

*This study examined race and gender differences in four career experience variables using a sample of Black and White MBAs (masters of business administration). Results supported hypothesized race effects for job involvement, access to mentors, career satisfaction, and gender differences in job involvement and hierarchical level. However, Black MBAs were not at lower hierarchical levels than White MBAs of comparable experience, and female MBAs did not report significantly less access to mentors or lower career satisfaction than did male MBAs. Implications of the findings for organizations are discussed.*

## **A Race and Gender-Group Analysis of the Early Career Experience of MBAs**

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**R**ecently, increased attention has been given to non-Whites and women as sources of labor in the coming decades in the United States. One often cited statistic is that between now and the year 2000, only 15% of net additions to the labor force will be the traditional White males. Discussions of the success of integration of non-Whites and women into the managerial ranks of organizations with predominantly White-male power structures have often cited a pattern of vastly improved access with only modest progress on upward mobility and other postentry treatment issues (Jones, 1986; Klein, 1980; Martin, Harrison, & Dinitto, 1983; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987; Szafran, 1984). These studies are helpful in identifying issues for attention. However, many scholars have noted the need for additional empirical research on race and gender differences in career experience (Bartol, Evans, & Stith, 1978; Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1986; Ilgen & Youtz, 1986). Especially rare are studies that examined both race and gender as differentiating dimensions of career experience among organizational populations and that focused on managerial personnel (Brenner, Blazini, & Greenhaus, 1988).

WORK AND OCCUPATIONS, Vol. 18 No. 4, November 1991 431-446  
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This article presents the results of a survey designed to examine race and gender differences on four dimensions of career experience among recent MBA (master of business administration) graduates. The survey procedure is described later. The dimensions are job involvement, access to mentors, career satisfaction, and hierarchical level. These dimensions of career experience were selected for attention for two reasons. First, they have been identified in previous research as important dimensions in terms of career success. Second, there are reasons to believe that they represent career areas where the experience of minority and nonminority members of organizations may differ.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

### JOB INVOLVEMENT

Job involvement refers to identification with one's work (Jans, 1985) and has been found to influence a number of important career issues and outcomes, including organizational commitment (Blau, 1985), career satisfaction (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977) expected or actual turnover (Lee & Mowday, 1987; Siegel & Ruh, 1973), and upward mobility desires (Hall, Goodale, Rabinowitz, & Morgan, 1978). Thus, if women and non-White men have lower levels of job involvement than White males, this could partly explain the problems that members of the former groups have experienced in career success in managerial careers.

We were unable to locate any published empirical research on race-group differences in job involvement; however, there are related findings in other streams of research. Runyon's (1973) locus-of-control research found that externals evidence low degrees of job involvement. Further, Helms and Giorgis (1980) reported data showing that, compared to Whites, Black Americans have a worldview that is consistently external in locus of control, and Cox (1988) found that Blacks rated external influences on promotion opportunities higher than Whites did. These findings suggest that Blacks may have lower job involvement than Whites.

In addition, Rabinowitz and Hall (1977) argued that self-esteem deriving from the fulfillment of work-related expectations is key to high levels of job involvement. Because the effects of negative stereotypes and discrimination add an additional source of frustration to work-related goals for women and non-White men, it is reasonable to expect that their self-esteem, and ultimately their job involvement, may suffer.

Male-female comparisons on job involvement are also generally unavailable in the literature. Rabinowitz and Hall (1977) studied men and women employed by the Canadian government and initially found that men had higher involvement levels than women. However, when job level and job tenure were controlled in a subsequent analysis, the difference disappeared. In a recent study of work/nonwork conflict, Wiley (1987) found that higher levels of job involvement were associated with higher levels of family-work role conflict. In a society where family responsibilities are more strongly associated with women than men, we would expect this conflict to be more severe for women. Women in management positions may therefore reduce job involvement levels as a conflict reduction strategy. The following hypotheses were thus posed:

Hypothesis 1a: Black MBAs will display lower levels of job involvement than their White counterparts.

Hypothesis 1b: Female MBAs will display lower levels of job involvement than their male counterparts.

