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Developmental Practices, Organizational Culture, and Minority Representation in Organizational Leadership: The Case of Partners in Large U.S. Law Firms

By
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and
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Explanations of minority underrepresentation among organizational managers have focused primarily on either employee deficits in human and social capital or employer discrimination. To date, research has paid little attention to the role of developmental practices and related cultural values within organizations. Using data on large U.S. law firms, the authors investigate the role of formal developmental practices and cultural values in the representation of three minority groups among firm partners: African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. The authors find that formal practices and cultural values intended to aid employee growth and development do not “level the playing field” for minorities. Formal training and mentoring programs do not increase minority presence, while a longer time period to promotion, a cultural commitment to professional development, and a cultural norm of early responsibility are all negatively associated with minority representation. Although the pattern is broadly similar across all three groups, some effects vary in interesting ways.

Keywords: lawyers; promotion; race; organizational culture; law firms

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Racial and ethnic minorities are scarce among managers and executives within organizations in the United States. Studies reveal that racial and ethnic minorities face lower chances of promotion (Miller, Kerr, and Reid 2010) and attain lower organizational rank or authority (Elliott and Smith 2004) than do their white counterparts. As a result, minorities are underrepresented among managers relative to their presence at lower organizational levels (Cohen and Huffman 2007).

Previous investigations of this underrepresentation have pointed to processes at the individual, organizational, and environmental levels. At the individual level, professionals' preferences and skills (S. Smith 2005) and organizational decision-makers' cognitive biases (DiTomaso et al. 2007) shape career outcomes for professionals. At the organizational level, the characteristics of jobs and workplace settings constrain or enable the operation of individual-level processes (Reskin 2003). At the level of the industry or organizational field, legal regulations, institutionalized practices, and market competition shape organizational actions and employees' career prospects (Skaggs 2009).

However, to date, scholars examining the determinants of racial and ethnic minority access to managerial positions have paid relatively little attention to the role of developmental practices and related cultural values within organizations. Yet such practices and values might counteract or diminish informal processes that place minorities at a disadvantage in obtaining the training, mentoring, and other opportunities that are vital for promotion into management (Thomas and Gabarro 1999). Of course, minority representation in management reflects not only the rate of minority promotion but also the inflow of minority managers through external hiring and their outflow through retirement and other forms of termination. Nevertheless, organizational practices that benefit nonmanagement minority employees can have a discernible impact on the presence of minorities among an organization's managers (Kalev 2009).

In this study, we ask whether organizations' practices and cultural values relating to employee development influence the representation of racial minorities among partners in large law firms. We also contribute to the literature on racial workplace inequality by examining multiple minority groups. Most studies that have examined racial inequality in workplace outcomes have focused on a comparison of whites and African Americans (e.g., Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006; Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2009). In our study, using data on large law firms across the United States, we investigate the representation of three minority groups: African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans.

Individual and Interactional Sources of Minority Underrepresentation in Management

Previous research points to three processes that might lead organizational decision-makers to choose whites over minorities when selecting candidates for promotion

into management. First, minorities may enter organizations with lower levels of the abilities and skills valued by employers, and these deficits may remain relatively constant as both white and minority employees progress toward promotion. Usually thought of as the “human capital” view, this argument also extends to resources beyond cognitive and technical skill, such as cultural competence and social ties (Nee and Sanders 2001). Importantly, this explanation does not necessarily blame minorities themselves for these deficits, which may be the result of earlier educational, cultural, and social disadvantages. Consistent with this view, empirical evidence indicates that at least a portion of the racial gaps in promotion and managerial representation is explained by differences in education and technical skill across racial groups (R. Smith 2005). Some qualitative studies find that minorities feel less culturally at ease than whites in corporate work environments (Bell and Nkomo 2001). Minorities often have fewer effective social networks (McGuire 2000) as well, and racial differences in social network composition play a role in explaining the racial gap in organizational mobility (Thomas and Gabarro 1999).

A second explanation of race disparities in promotions holds that, even though whites and minorities may possess the same levels of technical, cultural, and social resources, conscious or unconscious cognitive biases lead employers to assess minorities less favorably than whites. These biases, which are based on racial stereotypes or (for white decision-makers) explicit or implicit in-group favoritism, may lead organizational leaders to perceive minority employees as less competent than whites (Reskin 2001). Empirical evidence suggests that employers tend to hold minorities to stricter standards for demonstrating ability (Foschi 2009).

A third possibility is that minority and white employees enter organizations with relatively similar levels of technical, cultural, and social resources, but whites pull ahead during the course of employment as a result of better developmental opportunities. Senior employees typically have considerable discretion in deciding whether they will mentor or sponsor someone for developmental experiences. Due to cognitive biases, organizational decision-makers often perceive white employees as having greater potential. As a result, through a series of small, informal, and largely unplanned decisions, whites are likely to receive more on-the-job training, more mentoring, and more opportunities to perform challenging tasks that build skills. Although there may be no deliberate intention to exclude minorities, they may experience “benign neglect” (Sander 2006) or an “absence of advantage” (DiTomaso et al. 2007) while colleagues and superiors invest heavily in the career development of white employees. Research evidence suggests that, compared to whites, minorities are less likely to form informal developmental relationships and/or to receive developmental experiences (Sander 2006; Wilkins and Gulati 1996). In particular, minorities are less likely than whites to form a developmental relationship with a white mentor (García-López 2008), and relationships with white mentors provide improved opportunities for advancement (Elliott and Smith 2004). When minorities do forge cross-race developmental relationships with white mentors, they receive less guidance and support than those in same-race relationships (Cox and Nkomo 1991).

