spectrum. It is also beneficial to understand bullying as behaviour that contributes to a toxic workplace. Bullying behaviours on the left side of the spectrum in Figure 1 indicate their existence below a criminal threshold and juvenile in terms of escalatory nature. In other words, such negative behaviours represent a foundation for the prevalence of more severe behaviours over time regardless of age. Adolescent and adult bullying both display a typical spectrum of escalation and suggest that while varying in degrees, the tendency is that without interference, it is likely that bullying behaviours will at least continue and, at most, escalate.<sup>10</sup> Research from across the globe, for example, indicates that anti-social behaviours such as bullying in adolescence positively correlate with contact with criminal conduct and police/court contact in early adulthood.<sup>11</sup> More specifically, "childhood bullies have a higher tendency to become adult

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<sup>9</sup> Jun Won Kim, Kounseok Lee, Young Sik Lee, Doug Hyn, Kyung Joon Min et al. "Factors associated with group bullying and psychopathy in elementary school students using child-welfare facilities," *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 11. (Aucklack, 2015): 992. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2240212997?parentSessionId=mdI7dqJTnGxAgTREPkbGtPG6AO98zzpVkpXsFibPeLo%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=9867>

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Renda, Suzanne Vassallo and Ben Edwards, "Bullying in early adolescence and its association with anti-social behavior, criminality and violence 6 and 10 years later," *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health* 21 (2011): 120. <https://web-s-ebsohost-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=d8762253-4371-40c2-86b8-cfaa37050035%40redis>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

bullies.”<sup>12</sup> Other influencers within adolescent households contribute to the chances of perpetuating such behaviours in a similar way that existing organizational climates do within the workplace. Therefore, the spectrum of behaviours identified in Figure 1 is valuable to understanding the time and broader behaviours that situate bullying within the CAF.

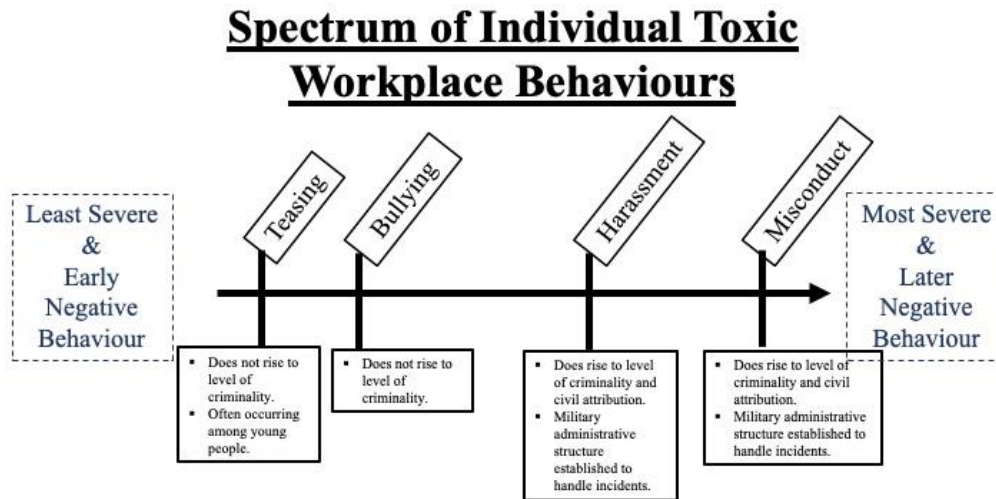


Figure 1: Spectrum of Individual Toxic Workplace Behaviours

An organization’s focus on the right end of the spectrum at the expense of the left allows behaviours on the left to permeate and exasperate. Permeation does not just occur within a single individual but also horizontally throughout the organization and beyond. A bully within a military squadron or unit, for example, both receives and sends a message that such behaviour is acceptable when such behaviours are left uncorrected.<sup>13</sup> As national media attention has portrayed, the CAF recently has been focusing on legally attributable offences such as harassment, discrimination, and misconduct– the right side of spectrum behaviours.<sup>14</sup> However,

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Eric Storch, “Once a bully, always a bully? Tips to address adult bullying behavior,” *Baylor Psychiatry Clinic*. (Jan 30, 2018). <https://blogs.bcm.edu/2018/01/30/once-a-bully-always-a-bully-tips-to-address-adult-bullying-behavior/>

<sup>13</sup> Cynthia Plonien, “Bullying in the Workplace: A Leadership Perspective,” 108.