## MENTORING

The utility of mentor relationships as career enhancement mechanisms has been well demonstrated in recent research (Kram, 1985; Thomas, 1990), but little empirical evidence exists about the relative availability of mentor assistance to members of different race/gender groups. Noe (1988) argued that the mentoring relationships available to women are not keeping pace with their increasing representation in managerial jobs and discussed six factors which tend to stymie access to mentors for women, three of which — negative stereotyping, tokenism, and lack of access to information networks — seem equally applicable to non-White men. These findings prompted the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Black MBAs will have less access to mentor relationships than their White counterparts.

Hypothesis 2b: Female MBAs will have less access to mentor relationships than their male counterparts.

## CAREER SATISFACTION

Previous research has established the importance of job and career satisfaction to a number of work outcomes including turnover and absenteeism (Arnold & Feldman, 1982; Smith, 1977). With regard to non-White and White female members of organizations, the turnover outcome is especially

important because the rates of turnover for these groups are substantially higher than for White-male workers (Bergmann & Krause, 1968; Hymowitz, 1989; Schwartz, 1989). However, whether or not there are race and gender differences in career satisfaction is not well established in previous research. Cross-racial-group research in job and career satisfaction has been inconclusive (Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1982). Weaver (1977) and Brenner et al. (1988) are among those reporting that Blacks are less satisfied than Whites, whereas others found either no differences or Blacks to be more satisfied than Whites (Gavin & Ewen, 1974; Jones, James, Bruni, & Sells, 1977). Research on gender differences has also produced contradictory findings. Busch and Bush (1978), in a study of industrial salespeople, found no significant gender difference in career satisfaction. Varca, Shaffer, and McCauley's (1983) study of college graduates found males more satisfied than females with pay and promotion. Sauser and York (1978) studied state government employees and found males higher than females on overall career satisfaction but females outpaced males on satisfaction with pay. Further confusing the issue is research by Tsui and Gutek (1984) on industrial middle managers, which initially found females higher than males on overall satisfaction but that this difference disappeared in a follow-up study of the same sample 18 months later.

In the present study, we were specifically concerned with the issue of career satisfaction within the context of managerial careers. This combination of interests diverges from most previous research which addressed nonmanagerial personnel and job (versus career) satisfaction. It was expected that the focus of the present study on MBAs with noninterrupted career paths would increase probabilities that subjects are strongly career oriented and therefore especially sensitive to sources of interference with career progress. In view of the research reviewed by Rabinowitz and Hall (1977) showing that job involvement is positively correlated with various aspects of satisfaction, including satisfaction with upward mobility, we predicted the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: Black MBAs will report lower levels of career satisfaction than their White counterparts.

Hypothesis 3b: Female MBAs will report lower levels of career satisfaction than their male counterparts.

#### HIERARCHICAL LEVEL

There has been much discussion and some empirical evidence in the literature of "glass ceiling" effects on upward mobility for both non-Whites

and White women in managerial careers (Cannings, 1988; Fernandez, 1981; Jones, 1986; Kanter, 1977b; Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1987; Work, 1984), the conclusion being that a combination of structural (e.g., different career ladders), attitudinal (e.g., negative stereotyping of non-Whites and White women by White males), and sociocultural factors (e.g., different emphasis on family versus work roles) combine to limit the vertical mobility of White women and non-Whites in hierarchical organizations. However, some observers continue to propose that women and non-Whites simply lack the experience or educational preparation necessary to compete for higher-level positions (as reviewed in DiTomaso, Thompson, & Blake, 1986). The question that ensues is whether women and non-White men in managerial careers achieve similar hierarchical levels to White males with comparable levels of experience and education. An earlier study by Stewart and Gudykunst (1982) involving 400 employees from all levels of a financial institution found that women were at lower levels than men with similar education and experience. In a recent study of upward mobility of Blacks and Whites at three large organizations, Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990) found that compared to Whites, Blacks were more likely to be plateaued and had lower ratings of promotability.