Developmental relationships and experiences are vitally important for the cultivation of needed capabilities and resources (Thomas and Gabarro 1999). Whereas formal education imparts abstract principles and general analytical skills, the more practical forms of knowledge and skills that are essential for effective functioning are typically acquired in the workplace itself (Schleef 2006). Pivotal to the idea of mentoring is the claim that mentors provide channels for upward mobility and support to their protégés' careers (Ragins 1997). Mentors serve as advisors, teachers, exemplars, and career advocates (McManus 2005). Thus, over time, differential access to developmental opportunities is likely to produce an observable gap in technical, cultural, and cognitive resources between whites and minorities, even if they entered employment with similar levels of these resources. Indeed, there is evidence that less extensive and effective developmental experiences explain a portion of the racial gap in upward organizational mobility (R. Smith 2005).

The Role of Organizations' Developmental Practices and Cultural Values

Characteristics of jobs, workplaces, firms, and organizational environments moderate the impact of individual and interactional processes by constraining or enabling their operation (Reskin 2003). Here, we focus on organizational employment practices and cultural values relating to the professional development of employees prior to promotion into management. Formal development practices can narrow differences in developmental experiences and the gaps that result in technical, cultural, and social resources by compensating for minorities' reduced access to more informal developmental relationships. Cultural values that encourage supportive and nurturing behavior toward junior employees may lead organizational leaders to offer informal training, mentoring, and developmental assignments more widely and not only to those junior employees who are perceived as future stars.

Formal developmental practices. Many organizations offer formal training programs to their junior professionals and aspiring managers.¹ Formal training programs are intended to ensure that all employees obtain the same baseline level of knowledge and skill, including firm-specific skills such as knowledge of organizational procedures and routines. Formal training programs can have substantial positive effects on employee performance as well as on job satisfaction and commitment (Saks 1996). We suspect that formal training programs are likely most successful at building technical and cognitive skills and are less effective at conveying culturally valued styles of communication or fostering social network ties to colleagues and clients. Still, to the extent that formal programs make training accessible to all junior employees, they should serve to reduce any

skill and productivity gap that might otherwise exist between minorities and whites and improve minorities' chances for promotion into management.

Organizations may also offer formal mentoring programs that match new employees to more senior colleagues (Blake-Beard 2001). A formal mentoring program ensures that each junior employee is assigned a contact for guidance. Of course, the benefits of formal mentoring are likely to be weaker than those of informal mentoring relationships, which develop spontaneously and typically last longer than formal relationships. Indeed, in a quantitative meta-analytic review, Underhill (2006) reveals that informal mentoring produces larger and more significant effects on career outcomes than formal mentoring. Nonetheless, formal mentoring programs have generally been found to be satisfying to employees and offer such benefits as learning, coaching, psychosocial support (Eby and Lockwood 2004), development of self-confidence and professional direction (Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, and Marchese 2006), and opportunities for career progress (Kay, Hagan, and Parker 2009). Formal mentoring programs may be particularly beneficial to racial and ethnic minorities, who might otherwise have difficulty gaining access to mentoring (McManus 2005). Indeed, research suggests extensive benefits of formal mentoring programs for racial minorities (Ortiz-Walters and Gilson 2005), and at least one study has found that formal mentoring programs are positively associated with the representation of African Americans among managers (Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006).

Another important organizational employment practice is the length of the expected or typical probationary period leading up to promotion. The duration of time until promotion decisions could have either positive or negative consequences for minorities. On one hand, a longer track until promotion could aid minorities by affording them the time to overcome conscious or unconscious employer bias through repeated strong performances. Research suggests that minority corporate managers who attain the executive level often take longer to achieve promotion than their white colleagues (Thomas and Gabarro 1999). On the other hand, a longer time until promotion could increase the impact of processes of cumulative advantage and disadvantage. If organizational decision-makers disproportionately select whites for informal training, mentoring, and developmental assignments, whites are likely to gain greater skills, further solidifying the impression that they are more competent and better suited for positions of responsibility and increasing their advantage in the next round of selection. A longer expected period until promotion could worsen minorities' disadvantage by allowing this cycle to repeat.

Cultural values. In addition to formal structures and practices, organizational culture has an important influence on employee behavior (Wallace and Leicht 2004). We understand "organizational culture" to encompass the beliefs, values, and norms that are widely shared or acknowledged within an organization (Trice and Beyer 1993). Here we consider three aspects of organizational culture: a commitment to the professional development of junior employees, a norm of

giving substantial responsibility to employees at early stages in their careers, and an emphasis on collegiality.

Some organizations are characterized by the value they place on the internal development of junior employees. In these organizations, training, mentoring, and sponsorship are understood as professional obligations of the firm (McManus 2005). Senior employees are expected to take on responsibility for the formation of less experienced employees through mentoring and sponsorship, as a service to the firm rather than for the purpose of enhancing their own status or political clout. Like a longer partnership track, a cultural commitment to professional development could be either beneficial or detrimental to the advancement of minorities. Such an atmosphere could be beneficial if it leads senior employees and decision-makers to offer informal mentoring and developmental experiences more inclusively and consistently to junior employees of all races and ethnicities. If so, a cultural emphasis on professional development would increase the probability that whites and minorities receive similar developmental experiences, which should in turn reduce the disparity in their prospects for promotions into management. Consistent with this reasoning, at least one study has found that an organizational emphasis on the internal development of employees is positively associated with the presence of African Americans among managers (Fields, Goodman, and Blum 2005). In contrast, a cultural commitment to professional development could be detrimental to minorities if senior employees respond by focusing their developmental efforts along the lines of homophily toward junior employees who are socially similar to themselves. In that case, since most senior employees in major organizations are white, this cultural value would only aggravate the disadvantage that minorities face in gaining access to developmental experiences.

