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Volume 26, 1999-2000 (4 issues) \$295.00 (outside the U.S., \$345.00). Price for individual subscribers certifying that the journal is for their personal use, \$52.00 (outside the U.S., \$61.00).

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Longitudinal Examination of Mentoring Relationships on Organizational Commitment and Citizenship Behavior

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Introduction

In most occupations, younger less experienced individuals learn from older, more experienced mentors. Mentorship relationships are often the primary means through which employees become socialized into an organization and career. Much research has shown that mentors advance a protégés career by providing emotional support and confidence, suggesting useful strategies for achieving work objectives, providing opportunities for the protégé to demonstrate competence, bringing the protégé to the attention of top management, protecting the protégé from the repercussions of errors, helping them avoid risky situations for their careers, and advancing the protégés career by nominating him or her for promotions (cf. Kram & Hall, 1996; Ragins, 1995; 1997a; 1997b; Russell & Adams, 1997).

One theoretical framework that provides insight into the mentoring process is social learning theory (Bandura, 1986). Social learning the-

This work was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to Dr. Stewart Donaldson (R03 MH 50230-02). Special thanks to Lynne Mellett for her outstanding contributions during the data collection phase of Project WORKWELL.

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ory applied in the context of mentoring relationships suggest that protégés learn from their mentors through two primary mechanisms: (1) instrumental support and (2) psychosocial support. Consistent with this framework, Kram (1983) used interviews with managers to identify two primary functions mentors serve. First, mentors provide advise and council about career issues and directly promote a protégé's career interests (the career function). Second, mentors teach protégés how to deal with inevitable emotional turmoil at work as well as provide much-needed emotional support (the psychosocial function). That is, a good mentor provides a protégé with career counseling, friendship, and role modeling, and enhances her or his sense of competency (Kram, 1985; Russell & Adams, 1997). Although not a focus of the current study, it is important to note that there is some recent empirical evidence to suggest that role modeling may actually be a third independent mentoring function (separate from the psychosocial function; Scandura & Ragins, 1993).

Numerous researchers have reported that protégés receive more organizational and career benefits than peers without mentors. For example, past research has demonstrated that protégés have greater job and career satisfaction, better organizational socialization, higher incomes, and faster promotion rates as compared to employees without mentors (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Ragins, 1995; Whitely & Coetzier, 1993). In addition, research shows mentors help socialize a protégé to an organization's norms which in turn has a positive effect on protégés' job satisfaction and retention (Blake, 1995). Mentors also provide protégés with access to informal networks and the power structure that is critical for upward mobility and long term career success (Kram & Hall, 1996). However, much of the research on mentoring has relied almost exclusively on cross-sectional designs, with a few exceptions (Chao, 1997; Green & Bauer, 1995; Orpen, 1995), despite the continued calls for longitudinal designs (e.g., Russell & Adams, 1997). Further, some scholars still assert that solid research supporting the benefits of mentoring is relatively scarce (Burke & McKeen, 1997).

Although mentoring may be associated with many positive rewards for protégés, not all mentoring relationships are inherently helpful. Some of the problems that plague less successful mentoring relationships include mentors who fail to provide their protégés with critical feedback, or mentors who sabotage their protégés out of jealousy (Kizilios, 1990). Cross-gender mentoring pairs sometimes encounter a unique set of barriers such as resentment and speculation of sexual

impropriety by coworkers (Ragins, 1989). Malicious gossip and rumors can result in reputation damage, lower productivity, and ultimately loss of personnel for both mentors and protégés. It seems likely that a negative mentoring relationship may be just as detrimental to a protégé's career as no mentor at all. In fact, Blake, Cox, and Dreher (1996) dichotomized mentoring relationships into high and low quality in their analysis of mentoring relationships and the career success of Black and White women in the corporate sector. They found that protégés with higher quality mentoring were more satisfied with their career progress than those with lower quality mentoring. Therefore, it seems important to examine how variations in the quality of mentoring can affect organizational outcomes. The purpose of the current study is to examine how the quality of mentoring relationships affect valued organizational behaviors over time.