<sup>14</sup> CAF Sexual Misconduct Class Action Law Suit (2021) Accessed April 21, 2022 <https://www.caf-dndsexualmisconductclassaction.ca> or varying news outlets publishing the myriad of misdoings of the very senior of

falling below that legal threshold and often going unpunished remains the infancy of such poor decision-making and bullying behaviour. Studies suggest that due to bullying's indicator for future criminal behaviours, additional focus on eradicating negative behaviours in the military starting further left on the spectrum would make more sense.<sup>15</sup> Arguably if bullying behaviours were curbed or stopped in their infancy, those individuals would not escalate to harassment or misconduct. But such interventions to curb early toxic behaviours such as bullying are complex in a military environment. Rank disparities between individuals are often perceived to disallow an opportunity for intervention by parties. It can be difficult for members junior to approach or speak up against a bully wearing a higher rank.<sup>16</sup> In media cases of right-spectrum incidents that have come out in recent years, perhaps spurred by the CAF sexual assault class-action suit and several senior leadership misconduct investigations, victims have spoken about the escalation of behaviours by perpetrators.<sup>17</sup> They have also discussed the emboldened sense of acceptableness and recognized lack of accountability for such behaviours with increased rank.<sup>18</sup> One of the best examples of both the evolutionary nature of the spectrum of behaviours and the CAF's focus on

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Canadian military leadership such as Ashley Burke & Murray Brewster, "A Military in Crisis: Here are the senior leaders embroiled in sexual misconduct cases," CBC (Oct 2021). Accessed April 21, 2022

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/sexual-misconduct-military-senior-leaders-dnd-caf-1.6218683>

<sup>15</sup> David Farrington, Maria Ttofi & Friedrich Losel, "School Bullying and later criminal offending." *Criminal Behaviour & Mental Health*, Vol 21 Issue 2 (April 2011): 78. [https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=e73d6389-2c05-41ed-8d53-](https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=e73d6389-2c05-41ed-8d53-145743bf7592%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSszY29wZT1zaXR1#AN=58757444&db=sih)

[145743bf7592%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSszY29wZT1zaXR1#AN=58757444&db=sih](https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=e73d6389-2c05-41ed-8d53-145743bf7592%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSszY29wZT1zaXR1#AN=58757444&db=sih)

<sup>16</sup> Unlike the CAF Bystander Intervention Training (2021) which discusses intervention underpinned in a Duty to Report IAW QR&O 4.02 and 5.01, QR&O 106.02 due to the service offence nature of sexual misconduct, bullying is not encapsulated in this requirement for action. The CAF Facilitator Training Guide speaks to rank disparities in their scenario training and acknowledges the uniqueness rank plays in intervening. A good recommendation that is given to overcome this is to "delegate" or seek the support of a more senior person before confronting the individual. P. 23. In this instance, the Chain of Command is to be leveraged to provide the solution, assuming they are also not the problem. Director General Professional Military Conduct (DGPMC). "Bystander Intervention: Addressing Sexual Misconduct Training Material." 1 Sep 2021. Accessed 21 Apr 22.

<http://intranet.mil.ca/assets/DefenceTeam/docs/en/cpcc/bystander-intervention-facilitator-guide.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> See survivor experiences such as Julie Marcotte here: <https://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/surviving-and-overcoming-sexual-assault-in-the-canadian-armed-forces> and Justin Hudson here:

<https://globalnews.ca/news/8360601/canadian-veteran-military-sexual-assaults-misconduct/> for example.

<sup>18</sup> See Maj Brennan case study in subsequent footnotes involving General Vance as one among many examples.



the right side of the spectrum rather than the left involved the former CAF Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Jonathan Vance.<sup>19</sup>

In early 2021, retired Major Kellie Brennan went public with her relationship with a recently retired and former CDS General Jonathan Vance.<sup>20</sup> This case demonstrated the evolution of bullying behaviour, the role the military hierarchy plays in establishing a disproportionate power dynamic, and intervention difficulty. In the case, Major Kellie Brennan detailed a 20-year affair with the General.<sup>21</sup> General Vance's use of his superior military rank in the relationship was pivotal in his initial bullying behaviour, which later progressed to sexual harassment and, finally, sexual misconduct. The rationale for General Vance's action lies in typical bullying characteristics, including the promulgation of power dynamics that affords a perpetrator continued leverage – usually by rank in the military – over the other and narcissistic behaviour.<sup>22</sup> Major Brennan expressed that while a participant in the relationship, she in no way felt able to say no to him – a prevalent sentiment among victims.<sup>23</sup>

This case displays the difficulty of intervention involving higher ranking individuals and progressively gets more complex as the perpetrator climbs in rank. Maj Brennan explained that many people throughout the duration of the relationship were aware of the relationship and some of the actions by the General, but they did and said nothing. Others continued to keep silent even after the General was married and still pursued a relationship with Brennan. Despite mandatory

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<sup>19</sup> Mercedes Stephenson, Marc-Andre Cossette & Amanda Connolly, "Vance is 99% match with child born after he said Brennan relationship ended: paternity test," *Global News* (Sept 16, 2021). Accessed 12 Apr 22. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8195276/canadian-forces-sexual-misconduct-crisis-jonathan-vance/>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Christian Balducci, "Workplace bullying and its relation with work characteristics, personality, and post-traumatic stress symptoms: an integrated model," *Anxiety, Stress & Coping: An International Journal* 24 Issue 5, (2011): 507. <https://www-tandfonline-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/10615806.2011.555533>

<sup>23</sup> Stephenson, Cossette & Connolly, "Vance is 99% match with child born after he said Brennan relationship..." See also previous survivor stories cited in footnote 17 for evidence of feelings of inability to say 'no.'