The present study sought to contribute to this line of inquiry by (a) updating the research of Stewart and Gudykunst (1982) and determining whether or not their results can be replicated with a sample of MBAs from top schools and (b) examining the race effects found by Greenhaus et al. (1990) with a better educated sample (three-fourths of the Greenhaus et al. sample were noncollege graduates), with controls for education level, and using actual hierarchical level attained rather than promotability ratings as a measure of advancement. The following hypotheses were thus posed:

Hypothesis 4a: Black MBAs will be at lower hierarchical levels than White MBAs of comparable experience and performance levels.

Hypothesis 4b: Female MBAs will be at lower hierarchical levels than male MBAs of comparable experience and performance levels.

## METHOD

### SOURCES OF DATA

Data for the study were taken from a file of career data for 849 MBAs accumulated by the authors between 1986 and 1988. The data file contains

information collected from two separate mail surveys. The first was a survey of members of the National Black MBA Association (NBMBAA), a non-profit organization of Black college graduates headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. Roughly 90% of members hold MBA degrees, and about 70% of those are alumni of the top 20 business schools in the United States. At the time of the study, the organization had approximately 1,200 members. After eliminating student members and members for whom current addresses were not available, 834 members were contacted and invited to participate. Contact for most members was by mail; however, several hundred members were contacted personally during the association's national and regional meetings. Completed questionnaires were obtained from 317 members, of which 309 were fully usable (a response rate of 37%).

The second survey was of alumni of 1 of the top 20 graduate business schools in the United States. All alumni who had graduated between 1976 and 1986 were contacted. Alumni prior to 1976 were not contacted because of the small number of female graduates and because complete demographic data were not available in the alumni office for earlier classes. Questionnaires and letters inviting participation were sent to 1,300 alumni. Of these, 540 responded (response rate of 41.5%), 37 of whom were either graduates with interrupted careers or self-employed (both were conditions that we wished to exclude from this study). Therefore, 503 responses were used from this survey. Of these respondents, 21 were Black.

The question arises as to whether the nonresponding members of the surveyed groups differed in some important respects from the respondents. Although data are not available on all relevant criteria, it was possible to check mean age (35 years), gender composition (60% male), proportion of members from the top 20 schools (70%), and geographic location (about 85% from the Midwest and Northeast) on the NBMBAA sample. Also, it was possible to compare mean age, race and sex composition, and year of graduation for the predominantly White sample. The only difference of note among all the comparisons was that a disproportionate number of recent graduates (past 3 years) responded in the White-MBA group.

A few respondents from the first survey had graduate degrees other than the MBA. These were excluded from this study, leaving a final sample size of 729 for the two surveys combined. The gender/race count was 340 White males, 116 White females, 163 Black males, and 110 Black females. The average age for the full sample was 33.5 years, and the average number of years of work experience was 6.

## MEASURES

Job involvement was measured by four Likert-type items from a scale developed by Lodahl and Kejner (1965). A similar scale was used by Slocum, Cron, Hansen, and Rawlings (1985). They reported an alpha coefficient of .79. The coefficient alpha for the four-item scale in this study was .75.

Previous researchers had noted the multidimensional nature of sponsorship relationships (Kram, 1985; Thomas, 1990). In this study, we were interested in the career advancement function of mentoring. This was measured by asking respondents to rate the extent to which his or her career had been aided by a mentor(s) on a 7-point scale anchored by *not-at-all* (1) and *maximum possible extent* (7). Mentor was defined as a person in a higher organizational position who has been particularly helpful and supportive to one's career.

Career satisfaction was measured in two ways. The first was a measure of overall satisfaction with one's work career in general. A two-item version of a scale developed by Beehr, Taber, and Walsh (1980) was used for this measure. Both items were answered on a 7-point response format. The first item asked respondents to indicate the extent to which the present job was the type desired at this stage of their career, and the second item asked for a rating of general satisfaction with career progress. Responses to these two items were summed to form the measure of overall career satisfaction ( $\alpha = .62$ ). The second measure addressed satisfaction with the rate of upward mobility experienced by the respondent. The item asked how rapidly respondents had moved up and was anchored at the extremes by *much less rapidly than expected* (1) and *much more rapidly than expected* (5).