The nature and direction of the effect may depend on organizational size. A commitment to professional development of junior employees in general may more easily translate into particularistic ties based on homophily in smaller organizations. In smaller organizations, where there are relatively few junior employees, it is easier for potential mentors to justify their choice of socially similar protégés by pointing to their individual strengths and apparently greater promise. In larger organizations, which are usually both more bureaucratic and more visible within their organizational fields than smaller organizations, a cultural commitment to professional development may more readily take on an inclusive tone and be viewed as a policy that applies to all. Some research suggests that in the case of gender, larger bureaucratic organizations may be more inclusive when it comes to career development and promotion of women (Hagan et al. 1991).

The effect of a cultural value on fostering professional development could also depend on the representation of minorities among junior employees. It may be easier for potential mentors, who are predominantly white in most organizations, to maintain an inclusive, even-handed commitment to the professional growth of all junior employees when there are relatively few minorities among them. As the minority presence among junior employees grows, white senior employees and

organizational leaders may feel increasingly uncomfortable and may gravitate—consciously or unconsciously—more strongly toward white protégés.

A second important aspect of organizational culture is the extent to which an organization has established norms for providing employees with a significant amount of responsibility early in their careers, as opposed to keeping them under close supervision during a lengthy period of gradual experimentation and skill-building. Once again, it is possible to foresee both advantages and disadvantages for minorities. On one hand, early responsibility for strategy formulation and relationships with major clients or customers is highly desirable to the career advancement of junior employees who are aiming for management. Because minority employees may be more likely to find themselves confined to support roles and “back office” tasks than their white counterparts (Sander 2006), a norm of giving early responsibility may be especially valuable for them. On the other hand, early responsibility could operate as a screening device for those who already have the necessary skills (or are quickly able to acquire them on their own) and “weed out” the rest. Early responsibility would then signal a “sink or swim” philosophy that places the burden of responsibility for skill development on junior employees, rather than on the firm. In that case, a norm of early responsibility could intensify the disadvantage of minorities, whose early missteps are likely to be perceived as evidence confirming weaker abilities.

A third significant dimension of organizational culture is the value placed on collegiality. By “collegiality,” we understand both a positive social atmosphere of trust and a relatively nonhierarchical, team-based, decentralized way of organizing work and managing the firm (Greenwood and Empson 2003). Under the conditions of uncertainty that typically surround managerial work, people feel more comfortable trusting and relying on others who are socially similar to themselves; this in turn leads to the “homosocial reproduction” of management (Kanter 1977). A sustained cultural emphasis on collegiality—rather than on competition or hierarchy—may help to overcome these tendencies on the part of organizational decision-makers. Rather than reinforcing group boundaries along racial lines, a culture of collegiality could help employees of all races to redefine the “in-group” as inclusive of all members of the organization. Thus, even in the absence of a cultural commitment to professional development, an atmosphere of collegiality could ensure that developmental opportunities are more accessible to minorities.

Research Setting and Data

We apply the ideas discussed above to the case of large law firms that serve corporate clients. Most large firms now have multiple offices in major cities throughout the United States and abroad. Although major strategic directions are determined centrally, individual offices often maintain somewhat different policies, practices, and cultures. Law firms are typically organized as partnerships. The partners are both the owners and the managers of the firm. Partners typically

supervise small teams of lawyers that are assembled for a given case or transaction. Executive groups or committees oversee the day-to-day management of the office and the firm as a whole, but the entire partnership usually must approve major changes in firm strategy or structure.

Large firms also employ junior lawyers as “associates” during a “partnership track” period that typically lasts between 6 and 10 years. At the end of this period, the firm’s partners consider the members of an associate class for promotion to partnership (Galanter and Palay 1991). Firms traditionally maintained an “up-or-out” policy, so that associates who were “passed over” for partnership were expected to leave the firm; but in recent years many firms have begun to employ some experienced lawyers in non-partnership-track positions on a permanent basis (Gorman 1999). As of 2005, minorities represented 8.9 percent of lawyers and 4.9 percent of partners in the average major law firm office (Gorman and Kay 2010). The corresponding figures for specific groups were as follows: African Americans, 2.5 percent of lawyers and 1.6 percent of partners; Latinos, 2.3 percent of lawyers and 1.6 percent of partners; Asian Americans, 4.1 percent of lawyers and 1.7 percent of partners.

In this study, we analyze data on more than 1,300 law firm offices across the United States from the 2005–2006 edition of the *National Directory of Legal Employers* (National Association for Law Placement 2005) compiled by the National Association for Law Placement (NALP), a nonprofit organization established to provide information about employment to law schools and their students. The NALP conducts an annual survey of all law firms that carry out on-campus recruiting at law schools, asking for both quantitative and qualitative information, and compiles the results in annual editions of the *NALP Directory*. Firms report information as of February 1 of the publication year. Our unit of analysis is the office, not the entire firm. In most cases, law firms with multiple offices provide information pertaining to each office separately; the few firms that did not provide office-specific information were eliminated from our sample. We also removed from the sample any nonfirm employers (e.g., government agencies or public-interest law offices), offices located outside the United States, and offices with fewer than five lawyers. The final sample includes 1,394 offices.

Measures

Dependent variables. In the analyses that follow, we model the proportion of partners who belong to any of three racial or ethnic minority groups: African American, Latino, and Asian American. We also examine the proportions of partners who are members of each group separately. We follow previous research (Gorman 2005; Kalev 2009; Reskin and McBrier 2000) in transforming these proportions into their log odds to avoid predicted proportions below zero and above one, and because the functional form is likely to provide a better fit to the data.

Independent variables. The first set of independent variables captures formal professional development practices. Binary variables (coded 0–1) indicate whether an office offers a *formal training program* or a *formal mentoring program*. The typical period of time from entry to promotion, or *partnership track length*, is measured in years (ranging from four to nine and one-half years).

Measures of organizational culture were obtained from the narrative statements that firm offices provide in conjunction with their NALP survey responses.² These narrative statements were coded by three student research assistants. An initial subsample of fifty cases was coded by all three research assistants, resulting in high intercoder reliabilities. Before the assistants proceeded with additional coding, discrepancies in this subsample were discussed and resolved. Three binary variables (coded 0–1) measure whether the office's culture includes *a commitment to professional development*, *a norm of early and substantial responsibility*, and *an emphasis on collegiality*.