CAF Standard for Harassment and Racism Prevention (SHARP) training (1998-2000), Operation HONOUR (2015-2021), including bystander intervention training, and under the ethos of “duty with honour,” misconduct continued to occur within the ranks. But the escalation of bullying behaviour in the CAF at the individual level continues to be prolific and not just because no one intervenes.

### **MILITARIES ARE UNIQUELY STRUCTURED TO ENCOURAGE BULLYING**

Bullies thrive in environments where they are supported by larger organizational structures that reinforce drastically unequal power dynamics. For the military, this is represented internally by rank and externally by comparable military might. Militaries are capable of acting like civilian organizations in that they can become organisms capable of bullying at the organizational and strategic levels. The CAF is one of those organisms that continues to afford bullying the opportunity to be pervasive internally, and it is this structure that supported the former General’s behaviour. The systemic nature of bullying within an organization can be a problem at the strategic and tactical levels. Positively, the symbiotic relationship between the strategic-operational-tactical levels means that improvements in leadership naturally impact the other. Likewise, the individual and organizational levels depend on and reinforce one another.<sup>24</sup> The structure of the CAF creates bullying threefold: first, by fostering and rewarding finite mindsets; second, by breeding careerism; and third, by cultivating a reinforcing hierarchy including but also beyond rank. While this paper focuses on the uniqueness of the military organization vice its civilian counterpart, this is not to say there does not exist distinct similarities between the two. Bullying’s prevalence in general, as evidenced in the creation of

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Derber and Yale Magrass, *Bully Nation*, (University Press of Kansas: Dec 17, 2017) Online excerpt on *Truthout* website: <https://truthout.org/articles/the-bullying-of-us-militarism-pervades-the-entire-society/>

organizations such as the *Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI)*, demonstrates the pervasive nature of such behaviours in American workplaces today.<sup>25</sup> WBI notes as well that the growth of online work has not curbed bullying and, in some circumstances, has afforded more opportunity for it as workers are more connected virtually now than ever.<sup>26</sup>

## **A Finite Mindset**

The CAF and many militaries tend to be reactive and short-sighted when dealing with internal problems. Departments are hastily created, and individuals are appointed to identify and fix specific issues rather than attempt to figure out the source and do the work to address it.<sup>27</sup> The CAF sees this in its myriad of issues, from recruitment to retention to procurement to public image, which have existed for decades. However, this reactive behaviour is inherently self-interested in terms of self-preservation – a sentiment that has percolated down to the member level and encouraged bullying behaviour. The creation of the CAF Professional Conduct and Culture Department (CPCC) in 2021 represents an attempt to set a cultural environment that eliminates discriminatory practices and sexual misconduct in the forces.<sup>28</sup> The department is aiming to change CAF culture. As Simon Sinek, in his book *The Infinite Game*, asserts, culture is the result of an organization’s values plus behaviours they accept.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Sinek determines

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<sup>25</sup> Drs Ruth and Gary Namie, “The Bullying Institute,” modified 2022, accessed April 2022. <https://workplacebullying.org>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Reference the numerous former Supreme Court Justice reports identified throughout this paper that indicate repeated recommendations that were not actioned. Many of such recommendations required significant changes to the CAF, including the procedures surrounding the investigation and prosecution of sexual misconduct. See also most recently the Final Report of the Minister’s Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination with MND Anand. (25 Apr 22) <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2022/04/ministers-advisory-panel-on-systemic-racism-and-discrimination-final-report.html>

<sup>28</sup> Government of Canada, “Chief Professional Conduct and Culture,” last modified 11 Mar 22, accessed April 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/organizational-structure/chief-professional-conduct-culture.html>

<sup>29</sup> Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game* (USA: Penguin Random House, 2019): 122.

that organizations get the behaviours they reward.<sup>30</sup> Therefore the CAF has been rewarding bullying behaviour in some regard. One way the CAF rewards members' expeditionary *performance* involving the use of force is by awarding medals. Such advocacy of deployed violence is juxtaposed with a requirement for domestic subservience and a peaceful public image. These medals are often associated with killing the 'enemy' or support thereof.<sup>31</sup> Inherently, there is tension between CAF acceptable battlefield behaviours and home unit ones. Militaries generally do not issue medals for avoiding conflict or preventing it despite the courage behind such behaviours taking many forms.<sup>32</sup> The CAF, therefore, not only accepts but rewards violent behaviours, executed without question and often perceived as in support of national-level bullying efforts.

