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**NAVAL
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**IMPLICIT AND/OR SYSTEMIC BIAS
IN THE NAVY INDIVIDUAL AWARDS SYSTEM**

by

Juanita T. Hopkins

March 2024

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**IMPLICIT AND/OR SYSTEMIC BIAS
IN THE NAVY INDIVIDUAL AWARDS SYSTEM**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MANAGEMENT

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the level of implicit bias against female and minority active-duty members within the Navy awards and decorations program. Data provided is utilized through performance of statistical analysis of awards and decorations distributed to individuals by the Navy from September 2011 to September 2022. The data includes all levels of awards for heroism and performance, totaling 23 different awards. The analysis compares active-duty Navy members by rank, gender, and race to analyze the disparity in distribution to females and minorities as compared to their Caucasian male counterparts. The study further analyzes the data separately for the officer and enlisted ranks. The analysis showed that, for the Navy, enlisted and Blacks received significantly fewer awards than expected.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AI/AK	American Indian / Alaska Native
API	Asian/Pacific Islander
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, People of Color
CCA	Command Climate Assessment
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COC	Chain of Command
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DAF	Department of the Air Force
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
DOD	Department of Defense
DODI	Department of Defense Instruction
DON	Department of the Navy
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FY	Fiscal Year
IAT	Implicit Association Test
ISIC	Immediate Superior in Command
MCPON	Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy
MEO	Military Equal Opportunity
MFT	Mission, Functions, and Tasks
MLDC	Military Leadership Diversity Commission
MOH	Medal of Honor
MTF	Military Treatment Facility
NC	Nurse Corps
NIH	National Institute of Health
NIMHD	National Institute on Minority Health & Health Disparities
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
PCSM	Pilot Candidate Selection Method
POAM	Plan of Actions and Milestones
SECNAV	Secretary of the Navy

TF1N	Task Force One Navy
TIS	Time in Service
UCMJ	Uniformed Code of Military Justice
VCNO	Vice Chief of Naval Operations

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the historic roles racism and bias have played in systems in our society and its contemporary impact on systems such as the Navy Individual Awards System.

A. BACKGROUND

Racism and bias have permeated the pages of the history of the United States, and by extension, although to a lesser degree, the U.S. military. Women, minorities, and other marginalized and underrepresented groups, have been subject to acts of racism and bias throughout history. The effects of bias and racism are widespread (systemic), affecting such systems or fields as academia, the public domain, the criminal justice system, health and healthcare, the labor market, education, housing, and even the laws that govern our society (Staats et al., 2015). While the effects of racism and bias are widespread, the acts are not always overt or ostensible, adding to the layers of an already complex and sensitive issue which must be carefully navigated to overcome the barriers put in place due to its existence. For example, Dr. Nancy Hopkins stated,

If you asked me to name the greatest discoveries of the past 50 years, alongside things like the internet and the Higgs particle, I would include the discovery of unconscious biases and the extent to which stereotypes about gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and age deprive people of equal opportunity in the workplace and equal justice in society. (Quoted in Staats et al., 2015, p. 1)

There is a vast array of scholarly work and research related to the study of unconscious bias, also referred to as implicit bias, to which it will be referred as throughout the remainder of this thesis. While the body of work is significant in size, scholars do tend to agree on its definition as well as basic ideas surrounding the concept. To understand *implicit bias*, we must first understand *bias*; to understand bias, as Banaji et al. (2003) state, “requires letting go of the notion that our conscious attitudes always represent what we think they do,” (p. 56), and demands that we scrutinize our ability to be objective and fair. In their Community Relations Services Toolkit for Policing entitled *Understanding Bias: A Resource Guide*, the United States Department of Justice defines bias as follows: “bias

is a human trait resulting from our tendency and need to classify individuals into categories as we strive to quickly process information and make sense of the world,” (p. 1). Project Implicit, an international network of scholars and scientists committed to challenging organizational and institutional disparities through data-driven research and education (Project Implicit, n.d.), define implicit bias as follows: “implicit bias is an automatic reaction that we have towards other people. These attitudes and stereotypes can negatively impact our understanding, actions, and decision-making,” (Project Implicit, n.d.). Project Implicit goes on to underscore the societal implications of implicit bias across settings such as healthcare and education and in organizational practices such as hiring and promotion. The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, in its aim to debunk myths and common misperceptions regarding implicit bias, expands the definition beyond stereotyping indicating that implicit bias includes “favorable or unfavorable evaluations towards groups of people,” and that having implicit biases does not make an individual “good” or “bad” but argues instead that we all have implicit biases (Staats et al., 2015, p. 4). In line with other scholars, the University of California San Francisco Office of Diversity and Outreach point out the increased prevalence of implicit bias as compared to conscious biases even though implicit bias(es) are often incongruent with an individual’s conscious values.

American history has revealed time and again that implicit and explicit bias, racism, and discrimination are perennial issues that organizations, including the Department of Defense (DOD), must make continued and conscious efforts to combat. Despite its best efforts, women and minorities have faced challenges within the DOD and remain underrepresented in certain realms within the DOD, such as women in combat positions or women and minorities in certain senior leadership positions and ranks. Although women were allowed in the Navy in 1917 as Yeomen, they were not allowed to permanently serve in the regular Army and Navy until the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act of July 30, 1947 (Public Law 80-625), which excluded them from combat positions—women would not be allowed to serve in combat positions until the January 24, 2013, policy reversal (Naval History and Heritage Command, 2023). The Navy would not see its first female flag officer, Rear Admiral Alene B. Duerk, NC, until June 1972; the first African

American female flag would not be realized until 1998; the first female would not graduate from the Naval Academy, founded October 10, 1845, until 1980 (Naval History and Heritage Command, 2023). Although Executive Order 9981 of July 30, 1948, abolished discrimination based on “race, color, religion, or national origin” in the armed forces, the Navy did not begin to fully integrate the force until more than two decades later in the 1970s (Naval History and Heritage Command, 2023), although Asian-Americans were no longer serving in segregated units by the time of the Executive Order (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

While the Navy continues to make strides in achieving equity across the ranks, Walsh (2020) indicated that at the time, out of 268 admirals in the Navy, only 10 (3.73%) were Black, despite Black sailors comprising 17.52% of the total Navy and 7.95% of the officer corps (Department of Defense, 2020). To date, there has not been a minority in terms of race to serve in the highest-ranking position in the Navy, CNO although history has recently been made with Admiral Lisa Francetti’s appointment on November 2, 2023, making her the first female to serve in the role. Admiral Michelle Howard also made history in 2014 by serving as the first Black female VCNO. On the enlisted side in the Navy, the highest-ranking position is the MCPON. While there has not been a Black or female to serve in this position to date, Joe R. Campo, was selected to serve as MCPON, the first Hispanic American to do so, in 2006.

Women and minorities have continually encountered challenges due to racism and bias in society. An anecdotal but current example surrounds the nomination of Julie Su for the U.S. Secretary of Labor—despite her accomplished professional and academic history, she has faced backlash from naysayers who suggest she is unqualified and/or has only been selected to fill a quota, either because she is female, Asian, or both. Levinson and Smith (2012) highlight the existence of racial disparities in America across systems to include the criminal justice system and property ownership, elucidated by the following example regarding incarceration statistics: Blacks or African-Americans represent 50 percent of the incarcerated population although they are only 13 percent of the population. Their text also underscores the impacts and effects of implicit bias in their discussion of several tests to include shooter-reaction time (with regards to police shootings) and a well-known test to

measure implicit bias, the Implicit Association Test or IAT. In a time where the police-related shootings of unarmed black men were not heavily covered and shared via the various media platforms, this 2012 text addresses the question surrounding “trigger-reaction time” as it pertains to the interaction between police officers and Black perpetrators. The question was posed by social scientists due to the numerous instances of police-related shootings of unarmed Black men and aimed to examine what they termed shooter bias, (Levinson & Smith, 2012). The studies of the reaction time had participants shoot perpetrators who were holding a gun as quickly as they could without harming innocent bystanders; the results of these studies were consistent—“participants tend to shoot black perpetrators more quickly and more frequently than white perpetrators and conversely decide not to shoot white bystanders more quickly and more frequently than black bystanders,” (Levinson & Smith, 2012, p. 16). The IAT has been completed millions of times and has consistently revealed some level of implicit bias, racial and nonracial. Project Implicit alone has collected more than 28 million completed tests since its inception in 1998 (Ratliff & Smith, 2021). Among the millions of completed tests, an interesting finding is that law students, just like other community members, have implicit biases as they tend to associate “men with judges” and “women with paralegals” (Levinson & Smith, 2012, p. 17).