Organizational Behaviors Affected by Mentoring

Two organizationally valued outcomes likely to be affected by the quality of an employee's mentoring relationships are organizational commitment and citizenship behavior. Organizational commitment has been defined in a number of ways throughout the literature (e.g., Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). In general, organizational commitment refers to the strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization (Porter et al., 1974). The antecedents of an employee's feelings of organizational commitment include having positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, opportunities for critical feedback, and interaction with effective agents of socialization. In fact, mentors often offer good relationships as protégés' colleagues or supervisors, provide feedback, and help socialize protégés to an organization's norms (Blake, 1995; Scandura, 1992). In addition, recent researchers have found that mentoring positively affects organizational commitment among protégés in formal mentoring programs (Heimann & Pittenger, 1996) and male protégés in informal mentoring relationships (Baugh, Lankau, & Scandura, 1996). Therefore, it is predicted that:

- H1a: The quality of a protégés mentoring relationship will predict her or his current level of organizational commitment.
- H1b: Protégés involved in high quality mentoring relationships will report higher levels of organizational commitment over

time than those protégés involved in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships.

Often employees or protégés who competently perform the requirements of their job are perceived as committed to their organizations. However, recent attention has focused on a special type of behavior in which individuals perform above and beyond the requirements of their job (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ, 1990; Organ & Ryan, 1995). This behavior, known as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) consists of behavior which is neither mandatory nor compensated by formal reward systems, is discretionary, and goes beyond what is formally prescribed for a particular organizational role (Organ & Konovsky, 1989; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Hui, 1993). Examples include helping co-workers with a job related problem, tolerating temporary impositions without complaints, and promoting a positive work climate (Bateman & Organ, 1983; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1993).

McManus and Russell (1997) proposed that a promising future direction for mentoring research is to examine the link between mentoring and OCB. They suggest by definition, mentoring is often an OCB, and mentors role model OCB by being good mentors. Further, one important antecedent to OCB is leader supportiveness. The leader acts as a positive role model for OCB and reinforces protégés' acts of OCB (Bateman & Organ, 1983). While a leader is typically referred to as a supervisor, more recent research suggests that the dyadic processes between supervisors and employees and mentors and protégés parallel each other in some respects (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). Therefore, the following hypotheses are suggested:

- H2a: The quality of a protégés mentoring relationship will predict the protégés current level of organizational citizenship behavior.
- H2b: Protégés involved in high quality mentoring relationships will perform higher levels of organizational citizenship behavior over time than protégés in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to examine the concurrent and somewhat longer term relationships between mentoring, organiza-

tional commitment and citizenship behavior among ethnically diverse, non-professional protégés. This study extends the literature on mentoring by (1) focusing on the quality of the mentoring relationship, (2) employing a longitudinal design to examine organizational commitment and citizenship behavior, (3) assessing organizational citizenship behavior using both self and co-worker reports, and (4) studying mentoring relationships in a diverse population of non-professional employees.

Methods

Participants

A subset of data from Project WORKWELL, a study of non-professional employees in southern California funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, were utilized in this study. The database consists of two waves of data (collected six months apart) from a total of 408 ethnically diverse, non-professional employees. The overall completion rate at time one data collection was 97%. At time two data collection, 366 participants (89% of the total original sample) returned to complete the second part of the study. A subset of 157 participants, who reported that they were a protégé in the same informal mentoring relationships at both time one and time two data collection, were included in the current analyses. That is, if a participant had mentor at time one and reported to have the same mentor at time two, she or he was included in this study.