Behaviours on the spectrum above that would typically be discouraged and criminally prosecuted become expected and celebrated. Just as it seems counterproductive to reward the very behaviours organizations are trying to curb, it is doubly misguided as it represents the furtherance of the finite mindset through a focus on individual hardware. "Finite thinking asks what's best for me. Infinite thinking asks what's best for us."<sup>33</sup> The latter, Alan English argues, is due to the increasing bureaucratization of the CAF combined with a clear emphasis on performance over leadership.<sup>34</sup> He says that finite type thinking weakens the values-based culture required for the practice of a profession and inhibits the organization's ability to deal with

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<sup>30</sup> Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> Derber & Magrass, *Bully Nation*, online excerpt.

<sup>32</sup> CAF awarded medals, distinct from government awarded or NATO awarded medals (which may also be given to civilians), specifically identify the recognition of performance in the presence of 'the enemy' or in some instances, an 'armed enemy.' Government of Canada, *Canadian Medals Chart*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/medals/medals-chart-index.html>

<sup>33</sup> Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Alan Okros, "Chp 2: Civil-Military Relations: the Broader Context," In I. Goldenberg, et al., eds. *The defence team: military and civilian partnership in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence*, (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2015): 58. [https://cradpdf.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc204/p802756\\_A1b.pdf](https://cradpdf.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc204/p802756_A1b.pdf)

“wicked problems” on a grander scale.<sup>35</sup> But the short-term, reactive focus of the CAF is not unique to Canada’s military.

Militaries by nature measure their success in finite conflicts and wars. They “win wars” and “defeat enemies” in very decisive terms.<sup>36</sup> By definition, winning wars and defeating enemies have finite endings and thus require only finite mindsets to bring success. Militaries “win” when they impose their individual or collective will on other countries for a specified amount of time. In other words, they bully professionally when asked to do so. To therefore wonder why military members then mimic such behaviour individually is absurd.<sup>37</sup> The military and strategic political tactic to label perceived infinite problems as ‘wars’ is also done purposefully. Examples are the ‘war on drugs’ and the ‘war on terror.’ This methodology aims to capitalize on people’s optimistic understanding of the finite nature of war, and therefore it tends to lure immense public support... for a finite time. However, the reality is that there is no end state for the ‘war on terror’ or the ‘war on drugs.’ There is no utopian existence among humans where human-determined ‘illegal drugs’ or terrorist organizations do not exist. These labels represent a purposeful confusion of terms to garner public support for military operations. Individual leadership focused finitely on their own careers projected downward has also impacted bullying culture throughout the institution.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> This vernacular is used through the US and Canada in a variety of conflicts, but specifically the Iraq War where the US State Department spoke of the goal of “defeating ISIS.” <https://www.state.gov/about-us-the-global-coalition-to-defeat-isis/> Former MND Sajjan spoke with coalition partners about their common goal to “defeat ISIS.” <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/news/2018/12/minister-sajjan-concludes-successful-meeting-with-major-force-contributors-to-the-global-coalition-to-defeat-isis.html> . Accessed 21 Apr 22. The reality today however is that conflict occurs within a much more complex battlespace, within which metrics become very subjective. What the end of war looks like today is different than the cinematic treaty signing and white flag surrender during the great wars. The determination of success in a conflict is determined by the goal, and modern conflict goals are often shifting or ambiguous. Even for soldiers it can become confusing as to who is the ‘enemy’ of the day. If the enemy cannot be truly defined it is understandable that their ‘defeat’ becomes hard to quantify as well.

<sup>37</sup> Derber & Magrass, *Bully Nation*, Chp 6. “Marching to Bully: How the military trains bullies both inside and outside the service.”

## **Militaries Breed Careerism**

Leadership matters in the pervasiveness of bullying. Leaders directly set the tone for subordinates and provide direction on appropriate individual and collective behaviours.<sup>38</sup> So, leadership styles influence bullying. In a Canadian study on leadership styles and their correlations with bullying in work environments, researchers found that “transactional or transformational leadership is likely to provide an environment that makes bullying rarer than under negative or passive leadership.”<sup>39</sup> Specifically, as Bernard M. Bass, an American scholar in leadership studies and organizational behaviour, explains, the transformational leadership style is critical, which provides individualized consideration to subordinates and promulgates a high level of compassion. The antithesis of a laissez-faire leadership approach is that transformational leadership styles speak about more unified and collective decision-making and communication methods. But transformational leadership is not focused on pursuing personal interests, so transformational leaders in the CAF are rare. The CAF as an institution revolves around the upward trajectory of individual careers. Thus, transactional and self-interested leaders in the CAF have a natural proliferation. And while a paradox in the military between collective action and individual recognition is not necessarily harmful, when out of balance, individuals have the capacity to destroy any sense of a collective.