Perhaps one of the most compelling revelations in contemporary society happened with the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted the lives of millions of people across the world, the likes of which hadn’t been seen for over a century. The pandemic highlighted an issue that has long been discussed and studied in the medical field—that of the disparate rates of access to and quality of healthcare of marginalized groups to include the poor, minorities, and those living in rural areas. An NIH report discusses how the pandemic highlights trends commonly seen in vulnerable communities (Andraska et al., 2021). At the time of this report there had been more than 32 million cases of COVID-19 resulting in more than three million deaths worldwide. Those who are considered BIPOC or fall into other marginalized groups had higher rates of morbidity (rates of infection and complications) and mortality (deaths). After a review of an analysis of racial trends from the summer of 2020, Andraska et al. (2021) concluded that the results indicated that the

rates of morbidity and mortality were three to six times higher in Black counties when compared to the rates of predominantly White counties. This disparity is not just seen in an individual's ability to access healthcare but is reflected in the quality of healthcare received (most notably evaluated in patient outcomes) as well as doctor-patient interactions, an example being that patients of color more often have medical complaints such as pain more readily dismissed by medical staff, to include doctors, than White patients.

The Navy has taken concerted efforts in pursuit of fostering a culture that embodies and embraces the ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion, most recently exhibited by the creation of Task Force One Navy and the ensuing lines of effort. By extension, those ideals include the expectation to be recognized for merit-based performance awards at equitable rates compared to a Sailors counterpart. As a diverse force, Sailors within the enlisted and officer ranks bring with them their backgrounds and personal experiences which shape their thoughts and actions to include the possession of conscious and unconscious beliefs so it is worthwhile to examine a process exposed to significant levels of subjectivity within the Navy.

B. PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this study is to address the following research question: Does the distribution of awards across demographics suggest that implicit bias may impact the Department of the Navy's Individual Awards System?

This will be accomplished by comparing the rates of awards for heroism and performance proffered to individuals under the Navy Individual Awards system. Comparisons will be made between that of officer, enlisted, male, female, Black, and Asian with the baseline or reference category being White males. The comparison is to determine differences and significance of differences, if any, between the demographic groups as compared to their White male counterparts. A disparity in rates of proffered awards for heroism and performance could point to the existence of bias within the Navy Individual Awards system which would have implications for leadership and DON policy makers.

Research has been conducted by previous NPS students under the same topic for different services (Air Force and Marine Corps), whose results revealed disparities across demographics in terms of rates of awards proffered. *Meritocracy*, as defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.), is “a system, organization, or society in which people are chosen and moved into positions of success, power, and influence on the basis of their demonstrated ability and merit.” Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines *merit* as “a praiseworthy quality or a character or conduct deserving reward, honor, or esteem.” If the Navy is indeed a meritocracy, and these definitions are subsequently applied to the Navy Individual Awards System, then one would expect that across demographics, individuals have an equal chance at the opportunity to receive an award based on heroism or performance.

However, there is extensive literature that reveals that, despite one’s best conscious efforts to avoid falling prey to biases, avoiding implicit biases is very difficult. In fact, Castilla and Bernard (2010) speak specifically on meritocracy in organizational settings and describes a phenomenon it calls the “paradox of meritocracy,” arguing that people that work in organizations that highlight meritocracy in fact are more likely to display their biases. Additionally, the RAND Corporation (2021), in their report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in the Department of the Air Force, point out that while the goal of implicit bias training is to “identify and mitigate implicit biases held by employees,” the effects of said training have not proven to be enduring nor do they tend to actually mitigate the targeted behavior; this statement is supported by the finding from Davis et al. (2022) that bias training is needed early and often. The uniformed services, including the Navy, take pride in offering opportunity equitably to those who wear the uniform, providing recognition based on merit. However, as the literature has shown, it is difficult to counter the effects of biases and the Individual Awards System is one which opens itself up to bias, particularly implicit bias.

C. NAVY AWARDS POLICY

The Department of the Navy Military Awards Policy, SECNAVINST 1650.1J of May 2019, buttressed by the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual, SECNAV M-1650.1

of August 2019, is the overarching instruction provided to commands in carrying out their respective awards programs and provides the following guidance:

The purpose of DON military awards is to provide deserving members of the Naval Service recognition for qualifying acts of valor or non-combat heroism, for exceptionally meritorious achievement or service, and for arduous or otherwise special service.

The rank/grade of the intended award recipient shall not be a factor in the nomination or approval of any DON military decoration, medal, or ribbon, unless an explicit rank/grade restriction exists within the award criteria published in statute, executive order, references (a) through (f), or this instruction. No rank/grade limitation shall be established within DON on any award except by specific written authorization from SECNAV. (Department of the Navy, 2019, p. 1–3)

However, across the levels and types of command (operational vs. shore; joint medical facility vs. service specific MTF), there are numerous instructions and local idiosyncrasies that dictate how commands and subordinate commands run their respective awards programs opening them up to increasing levels of subjectivity. In addition to numerous local policies governing awards programs, those who vote on the awards boards are not always consistent adding to the level of subjectivity and variance. Baker (2021) states, “the grip bias holds over the awarding of military medals—whether caused by racism or something else—has been publicly known for decades.” While this quote from her *Defense Post* article is not specific to the Navy, it speaks to a long-perceived disparity regarding rate of and level of awards distributed within the DOD underlined by specific guidance within the FY 2010 NDAA to tease out “inadvertent subjective bias” in the approval process for awards. Baker (2021) does provide DON-specific examples stemming from a 1992 DOD review of awards, specifically the Medal of Honor: one is a Black Vietnam veteran whose 2010 MOH award was downgraded to a Silver Star, the other a Mexican-born Marine whose MOH nomination was downgraded to a Navy Cross, both without explanation. The impacts of subjectivity with respect to both the interpretation of governing instructions as well as to what qualifies as deserving an award, and therefore the increased likelihood to introduce bias into the awards process, is also highlighted in the research conducted by prior NPS students (Davis et al., 2022).

D. IMPLICIT BIAS

While there is minimal literature on implicit bias within the DOD or service specific awards systems, each service does hold its members to a certain level of conduct and guiding principles, for the Navy, the core values are those of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Inherent in these principles are ideas such as treating everyone fairly irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, etc.

- **Honor** – I am accountable for my personal and professional behavior. I will be mindful of the privilege I have to serve my fellow Americans. I will:
 - Abide by an uncompromising code of integrity, taking full responsibility for my actions and keeping my word.
 - Conduct myself in the highest ethical manner in relationships with seniors, peers, and subordinates.
 - Be honest and truthful in my dealings within and outside the Department of the Navy.
 - Make honest recommendations to my seniors and peers and seek honest recommendations from junior personnel.
 - Encourage new ideas and deliver bad news forthrightly.
 - Fulfill my legal and ethical responsibilities in my public and personal life.
- **Courage** – Courage is the value that gives me the moral strength to do what is right, with confidence and resolution, even in the face of temptation or adversity. I will:
 - Have the courage to meet the demands of my profession.
 - Make decisions and act in the best interest of the Department of the Navy and the nation, without regard to personal consequences.
 - Overcome all challenges while adhering to the highest standards of personal conduct and decency.
 - Be loyal to my nation by ensuring the resources entrusted to me are used in an honest, careful and efficient way.
- **Commitment** – The day-to-day duty of every man and woman in the Department of the Navy is to join together as a team to improve the quality of our work, our people and ourselves, I will:
 - Foster respect up and down the chain of command.
 - Care for the personal and spiritual well-being of my people.
 - Show respect toward all people without regard to race, religion, or gender.
 - Always strive for positive change and personal improvement.
 - Exhibit the highest degree of moral character, professional excellence, quality, and competence in all that I do. (Department of the Navy, 2023)

While implicit bias has been previously defined, Table 1 provides a comparison and contrast for further clarity.

Table 1. Comparison/Contrast, Explicit and Implicit Bias. Adapted from McClellan (2020).

Explicit Bias	Implicit Bias
Expressed directly (verbally)	Expressed indirectly (non-verbally)
Aware of bias	Unconscious bias
Operates consciously	Operates sub-consciously
Ex. 1: I like White Sailors more than Black Sailors	Ex. 1: Sitting further away from Black Sailors than White Sailors
Ex. 2: I like male Sailors more than female Sailors	Ex. 2: Evaluating male Sailors more favorably than female Sailors
Ex. 3: I like tall Sailors more than I like short Sailors	Ex. 3: Meritoriously advancing the 6' Sailor instead of the 5'5" Sailor

E. WHY STUDY BIAS

Coinciding with the havoc COVID-19 wreaked on society, in addition to having to grapple with a pandemic that stretched the limits of individuals and organizations alike, the U.S. was simultaneously dealing with increased racial tensions, arguably, the likes of which hadn't been seen or felt since the Civil Rights era. The DOD was not immune to the effects of heightened tensions in society at large, in fact, guidance came from the former CNO, Admiral Mike Gilday, to address these issues head on,

As a Navy, we must seize this opportunity to engage in conversations about race relations and inclusion within our force. Now is the time to have open and honest conversations across our Navy. We need to identify what is really happening, understand where barriers exist, and listen to all perspectives on how we can bring our unique skillsets together to tackle these issues. (MyNavyHR, 2020, p.1)

As a result of the guidance from the CNO, an initiative entitled "Enduring Conversations" ensued across Naval commands to provide Sailors safe spaces to speak

about the current socio-political climate as well as foster an environment of inclusion. In addition to these “Enduring Conversations,” the CNO established Task Force One Navy (TF1N) to address racism, sexism, and other biases in the Navy. There have been several instances in recent past that underline the need for such a task force and highlight the importance of the task force’s final report and lines of effort. For example, the 2017 Marines United incident in which an online community of Marines, enlisted and officer, were found to be exchanging compromising photos of other Marines; in 2020, a Naval Academy alumni board member accidentally live-streamed he and his wife making disparaging comments about several minority groups and women in the military, going on for more than half an hour, before realizing his error; in 2021 there were two racist incidents aboard two naval vessels: in one, a noose was found, the other, hate speech written on a bathroom wall (Baldor, 2021). In 2017, LCDR (ret) Reuben K. Green released a book entitled *Black Officer, White Navy*, that Kirkus Reviews (2017) describes as “a frank and detailed memoir of service in the face of discrimination.”