Control variables. The rate at which minorities are promoted to partnership depends on their presence among associates. *Minority group presence among associates* is measured by the proportion of associates who belong to the relevant group.

Various aspects of jobs and workplaces are also likely to influence the representation of minorities in managerial positions. Organizational size is a perennial subject of interest because it is closely associated with so many organizational processes. Larger, more visible organizations are also more susceptible to institutional pressures (Edelman 1990) that should operate to promote diversity. Size may also affect minority representation because it is closely associated with bureaucratization, which may help disadvantaged groups by establishing objective standards and procedures for employee evaluation (Baron et al. 2007). Organizational size is tapped by two measures: *office size* (the number of lawyers in the establishment as reported in the 2005–2006 NALP Directory) and whether the establishment's firm was included in the 2005 *AmLaw 200* rankings published by *American Lawyer* magazine. Similar to the *Fortune 500* for corporations, this data source ranks the top 200 U.S. law firms by their gross revenues; because revenues are generated by lawyers' billable hours, revenues are highly correlated with firm size. To capture bureaucratization more directly, we also include a measure of whether an office is divided by *departments* (0 if no, 1 if yes).

If employers tend to place whites ahead of minorities in their "labor queues" for hiring and promotion (Alon 2004; Reskin and Roos 1990), then minorities' prospects depend on the number of available positions relative to the number of white candidates interested in filling those positions. Thus, characteristics that make jobs more attractive are likely to be negatively associated with the representation of minorities, presumably because they then face greater competition from whites (and, conversely, characteristics that make jobs less attractive are likely to be positively linked to minority presence). At least one study has found a negative relationship between salary level and minority presence among

managers (Fields, Goodman, and Blum 2005). Although we do not have data for all cases on partner compensation, we do have a measure of the starting salary paid to associates. Associate and partner compensation are likely to be at least loosely linked. Because starting salaries vary across cities, we use the difference between an office's starting salary and the city mean.

We also include three structural characteristics that are likely to limit lawyers' opportunities for advancement, recognition, and self-actualization, thus making jobs less appealing to white competitors: leverage, a two-tier partnership, and branch office status (see Gorman and Kay 2010). *Leverage* is measured as the ratio of nonpartner lawyers to partners within the office. Higher leverage is associated with lower chances of making partner and, for those who do become partner, greater pressure to generate business to keep associates employed (but also greater profits in the event of success).³ A dichotomous variable (coded 0–1) indicates the presence of a *two-tier partnership* including both traditional, equity-holding partners and salaried lawyers who bear the title of "partner" without its traditional ownership rights. Another dichotomous variable indicates whether the office is a *branch office* (0 if headquarters, 1 if branch office); lawyers in a firm's principal office are likely to have better prospects and perform more interesting work.

Finally, three dichotomous variables indicating *region of the United States* (Midwest, South, and West, with Northeast as the reference category) were included to tap geographical variation in racial and ethnic presence.

Results

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, and ranges for the variables used in the analysis. In the average establishment, minorities represented 14 percent of associates and just 5 percent of partners. When we consider minority groups separately, we find African Americans made up 4 percent of associates and 1.6 percent of partners; Latinos, 3 percent of associates and 1.6 percent of partners; and Asian Americans, 7 percent of associates and 1.7 percent of partners. Thus, all three minority groups start out at different levels of representation in the lower ranks of firms but end up with a similar presence (1.6 to 1.7 percent) among partners. Formal training programs were more common (present in 39 percent of offices) than formal mentoring programs (less than 21 percent of offices offered these). A sizable share of establishments (41 percent) encouraged junior employees to take on significant responsibilities early, and the same percentage maintained a cultural value of fostering the professional development of junior employees. An emphasis on collegiality was present in only 22 percent of establishments.

The results of the multivariate regression analyses are presented in Tables 2 through 5. Huber-White standard errors are used because of likely violations of the assumptions that errors are independent and identically distributed.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis

| Variable | Mean | SD | Min. | Max. |
|---|--------|-----------|------|--------|
| Group presence among partners | | | | |
| Proportion minority | .049 | .089 | 0 | 1 |
| Proportion African American | .016 | .055 | 0 | 1 |
| Proportion Latino | .016 | .045 | 0 | .455 |
| Proportion Asian American | .017 | .049 | 0 | .583 |
| Formal training program | .391 | .488 | 0 | 1 |
| Formal mentoring program | .205 | .404 | 0 | 1 |
| Partnership track length | 7.66 | .821 | 4 | 9.5 |
| Cultural value on professional development | .406 | .491 | 0 | 1 |
| Cultural norm of early responsibility | .406 | .491 | 0 | 1 |
| Cultural value on collegiality | .450 | .498 | 0 | 1 |
| Group presence among associates | | | | |
| Proportion minority | .138 | .129 | 0 | 1 |
| Proportion African American | .040 | .062 | 0 | 1 |
| Proportion Latino | .032 | .064 | 0 | .833 |
| Proportion Asian American | .067 | .093 | 0 | 1 |
| Establishment size | 81.604 | 86.042 | 5 | 809 |
| <i>AmLaw 200</i> | .600 | .490 | 0 | 1 |
| Departments | .713 | .453 | 0 | 1 |
| Starting salary (difference from city mean) | -14.99 | 8,704.761 | 0 | 1 |
| Two-tier partnership | .500 | .500 | 0 | 1 |
| Leverage | 1.427 | 1.055 | .133 | 12.333 |
| Branch | .559 | .497 | 0 | 1 |
| Region Midwest | .149 | .356 | 0 | 1 |
| Region Northeast | .306 | .461 | 0 | 1 |
| Region South | .271 | .445 | 0 | 1 |
| Region West | .274 | .446 | 0 | 1 |

