

**An exploration of the career barriers faced by black  
women in middle management: An application of  
Schlossberg's Transition Theory**

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**A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand,  
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## **Declaration**

I declare that this is my own unaided work, and that I have given full acknowledgment to the sources that I have used. This research is being submitted for the Degrees of Masters of Arts (Industrial Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

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## **Abstract**

This study explored the career barriers of black women in middle management through the application of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The rationale behind the study was informed by statistics that show that there are few black women in top management, a fact attributable to the double discrimination faced during Apartheid because of their gender and race. The two aims of the study were to explore any career barriers that these women may be experiencing or have experienced as they attempt to advance their careers to top management; and secondly, to explore the coping strategies that these women use to deal with the barriers experienced while attempting to advance their careers. In order to investigate the research questions, nine women who met the criteria of the study participated in semi-structured interviews. The study was qualitative in nature, and the interview transcripts were analyzed through thematic content analysis. The main themes were identified and presented under the 4 S's: Situation, Self, Support and Strategy. What became apparent from the findings was that the participants were dealing with a dual challenge of gender and race discrimination. They were also dealing with role conflict and other barriers such as politics in the workplace and age discrimination. However, it was found that these women were proactive in confronting their challenges as they engaged in numerous coping strategies including education and social support to cope with the career barriers. Schlossberg's Transition Theory proved to be an appropriate framework for exploration of the career barriers and thus the application of this theory had implications for theory, organisations and future research.

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