Hierarchical level was measured by the ratio of the respondent's current organizational level divided by the total number of levels in the hierarchy of the firm (level ratio). This approach was taken to acknowledge interorganizational differences in the height of authority structures. In the second data base (but not in the first), it was possible to get some check on the current management level by examining a work chronology that respondents were asked to provide along with their questionnaire responses. In all but a few cases, the level reported by the respondent matched up with what was suggested by the titles and job descriptions in the work chronology. In the few cases where the chronology data did not match the level reported, the chronology analysis was used.

The questionnaire also requested data on the respondent's employer. These were (a) the total number of employees (a measure of firm size), (b) total

number of levels in the management structure, (c) the rate at which vacancies had occurred in management jobs during the respondent's company tenure (scale from 1 = *low* to 7 = *high*), (d) years of total related work experience, (e) the extent to which affirmative action and equal opportunity programs had been implemented at the firm (scale from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *maximum possible extent*), and (f) formal job performance ratings for the past two rating periods (scale from 1 = *poor* to 5 = *outstanding*). In the NBMBA version of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to report their age and gender. For the alumni data base, this information was taken from files of the alumni office.

## RESULTS

Table 1 provides means, standard deviations, and a correlation matrix for variables in the data analysis. The means indicate that the four gender/race groups were generally similar on the measured individual and organizational factors, with only a few differences. On average, the Black males in the sample were slightly older and more experienced than the other groups. In addition, Blacks tended to work in larger organizations, and Black females reported higher job performance ratings than all the other groups.

The correlations for job involvement and mentor assistance indicate that both had moderately strong and highly significant associations with the career outcomes of satisfaction and hierarchical level. The one exception was that job involvement was not related to satisfaction with upward advancement. This supports research reviewed earlier, suggesting that career success is enhanced by high job involvement and access to mentors.

All hypotheses were tested by conducting a series of analyses of covariance using the GLM program of the SAS computer package. This analysis produces *F* statistics for main effects and interactions. The interaction terms were further analyzed by the LSMEANS option of GLM. This provides a test of the hypothesis that the mean of one gender/race group is equal to each of the other groups. Each of the five career experience variables was run separately as a dependent variable. In each analysis, Gender and Race were entered as factors, and age, job performance, years of experience, company size, and rate of management vacancies were entered as covariates. A Gender  $\times$  Race cross-term was also used in each analysis to test for interaction effects. Results of these analyses along with means and standard deviations for the career experience variables are shown in Table 2.



**TABLE 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

	Means (SD)				Product-Moment Correlations (N = 729)											
	Black Males (n = 163)	Black Females (n = 110)	White Males (n = 340)	White Females (n = 116)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
	Individual factors															
1. Age	36.14* (6.68)	33.17 (5.09)	30.88 (4.54)	33.1 (5.15)	.56***	.02	.03	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.14***	-.11**	-.15***	.24***	
2. Years of experience	7.38* (5.77)	5.72 (4.9)	4.6 (2.28)	4.77 (2.65)	.00	.07	.00	-.08	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.07	-.04	-.24***	
3. Performance	4.19 (1.34)	4.45* (1.34)	4.08 (1.51)	4.09 (1.33)	-.02	-.03	.06	.02	.02	.00	.11**	.24***	.10*			
Organizational factors																
4. Size	46.0K* (12.4K)	41.5K* (7.8K)	30.7K (7.3K)	27.8K (7.9K)	.11**	.04	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.06	-.05	-.12**			
5. Vacancy rates	3.45 (1.67)	3.28 (1.72)	3.22 (1.70)	3.21 (1.56)		-.02	.05	-.05	.03	-.03	.02					
6. Extent of AAEEO <sup>a</sup>	3.47 (1.47)	3.34 (1.47)	4.64 (1.37)	4.83 (1.47)		.09*	.21***	.32***	.17***	.07						
Career experience																
7. Job involvement												.24***	.25***	.05	.15***	
8. Mentor assistance												.40***	.17***	.14***		
9. Satisfaction (career)												.41***	.28***	.28***		
10. Satisfaction (advancement)												.17***	.17***	.17***		
11. Hierarchical level																

a. Affirmative action and equal employment opportunity.

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001.