Bias is inherently human, it is found in all cultures and societies, and its effects are even felt by those among us who have a high social status, such as educated professionals, political leaders, and the wealthy. Former President Barack Obama, known for speaking candidly about his own experiences with racism and bias, is one such example. A journalist, Katie Rosman, speaks about her encounter with the former President, then just a state senator, at an elite New York Media event in 2003: she engaged in conversation with him, one of very few Blacks in attendance at this event, and was subsequently approached by a colleague following her conversation with Obama (Larson, 2013). She reveals that the colleague shared that he had mistaken Obama for a waiter and had asked him to “fetch” him a drink. Obama has also been quoted saying, “There are very few African American men in this country who haven’t had the experience of being followed when they are shopping in a department store. That includes me” (Larson, 2013).

Historic societal implications along with recent incidences within the ranks, coupled with higher guidance to specifically address what has been identified as an ongoing issue within the Navy specifically, it is not far-fetched to surmise that implicit bias may in fact exist within the Navy’s Individual Award System. Taken together, the aim of the

current thesis is to objectively and empirically examine some of these issues using a Naval personnel system explicitly framed as meritocratic to do so.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide amplifying information surrounding bias and implicit bias. Additionally, the DOD's equal opportunity policy and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts will be discussed. This literature review aims to identify potential drivers of bias and discuss its implications and relevancy within the DOD to include the awards system.

A. MILITARY EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The DOD's MEO policy, DODI 1350.02 of 4 September 2020, is in place to ensure that all DOD personnel are treated with respect and serves as the overarching guidance for each of the services. Using this higher guidance, each service has adapted its own set of policies for its members. These policies are framed as a toolkit to enable the Commanders' ability to foster a command climate that is positive and inclusive. Per DODI 1350.02, the objectives to be achieved through the MEO Program are:

1. Ensure that Service members are treated with dignity and respect and are afforded equal opportunity in an environment free from prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), gender identity, or sexual orientation.
2. Process, resolve, track, and report MEO prohibited discrimination complaints, including anonymous complaints.
3. Prevent and respond to prohibited discrimination through education and training, reporting procedures, complainant services and support, and appropriate accountability that enhances the safety and well-being of all Service members.
4. Hold leaders at all levels appropriately accountable for fostering a climate of inclusion that supports diversity and is free from prohibited discrimination.
5. Prevent retaliation against Service members for filing an MEO prohibited discrimination complaint.
6. Respond to incidents involving harassment, including sexual harassment, in accordance with the procedures outlined in DODI 1020.03. (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020)

The Navy's respective policy is OPNAVINST 5354.1H, *Navy Harassment Prevention and Military Equal Opportunity Program Manual* of 3 November 2021, and

states, “the objective of the Navy’s MEO program is to promote an environment free from personal, social, or institutional barriers that prevent Service members from rising to the highest level of responsibility possible” (pg. 1–1). The Navy’s MEO policy covers the following behaviors: harassment (including sexual harassment and discriminatory harassment), hazing, bullying, stalking, prohibited discrimination, and wrongful broadcast or distribution of intimate visual images. It also covers retaliation prevention to mitigate adverse actions against or the ostracization of individuals who file formal or informal complaints. This instruction states, “harassment and prohibited discrimination are fundamentally at odds with the obligation of Service members to treat others with dignity and respect and must never be ignored or condoned.” Violating the principles set forth in policy have potentially significant consequences to include being punished under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) all the way to separation from active service. Additionally, unit level commanders are responsible for collecting and tracking data specific to this instruction, taking action on data collected as required, and reporting results and any associated plans of action and milestones (POAMs) to their immediate superior in command (ISIC), which is the first flag in their chain of command (COC)—this is done on an annual basis, usually in conjunction with the annual Command Climate Assessment (CCA) evolution.

The data that is collected and reported annually at the unit level is aggregated and presented in the annual DON No Fear Act Annual report. This report breaks down the complaints submitted during each fiscal year (FY) by basis (note: a single complaint may include more than one basis, so the number of complaints submitted need not align with the number of complaints). DON personnel are required to partake in numerous amounts of training each fiscal year, part of this training requirement covers the topics that fall under the purview of the DOD MEO and DON MEO program policies—this training is required for all personnel irrespective of rank or time in service (TIS). Despite the requirement for annual training surrounding these behaviors, the DON still deals with hundreds of complaints each fiscal year. From FY-2011 to FY-2022, a total of 8,743 complaints have been submitted by a total of 8,402 complainants. There are multiple bases under which one may submit and include in a claim—during this period 3,677 (43.8%) were for *race*; 2,960

(35.2%) were for *sex [gender]*; 193 (2.2%) were for *awards*; 3,935 (46.8%) were for *harassment*; 398 (4.7%) were for *sexual harassment*; and 1,616 (19.2%) were for *promotion/non-selection* (Office of Equal Employment Opportunity [EEO], 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). These statistics help to reinforce the need for training “early and often” as cited by Davis et al. (2022), as well as a requirement for continued and pro-active measures taken by the DOD and DON towards fostering environments and command climates where all members are treated with dignity and respect as outlined in governing instructions.

B. DEI EFFORTS

Research has shown that organizations realize a myriad of benefits when their organizations are diverse. The Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2009) defines diversity as follows:

- Diversity is recognizing, appreciating, respecting, and utilizing a variety of attributes, not just race and ethnicity.
- Diversity creates performance advantages through the synergy of diverse ideas and people.
- A diverse military appropriately reflects our nation.

Diversity is a strategic objective and can have implications for force readiness—this is highlighted by a quote from the CNO, Admiral Mike Gilday: “When our Sailors feel included, respected, and empowered, they will be more ready to win wars, deter aggression, and maintain freedom of the seas” (U.S. Navy, n.d.). According to the 2020 Task Force One Navy (TF1N) final report, “diverse teams are 58 percent more likely than non-diverse teams to accurately assess a situation,” and notes that “gender-diverse organizations are 35 percent more likely to outperform their non-diverse counterparts.” Diversity was also listed as a strategic imperative in the DOD’s 2012 *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan*, created in compliance with Executive Order 13583 on establishing a coordinated government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the Federal workforce (Department of Defense, 2012):

A Case for Action

Diversity is a strategic imperative, critical to mission readiness and accomplishment, and a leadership requirement. As the global threat environment continues to evolve, the DOD Total Force will confront complex, asymmetric operational environments, and unconventional tactics, necessitating full deployment of all department assets—foremost our people.

“As the challenges we face require a Joint Force that is flexible, agile, and adaptive, it emphasized people as much as platforms. It recognizes that the unique character of our Service members...is a formidable advantage” (2011 National Military Strategy). (Department of Defense, 2012)

While the Navy’s efforts to push DEI initiatives and promote equity and inclusion in the service have been far from tenuous, in an unfortunate unfolding of events, the CNO released a message on June 3, 2020 (followed by NAVADMIN 188/20 of June 30, 2020) addressing the heightened socio-political climate across the nation following the murder of George Floyd and subsequent protests. This message came 50 years after one of Admiral Zumwalt’s infamous “Z-Grams,” this one dated December 17, 1970, titled Z-gram 66, Equal Opportunity in the Navy (Naval History and Heritage Command, 2016). Admiral Zumwalt’s Z-Gram 66, in addition to identifying initiatives he would pursue, strongly encouraged leadership to ensure they were aware of issues faced by their minority Sailors,

We are determined that we shall do better. Meanwhile we are counting on your support to help seek out and eliminate those demeaning areas of discrimination that plague our minority shipmates. Ours must be a Navy family that recognizes no artificial barriers of race, color, or religion. There is no Black Navy, no White Navy, just one Navy, the United States Navy. (Naval History and Heritage Command, 2016)

The Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) was created as a Federal Advisory Commission because of Public-Law 110–147 stemming from meetings between members of the Congressional Black Caucus and military leaders. What began as a desire to increase minority representation in the general and flag officer ranks evolved to the MLDC being charged with creating a uniform definition of *diversity* and broadening the scope of their recommendations to go beyond demographic diversity as The Commission saw fit (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). The MLDC, hereafter referred to as The Commission, was given 16 specific tasks to address in its charter to assist in

accomplishing its ultimate objective, which was to “conduct a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of policies that provide opportunities for the promotion and advancement of minority members of the Armed Forces, including minority members who are senior officers” (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2011). Findings from The Commission’s report include the following: (1) despite women comprising 50 percent of the recruiting pool, they were underrepresented across all Services and commissioning sources; (2) military officer composition less diverse than the troops they are leading and the broader civilian population being served; (3) across all Services, Black (Hispanic and non-Hispanic) officers’ promotion rates were significantly lower than pay-grade specific average promotion rates for the respective Service; (4) female officers in the Navy and Coast Guard had significantly lower than average promotion rates from O-4 to O-5; (5) Hispanic Marines had slightly lower than average promotion rates from E-7 to E-8; and (6) female Marines had significantly lower than average promotion rates to E-9 but a higher than average promotion rate to E-7.