The majority of protégés were women (70%) and the average age was 34 years. The following is the ethnic composition of the protégés: 45% Latino American; 22% European American; 15% African American; 10% Asian American; .05% American Indian; 5.5% other; 2% did not report. Considering highest education level, 3% reported elementary or junior high; 34% reported having a high school diploma; 50% reported some junior college experience; 10% reported some four year college or a college degree; 3% were missing. On average, protégés were employed 38 hours per week ($sd=11.2$, Median=40) and had worked for their company for an average of 4.8 years ($sd=5.25$; Median = 3 years). Half of the protégés reported earning a personal salary of \$20,000 or less per year; 20% reported a personal salary between \$20,001-\$25,000. In general, protégés worked for a diverse range of companies, industries and occupations.

Procedure

Data for Project WORKWELL were collected by a team of researchers at University of Southern California, Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Research. The general purpose of the research study was to examine the effects of employees' lifestyles and psychosocial working conditions (including informal relationships with mentors) on their mental and physical health as well as their work performance. In addition to these substantive issues, Project WORKWELL was designed to better understand and control for response bias; therefore, multiple measures (both self reports and co-worker reports) and a longitudinal design were employed. For this study, self and co-worker reports at the time one and time two (six months later) data collection points were utilized (cf. Donaldson, & Grant-Vallone, 1999).

Measures

The Project WORKWELL database contains an array of scales which captured a wide range of dimensions of work performance, psychosocial work environments, and employee well-being. One specific component of the psychosocial work environment questions focused on an employee's mentoring relationships. A mentor was defined for participants as "a more experienced employee who advises, counsels, or otherwise enhances the personal development of a less experienced employee." For the present study, two predictor variables and two criterion variables were selected. The predictor variables were instrumental and psychosocial support offered by a mentor. The criterion variables were organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

Quality of Mentoring Relationships

A number of items were asked about instrumental and psychosocial mentoring functions at both time one and time two. These items were adapted from Noe (1988). The four items which measured instrumental support had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$). Three items which measured psychosocial support also had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .76$).

In order to examine various levels of the quality of mentoring relationships, several steps were taken. First, only those protégés who indicated that they had the same mentor at both time one and time

two were included in the analysis. Next, protégés were grouped according to the quality of mentoring which they received. Responses to the instrumental support and psychosocial support scales from time one were dichotomized (high instrumental support; low instrumental support; high psychosocial support; low psychosocial support). In order to create these sub-categories, individual items were analyzed. A protégé was considered to have high quality instrumental support if she or he agreed or strongly agreed with a minimum of four out of the five instrumental mentoring questions. Similarly, a protégé was considered to have high quality psychosocial support if she or he agreed or strongly agreed with a minimum of two out of the three psychosocial mentoring questions. This strategy was used, rather than a median split, in order to ensure that protégés categorized as having high quality mentoring, were in fact, agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were receiving high levels of both types of support. Next, three levels of quality of mentoring relationship were defined. If a protégé had high levels of both instrumental and psychosocial support they were placed in the *high quality* mentoring category ($n = 61$); if a protégé had high levels of either instrumental or psychosocial support and low levels of the other they were considered to have *moderate quality* mentoring ($n = 45$); and if a protégé had low levels of both instrumental and psychosocial support they were considered to have *low quality* mentoring ($n = 51$).

Organizational Outcomes

The first criterion variable assessed was organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was measured with the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). This scale had high internal consistency in this study ($\alpha = .80$). The second outcome variable, organizational citizenship behavior, was measured with the altruism subscale of Organ's (1988) Organizational Citizenship Behavior Questionnaire. This subscale has been used in numerous studies and has been found to have good psychometric properties across studies (Organ & Ryan, 1995). The altruism scale of citizenship behavior had high internal consistency (self-report $\alpha = .81$; co-worker report $\alpha = .82$) in the current study.

