Determinants of Privilege, Justice, Unit Cohesion and

Unit Effectiveness in the Military

Executive Summary

Ulysses J. Brown, III, Ph.D.

College of Business Administration

Savannah State University

Savannah, Georgia

ONR-ASEE Summer Faculty Research Fellow

DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

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The purpose of this research was to investigate "white" or majority group privilege in the military. The investigation also attempted to examine the determinants of majority privilege, minority privilege, organizational justice, work group cohesion, and work group effectiveness of military personnel. White privilege is operationalized as a set of unearned benefits that are only available to majority group members and are so ingrained into the fabric of American life such that most Caucasians are unaware of their very existence (McIntosh, 1989). Using a survey research methodology, this study sampled 5,882 members of the military to observe their responses to organizational climate factors such as job satisfaction, commitment, organizational trust, etc. Additional items are added to the survey instrument to assess affective commitment, procedural organizational justice, majority privilege, and minority privilege. The hypotheses are tested using structural equation models for six racioethnic groups (American Indians/Native Alaskans, Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders/Native Hawaiians, and Whites). Findings revealed that racist behavior was a salient predictor of organizational justice, majority privilege, minority privilege, work group effectiveness, and work group cohesion. In the gender models, racist behavior also was a significant predictor of most outcome variables, including unit effectiveness, unit cohesion, majority privilege and organizational justice for female military members. Thus, one of best ways to improve the organizational climate in the military is to reduce racist behavior in military units. The reduction of racist behavior may have a salutary effect on the perceptions of persons of color regarding majority group privilege, as racist behavior was a significant predictor of this outcome variable in each racioethnic group model. Although not the panacea, according to these findings reducing racist behavior in the military may have a multiplier effect on organizational performance and organizational climate. I

recommend that the military develop intervention strategies to reduce racist behavior of its personnel. Perhaps one of the best ways to accomplish this task is for unit commanders to support equal opportunity (EO) and diversity-training programs that seek to improve the organizational climate. Another recommendation to improve the organizational climate is for DoD personnel to become aware of microaggressions in the workplace. Microaggressions are hostile or derogatory conscious and unconscious slights or insults directed towards persons of color (Sue et al., 2007). The final recommendation is that the handout located in Appendix C on microaggressions becomes part of the orientation materials that new military members receive when first arriving at their new duty station. Providing this handout to current organizational members and having a discussion concerning its contents will improve the organizational climate. A limitation of this study was that samples for some of the racioethnic groups were small, which may influence power and the stability of the model coefficients; secondly, the reliability coefficient for commitment was below the recommended minimum threshold value. Future research studies should examine the efficacy of diversity and EO training programs to reduce racist behavior in military units. Another interesting research avenue would be to compare the responses of enlisted members and officers. Enlisted members E-6 and below are compared to those E-7 and above. A comparison of junior and senior officers is also necessary. Future research is necessary to compare the branches of the military across this nomological network. Longitudinal designs are necessary in this area to examine the behavior of these constructs to determine whether they wax or wane overtime.