All minorities. Table 2 presents the equations modeling the proportion of partners who belong to any of the three minority groups. Model 1 is a baseline model including only control variables. As expected, the proportion of minorities among associates has a strong positive effect on minority presence among partners. Surprisingly, establishment size has a negative effect. The coefficient on a firm's membership in the *AmLaw 200* is also negative, but the effect does not reach statistical significance. Also unexpected is the negative impact of departmentalization. As we anticipated, minority presence among partners is positively associated with leverage (the ratio of nonpartners to partners) and with status as a branch office, but a two-tier partnership has no significant effect. Geographically,

TABLE 2
 Regressions of Log Odds of Proportion of Minorities among Partners on Selected
 Organizational Characteristics

| Variable | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Professional development practices | | | | |
| Formal training program | | .008 (.058) | .012 (.058) | -.001 (.055) |
| Formal mentoring program | | -.079 (.057) | -.081* (.056) | -.066 (.056) |
| Partnership track length | | -.076*** (.033) | -.076*** (.033) | -.074*** (.032) |
| Cultural values and norms | | | | |
| Cultural value on professional development | | -.089** (.049) | -.092** (.049) | -.079** (.047) |
| Cultural value on professional development × office size | | | .001** (.001) | |
| Cultural value on professional development × group presence among associates | | | | -1.059** (.508) |
| Cultural norm of early responsibility | | -.089** (.046) | -.091** (.046) | -.092** (.045) |
| Cultural value on collegiality | | .050 (.046) | .051 (.046) | .050 (.046) |
| Control variables | | | | |
| Group presence among associates | | | | |
| Proportion minority | 2.632**** (.456) | 2.703**** (.453) | 2.716**** (.452) | 2.639**** (.408) |
| Establishment size | -.002**** (.000) | -.002**** (.000) | -.002**** (.000) | -.002**** (.000) |
| <i>AmLaw 200</i> | -.059 (.063) | -.032 (.061) | -.032* (.061) | -.023* (.060) |
| Departments | -.167*** (.058) | -.141*** (.055) | -.136*** (.055) | -.151*** (.055) |
| Starting salary (difference from city mean) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) |
| Two-tier partnership | -.010 (.049) | -.005 (.053) | -.001 (.053) | -.002 (.053) |
| Leverage | .266**** (.028) | .278**** (.030) | .279**** (.030) | .276**** (.029) |
| Branch | .250**** (.071) | .290**** (.072) | .287**** (.073) | .295**** (.071) |
| Region Midwest ^a | .215*** (.068) | .195*** (.069) | .194*** (.069) | .196*** (.068) |
| Region South | .391**** (.059) | .337**** (.056) | .339**** (.056) | .339**** (.056) |
| Region West | .380**** (.060) | .344**** (.060) | .346**** (.060) | .351**** (.060) |
| Constant | -3.681**** (.100) | -3.113**** (.268) | -3.307**** (.267) | -2.784**** (.261) |
| R^2 | .328 | .358 | .360 | .362 |
| N | 1,384 | 1,353 | 1,353 | 1,353 |

NOTE: Standard errors appear in parentheses.

a.Comparison category is the Northeast region.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

minority representation is especially high in the West and South and lowest in the Northeast. These control variable effects do not change substantially across models, except that the coefficient on membership in the *AmLaw 200* becomes

TABLE 3
 Regressions of Log Odds of Proportion of African Americans among Partners on Selected Organizational Characteristics

| Variable | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Professional development practices | | | | |
| Formal training program | | -.005 (.046) | .001 (.046) | -.024 (.044) |
| Formal mentoring program | | .015 (.046) | .013 (.045) | .021 (.045) |
| Partnership track length | | -.010 (.028) | -.010 (.028) | -.010 (.027) |
| Cultural values and norms | | | | |
| Cultural value on professional development | | -.123*** (.042) | -.129*** (.043) | -.119*** (.042) |
| Cultural value on professional development × office size | | | .001** (.001) | -.2983*** (1.281) |
| Cultural value on professional development × group presence among associates | | | | |
| Cultural norm of early responsibility | | -.057* (.038) | -.060* (.038) | -.051* (.038) |
| Cultural value on collegiality | | .029 (.040) | .031 (.041) | .020 (.040) |
| Control variables | | | | |
| Group presence among associates | | | | |
| Proportion African American | 2.717*** (1.053) | 2.875*** (1.037) | 2.882*** (1.032) | 2.425*** (.786) |
| Establishment size | -.005*** (.001) | -.005*** (.001) | -.005*** (.001) | -.005*** (.001) |
| <i>AmLatw 200</i> | .012 (.053) | .024 (.052) | .024 (.053) | .041 (.050) |
| Departments | -.182*** (.054) | -.158*** (.049) | -.149*** (.050) | -.163*** (.048) |
| Starting salary (difference from city mean) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) |
| Two-tier partnership | -.016 (.043) | .011 (.046) | .018 (.046) | .019 (.046) |
| Leverage | .332*** (.029) | .338*** (.030) | .338*** (.030) | .340*** (.028) |
| Branch | .242*** (.064) | .286*** (.068) | .282*** (.068) | .273*** (.068) |
| Region Midwest ^a | .179*** (.062) | .172*** (.063) | .170*** (.064) | .175*** (.063) |
| Region South | .226*** (.056) | .183*** (.051) | .187*** (.051) | .188*** (.051) |
| Region West | .103** (.053) | .097* (.056) | .102* (.056) | .094* (.056) |
| Constant | -3.698*** (.106) | -3.646*** (.244) | -4.126*** (.244) | -3.585*** (.234) |
| R ² | .428 | .468 | .473 | .475 |
| N | 1,384 | 1,353 | 1,353 | 1,353 |