When individual interests outweigh collective ones, bullying can emerge as a means to reinforce the imbalance. “Bullies engage in relational bullying to advance their goals. Whether it is to promote themselves or get back at someone they don’t see eye-to-eye with, this seems to be

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<sup>38</sup> Renee L. Cowan, “\*\*it Rolls Downhill,” *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* (Routledge, 2013): 100. <https://www-tandfonline-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1080/17459435.2013.835347?needAccess=true>

<sup>39</sup> Marc Dussault & Eric Frenette, “Supervisors’ Transformational Leadership and Bullying in the Workplace,” *Sage Journal* Volume 117 Issue 3 (December 2015): 725.

the most common manifestation of bullying behaviour among adults.”<sup>40</sup> In self-protective measures, individuals sacrifice unity and collective unit wellbeing for individual career desires in a non-combat environment. This can be demonstrated in the military when leaders disallow subordinates particular professional development (PD) or operational temporary duty (TD) opportunities and are then seen taking advantage of the opportunity themselves, for example. Such behaviours create an atmosphere of distrust and dishonesty and fuel further careerist mentalities on both sides. The increasingly careerist focus for individuals in the CAF has become a catalyst for not just dishonesty, as Dr. English argues in his article, but bullying tendencies as well. He asserts that this trend has been why the CAF has failed to weed out toxic leaders in the CAF.<sup>41</sup> However, CAF members who display bullying behaviours while fostering mistrust are not usually poor performers, so their identification can be difficult.<sup>42</sup>

Individuals who bully cannot be directly identified in members' yearly appraisals necessarily. Toxic leaders and those who display bullying behaviour often do very well on these results-based reports and progress quickly through the ranks. But nowhere on the CAF performance evaluation report (PER) or new PaCE form is there a category for trust, for example. In evaluating effective team performance, Simon Sinek discusses the evaluation methods used in the US Navy Seals to define the relationship between performance and trust. The aim is to identify the right individual for the unit based on a balance of technical competence (performance) and character (trust) specifically.<sup>43</sup> “What the Seal’s discovered is that... the high

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<sup>40</sup> Storch, “Once a Bully, Always a Bully,” no page.

<sup>41</sup> Allan English, “Corruption in the Canadian Military? Destroying trust in the chain of command,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23, issue 1 (Dec 2016): 44. <https://www-tandfonline-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/11926422.2016.1250654?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

<sup>42</sup> It would be remiss not to mention several new initiatives aimed at closing this identification gap such as the character-based leadership model for GOFOS and 360 review within PACE. However, the current lack of transparency of the GOFOS analysis combined with the infancy of the PACE evaluation do not yet allow for their impacts to be fully evaluated. It is definitely a field ripe for review in the coming years.

<sup>43</sup> Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 109.

performer of low trust is a toxic team member.”<sup>44</sup> The Seals have thus found that the most effective teammates are not necessarily top performers. Ironically, however, the CAF annual PER assesses individuals solely on their performance and potential. Nowhere on the form are character traits, such as trust rated. Thus, one of the ways distrustful, toxic leaders displaying bullying tactics flourish in the CAF the lack of evaluation of trustworthiness and similar character traits is one explanation.

The CAF is presently witnessing a leadership crisis involving distrustful members interested in their performance and career trajectories rather than the success of subordinates and the CAF team. Indeed, the systematic nature of the PER and its focus on performance allows bullies and distrust to thrive. But such misguided priorities are not just wrong because they enable toxic behaviours to flourish. Such preoccupations are also bad for a company’s bottom line. General Electric CEO Jack Welch, in the 1980s and 1990s, experienced the negatives of advancing individuals predominantly on performance. His bottom line suffered greatly.<sup>45</sup> While the company was dominated by high performers, they were found to often “intentionally sabotage their colleagues to advance themselves.”<sup>46</sup> The individual careerist focus within the CAF, documented in performance reports that neglect the very traits necessary to inspire outstanding leadership and foster trust, damages the individual and the organization. This erosion of trust, prolific bullying and misconduct in the CAF destroys public confidence – the CAF’s bottom line. Such spherical structures also become increasingly difficult to change once their values become internalized, as is witnessed in the CAF. There can exist a sentiment that “this is

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<sup>44</sup> Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 110.

<sup>45</sup> Prior to Jack Welch’s takeover General Electric (GE) was facing bankruptcy due to lack of revenue, stock prices etc. Following Jack Welch’s takeover in 1981 revenue soared in GE, up 600% to \$130 billion. GE’s stock market value also rose to more than \$400 billion from \$14 billion.

<sup>46</sup> Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 112.



the way we have always done things” can be dangerous when that has harmed people and families.

### **Bullying Cultivates a Reinforcing Hierarchy**

Following a recent anonymous Unit Climate Survey within a CAF unit, the report identified significant bullying behaviour, some of which rose to the level of harassment.<sup>47</sup> A commander gathered a small team to investigate. Rather than attempt to identify the source or sources of instability and friction within the unit, the commander instead asked the group to investigate the respondents to figure out who was speaking out about the adverse climate – the commander wanted to know names. This commander was not only displaying bullying behaviour over the investigative team by going against the unanimity of the survey but also by asking them to figure out who the victims were that spoke out. In other words, the CO was setting the tone for the acceptance of bullying within the unit. Beyond being the antithesis of the purpose of the climate survey, the commander's dominance within the hierarchy was reinforced through their bullying by seeking to identify and presumably remove or punish those that spoke out negatively. Individual dominant and submissive roles are identified and reinforced when bullying behaviour is exerted, such as in this situation. Compounding the power struggle is the overlay of the military rank structure – which superficially imposes a superiority complex to complicate the relationships further. No one on the tiger team dared question the General’s demands. But it is not through eliminating rank hierarchies that bullying will be purged. There is a balance to find.

