

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **WOMEN IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:
USING NETWORKS AND MENTORS TO
NAVIGATE THE MANAGEMENT
HIERARCHY**

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The purpose of this study is to examine the networking and mentoring experiences of White and Black women as they navigate the management hierarchy of the federal government. Network theory and intersectionality theory provide the framework for the study, which used a qualitative research design. The study explores differences in networking and mentoring experiences of women in federal management by both race and grade. The multi-agency study includes 18 White and Black women who have worked in management positions at the GS13, GS14, GS15 and SES levels of the federal government. The women each participated in an interview about their experiences with networks and mentors in the federal government. The data show that the women in the study included primarily same-race and same-grade network members. Their networks include current and former supervisors who also played mentoring roles. The results suggest that primarily structural constraints influenced the network patterns of the women included in the study although there is some evidence of individual preference playing a role in composing their networks.

Women use their networks primarily for friendship, work purposes, advice and support. Differences in network and mentoring experiences appear to be more pronounced by grade level than by race.