NOTE: Standard errors appear in parentheses.

a. Comparison category is the Northeast region.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

TABLE 4
 Regressions of Log Odds of Proportion of Latinos among Partners on Selected Organizational Characteristics

| Variable | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Professional development practices | | | | |
| Formal training program | | -.047 (.048) | -.041 (.048) | -.048 (.048) |
| Formal mentoring program | | -.099** (.051) | -.101** (.050) | -.101** (.050) |
| Partnership track length | | -.066*** (.027) | -.065*** (.027) | -.066*** (.027) |
| Cultural values and norms | | | | |
| Cultural value on professional development | | -.058* (.041) | -.064* (.043) | -.059* (.041) |
| Cultural value on professional development × office size | | | .001** (.001) | .444 (.826) |
| Cultural value on professional development × group | | | | |
| presence among associates | | | | |
| Cultural norm of early responsibility | | -.001 (.042) | -.002 (.042) | -.003 (.042) |
| Cultural value on collegiality | | .012 (.040) | .014 (.041) | .011 (.041) |
| Control variables | | | | |
| Group presence among associates | | | | |
| Proportion Latino | 3.251*** (.489) | 3.360*** (.486) | 3.393*** (.482) | 3.320*** (.501) |
| Establishment size | -.006*** (.001) | -.006*** (.001) | -.006*** (.001) | -.006*** (.001) |
| <i>AmLaw 200</i> | -.064 (.058) | -.039 (.058) | .039 (.057) | -.038 (.058) |
| Departments | -.162*** (.043) | -.163*** (.043) | -.154*** (.044) | -.164*** (.044) |
| Starting salary (difference from city mean) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) |
| Two-tier partnership | -.047 (.041) | -.051 (.044) | -.045 (.044) | -.052 (.044) |
| Leverage | .384*** (.030) | .386*** (.031) | .387*** (.032) | .386*** (.032) |
| Branch | .323*** (.067) | .363*** (.069) | .360*** (.068) | .363*** (.069) |
| Region Midwest ^a | .111** (.058) | .095 (.059) | .093 (.059) | .095 (.059) |
| Region South | .279*** (.048) | .261*** (.050) | .264*** (.050) | .261*** (.050) |
| Region West | .245*** (.048) | .222*** (.050) | .225*** (.050) | .222*** (.050) |
| Constant | -3.807*** (.094) | -3.301*** (.217) | -3.809*** (.217) | -3.215*** (.218) |
| R ² | .565 | .571 | .575 | .572 |
| N | 1,384 | 1,353 | 1,353 | 1,353 |

NOTE: Standard errors appear in parentheses.
 a. Comparison category is the Northeast region.
 * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

TABLE 5
 Regressions of Log Odds of Proportion of Asian Americans among Partners on Selected Organizational Characteristics

| Variable | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Professional development practices | | | | |
| Formal training program | | -.077** (.043) | -.073** (.043) | -.080** (.043) |
| Formal mentoring program | | -.043 (.046) | -.044 (.046) | -.034 (.047) |
| Partnership track length | | -.074*** (.026) | -.074*** (.026) | -.075*** (.026) |
| Cultural values and norms | | | | |
| Cultural value on professional development | | -.006 (.045) | -.010 (.045) | -.002 (.045) |
| Cultural value on professional development × office size | | | .001* (.001) | |
| Cultural value on professional development × group presence | | | | -1.181** (.513) |
| among associates | | | | |
| Cultural norm of early responsibility | | -.094*** (.037) | -.096*** (.037) | -.092*** (.037) |
| Cultural value on collegiality | | .040 (.037) | .041 (.037) | .039 (.037) |
| Control variables | | | | |
| Group presence among associates | | | | |
| Proportion Asian American | 1.625*** (.400) | 1.582*** (.409) | 1.597*** (.407) | 1.570*** (.363) |
| Establishment size | -.006*** (.001) | -.006*** (.001) | -.005*** (.001) | -.005*** (.001) |
| <i>AmLaw 200</i> | -.094* (.054) | -.072 (.055) | .072 (.054) | -.068 (.054) |
| Departments | -.177*** (.048) | -.179*** (.047) | -.173*** (.048) | -.192*** (.048) |
| Starting salary (difference from city mean) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) | .000 (.000) |
| Two-tier partnership | -.081** (.041) | -.092** (.046) | -.088** (.046) | -.094** (.046) |
| Leverage | .337*** (.028) | .341*** (.029) | .341*** (.029) | .337*** (.029) |
| Branch | .345*** (.068) | .388*** (.068) | .386*** (.068) | .397*** (.068) |
| Region Midwest ^a | .055** (.058) | .034 (.059) | .034 (.059) | .036 (.058) |
| Region South | .027 (.047) | -.009 (.047) | -.005 (.047) | -.009 (.046) |
| Region West | .330*** (.052) | .297*** (.053) | .299*** (.052) | .300*** (.052) |
| Constant | -3.643*** (.093) | -3.047*** (.216) | -3.499*** (.212) | -2.927*** (.209) |
| R ² | .532 | .538 | .539 | .541 |
| N | 1,384 | 1,353 | 1,353 | 1,353 |

NOTE: Standard errors appear in parentheses.

a.Comparison category is the Northeast region.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

marginally significant ($p < .10$) when interaction terms are included in models 3 and 4.

Model 2 introduces the professional development variables. Neither formal training programs nor formal mentoring programs are significantly associated with overall minority presence among partners. Longer partnership tracks reduce minority representation. Interestingly, a cultural value of fostering the professional development of junior employees has a significant negative effect, consistent with our second alternative conjecture about the role of this variable. A cultural norm of encouraging early responsibility is also negatively linked to minority presence among partners, in line with our second alternative argument. A cultural emphasis on collegiality is not significantly associated with the proportion of minority partners.