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<sup>47</sup> Incident heard during discussion among military colleagues.

Researchers have found that flatter, less hierarchical groups experience less bullying within the animal kingdom as well.<sup>48</sup> The animal kingdom exemplifies the delicacy of hierarchies for group survival.<sup>49</sup> But hierarchies still exist even among relatively harmonious groups, and animal hierarchies are maintained by regulating access to resources not unlike within the military.<sup>50</sup> In the military, the prevalence of bullying occurs when a dominant member denies or punishes attempts by others to access resources such as permission for leave, opportunities for innovation, advancement, access to senior members, etc. Such resources or accommodations represent elements that will not alone destroy an individual's ability to serve or continue to participate in the group but distinctly disadvantages them. Such disadvantages work two-fold in the military environment. First, it seeks to reinforce the hierarchy and second, it allows the superior members time and space to focus on themselves. Such actions also work to discourage future injects or challenges to the hierarchy.

At a more strategic level, the bullying of countries militarily or with an equivalent fighting force has long existed. Often guised in moral justification, stronger countries interfere in weaker countries very strategically aware of the hierarchical position that allows them to do so.<sup>51</sup> Modern-day Russian forces in Ukraine are an example.<sup>52</sup> But for, as common as such endeavours

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<sup>48</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 204. This concept is known as a heterarchy or sometimes referred to as "power to the edge" in a military context. For more information see Robert S. Bolia, "Power to the Edge: Command... Control... in the Information Age," *Air & Space Power Journal* 20 issue 2 (Summer 2006): 122-124. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/217767484?parentSessionId=mazefgVi75MYL8OoAfEe9PL31QAvnIAZKRbsX444SPQ%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=9867>

<sup>49</sup> Richard Hutch, "Dominance Hierarchies and Health: Constructing Personal Zones of Spiritual Power and Healing in Modern Medicine," *Journal of Religion and Health* 45 issue 3 (Sept 2006): 329. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/756918795?parentSessionId=Tvbqn7RhIUR%2Buyp%2FYF5qEFyXylv6LKN%2B7ZFr2i3NgN0%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=9867>

<sup>50</sup> Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 205.

<sup>51</sup> Derber & Magrass. *Bully Nation*.

<sup>52</sup> Interestingly however, it is the heterarchical nature of the Russian forces in general (acknowledging several instances of desertion or subversion in the media) that is arguably struggling against a much more heterarchical Ukrainian force. So while the mentality of superiority may have compelled Russia to invade or bully Ukraine, that same mentality has become problematic in the success of the current endeavours.

have been, historians still debate the biological inherentness of such power projections. War and men going to war, contrary to popular belief, is generally not done without significant influence.<sup>53</sup> Even in Ukraine, martial law has made it illegal for men between the ages of 18 and 60 to leave the country, despite significant numbers of volunteer fighters from around the world assisting.<sup>54</sup> “...all evidence indicates that war is something that societies impose on men, who most often need to be dragged kicking and screaming into it, constantly brainwashed and disciplined once there and rewarded and honoured afterwards.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the military arguably bullies men and women into war through systematic methods because they can. The instillment of an instinct to follow orders is integral during CAF basic training and is relied upon, especially during strategic military conflicts. A hierarchy conveniently affords justification for power imbalances. When bullying is exerted as a primary means of exercising power, the hierarchy is contributory.

The lack of networked leadership within the hierarchy is also a critical component. But beyond good leaders, the stability of such leadership also contributes to workplace toxicity and the prevalence of bullying. Leaders set the tone for acceptable behaviour, and leadership voids can be a breeding ground for bullying. “Human social hierarchies are more complex than any animal society. Yet they appear to share at least superficial signals with non-human primates.”<sup>56</sup> Just like animals, humans have a preference for the status quo because it is comfortable. Change and threats of change are uncomfortable and foster uncertainty within the hierarchy. Every annual posting season (APS) in the military, members and leaders leave units, and new members

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<sup>53</sup> Lauren Frayer, “Ukraine women are volunteering to fight – and history shows they always have,” *NPR* (March 19, 2022). Accessed 21 Apr 22. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/19/1087712539/ukrainian-women-are-volunteering-to-fight-and-history-shows-they-always-have>

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 253.

<sup>56</sup> Goldstein, *War and Gender*, 205.

arrive. This change creates a vacuum within which members begin the process of the re-establishment of the hierarchy within a team. This behaviour also occurs within the animal kingdom. The chicken pecking order, through to a lion pride are decided through bullying behaviours – albeit much more physically.<sup>57</sup> The level of bullying within the flock or tribe will only be as much as the leader allows. Following leadership changes, other animals within the group may respond to the void with their power ambitions. And new leaders are expected to set the tone for acceptable behaviour. The same is true in the forces. The organization's leaders, units, and formations set the standard of acceptable behaviour. Consistent leadership is vital.