The 1960s and 1970s brought about numerous changes in the armed forces, partially due to the Civil Rights Era/equal-rights movement and in part to the shift to an all-volunteer force in 1973. As previously mentioned, the armed services were not fully integrated until the 1970s, following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made it illegal to discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. In 1972, women were allowed to join the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) and in 1975 legislation was passed allowing women to attend military service academies such as the Naval Academy and the DOD reversed its policy allowing the involuntary discharge of women due to pregnancy (Kamarck, 2019). The DOD stood up the Defense Race Relations Institute (DRRI) in 1971, renamed the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) in 1979, with the charge to

conduct training for Armed Forces personnel designated as instructors in race relations, develop doctrine and curricula in education for race relations, conduct research, perform evaluation of program effectiveness, and disseminate educational guidelines and materials for utilization throughout the Armed Forces. (Congressional Research Service, p. 10, 2019)

Today, DEOMI’s mission and vision reflect the ideals of its inception, its mission being to “develop and deliver innovative education, training, research, and collaborative solutions to optimize total force readiness,” and its vision for “an inclusive force that values and develops all individuals and thrives on their contributions,” (DEOMI, 2023). Additionally, DEOMI oversees the CCA process through completion of the Defense Equal Opportunity Climate Survey or DEOCS, which is a tool for commanders to have a more accurate gauge of unit morale as well as identify potential areas of strengths and weaknesses, taking action where necessary. The DEOC Survey was redesigned, keeping in mind what success looked like for the DEOCS, policy makers and senior leaders identified personnel issues, rephrased as Strategic Target Outcomes (STOs), strategically important to the DOD. These, along with the factors being assessed in the redesigned survey, are outlined in Tables 2 and 3 (Office of People Analytics, 2021).

Table 2. Defined Strategic Target Outcomes. Source: Office of People Analytics (2021).

Strategic Target Outcome	Definition
Racial/Ethnic Harassment/ Discrimination	Unfair treatment and/or behavior that is unwelcome or offensive to a reasonable person based on race, color, religion, and/or national origin (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2018; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021a, 2021b).
Readiness	The capability of a unit or organization to perform the mission or function for which it is organized or designed. Readiness also includes overall work performance and deployability (DOD, 2020a).
Retention	The individual’s voluntary decision to stay with their unit or organization after their obligated term of service has ended (i.e., as determined by their enlistment contract) or until the completion of the mission or project (Congressional Research Service, 2020; Das & Baruah, 2013; Knapp, 1993).
Sexual Assault	Intentional and unwelcome sexual contact characterized by use of force, threats, intimidation, abuse of authority, or when the victim does not or cannot consent (DOD 2017; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2018).
Sexual Harassment	Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and deliberate or repeated offensive comments or gestures of a sexual nature. These behaviors are so severe and pervasive that a reasonable person would perceive, and the victim does perceive, the environment as hostile or offensive (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2018).
Suicide	The act, or an attempt, of taking one’s own life voluntarily and intentionally (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Table 3. Final Factors and the Strategic Target Outcome (STO) Alignment.
Source: Office of People Analytics (2021).

Factors	Factor Type	R/E H/D	REA	RET	SA	SH	SUI
Alcohol Impairing Memory	Risk						
Binge Drinking	Risk						
Cohesion	Protective						
Connectedness	Protective						
Engagement & Commitment	Protective						
Fairness	Protective						
Inclusion	Protective						
Leadership Support	Protective						
Morale	Protective						
Passive Leadership	Risk						
Racially Harassing Behaviors	Risk						
Safe Storage for Lethal Means	Protective						
Sexist Behaviors	Risk						
Sexually Harassing Behaviors	Risk						
Stress	Risk						
Toxic Leadership	Risk						
Transformational Leadership	Protective						
Work-Life Balance	Protective						
Workplace Hostility	Risk						

R/E H/D – Racial/Ethnic Harassment/Discrimination

REA – Readiness

RET – Retention

SA – Sexual Assault

SH – Sexual Harassment

SUI – Suicide

Most recently, the CNO established TF1N on July 1, 2020 to “analyze and evaluate issues in our society and military that detract from Navy readiness, such as racism, sexism, and other structural and interpersonal biases,” (Kime, 2020). According to the final TF1N 2020 report, the enlisted force, as compared to the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau data, was more racially and ethnically diverse than the general population but was underrepresented with regards to gender; the officer corps, per the report, remains overwhelmingly White and male, and with the exception of Asian representation, is not reflective of American society; data suggests that officer promotion rates amongst minorities is on par with their

counterparts, however, minorities were underrepresented in the number of officers eligible for promotion in the grades of O-4, O-5, and O-6 affecting the opportunities to reach Flag Officer level; enlisted advancement rates revealed that minorities advance slower as compared to their White counterparts except for meritorious advancements of which minorities comprise a higher percentage. As the report states, “TF1N was founded during a time of national crisis and has emphasized the Navy’s expanding efforts to invest in I&D-related efforts,” (TF1N, 2020). The task force came up with a total of 56 recommendations each falling under one of the four lines of effort established, listed in Figure 1:

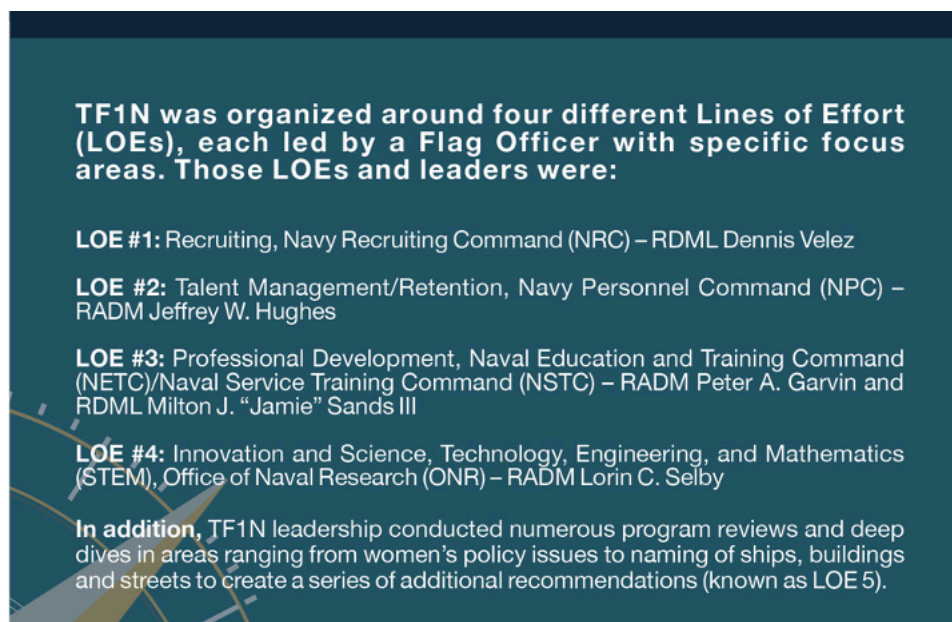


Figure 1. TF1N Lines of Effort. Source: TF1N (2020).

Despite progress made and efforts pursued, “racial/ethnic minorities and women are still underrepresented in leadership positions,” (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2011). This quote, taken from The Commission’s 2011 final report still rings true more than a decade later. According to the latest force demographics, statistics retrieved from the DOD’s Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, show that the Navy is comprised of 17.55% Blacks, 20.47% women, 7.13% Asian-American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), 17.2% Hispanic, and 1.91% American Indian/Alaska Natives. The latest

complete set of U.S. census data is from 2018—some, but not all portions of the U.S. census have been released. The table from Kamarck (2019) illustrates the racial/ethnic demographic breakdown of the Services as compared to the most recent census data.

Table 4. Race and Ethnic Representation in the Active Component and U.S. Population. Source: Kamarck (2019).