Analysis Strategy

Analysis of covariance was conducted using MANOVA on SPSS for Windows to test the main hypotheses. A priori contrasts were also

conducted to assess whether (1) protégés in high quality mentoring relationships had higher levels of organizational commitment and citizenship behavior than those in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships, and (2) protégés in low quality mentoring relationships had significantly lower levels of organizational commitment and citizenship behavior than those in high or moderate level relationships. This procedure was utilized so that finer gradations of mentoring quality could be better understood. Despite having a rather diverse sample of protégés, this study was not designed to adequately assess gender and ethnicity differences (i.e., groups may not be comparable). However, gender and ethnicity were used as control variables in all the hypothesis testing analyses because past research demonstrates that these variables can have differential effects on organizational outcomes. For organizational citizenship behavior, both self and co-worker reports were analyzed. The means, standard deviations and correlation matrix for self and co-worker reported organizational commitment and citizenship behavior at time one and time two are displayed in Table 1.

Results

Organizational Commitment

Hypotheses 1a and 1b, which predict that protégés with high quality mentoring relationships will have higher levels of organizational commitment concurrently and over time than those in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships, were supported. Using cross sectional data, taken solely from time one, there was a significant difference between the quality of an employee's mentoring relationship and her or his level of organizational commitment $F = 27.31, p < .001$. Specifically, protégés with high quality mentoring relationships reported significantly higher levels of commitment than those in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships, $t = 6.98, p < .01$.

These findings were replicated when longitudinal data were utilized. First, there was a significant difference between the quality of an employee's mentoring relationship at time one and her or his level of organizational commitment six months later $F = 11.94, p < .01$. Similarly, protégés with high quality mentoring relationships at time one reported significantly higher levels of commitment at time two than those in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships,

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelation Matrix for Organizational Outcomes at Both Time One and Time Two

| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| <i>Time 1</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1. Self-report Org. Com. | 2.57 | .53 | — | | | | |
| 2. Self-report Citiz. Beh. | 3.03 | .44 | .32*** | — | | | |
| 3. Co-worker report Citiz. Beh. | 2.92 | .50 | .17* | .13 | — | | |
| <i>Time 2</i> | | | | | | | |
| 4. Self-report Org. Com. | 2.60 | .54 | .56*** | .14 | .14 | — | |
| 5. Self-report Citiz. Beh. | 3.04 | .44 | .36*** | .70*** | .15 | .29*** | — |
| 6. Co-worker report Citiz. Beh. | 2.86 | .52 | .11 | .13 | .71*** | .10 | .17* |

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

$t = 4.76, p < .01$. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Hypotheses 2a and 2b predict that protégés in high quality mentoring relationships will perform higher levels of citizenship behavior at work than protégés in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships. The results of this study partially support Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

When self reports were used to measure organizational citizenship behavior, hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported with both the cross sectional and longitudinal data. There was a significant difference between the quality of an employee's mentoring relationship at time one and her or his self reported citizenship behavior at time one ($F =$

Table 2
Results of Analysis of Covariance of Organizational Commitment Controlling for Gender and Ethnicity

| | Quality of Mentoring Relationships | | | F-value df (2,155) | Contrasts | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | Low (n=51) | Mod (n=45) | High (n=61) | | High vs. Mod/Low t-Value | Low vs. Mod/High t-Value |
| | | | | | | |
| <i>Time 1</i> | | | | | | |
| Org. Com | | | | | | |
| Mean | -.29 | .01 | .53 | 27.31*** | 6.98** | -5.24** |
| SD | (.58) | (.60) | (.56) | | | |
| <i>Time 2</i> | | | | | | |
| Org. Com. | | | | | | |
| Mean | -.23 | -.06 | .39 | 11.94** | 4.76** | -3.10** |
| SD | (.64) | (.69) | (.64) | | | |

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

9.60, $p < .01$), and citizenship behavior six months later at time two ($F = 11.68$, $p < .01$). Further, protégés with high quality mentoring relationships at time one reported significantly higher levels of citizenship at time one ($t = 4.09$, $p < .01$) and time two ($t = 4.76$, $p < .01$) than those in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships (see Table 3).