In model 3, we add an interaction between a cultural commitment to professional development and office size. Model 4 substitutes an interaction between a cultural emphasis on professional development and minority presence among associates. Because both continuous variables were centered before the multiplicative interaction terms were created, the coefficients on the cultural value variable reflect its effect when office size (in model 3) and proportion of minorities among associates (in model 4) are at their means. In model 3, as we anticipated, the coefficient on the interaction with office size is positive and significant, indicating that the negative effect of a cultural value on fostering professional development is weaker in larger offices.⁴ Conversely, the negative effect of organizational size is only half as strong in offices with a stronger cultural commitment to professional development. The coefficient on the formal mentoring program indicator also becomes marginally significant ($p < .10$) and negative in this model.

In model 4, also as expected, the coefficient on the interaction with minority group presence among associates is negative, indicating that the negative impact of a cultural value on fostering professional development is especially strong when minorities hold a greater share of associate positions. At the same time, the positive effect of high representation of minorities among the associate ranks is diminished when an organizational culture places greater emphasis on professional development.

Specific minority groups. Table 3 presents results for African American partners. While the pattern of results is similar to those for all minorities jointly, a few differences are worth noting. Partnership track length is not significantly associated with African American presence among partners, whereas it was for minorities overall. The coefficient on a cultural emphasis on professional development is more negative for African Americans than it is for all minorities together, and the coefficient on the interaction between this cultural value and group presence among associates is nearly three times as large in absolute value for African Americans as it is for minorities overall. Finally, the negative impact of a norm of early responsibility is only marginally significant for African Americans.

Results for Latinos are reported in Table 4. In contrast to the results for all minorities together, formal mentoring programs are significantly negatively

associated with Latino representation among partners. Interestingly, the negative impact of a cultural value on professional development is only marginally significant for Latinos ($p < .10$), and the interaction between this cultural value and group presence among associates is not statistically significant here. A norm of early responsibility also has no significant effect.

Finally, Table 5 presents results for Asian Americans. Relative to the results for all minorities together, Asian Americans are distinctive in that the presence of a formal training program is negatively associated with their representation among partners. Intriguingly, a cultural emphasis on professional development has no significant impact for Asian Americans. However, similar to African Americans but unlike Latinos, the interaction between this cultural value and group presence among associates is negative, indicating that the effect of this cultural value becomes more negative as the Asian American share of associate positions increases. Finally, it is clear that Asian Americans are primarily responsible for the negative impact of norms of early responsibility that we saw for all minorities together in Table 2.

There is notable consistency across the different racial groups when we examine the control variables. The proportions of all three groups among partners increase with their group's current representation among associates. Larger offices and establishments with departments have negative effects on the proportions of all three racial groups among firm partners. Both leverage and status as a branch office are positively associated with presence among partners for all three racial groups. Only the role of a two-tier partnership varies: it is negatively linked to representation among partners for Asian Americans but not for the other two groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

Organizations that hope to fill a substantial number of their management positions through internal promotion have an interest in the growth and development of their nonmanagement employees. Such organizations often maintain both formal practices and cultural values intended to bolster nonmanagement employees' technical skills, interpersonal competencies, and social connections. Although these practices and values are not specifically aimed at fostering diversity, it is intuitively appealing to think that minority employees might derive particular benefit from them. Whites are likely to have better access to informal developmental opportunities (Kay, Hagan, and Parker 2009), so organizational efforts to make developmental experiences uniformly available should help to "level the playing field."

Our findings suggest that this intuitive expectation is misguided. Strikingly, none of the practices or cultural characteristics considered was positively associated with the presence of minorities among partners—the management tier of large law firms. All of them had either negative effects or no effects.

Perhaps the most notable finding is that an organizational culture of fostering and taking responsibility for employees' professional development works to *decrease* the proportions of minorities in management. Yet as institutional theorists have reminded us (Meyer and Rowan 1977), there is often a "loose coupling" between organizations' formal pronouncements and their implementation. A firm may articulate and celebrate a cultural commitment to the growth and development of employees, but in practice that culture may not be fully inclusive. Indeed, senior managers who receive cultural encouragement to nurture the progress of nonmanagement juniors may simply direct their attention even more vigorously to protégés who are socially similar to themselves. If this interpretation is correct, it may help to explain the unanticipated finding that the negative effect of a cultural emphasis on professional development is strongest for African Americans, marginal for Latinos, and nonsignificant for Asian Americans. It is possible that white senior managers feel the least social dissimilarity and discomfort with Asian American protégés, somewhat more with Latinos, and considerably more with African Americans.

Loosening long-standing patterns of occupational segregation will require that organizations move beyond well-intended cultures of professional development and collegiality to implement programs that are fully inclusive of racial minorities in their day-to-day reality. An important policy implication of our findings is that mentoring and training programs within organizations need to be purposely designed with minorities in mind and monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure inclusivity as well as assessed in terms of outcomes for all employees. Interestingly, we found that both organizational size and the representation of minorities among nonmanagement employees moderate the impact of a cultural emphasis on professional development. In the case of organizational size, the interaction is positive, so that the negative effect of a cultural emphasis on professional development becomes weaker as organizational size increases. Although additional research is needed, it is possible that larger organizations are better able to translate their cultural values into actual behavior on the part of senior managers. Furthermore, in larger organizations, mentors and sponsors may be more aware of the organizational context surrounding them and more likely to understand themselves as enacting organizational roles, rather than merely forming personal bonds with protégés. It is also worth noting that, conversely, a cultural value on professional development lessens the negative effect of organizational size. The decline in the proportion of minority partners as office size increases hints that once a firm has demonstrated its political and institutional legitimacy by including a certain number of minorities in its management ranks, further increases in minority presence are seen as unnecessary, regardless of size. A cultural emphasis on professional development may exert pressure to lessen this sort of tokenism.