Rank and Grade	White	Black	Asian	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Multi/Unknown	Hispanic
General/Flag Officer (O-7 and above)	87.5%	8.1%	1.8%	None	0.3%	2.4%	2.1%
Officer (all)	77.3%	8.1%	5.2%	10.1%	0.5%	8.2%	7.6%
Warrant Officer	69.0%	16.0%	3.1%	0.8%	0.6%	10.4%	11.6%
Senior Enlisted (E-7 and above)	63.1%	19.1%	3.8%	1.3%	1.2%	11.5%	14.3%
Enlisted (all)	67.4%	18.5%	4.3%	1.3%	1.3%	7.3%	17.5%
Total Active Duty	69.1%	16.8%	4.4%	1.2%	1.1%	7.5%	15.8%
U.S. Resident Population (age 18–64)	76.2%	13.7%	6.3%	1.2%	0.3%	2.2%	17.9%

Notes: Race and Hispanic origin are self-identified. *The concept of race is separate from the concept of Hispanic origin. Hispanic may be more than one race (e.g., Hispanic and White or Hispanic and Black). Percentages for race should not be combined with percent Hispanic.

C. BIAS ACROSS SETTINGS

To begin, it is helpful to define *minority* and to clearly delineate between *implicit bias* and *discrimination*. The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) references the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) when defining *minority*. OMB defines the following as belonging to minority racial and ethnic groups: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. With so much information to process in the world around us, the human brain often relies on heuristics—a mental shortcut that aids in quick decision making. The same concept can apply when dealing with people—we tend to categorize people, organizing them into what we determine to be the appropriate bin for that individual (male vs. female, White vs. Black, short vs. tall). While *implicit bias* has

been previously defined, an excerpt from the December 2018 Justice Research Statistics Association (JRSA) fact sheet is provided below as it compares implicit bias, racism, and discrimination:

What is Implicit Racial Bias

It is important to distinguish implicit racial bias from racism or discrimination. Implicit biases are associations made by individuals in the unconscious state of mind. This means that the individual is likely not aware of the biased association.

Implicit racial bias can cause individuals to unknowingly act in a discriminatory way. This does not mean that the individual is overtly racist, but rather that their perceptions have been shaped by experiences and these perceptions potentially result in biased thoughts or actions.

No one is immune from having unconscious thoughts and associations, but, becoming aware of implicit racial bias creates an avenue for addressing the issue. (Justice and Research Statistics Association [JRSA], 2018)

Implicit biases are cognitions and unintended tendencies that we are typically unaware of that preclude us from progressing towards a more inclusive and diverse society. From academic settings to the labor market, studies have shown that the existence of implicit bias is not confined to a particular setting. Additionally, the literature shows that implicit bias has unfavorable and disproportionate impacts on women and racial/ethnic minorities underlining the argument that implicit bias plays a role in the gaps present across settings. These gaps are pervasive and further fueled by a lack of representation of women and minorities in academia, academic research, and leadership positions, for example, which serves to widen the chasm despite policies in place aimed at reducing disparities.

The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity's *Implicit Bias Review* (Staats et al., 2015) discusses implicit bias in educational settings and provides a synopsis of a 2014 study that surveilled teachers' responses to race and skin tone using the IAT over a three-year period where ninety-six percent of the 308 participants reported receiving a result that indicated a preference for European and fairer-complexions, results that were hard for many of the respondents to accept and believe, which aligns with a concept surrounding implicit bias provided earlier in this text, that implicit biases often run counter

to one's own conscious values and beliefs. To illustrate the implications of these results, a real-world example is provided:

Jackson-Thomas teachers experienced heavy workloads with increasingly high demands in the classroom, making them more vulnerable to the high influence of their implicit associations between minority youth and lower academic expectations. Mr. J, an English teacher, explicitly expressed the idea that all of his students could succeed; however, he unconsciously held lower expectations for his students of color.

Operating outside of his conscious awareness, this implicit bias affected his behavior when he neglected to give Janae, one of his African American students, corrective feedback when making mistakes on her writing samples. Though Janae received a grade like the rest of her classmates, her misspellings and punctuation errors were never circled on her paper, a common practice that Mr. J. would use for other students. This teaching difference made the more challenging writing prompts given later in the semester more difficult for Janae than for her White counterparts, and did not allow her to reach her full potential in writing. (Staats et al., 2015)

Calaza et al. (2021) use scientific evidence to argue the existence of implicit bias in the academic community “contributing strongly to damaging unconscious evaluations and judgments of individuals or groups,” through the review of several studies on implicit bias. The authors follow up their stance with recommendations to mitigate these harmful effects, specifically addressing these recommendations to editors of scientific journals, influential personnel within funding agencies and research institutions, and finally, members of selection committees. The authors begin by citing the 2017 study by Bian et al. on gender implicit bias whose finding suggest the stereotyped association of brilliance with males (vs. females) begins very early and begins to impact girls as early as the age of five. Along the same lines, Nosek et al. (2009) found that a nation's differences in science and math success correspond with how strongly the nation's citizens ascribe to gender stereotypes in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), that is, associating men with STEM related fields and associating women with those in the liberal arts. In another study by Reuben et al. (2014), participants, who were volunteers in laboratory research, were to be rewarded for hiring a “good” candidate to perform mathematical tests. It was found that, despite the quality of the individual's resume or mathematical skills, “women were systematically less chosen than men in all three experimental conditions.” Condition

(1) only physical information about the candidate was provided; condition (2) candidates were given the opportunity to verbally discuss their mathematical skills; and finally, condition (3) information about candidates' performance on previously completed math test was provided. It is under condition (3) that the authors note a clear effect of implicit bias as “employers preferred to choose men with low performance in mathematics over women with good performance” (Reuben et al., 2014). As it pertains to the print of scholarly work, Bendels et al. (2018) found that, among articles published in high-impact journals, only 18.1% had women listed as senior authors [the last author]. Additionally, the higher the journal's impact index, the smaller the number of women listed as the principal author. Lariviere et al. (2013) expound on this finding in their study which concluded that articles with women as the principal author are cited less as compared to articles with men as the principal author. Lastly, Budden et al. (2008) find that in their study of double-blind reviewed articles, the number of articles with women as the first author were published at higher rates; in stark contrast to Dworkin et al. (2020), who, as a result of analysis of high-impact neuroscience journals, found that men were cited 11.6% more than expected considering the number of articles in the field and women 30.2% less than expected.

Eaton et al. (2019), examine the intersection of race and gender stereotypes and how it affects career progression in STEM. In doing so, they consider the “*stereotype content model*” (Eaton et al., 2019), which notes the perceived warmth and confidence of groups in society and highlights that women are generally perceived as less competent than men. The authors also point out that although women comprise about thirty-five percent of full-time STEM faculty across U.S. universities as of 2015, women that are African American and or Latinx account for less than one percent (Eaton et al., 2019). With an underlying framework identified and stereotyped intersections noted, the study looked at faculty perceptions of post-doctoral candidates in STEM fields, specifically biology and physics—raters were instructed to evaluate the curriculum vitae (CV) of a hypothetical post-doctoral candidate for “*hireability, likeability, and competence,*” (Eaton et al., 2019). The CV was based off real post-doctoral candidates and varied only in terms of the 8 combinations used to suggest race and gender. The study resulted in three main findings: (1) male post-doctoral candidate CVs were evaluated more favorably across departments;

(2) faculty in both departments exhibited some level of racial bias as White and Asian candidates were viewed as more competent (*hireability*) than Black candidates; and (3) Black and Latinx female candidates as well as male Latinx candidates were rated significantly lower on the measure of *hireability* than all other candidates across the physics department. The authors suggest that their findings lend credence to the claims of challenges faced by women of color in science stating the underrepresentation of women and women of color in STEM fields may be further exacerbated by the presence of biases in the recruiting and hiring processes which also serves to reinforce the notion that they are not appropriate for nor successful in these positions.

Dutt et al. (2016) and Kuo (2016), found that when letters of recommendation were written for women, significantly fewer adjectives were used to describe *brilliance* and *intelligence*. In a landmark study of implicit bias in the labor market, Bertrand & Mullainathan (2004) found that resumes with traditionally White-sounding names received fifty percent more callbacks than resumes with traditionally Black-sounding names after sending almost 5,000 resumes in response to close to 1,350 ads. This study illustrated that, despite any attribute that would normally increase the quality of a resume, no benefit accrued to those resumes with Black-sounding names such as having an address in a more affluent neighborhood, having more experience, or having invested in higher-level skills and/or certifications. However, these same “resume-enhancers” did serve to bolster response rates to applicants with White-sounding names. The resumes of fictitious candidates sent to potential employers were the same “high-level” or “low-level” quality changing only the names to suggest race and gender. This study is pivotal as it was not only able to minimize the impact and number of potential confounders, it was also conducted utilizing the gold standard—randomized control. Since the resumes were randomly assigned, the authors can more confidently contribute the disparity in callback rates for Whites vs. African Americans/Blacks to the name manipulation, again, meant to suggest to the employer the candidate’s race. The authors do note an important potential confounder of this study—the fact that the study does not account for the fact that employers may attribute more than just race to a candidate’s name (such as coming from a disadvantaged background).