When co-worker reports of citizenship behavior were used, hypotheses 2a and 2b were not supported. That is, there was not a significant difference between the quality of an employee's mentoring relationship at time one and her or his co-worker reported citizenship behavior at time one and time two. However, it is important to note that when the means were examined, there were similar trends to those found with the self report data. Specifically, protégés in low quality mentoring relationships were rated lower on citizenship behavior than those in moderate or high quality mentoring relationships. Refer to Table 3 for results of the analyses with co-worker reports.

Table 3
Results of Analysis of Covariance of Organizational Citizenship Behavior Controlling for Gender and Ethnicity

| | Quality of Mentoring Relationships | | | F-value df (2,155) | Contrasts | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | Low (n=51) | Mod (n=45) | High (n=61) | | High vs. Mod/Low t-Value | Low vs. Mod/High t-Value |
| | | | | | | |
| <i>Time 1</i> | | | | | | |
| Self Report OCB | | | | | | |
| Mean | -.14 | .07 | .34 | 9.60** | 4.09** | -3.21** |
| SD | (.63) | (.67) | (.55) | | | |
| Co-Worker OCB | | | | | | |
| Mean | -.07 | .17 | .10 | 1.48 | .28 | -1.65 |
| SD | (.72) | (.69) | (.69) | | | |
| <i>Time 2</i> | | | | | | |
| Self Report OCB | | | | | | |
| Mean | -.12 | .02 | .41 | 11.68** | 4.76** | -2.84 |
| SD | (.67) | (.58) | (.61) | | | |
| Co-Worker OCB | | | | | | |
| Mean | -.01 | .09 | .12 | .37 | .50 | -.84 |
| SD | (.79) | (.70) | (.67) | | | |

** $p < .01$

Discussion

The results of this investigation demonstrate that diverse, non-professional protégés in high quality mentoring relationships report greater organizational commitment than protégés in low or moderate quality mentoring relationships. Not only were these relationships supported by cross-sectional data, but the quality of an employee's mentoring relationship predicted organizational commitment six months after mentoring quality was assessed. This finding supports the notion that the quality of one's mentoring relationship (cf. Blake, Cox, & Dreher, 1996), in addition to whether or not a protégé has a mentor (e.g., Chao, 1997), can have immediate and somewhat longer term effects on important organizational behaviors such as organizational commitment.

Similarly, non-professional employees in high quality mentoring re-

relationships reported that they performed much better at work than employees in moderate or low quality mentoring relationships. That is, protégés with high quality mentoring relationships reported significantly more organizational citizenship behavior such as helping co-workers when their workloads increased, assisting supervisors when needed, and in general volunteering to do things not formally required by the job. This pattern of findings was shown to occur concurrently as well as six months after the quality of the mentoring relationship was assessed. However, it is important to underscore that these performance relationships were not corroborated by co-worker reports of organizational citizenship behavior. Possible reasons for these inconsistent findings are discussed below.

Strengths and Limitations

The design employed in this study enabled us to reveal organizational benefits of high quality mentoring relationships that were stable over a six month period.

These findings contribute to a small but growing literature on the longitudinal effects of mentoring relationships (Chao, 1997; Green & Bauer, 1995; Orpen, 1995). While this research contributes to the literature in important ways, there are a number of notable shortcomings that must be considered. First, it is important to note that all of the constructs examined in this study were measured (versus manipulated) which leaves open the possibility of reverse or reciprocal causation, and it is also possible that unmeasured "third variables" better explain some of the results (cf. Burke & McKeen, 1997). The latter problem was partially addressed by controlling for gender and ethnicity throughout the analyses.

Second, unlike the vast majority of the mentoring outcome literature, we employed a multimethod measurement approach for one of the two main outcome variables. That is, we were able to examine a plausible rival hypothesis untested in most prior research: That self-report bias or common method variance accounts for positive findings. Unfortunately, co-worker reports of organizational citizenship behavior were not significantly related to the quality of a protégés mentoring relationship, which has left us with an empirical puzzle to solve.