## **BULLYING IMPACTS IN THE CAF**

So what impacts have the aforementioned systematic fostering of bullying throughout the organization had? The true breadth of these impacts is unknown mainly due to a lack of research directly correlating the two. However, what is known is that bullying in the CAF has a direct negative correlation with member retention rates, fewer women in senior ranks and member welfare and “being a victim of workplace or social bullying is associated with worsening work performance, increased sadness, exclusion and avoiding social situations.”<sup>58</sup>

Research indicates that members are not leaving the CAF due to bullying alone. When the factors are examined, members go because of arbitrary decisions by individuals in the organization, which directly impacts their status/identity. In the 2019 CAF Retention Survey, the

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<sup>57</sup> Even among species with rather flat hierarchies such as stingrays or sharks, their social lives are actually more complex than initially assessed. Researchers have discovered that while exceptionally linear, there exists a shallow dominance hierarchy among groups in which a non-random dominant individual would prevail. See Joni Pini-Fitzsimmons, Nathan Knott and Culum Brown, “Heterarchy Reveals Social Organization of a Smooth Stingray Population in a Provisioned Food Context,” *Frontiers in Marine Science* (April 29, 2021) Accessed 21 Apr 22. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/19/1087712539/ukrainian-women-are-volunteering-to-fight-and-history-shows-they-always-have>

<sup>58</sup> Storch, “Once a Bully, Always a Bully,” no page.

top three most-cited occupation dissatisfiers were issues with advancement, promotion and PERs.<sup>59</sup> Correlated with the latter were disparities in leadership, training and development opportunities.<sup>60</sup> The commonality among these items is their arbitrary nature and performance focus, as previously discussed. Members focusing on themselves and their careers as the system encourages are devastatingly impacted when appraisals fail to meet imposed expectations.<sup>61</sup> When leaders are plagued with poor decision-making skills and bullying tendencies – member departure is just one outcome. Members eventually become disenfranchised, as the survey indicates, and they leave.<sup>62</sup>

Between 2002-2019 there were 216 suicides among Canadian Forces members.<sup>63</sup> Exposure to bullying correlates with a higher likelihood of suicide, and those experiencing suicidal thoughts are increasingly prone to being bullied – primarily due to their inferiority within the hierarchy.<sup>64</sup> The mental health stigma, both professionally and personally, still plays a factor in military members’ perceived usefulness to their unit and family as well. “Perceived burdensomeness was a significant mediator of the association between bullying and the level of suicidal ideation...”<sup>65</sup> The correlated relationship works in reverse as well. A research study

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<sup>59</sup> Polly Cheng. 2019 *Qualitative Analysis – CAF Reg Force Retention Survey (HRSG 2020)* DRDC, vi.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Grievances were within the top category of grievances among members according to the *Third Independent Reviews of the National Defence Act* as published by the Government of Canada. The report acknowledges that “members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have fewer means of redress than civilians in other organizations.” Para 622. Literature on leadership from a variety of sources speaks to effective and prudent leadership appraisals as not coming as a surprise to members due to ongoing feedback and communication between rater and ratee. Based on the grievance numbers in the CAF however, it is clear this leadership style is not widespread.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/acts-regulations/third-independent-reviews-nda/chapitre-4-military-grievance-process.html#toc1>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Government of Canada “2020 Report on Suicide Mortality in the Canadian Armed Forces (1995-2019),” (2020) accessed 31 Mar 22. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/health/2020-report-on-suicide-mortality-in-the-caf-1995-to-2019.html>

<sup>64</sup> Williamson, 2150. As cited in Teismann, T., & Forkmann, T. (2017). “Rumination, entrapment and suicide ideation: A mediational model.” *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy* 24(1), 228. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.1999>

<sup>65</sup> Gavin Crowell-Williamson, Martina Fruhbauerova, Christopher DeCou, Katherine Comtois. “Perceived burdensomeness, bullying, and suicidal ideation in suicidal military personnel.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. (December 1, 2019): 2147.

from 2016 found that “those who experienced suicidal ideation were more likely to have been exposed to workplace bullying or harassment and that low job control, as well as high job insecurity, were predictive of suicidal ideation.”<sup>66</sup> The capacity to overcome self-preservation is a complex phenomenon; however, bullying events leading to the alienation of individuals in the workplace are predictors of such end states.<sup>67</sup>

There is minimal research on the interpersonal foundations that impact military members' decisions to commit suicide. Yet, the statistics surrounding military members and suicide are staggering, and the risk to members is apparent. Interestingly, notions of the CAF as ‘a calling’ and chargeable offences such as desertion both thwart desires to leave the CAF and aim to invoke a deep sense of obligation among members. These ideologies, however, also create notions of entrapment. Delays to CAF soldiers’ requests to leave the forces due to personnel shortages have resulted in members being “kept” in the forces to the maximum extent to reduce the organization’s burden. However, as the Teismann and Forkmann (2017) study found, “perceptions of entrapment mediated the relationship between rumination and suicidal ideation, an effect independent of depression, anxiety, and distress.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, the very ideals that have been forged as a means to keep the CAF a collective unit have negatively contributed to individual wellbeing. Forced collective pressures are contrary to an individualistic military member’s career. The organizational structure encourages and propels a propensity for entrapment, fostering mental health instability, neither of which is beneficial for the CAF.