**TABLE 2: Means for Dependent Measures and Analyses of Covariance<sup>a</sup>**

<i>Career Experience Dimension</i>	<i>Group<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race × Gender</i>
Job involvement	BF	13.15	3.03	11.88***	3.96*	.03
	BM	13.76	3.34			
	WF	13.92	3.03			
	WM	14.66	3.07			
Mentor assistance	BF	3.52	1.87	29.18***	1.36	0.00
	BM	3.30	1.82			
	WF	4.40	1.70			
	WM	4.25	1.77			
Career satisfaction (overall)	BF	7.68	3.27	63.97***	1.69	0.02
	BM	8.13	3.27			
	WF	10.02	3.06			
	WM	10.26	2.94			
Career satisfaction (advancement)	BF	3.28	1.70	3.91*	3.24	8.65**
	BM	2.76	1.58			
	WF	3.23	1.22			
	WM	3.30	1.31			
Hierarchical level	BF	.30	.22	.45	4.17*	4.01*
	BM	.34	.26			
	WF	.24	.27			
	WM	.32	.28			

a. Covariates = age, job performance, years of experience, company size, and rate of management vacancies.

b. BF = Black females, BM = Black males, WF = White females, and WM = White males. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2 indicates significant main effects of Race for four of the five career variables. Blacks had lower job involvement ( $F = 11.88, p < .001$ ), less access to mentors ( $F = 29.88, p < .001$ ), lower overall career satisfaction ( $F = 63.97, p < .001$ ), and lower satisfaction with rates of advancement ( $F = 3.91, p < .05$ ) than did White MBAs of comparable age, experience, and performance, and who were working in organizations of similar size and with similar rates of job vacancies. These results strongly supported Hypotheses 1a, 2a, and 3a. Hypothesis 4a, which predicted that Black MBAs would be at lower hierarchical levels than White counterparts was not supported.

The data provided mixed support for the predictions on gender differences. There were significant main effects for Gender for two of the five career experience variables. Female MBAs had lower job involvement ( $F = 3.96, p < .05$ ) and were at lower hierarchical levels ( $F = 4.17, p < .05$ ) than

their male counterparts. However, there were no significant differences between men and women on levels of mentor assistance or on career satisfaction. Thus Hypotheses 1b and 4b were supported but 2b and 3b were not.

Finally, although no *a priori* predictions were made on interaction effects, we wished to examine the possibility that gender effects may differ between race groups and that race effects might differ across gender groups. The data indicate two significant interactions of race and gender. First, the finding that Blacks reported lower satisfaction with advancement than Whites applied only to Black men. Black-female MBAs were not significantly less satisfied with advancement rates than Whites and were significantly more satisfied with this aspect of career experience than were Black-male MBAs. Second, and more surprising, the gender effect on hierarchical level applied only to White MBAs.

## DISCUSSION

An important finding of this research is that both Blacks and women in this sample of MBAs were found to have lower job involvement than White males. As far as we can determine, this is the first published cross-race/gender study of comparative job involvement levels. Based on research reviewed in this article and our data, we believe that some of the reasons for the results are common to Blacks and White women and that others diverge. The research finding of Rabinowitz and Hall (1977) illustrating a connection between work-goal fulfillment and job involvement levels may well apply to both Blacks and White women who may experience additional frustration, compared to White males, due to career obstacles posed by their race and/or gender. These obstacles may be, but are not necessarily, manifested as lower levels of organizational rewards such as promotion rates and pay. They may also include feelings of isolation, as discussed by Kanter (1977a) and Pettigrew and Martin (1987), and majority nonacceptance of cultural differences (Foeman & Pressley, 1987; Triandis & Malpass, 1971). These factors may also be relevant to the finding here that Blacks tend to be less satisfied overall with their careers than Whites are.

Because women in our society are still more likely than men to bear the brunt of homemaking responsibilities, it seems reasonable that their job involvement may be influenced by this additional burden. The research previously cited, that high job involvement produces greater family-work life conflict (Wiley, 1987), supports this conclusion.