It is widely recognized that people of color face disparities in health care across the nation in terms of adequate access to health care, both routine and urgent, as well as with respect to quality of care received largely measured in terms of patient outcomes and rates of certain chronic illnesses such as Diabetes. A recent NPR article (2023) highlights one such example illustrating the significant disparity in infant and maternal mortality in and around the birthing process for Black women specifically when compared to White, Latino, or Asian mothers. Not only are people of color less likely to have access to health care, this feeds into another issue around the experience of Black women in health care—they are more likely to have their complaints of pain or other health concerns either completely dismissed or not taken as seriously resulting in a lower quality of and experience of care. Research conducted on this topic by previous NPS students found that Black women were identified as the subgroup (in civilian population) with the worst (maternal-health) outcomes (Lorick, 2020). Lorick (2020) also highlighted that adequate access to care seemed to correlate with improved maternal-health outcomes. Hall et al. (2015) conducted a study of fourteen peer-reviewed articles and one doctoral dissertation and found that, of the fifteen articles reviewed, fourteen suggested low-to-moderate levels of implicit bias against BIPOC individuals amongst health care professionals. Furthermore, thirteen of the studies revealed health care professionals more closely associated negative words with Blacks as compared to Whites.

Members within the DOD and DON are neither exempt from nor immune to implicit bias and its effects. McClellan (2020), an Army officer, wrote about the disparity in Black officer promotion rates as compared to their White counterparts, especially at the higher levels. McClellan (2020) argues that this current disparity in officer promotion rates is rooted in the history of Blacks in the Army noting that Blacks were not allowed to enlist until 1862 and that the first Black officer wasn't commissioned for another fifteen years following that. His research references The Commission's 2011 report finding that "Black (Hispanic and non-Hispanic) officers' promotion rates were substantially lower than paygrade specific average promotion rates for their respective service" (quoted in McClellan, 2020, p. 21). This is in line with findings from Yeung and Lim (2021) in their review of Air Force DEI efforts following the protests of 2020 across the nation:

- Analysis of pilot training attrition in 2009 to 2014 reveals that racial/ethnic minority and female students had significantly higher attrition rates than white and male students, respectively. Differences in the Pilot Candidate Selection Method (PCSM) scores accounted for the higher black and female attrition but not the Asian or Hispanic attrition. Although modifying PCSM could help reduce attrition differences, pilot diversity is not likely to improve without a larger flow of minority and female students into pilot training.
- Total Black representation at the general officer level does not match broader benchmarks for Black representation among DAF officers, total DAF military personnel, and, ultimately, the U.S. population. This disparity is strongly related to Black representation in the pilot force. Because of a sharp decline in the introduction of new Black pilots starting in 1993, Black representation among general officers will likely get worse for a long time before it gets better. (p. vii).

D. SUMMARY

The literature and studies reviewed provide evidence that implicit bias exists and has existed across settings negatively impacting women and BIPOC individuals at significantly higher rates. As the members who make up the military come from and reflect the population they serve, it is reasonable to deduce that those members bring with them the values, morals, habits, and behaviors of the same. This chapter highlights, that despite the many advances we've made as a people and a nation and the efforts pursued by the DOD and DON to promote equity amongst the ranks, our conscious efforts are at times outweighed by our unconscious thought processes and can work against the very policies put in place to keep us progressing forward to that end.

III. DATA, METHODOLOGY, AND RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to analyze the rates of awards proffered each year between 2011 and 2022 and determine if there are any significant differences in distribution of awards when broken down by demographic category. At the time of the request, the Navy was not providing awards data to the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). The data for this study was obtained through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. The data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

A. DATA

The data for this study is comprised of all U.S. Navy members who received awards for heroism or performance between September 2011 and September 2022. Awards for performance or heroism are identified in the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual (SECNAV M-1650.1 of August 2019) and are listed in Table 5. Individually identifying information was not provided for this data set. Additional demographics included identifying if the member was an Officer, Enlisted, Male, Female, White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander (API), American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK), or multi-racial.

Table 5. Awards for Heroism and Performance. Adapted from U.S. Navy (2019).

Heroism	Performance Awards
Medal of Honor	Defense Distinguished Service Medal
Navy Cross	Defense Superior Service Medal
Silver Star Medal	Legion of Merit
Distinguished Flying Cross	Bronze Star (without V device)
Navy and Marine Corps Medal	Defense Meritorious Service Medal
Bronze star (with V device)	Meritorious Service Medal
Purple Heart	Air Medal (without V device)
Air Medal (with V device)	Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (without V device)

Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (with V device)	Joint Service Commendation Medal
	Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal
	Joint Service Achievement Medal
	Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal

Each year the DOD compiles a demographic profile of the military community where the various demographic categories are reviewed across services and compared against the data from previous years. Race is self-reported. Per this report, members who choose to report their race may select American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK), Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Multi-Racial, or Unknown. For the purposes of this study, the above races were considered (excluding Unknown), Gender (male/female), and the Officer and Enlisted ranks. Members who self-reported their race as Asian and/or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander were considered together when analyzing the data—Asian/Pacific Islander or API.

B. METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study is to ascertain if there is data to support the presence of bias in the Navy Individual Awards system. As members of the armed forces are representative of the nation, to include possession of conscious and unconscious biases, one can argue that the individual brings those conscious and unconscious beliefs along with them. Evidence for bias in the Navy’s Individual Awards system would be suggested if members across demographics received more or less than the expected number of awards based on gender, race (self-reported), or rank as compared to the established baseline rate for that year.

Awards data from September 2011–September 2022 was used in this analysis. First, the rate of awards was established for the entire U.S. Navy active-duty population for the given year. Next, the number of expected awards was calculated for each demographic group: White, Black or African American, American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK), Asian/Pacific Islander (API), male, female, officer, enlisted. The expected

number of awards is defined as the number of awards the relevant demographic category (White, Black, American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK), Asian/Pacific Islander (API), male, female, officer, enlisted) would be expected to receive in any given year. The number of expected awards for each relevant demographic group is calculated by taking the population or “N” for each demographic group and multiplying it by the pre-determined awards baseline rate for the given year. For example, in 2022, there were 56,549 officers. The baseline rate of awards for 2022 was 1.42% or 0.0142. The expected rate of awards for officers was 802 or $(56,549 * 0.0142)$, illustrated in Table 6. Once the number of expected awards was calculated for each demographic in the given year, the expected number of awards was then compared to the baseline rate of awards for the total population. The steps were repeated for each year establishing the baseline awards rate for the entire population and then comparing them to the calculations for the relevant demographic groups looking for identifiable trends in the “+” or “-” delta value that are significantly above or below the expected rate of awards for a given demographic category.

Finally, the data is examined separately for the officer and enlisted ranks utilizing the same methodology above. A baseline rate of awards is established for the entire officer and for the entire enlisted population for each year between 2011 and 2022. Next, the expected rate of awards for each demographic category is compared against the baseline rate for the entire population to see if they perform differently within their respective ranks (officer or enlisted). The demographic categories considered in this breakout are White, Black or African American, American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK), Asian/Pacific Islander (API), male, and female.

C. OFFICER AND ENLISTED

The military has a long-held construct that separates its uniformed workforce into two categories: Officer and Enlisted. There is a smaller category that is not distinctly separate although unique, Warrant Officers. The Navy states, “Commissioned Officers make up the leadership and management teams of the Navy and Navy Reserve. They hold positions in dozens of different career and job areas, from healthcare to chaplaincy, aviation to engineering. These servicemembers tend to be highly educated and experienced,” (U.S.

Navy, n.d.). “Enlisted Sailors are members of the Navy or Navy Reserve who serve in an occupational specialty that requires a high school diploma (or GED) as a minimum educational requirement. Their responsibilities range from entry-level to Enlisted supervisory, advisory, and managerial roles,” (Navy, n.d.). Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the Officer and Enlisted ranks in the U.S. Navy and provide a brief description of each.



Figure 2. U.S. Navy Officer Ranks. Source: Bernal (2022).



Figure 3. U.S. Navy Enlisted Ranks. Source: Bernal (2022).

D. CALCULATIONS

The data provided from the FOIA request was utilized to complete the calculations. First, the total active-duty population for the Navy was determined for the given year. Next, the number of awards proffered for heroism or performance in that specific year was determined. The two numbers (total active-duty population and number of awards) were then utilized to determine the baseline rate of awards for the given year. For example, in 2022 there were 340,065 members on active duty and a total of 4,825 awards proffered that year. To determine the baseline rate of awards for 2022, the total number of awards (4,825) was divided by the total population (340,065) yielding a baseline award rate of 1.42%. Then, the population for each relevant demographic was documented: White, Black or African American, American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK), Asian/Pacific Islander (API), officer, enlisted, male, and female.

Continuing with the calculations, the expected rate of awards for the relevant demographic groups previously listed was then determined and compared to the actual number of awards given; the difference between the two numbers (the expected rate of awards vice actual number of awards distributed) for each demographic group resulted in a “+” or “-“ difference annotated as a “delta value.” For example, in 2022 the officer population totaled 56,549 and the enlisted population totaled 283,516. In 2022, the expected rate of awards for the officer and enlisted population was 802 and 4,023 respectively. This was calculated by multiplying the total population for each group by the established baseline rate of awards for 2022 (1.42%). The actual number of awards distributed in 2022 was 1,936 for officers (1134 more than expected) and 2,889 for enlisted (1134 less than expected). Next, the baseline for each group was compared to the baseline rate of awards for the given year. To compare each group’s baseline to the established baseline rate of awards for the given year, a deviation percentage was calculated. This was calculated by dividing the delta difference by the expected rate of awards. For example, in 2022 calculations for officers yielded a +1134 delta value (the number of awards above the expected rate) by the expected rate of awards (802). The calculations indicated that officers received 141.29% more awards than expected. Similarly, the calculations for enlisted

yielded -28.18%, a deviation percentage indicating enlisted personnel received fewer awards than expected in 2022.