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<sup>66</sup> Crowell-Williamson, Perceived burdensomeness... 2149.

<sup>67</sup> Crowell-Williamson, Perceived burdensomeness... 2149.

<sup>68</sup> Williamson, 2150. As cited in Teismann, T., & Forkmann, T. (2017). “Rumination, entrapment and suicide ideation: A mediational model.” *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy* 24(1), 230. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.1999>

## CONCLUSION

Bullying behaviour damages CAF members and families and degrades the institution by eroding trust. Bullying involves the unequal assertion of power for the sake of preservation and is extraordinarily problematic for a military profession for at least three reasons: (1) it reduces the force's effectiveness and subsequent mission accomplishment, (2) it negatively impacts retention, recruiting and the health and wellbeing of members and (3) it perpetuates a now proven public stereotype of the CAF as riddled with leadership and trust deficiencies. While bullying is primarily individually motivated, it is encouraged through systemic factors within the military culture. Many previously valued beliefs around prioritizing organizational effectiveness, individual military leadership success and homogeneity over diversity are no longer valid and creating friction. Ideas that people work best under control and regulations and that diversity is a problem are false.<sup>69</sup>

It seems too that notions of bullying have been overshadowed by criminal cases of harassment and sexual misconduct in the CAF in recent decades. In doing so, the earlier concerns surrounding bullying behaviour are being ignored. The connection between the predictive nature of bullying and more severe misconduct has not been realized or understood, especially in the military context. Indeed feasible recommendations should come only after the problem is thoroughly understood. Likewise, recommendations for change to better the CAF as an institution and address specific deficiencies beyond bullying have been prolific in the last decade from various sources. What has not been prolific is the CAF's adoption of recommendations.<sup>70</sup> Solutions are being given but not being employed.

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<sup>69</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Finding our way* (Brett-Koehler Publishers, March 2007), 3.

<sup>70</sup> From the Justice Fish report, DND committed to only beginning to implement 36 of 107 recommendations – most of which have not been implemented as of the date of publishing. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2021/06/defence-minister-releases-results-of-the-third-independent-review-of-the-national-defence->

A war on bullying or a mindset to abolish bullying in the military also appears not to be the answer. While a precursor to other behaviours, the behaviour will exist where the structures allow it to. It is also systemic before it is individual. In other words, the elimination of bullying in the CAF is an infinite game with an infinite horizon. So as Simon Sinek highlights, it would be a fallacy to expect to apply our military operational planning process (OPP) mentality to a conflict without a defined end state. Bullying has thrived within the CAF because members are rewarded for superior *performance* as determined during the PER process and more broadly within militaries that ‘win wars’ and ‘defeat enemies.’ Instead, the CAF mindset needs to focus on building a flexible, resilient force focused on protecting Canadians and others worldwide. An infinite perspective recognizes the longevity of an armed forces mission for Canada and the value of the CAF being “measured by the desire others have to contribute to that organization’s ability to keep succeeding, not just during the time they are there, but well beyond their tenure.”<sup>71</sup> This mentality would ideally translate to leaders who are compelled to advocate the organization's long-term vision by inspiring others. Bullying ceases when the organizational structure discourages it, and leadership sets the example and forbids it. The recently appointed Canadian Minister of National Defence, Anita Anand, seems to be developing just such a foundation for change. Her most recent mandate letter aims to “transform the culture of the CAF, rebuild trust and build a healthy, safe and inclusive workplace, free from harassment, discrimination and violence...”<sup>72</sup> And while change for the CAF is not necessarily coming

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act-and-begins-implementation-of-recommendations.html From the Justice Deschamps report, while the Government of Canada attests to enacting all 10 recommendations, many argue that this is in fact untrue. The Sexual Misconduct Response Centre which was created in response for example, does not have the power to investigate allegations and it does not act as the central body for data collection as Justice Deschamps intended for example. <https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2021/04/27/canadas-military-says-it-has-implemented-sexual-misconduct-recommendations-experts-on-the-outside-disagree.html>

<sup>71</sup> Sinek, *The Infinite Game*, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Government of Canada. *MND Mandate Letter* (Dec 16, 2021). <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-national-defence-mandate-letter>



organically right now. It does provide an opportunity to be leveraged. Transformational leaders' new leadership approaches will be the key to the CAF's culture change success but will inevitably take time.

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