The results on mentoring were somewhat surprising in that women in managerial careers were expected to have a more difficult time than White men securing mentors, especially the higher-level type specifically targeted in this research. It should be noted that although the level of mentor assistance was not statistically significant at conventional levels of alpha ( $p < .05$ ), women did report less assistance than men (3.97 versus 4.25), and the difference was significant at a less conservative level of alpha ( $p < .10$ ). At issue is the importance of mentor-protégé background similarity to the establishment of mentor relationships, which has been argued in both directions in the literature (Thomas, 1990). One interpretation of the result that Black MBAs reported less help from mentors than Whites did, whereas women (compared to men) did not, is that race is a greater obstacle than gender. The absence of a Race/Gender interaction effect in our sample tends to reinforce this interpretation. This fits the conclusion of Jones (1986) in his discussion of the intersection of race and gender in the context of organizational upward mobility. However, Thomas (1990) argued that the availability of mentors to ethnic minorities must be evaluated within the context of the type of mentor relationship involved. In addition, a one-item measurement may not have been adequate to fully capture the respondents' experience with career-enhancement mentoring. Previous research on mentoring (Kram, 1985) and the correlations between mentor help and career success found here suggest that differential access to this form of career assistance will have an adverse impact on career success.

The results on career satisfaction and hierarchical level are somewhat difficult to interpret, especially when viewed in combination. As predicted, Black MBAs were less satisfied than Whites with their careers overall and with their rate of advancement. However, they did not hold lower positions in their organizations compared to Whites with comparable experience and performance ratings. Several interpretations are possible. One is that the Black MBAs held higher expectations for rates of advancement than did Whites, perhaps because of expressed commitment to affirmative action by their employers. High expectations among minorities are also reinforced by the emphasis on education in many Black families as a means of "getting ahead." Another possible explanation is that our measures failed to capture the source of the relative dissatisfaction for Blacks. For example, no measures of actual job challenge were available. It is conceivable that although Blacks' jobs were at the same level as those attained by the White MBAs, the actual authority and responsibility may not have been the same. This interpretation is consistent with the claim that minorities are disproportionately placed in positions with less direct impact on profit and loss (Jones, 1986).

It is interesting that the findings on gender differences in career satisfaction and hierarchical level were opposite those for race. Women were at lower levels than men but did not report less satisfaction with advancement or less overall career satisfaction. The reasons for these results are not clear. They may be partly due to gender differences in advancement expectations, career success criteria, or both. If women hold lower expectations for rates of advancement or place less importance on this dimension of career success than men, they may not experience dissatisfaction even though attained levels are somewhat lower. Another interpretation is that women are simply unaware of the difference. These findings hold implications for organizations seeking to more effectively manage culturally diverse work forces.

We suggested earlier that lower levels of job involvement among racial minority members may reflect an external locus of control and lower levels of self-esteem. Both latter variables may be at least partly due to racial discrimination against and negative stereotypes of Blacks. Job involvement among minority members may therefore be raised if organizations take steps to eliminate these forms of bias against Blacks. Specific steps might include management training programs on race relations and managing differences, the use of focus groups to discuss issues of race, and revamping managerial evaluation and reward systems to provide increased incentives for reducing racial bias. Another technique is the use of internally generated data on differential experience of minority members. An example is the recent study by U.S. West Corporation (see Trost, 1989), where the rate of advancement to middle management for White men was found to be seven times higher than that of White women and 16 times higher than that of non-White women. The data were then used to gain support for a special career development effort targeting minority women.

The work of Wiley (1987) cited earlier suggested that lower job involvement among women may be a role conflict reduction strategy. Thus organizations might facilitate higher job involvement for women by expanded attention to policy and benefit changes which make it easier for employees to balance work and home-life demands.

Although these proposals seem warranted, in that the results obtained here on job involvement are consistent with related research on locus of control, self-esteem through work fulfillment, and family-work conflict, the data do not permit a direct test of these linkages. Additional research is needed to determine whether or not these are, in fact, salient underlying factors of job involvement differences between race and gender groups.

To improve mentor access, more organizations should establish mentor programs to assist non-Whites and White women in forming support rela-

tionships for career enhancement. Such programs already exist in some companies, and favorable results have been reported (Noe, 1988). The research reported here may be useful in demonstrating the need for such programs which specifically target subgroups within the employee population.

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