Calculation of the deviation percentage for each relevant demographic group made it possible to quickly identify which groups received more or fewer awards than expected as determined by the calculated baseline. For 2022, officers, females, American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK), and Asian/Pacific Islander (API) all received more awards than expected (they were all above baseline); enlisted, males, and Blacks all received fewer awards than expected (they were all below baseline) with Blacks having the highest rate of negative deviation at -33.29% followed closely by enlisted at -28.18% (see Table 6).

Table 6. Baseline Calculations for 2022

Category	N	Expected # of Awards	Actual # of Awards	+/- Difference	% from Expected
Officer	56,549	802	1936	1134	141.29%
Enlisted	283,516	4023	2889	-1134	-28.18%
Male	269,712	3827	3638	-189	-4.93%
Female	70,353	998	1187	189	18.91%
Black	60,431	857	572	-285	-33.29%
White	214,194	3039	3163	124	4.08%
API	25,002	355	468	113	31.93%
AI/AK	5,897	84	247	163	195.21%

E. RESULTS

Awards data was evaluated for each demographic group and compared to the baseline rate of awards over a period of 12 years (2011-2022). As Table 7 and Figure 4 illustrate, over this time period, officers, females, whites, Asian/Pacific Islanders (API), and American Indians (AI)/Alaska Natives (AK) consistently received more awards year over year as compared to the baseline rate of awards. Despite accounting for roughly only 16% of the active-duty population each year in the dataset, officers received awards at significantly higher rates than expected. Blacks and enlisted personnel received fewer

awards than expected as compared to the baseline rate of awards at similar rates. On average, enlisted personnel received 36.38% fewer awards despite accounting for approximately 80% of the active-duty population each year in the dataset. The active-duty population of Blacks closely resembles that of officers in the dataset at around 17%, however, Blacks received 34.31% fewer awards on average over the 12-year time period.

Table 7. Average Percent Difference and Total Delta Values over Twelve Years

12 YEAR PERIOD (2011-2022)				
Category	Avg % from Expected	Total +/- Difference over entire period	Average +/- difference	
Officer	180.79%	17979	1498	
Enlisted	-36.38%	-17979	-1498	
Male	-5.91%	-2921	-243	
Female	22.93%	2570	214	
Black	-34.31%	-3545	-295	
White	11.55%	4177	348	
API	25.61%	1079	90	
AI/AK	128.55%	1955	163	

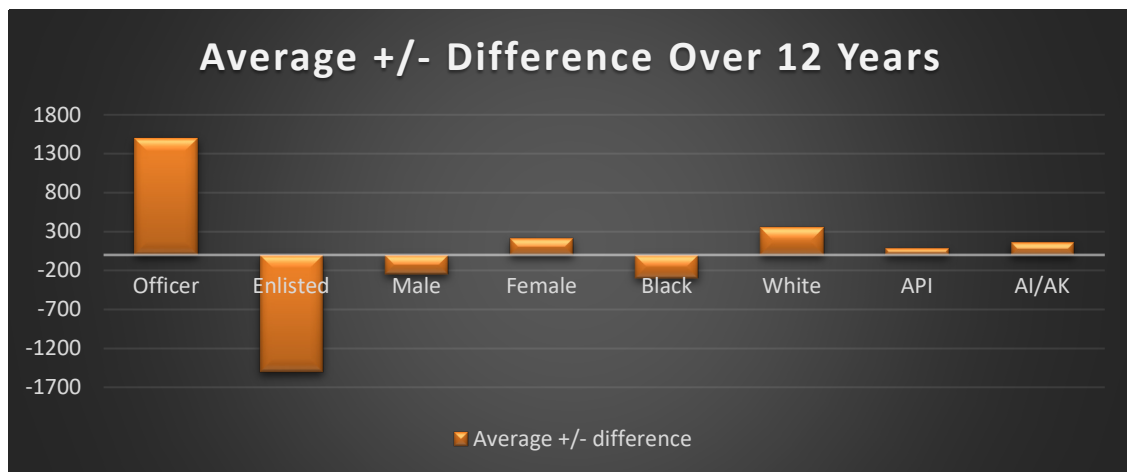


Figure 4. Average +/- Difference over Twelve Years

While some consideration must be given to the disparity in the rate of awards between officers and enlisted as highlighted by Stark (2021), “not all awards for performance or heroism are meant to apply to all ranks,” the chasm is wide enough to continue to question the equity of the distribution. An example of such a stipulation can be found in the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual (p. 2–38) regarding eligibility about the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal (NAM):

The NAM is a multipurpose decoration that may only be awarded to members of the Armed Forces in paygrades O-4 and below. The award may be authorized for specific achievement (i.e., as an impact award) or for sustained meritorious service. The performance shall be of such merit as to warrant more tangible recognition than is possible by a fitness report or performance evaluation, but, which does not justify a NC. (Assistant Secretary of the Navy [SECNAV], 2019).

Although instances do exist where distribution of awards may be impacted by a Servicemember’s rank, as similar research has found and concluded, it does not sufficiently explain away the disparity in the rate of awards between the officer and enlisted population.

Table 8. Total Delta Values and Percent Difference over Twelve Years

Awards												
Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	0.46%	1.40%	1.45%	1.62%	1.67%	1.88%	2.01%	2.01%	1.96%	1.15%	1.56%	1.42%
Total Difference Over Twelve Years												
Category	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Officer	590	1701	1644	1829	1711	1873	1867	1796	1736	904	1194	1134
Enlisted	-590	-1701	-1644	-1829	-1711	-1873	-1867	-1796	-1736	-904	-1194	-1134
Male	-87	-128	-205	-206	-271	-240	-356	-295	-436	-181	-327	-189
Female	86	125	203	204	262	236	338	215	251	134	327	189
Black	-100	-298	-315	-359	-332	-364	-346	-318	-330	-190	-308	-285
White	148	518	513	553	444	513	437	294	314	124	95	124
API	21	38	60	53	119	99	123	116	105	62	170	113
AI/AK	7	37	93	151	188	238	263	244	247	145	179	163
Percentage Difference Over Twelve Years												
Category	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Officer	238.89%	227.87%	209.94%	207.21%	188.71%	182.78%	170.70%	163.50%	160.22%	141.73%	136.70%	141.29%
Enlisted	-47.62%	-46.43%	-42.51%	-42.22%	-38.01%	-37.41%	-35.08%	-33.07%	-31.84%	-27.55%	-26.68%	-28.18%
Male	-6.98%	-3.51%	-5.35%	-4.82%	-6.15%	-4.90%	-6.87%	-5.62%	-8.34%	-5.79%	-7.70%	-4.93%
Female	35.22%	16.83%	24.94%	21.99%	26.47%	20.89%	27.38%	16.73%	19.14%	16.74%	29.91%	18.91%
Black	-38.55%	-39.60%	-39.64%	-40.13%	-35.66%	-35.01%	-31.45%	-28.46%	-29.27%	-27.74%	-32.86%	-33.29%
White	16.16%	19.26%	18.14%	17.34%	13.38%	13.79%	11.01%	9.73%	7.76%	5.08%	2.83%	4.08%
API	21.66%	13.08%	20.17%	15.77%	34.05%	25.07%	28.48%	26.62%	23.36%	22.69%	44.45%	31.93%
AI/AK	10.96%	20.24%	54.47%	88.87%	120.10%	150.00%	171.03%	169.96%	184.65%	193.30%	183.82%	195.21%

Previous results revealed that enlisted received significantly fewer awards so one may conclude, based on the former results, that the difference may be attributed to the fact that there are fewer Blacks within the officer ranks. When observing the entire population, over a period of 12 years, enlisted personnel received a total of 17,979 fewer awards than expected. Isolating the enlisted population, males received 9.89% fewer awards than expected on average and Blacks received 17.21% fewer awards than expected on average. The remaining relevant demographic groups—females, Whites, Asian/Pacific Islanders (API), and American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK)—all received more awards than expected on average. The result of this analysis is consistent with how the groups fared compared against the total population—Tables 8 and 9 show that the racial difference persists between enlisted and officer ranks so being an “officer” is not driving the difference.