The interaction between a cultural commitment to professional development and group presence at lower levels is negative, so that the negative effect becomes stronger as a greater share of nonmanagement positions are filled by minorities. More research is needed, but it seems that as minority group presence among

nonmanagement employees increases, organizations have increasing difficulty in implementing this cultural commitment in an even-handed way. Sociologists have long argued that racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination increase as a minority group increases in size and is perceived to pose a greater threat to the dominant group (Blalock 1967). Consistent with this idea, it may be that, as minority presence among nonmanagement employees grows, white senior managers increasingly respond to their firm's cultural mandate by concentrating their mentoring and sponsorship efforts toward white protégés.

Some research suggests that racial minorities are disadvantaged by a lack of opportunity to take on significant responsibility early in their careers (Sander 2006). Because they are asked to prove their competence repeatedly before being trusted with challenging tasks, they have fewer opportunities to gain visibility and take longer to advance than their white counterparts (Thomas and Gabarro 1999). However, early responsibility can be a double-edged sword for minority employees: if they are assigned responsibility and make mistakes, those mistakes are likely to be viewed much more negatively—and more conclusively attributed to weak ability—than the comparable missteps of whites. Our finding that a norm of early responsibility is negatively associated with minority representation at the partner level suggests that the second process outweighs the first.

Formal practices intended to aid nonmanagement employees in building and demonstrating skills and resources also fail to benefit minorities. One might expect that formal training and mentoring programs would help by offsetting minorities' likely disadvantage in access to informal developmental opportunities. Yet neither type of program has a positive effect on minority representation among partners. Although formal training programs may provide certain important information and limited opportunities to practice new skills, they likely fall far short of imparting the full range of technical and interpersonal skills that are vital to being perceived as having managerial potential—let alone the social connections and alliances that are essential for success. Formal mentoring programs, as well, are likely too limited in their effects to make a real difference. Research suggests that formal mentoring arrangements tend to be shorter in duration and less close than informal mentoring and focused primarily on technical skills and procedures rather than on career planning, advice on office politics, emotional support, and reputation building (Kay, Hagan and Parker 2009; Ragins and Cotton 1999). In formal mentoring programs, where matches are assigned rather than arising from interpersonal compatibility, mentors may lack motivation to act on behalf of their associates. Studies have documented the challenges of formal mentoring programs, including unmet expectations (on the part of associates), lack of attraction for identification, failure to forge a postprogram relationship, scheduling difficulties, mentor neglect, and feelings of personal inadequacy (by mentors) (Blake-Beard 2001; Eby and Lockwood 2004). Thus, while formal training and mentoring programs may be better than nothing, they typically yield more modest career outcomes than informal arrangements (Underhill 2006). More difficult to understand are the unanticipated negative

effects of formal training programs for Asian Americans and of formal mentoring programs for Latinos.

The length of the typical or expected time until promotion into management—in law firms, the partnership track—also plays a role in shaping racial minorities' representation among managers. Longer “probationary” periods of this sort are sometimes thought to be beneficial to employees who face a disadvantage of some kind. For example, “mommy tracks” in corporations and paused tenure clocks in universities are meant to allow parents additional time to establish a strong record of performance. Moreover, there is evidence that minorities often require more time than whites to attain promotion (Thomas and Gabarro 1999). However, if the same lengthened period is made available to employees who are *not* disadvantaged—in this case, whites—the extended period may worsen minorities' promotion prospects by enabling repeated cycles of cumulative advantage for whites and cumulative disadvantage for minorities. As a result, by the time the normative period to promotion expires, minority employees may, on average, have acquired fewer important skills than their white counterparts, thus limiting their prospects even if the promotion process is entirely fair. Moreover, minority employees, recognizing the compounding effects of being repeatedly passed over for career development experiences, are less likely than whites to feel committed to a future with the firm and more likely to leave in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

These interpretations of our results are necessarily tentative, because our data are subject to several important limitations. First, we lack information on processes at the individual and interactional levels, such as characteristics of and ties between minority partners, their white peers, and the decision-makers who originally chose to admit them to the partnership. Second, our data are cross-sectional, so we are unable to determine causal order with certainty. However, the reverse causal order does not seem plausible; it is hard to see why a greater minority presence among partners would make firms less likely to establish practices or uphold values aimed at the internal growth and development of nonmanagement employees. Finally, we have information only on “stocks” and not on “flows.” In other words, we have data on the proportions of partners who were members of various minority groups at a given point in time, but we lack information on the number of minorities and whites entering the partnership through promotion or external hiring and the number leaving the partnership through retirement or departure.

However, processes of internal upward mobility remain important for increasing racial and ethnic diversity and equality among managers. Broadly speaking, our findings align with the view that the formalization of human resources policies furthers these ends by checking bias and introducing procedural fairness (Reskin 2000). Although formal developmental practices do little to help minorities, our findings suggest that informal, cultural approaches to professional development actively hurt them. No matter how well intentioned such approaches may be, day-to-day behavior in organizations is only loosely coupled with organizational

ideals, and policies that are intended to be even-handed may not be implemented in that fashion. Hearing organizational encouragement to provide mentoring and support, senior managers may simply direct their efforts more energetically to aiding protégés who are socially similar to themselves.

Notes

1. By the term “formal training program,” we intend to refer to relatively intensive and sustained classroom-style sessions—not brief orientation sessions or occasional workshops—in which managers and senior colleagues present information and attempt to impart skills.

2. In most cases, offices provide statements independently, but a few firms supply the same statement for all offices.

3. Leverage could also have a negative influence on minority presence among managers, because it is associated with a steeper hierarchical structure and fewer managerial positions to fill. Thus, leverage could mean that employers find it easier to meet their staffing needs with whites and are not pushed to go deeper into their “labor queues.”

4. The effect does not actually become positive until office size reaches 174, nearly the 90th percentile of the office size distribution in our sample.

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