Organ and Ryan (1995) in a meta-analytic review of the OCB literature, found that rating source (self versus co-worker or supervisor) moderates the relationships between OCB and other measures of organizational attitudes and behavior. The use of all self-report ratings

seems to consistently lead to higher correlations. The findings of this study raise a thorny measurement dilemma to be pondered by mentorship researchers: Are these findings due to problems such as lack of information or skill distorting co-worker ratings of OCB? Or, is it the case that research on the effects of mentoring to date (including the other findings in this study) capitalize on self-report bias or shared method variance to support the benefits of mentoring relationships (cf. Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 1999; Schmitt, 1994)? Future research is sorely needed to sort out this potential measurement dilemma.

Another strength of this study is the focus on mentoring quality as opposed to just whether a protégés has a mentor or not (Blake, Cox, & Dreher, 1996). This approach avoids the problem of presuming all mentoring relationships are beneficial, which has been inherent to much of the mentoring outcome research to date. However, because this study was part of a larger quality of worklife project and there were space limitations on the questionnaires, we could only include a limited number of items to measure the quality of protégés' mentoring relationships. Although these items resulted in mentoring function scales with adequate internal consistency, a more extensive assessment of mentoring quality in future research would be desirable.

While interest in mentoring as a career development tool has grown over the past decade, most of the research literature has focused on the experiences of professional White men and women (Kram & Hall, 1996). Recently, an excellent body of literature has burgeoned related to Black experiences in mentoring as well (Blake, 1995; Cox & Nkomo, 1991; Thomas, 1990; Thomas & Higgins, 1995). However, most of the literature has focused on professionals and managers and very little is known about mentoring in non-professional occupations, and Latino and Asian employee populations. This has caused some scholars to assert that much existing mentoring theory and research is rooted in a world which no longer exists, a world of more stable and homogenous organizational environments (Kram & Hall, 1996).

The current study extends knowledge of mentoring relationships by studying a sample of non-professional Asian, Black, Latino, and White protégés currently involved in informal mentoring relationships. However, due to the nature and scope of this study, obtaining a representative sample of diverse, non-professional employees was not feasible. We acknowledge that the external validity of our findings may be limited. That is, it is possible that our recruiting methods have produced a rather unique sample of protégés. Future research

with non-professional employee populations is needed to bolster our confidence of the value of quality mentoring relationships in these populations.

Implications and Conclusion

Despite limitations, this study has several important implications for researchers, managers, and career development practitioners alike. First, mentoring relationships do exist, appear to be important, and seem to have long lasting effects in diverse workforces. More specifically, non-professional employees in quality mentoring relationships appear to be more likely to (1) have a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values, (2) be willing to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and (3) have a strong desire to maintain membership in an organization (organizational commitment as defined by Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982), than non-professional protégés in moderate or low quality mentoring relationships. Maintaining high levels of organizational commitment is also important because it has an inverse relationship with employee turnover, tardiness, and absenteeism, and is positively related to work motivation and involvement, prosocial behavior at work, organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Similarly, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has important implications for organizations as it has been found to positively affect sales unit performance (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994), improved customer service (George, 1991) and overall team performance (Pullins, Fine, & Warren, 1996). OCB also appears to enhance cooperation and pleasantness at work, as well as contribute to increases in work performance (Organ, 1990). Therefore, the results of this study suggest the potential for increasing organizational effectiveness by enhancing the quality of mentoring relationships among ethnically diverse, non-professional employees.

Future research investigating the precursors of a high quality mentoring relationships among diverse, non-professional employees seems desirable (cf. Ragins, 1997a). The findings of this study suggest the need for mentoring researchers to design studies that examine and control for self-report bias or common method variance.

The results of this study also hint that extending mentoring programs into diverse, non-professional work settings may be beneficial for both employees and organizations. That is, developing effective

mentoring programs for non-professional women and minorities may be a viable strategy for narrowing the gap in positive career outcomes between them and European American men (Kram & Hall, 1996; Ragins, 1995; 1997a; 1997b).

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