Table 9. Enlisted Delta Values and Percent Difference over Twelve Years

ENLISTED AWARDS BASELINE													
Awards Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	AVG
	0.24%	0.75%	0.84%	0.94%	1.04%	1.18%	1.30%	1.34%	1.34%	0.83%	1.14%	1.02%	1.00%
ENLISTED +/- DIFFERENCE OVER TWELVE YEARS													
ENLISTED	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	AVG
Male	-54	-117	-172	-164	-240	-215	-298	-290	-366	-190	-314	-228	-221
Female	54	115	172	163	239	213	293	235	237	151	314	228	201
Black	-24	-70	-69	-107	-70	-109	-92	-50	-104	-74	-168	-115	-88
White	16	128	142	182	43	121	86	9	-6	-42	-100	-94	40
API	22	36	42	34	91	65	78	76	80	43	126	75	64
AI/AK	22	55	106	145	204	222	244	237	228	128	163	139	158
ENLISTED PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCE OVER TWELVE YEARS													
ENLISTED	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	AVG
Male	10.01%	-7.19%	-9.41%	-7.97%	-10.55%	-8.46%	-10.70%	-9.94%	-12.34%	-10.06%	-12.04%	-9.97%	-9.89%
Female	50.85%	34.42%	43.86%	36.09%	46.22%	36.02%	43.73%	32.61%	31.65%	31.11%	46.75%	38.30%	39.30%
Black	18.96%	18.77%	-16.48%	-22.44%	-13.08%	-18.24%	-14.02%	-7.25%	-14.64%	-15.97%	-26.39%	-20.27%	-17.21%
White	4.40%	11.39%	11.18%	12.66%	2.67%	6.60%	4.23%	0.44%	-0.29%	-2.96%	-5.08%	-5.36%	3.32%
API	48.21%	26.87%	27.89%	20.22%	48.72%	30.66%	32.59%	30.38%	30.67%	25.43%	52.98%	34.85%	34.12%
AI/AK	66.36%	59.08%	111.69%	153.58%	220.06%	236.46%	260.55%	264.63%	272.57%	259.08%	253.40%	258.58%	201.34%

When observing the entire population, over a period of 12 years, officers received a total of 17,979 more awards than expected. Isolation of the officer population yielded similar results to isolation of the enlisted population and remained consistent with findings from comparison of the population as a whole. On average, males received 1.72% fewer awards than expected and Blacks received 20.58% fewer awards than expected on average. While the results of the officer breakout show the same trend as the enlisted breakout—males and Blacks received fewer awards on average—males do fare better in the officer population as the percentage difference is only around 2% fewer awards than expected on average as compared to almost 10% fewer than expected on average in the enlisted population. Blacks, however, fare about the same between the two demographic categories, receiving approximately 20% fewer awards on average. As in the former analyses, females, Whites, Asian/Pacific Islanders (API), and American Indian (AI)/Alaska Native (AK), all receive more awards than expected on average. Of note, Whites only received 1% more awards on average in the officer group as compared to the rates of awards received by this demographic in the enlisted and total population analyses. Table 10 illustrates the results of this analysis.

Table 10. Officer Delta Values and Percent Difference over Twelve Years

OFFICER AWARDS BASELINE													
Awards Baseline	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	AVG
	1.57%	4.60%	4.51%	4.98%	4.83%	5.33%	5.43%	5.29%	5.11%	2.77%	3.69%	3.42%	4.29%
OFFICER +/- DIFFERENCE OVER TWELVE YEARS													
OFFICER	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	AVG
Male	-35	-23	-49	-61	-51	-41	-75	-20	-82	5	-14	42	-34
Female	-34	22	47	60	43	39	62	-5	30	-13	14	-42	19
Black	-10	-43	-66	-49	-70	-44	-45	-67	-31	-14	-3	-38	-40
White	35	-4	-5	-35	39	14	-11	48	2	12	6	47	12
API	13	37	49	50	55	62	70	60	43	28	53	48	47
AI/AK	11	50	45	61	28	56	53	35	40	26	26	33	39
OFFICER PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCE OVER TWELVE YEARS													
OFFICER	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	AVG
Male	-4.98%	-1.13%	-2.41%	-2.72%	-2.37%	-1.74%	-3.11%	-0.87%	-3.62%	0.38%	-0.85%	2.77%	-1.72%
Female	25.35%	5.55%	11.52%	13.09%	9.53%	7.56%	11.35%	-0.85%	5.52%	-4.13%	3.30%	-10.48%	6.44%
Black	-14.73%	-22.09%	-33.92%	-22.90%	-34.01%	-19.26%	-19.19%	-29.77%	-13.85%	-11.03%	-1.99%	-24.25%	-20.58%
White	5.16%	-0.18%	-0.28%	-1.61%	1.88%	0.61%	-0.46%	2.13%	0.08%	1.04%	0.37%	3.25%	1.00%
API	33.35%	31.22%	41.06%	36.62%	40.82%	39.83%	42.43%	35.61%	25.19%	28.92%	40.20%	37.02%	36.02%
AI/AK	183.65%	268.74%	243.52%	290.99%	135.51%	238.90%	208.64%	131.75%	145.83%	163.82%	119.10%	156.47%	190.58%

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IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. SUMMARY

The data provided from the FOIA request was utilized to complete the calculations for the relevant demographic groups for the period covered, September 2011 to September 2022. The relevant demographic groups included the following: officer, enlisted, males, females, Whites, Blacks, Asian/Pacific Islanders (API), and American Indians (AI)/Alaska Natives (AK). The first calculation was to determine the baseline rate of awards for the entire population as a whole for each year. Next, the expected rate of awards was calculated for each demographic category utilizing the baseline rate of award. Utilizing the dataset provided, the actual number of awards received by each demographic category was recorded and then compared to the expected amount of awards. The difference between the actual number of awards received by each demographic category and the calculated expected amount of awards was recorded as the “+/- delta difference.” The rate of deviation, recorded as a percentage, was then calculated by taking the recorded +/- delta difference and dividing it by the expected amount of awards.

The results yielded from the calculations demonstrated across the 12-year period for the overall population, each relevant demographic category received more awards than expected with the exception of enlisted, males, and Blacks. The demographic categories that received the highest number of awards above the baseline set for their respective group were officers and Whites. Officers received a total of 17,979 more awards than expected followed by Whites who received 4,177 more awards than expected. Conversely, enlisted personnel received 17,979 fewer awards than expected and Blacks 3,545 fewer awards than expected across the 12-year period.

The data was also isolated by rank (officer and enlisted) to determine if the relevant demographic categories “performed” differently within their respective ranks. The results of this analysis for both officer and enlisted was almost identical to that of the overall population in that males and Blacks received fewer awards than expected on average with the remaining relevant demographic groups receiving more awards on average than

expected. Some slight distinctions were noted between the groups, for example, Whites fared better in the enlisted ranks as compared to the officer ranks—in the enlisted ranks, Whites received 3.32% more awards on average as compared to only receiving 1% more awards than expected on average within the officer ranks. Across both groups, Blacks received fewer awards than expected on average—17.21% fewer within the enlisted ranks and 20.58% fewer within the officer ranks.

B. CONCLUSIONS

Utilizing the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that there is an unquestionable disparity with regards to the recognition of males, enlisted Sailors and Black Sailors in both the officer and enlisted ranks. As has been previously reported, there is an inverse relationship to note between officers and enlisted as the data shows that officers received 17,979 more awards and enlisted 17,979 fewer awards than expected despite comprising roughly 80% of the total population each year in the covered time period. Blacks received 3,545 fewer awards whereas Whites received 4,177 more awards than expected over the 12-year period. Additionally, Blacks fared the same across the officer and enlisted ranks as they did when compared against the total population, receiving approximately 20% fewer awards than expected in both the officer and enlisted ranks. Lastly, though the margins are not as wide as with the enlisted and Black demographic categories, males also received fewer awards than expected each year in the data set.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the data and conclusions drawn suggest that there may be evidence of bias in the Navy's Individual Awards system, correlation does not equal causation. The first recommendation would be to suggest that Navy leadership dedicate resources in the form of allocated funds and personnel to conduct a deep dive into the observed disparity in the awards system and extend that to other systems/functions such as the Performance/Evaluation system and promotions as these processes are linked together with one underlying theme—representation. While specific research was not conducted in this study, it has already been previously noted that minority (in terms of race and gender) representation at higher levels of leadership is not evenly distributed—this is significant as

it is this leadership that determines who is promoted, recognized (recognition for purposes of this report refer to the receipt of a Personal Military Decoration [PMD]), and the marks and write-up received on individual performance evaluations and fitness reports. Following the socio-political uproar of 2020 previously referenced, the Navy stood up Task Force One Navy (TF1N) that laid out specific lines of effort in its final report—instead, the first recommendation is to reallocate resources to continuing the work started by the task force with a requirement for routine updates to Navy leadership.

Standardization would be the next recommendation. Recognizing shore commands and operational commands have different missions, functions, and tasks (MFTs), even between commands of the same type (shore or operational), the awards programs are executed differently from command to command down to how the award is graded and recommended. Taking note of the difference between shore and operational commands, Navy leadership should create a standard scoresheet for each level of award for shore commands and operational commands, more prescriptively delineating how awards should be graded minimizing the variation and subjectivity while still allowing Commanders the flexibility to tailor the awards program to the needs of their respective commands.

Lastly, a recommendation for further research into the disparity observed within this dataset would be recommended to determine if there are causal factors that can be identified and addressed through modified or newly implemented policies.

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