

# **“Don’t put my name on it”: Social Capital Activation and Job-Finding Assistance among the Black Urban Poor<sup>1</sup>**

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From a social capital theoretical perspective, deficiencies in access to mainstream ties and institutions explain persistent joblessness among the black urban poor. Little problematized, however, is the extent to which access leads to mobilization and the social context within which social capital activation occurs. Employing in-depth interviews of 105 low-income African-Americans, this work advances the literature in two ways. First, it suggests that what we have come to view as deficiencies in access among the black urban poor may have more to do with functional deficiencies of their job referral networks. Second, the findings from this study lay the groundwork for a single, multilevel conceptual framework within which to understand social capital activation, a framework that takes into consideration properties of the individuals, dyads, and communities of residence.

## INTRODUCTION

Within the urban poverty literature, social isolation from mainstream ties and institutions is the basis upon which the black urban poor are presumed to lack social capital that facilitates job finding (Briggs 1998; Ran-

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kin and Quane 2000; Tigges, Brown, and Green 1998; Wacquant and Wilson 1989). As a result, it is argued that absent access to personal contacts who are able to provide job information and influence hires, even during strong economic times, members of this group still have great difficulty finding work (Wilson 1987). Recent evidence suggests, however, that their social isolation has been exaggerated. These studies provide convincing evidence that the networks of the black urban poor are larger, more diverse and wide ranging, and much less detached from the mainstream than conventional wisdom indicates (Oliver 1988; Hurlbert, Beggs, and Haines 1998; Newman 1999), thus raising an interesting question. If social isolation has been overestimated, what is the source of the black urban poor's social capital deficiency?

Qualitative research suggests that even when connected to ties who can provide job information and influence, the black urban poor often have difficulty *mobilizing* these ties for job-finding assistance (Jackson 2001; Newman 1999). In *No Shame in My Game*, for instance, Katherine Newman (1999) notes that among the low-wage workers she studied, personal contacts were vital to the job-matching process, but assistance was not always forthcoming. Fearing that their referrals would prove unreliable and would compromise their reputations with employers, a few of her subjects denied help to their job-seeking ties. Access, therefore, did not guarantee mobilization.

While the work of Newman and others is noteworthy, it is only suggestive. Without systematic investigations of job contacts' willingness to assist, we do not know why and to what extent those in possession of job information and influence are willing (or disinclined) to provide job-finding assistance, as well as what conditions have to be met for assistance to be forthcoming. This study attempts to fill these gaps in the literature, both empirically and theoretically. First, by exploring the process of making job referrals, I systematically document the concerns that the black urban poor have about providing assistance and investigate the effect that these concerns have on their general willingness to come to their job-seeking ties' aid. Second, because prior research has not problematized the conditions that facilitate social capital activation during the job referral process, it is unclear what factors explain variations in job contacts' decisions to assist their job-seeking ties. Drawing from a wide variety of earlier investigations, I show that the factors favorable to social capital activation operate at multiple levels, and I offer a single, multilevel conceptual framework within which to understand social capital activation.

Employing in-depth interviews and survey data of 105 low-income

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African-Americans from one midwestern city, I find that those in possession of job information and influence overwhelmingly approached job-finding assistance with great skepticism and distrust. Over 80% of respondents in my sample expressed concern that job seekers in their networks were too unmotivated to accept assistance, required great expenditures of time and emotional energy, or acted too irresponsibly on the job, thereby jeopardizing contacts' own reputations in the eyes of employers and negatively affecting their already-tenuous labor market prospects. Consequently, they were generally reluctant to provide the type of assistance that best facilitates job acquisition in low-wage labor markets where employers rely heavily on informal referrals for recruitment and screening.

Social capital activation did occur, however, even in the context of pervasive distrust and perceived untrustworthiness. An examination of the job referral process revealed that assistance was contingent on several factors, including the SES of the neighborhoods in which contacts resided and the strength of their relationships with their job-seeking ties. However, decisions regarding the extent and nature of assistance were most profoundly affected by the interaction between job contacts' own reputations and job seekers' reputations. Overwhelmingly, job contacts were concerned about job seekers' prior behaviors and actions in the workplace and at home, as these indicated how they might behave once hired. Given little consideration were job seekers whose past indicated unreliability and those whose behaviors were characterized as "ghetto." Both types represented high risks. However, job contacts' decisions to assist also depended a great deal on their own reputations with employers. Those held in high regard were generally willing to assist even job seekers of ill repute. However, as their standing with employers declined, contacts became far more discriminating.

Thus, this study contributes to the literature on many levels. Findings indicate that social capital deficiencies of the black urban poor may have less to do with *deficiencies in access* to mainstream ties than previously thought. Instead, the inefficaciousness of job referral networks appears to have more to do with *functional deficiencies* (see Coleman and Hoffer 1987)—the disinclination of potential job contacts to assist when given the opportunity to do so, not because they lack information or the ability to influence hires, but because they perceive pervasive untrustworthiness among their job-seeking ties and choose not to assist. Furthermore, to the extent that social capital activation does occur, I show that decisions to assist are contingent on several factors, including the SES of contacts' community of residence, the strength of relationships with their job-seeking ties, and individuals' reputations and status. With these findings in mind, I propose a multilevel conceptual framework that understands

social capital activation as a function of properties at the community, the dyad, and the individual, thus laying the groundwork for future research designed to test rigorously the hypotheses implied herein.

#### SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY IN THE STATUS-ATTAINMENT TRADITION

##### Access and Mobilized Models

In the process of status attainment, Nan Lin (2001) differentiates between two types of social capital—accessed and mobilized. This distinction represents a potentially valuable route for rethinking the relationship between social capital, job finding, and joblessness among the black urban poor. Accessed social capital models explain status attainment as a function of individuals' network structure and composition (Boxman, De Graaf, and Flap 1991; Burt 1992, 1997; Campbell, Marsden, and Hurlbert 1986; Granovetter 1985; Lin and Dumin 1986; Lin 1999). In contrast to accessed social capital models, mobilized social capital models are limited to studies in which personal contacts have been used for instrumental action, such as job finding. Here, status attainment is explained as a function of the status of the job contact who provided aid (Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn 1981; Marsden and Hurlbert 1988; De Graaf, Dirk, and Flap 1988).

Having distinguished between accessed and mobilized social capital, however, a crucial aspect of social capital theory remains underdeveloped. Access assumed, what explains variation in actors' ability to mobilize social resources for instrumental action? After all, individuals' social proximity to others does not guarantee that the resources attached to others will be forthcoming, as the work of Newman (1999) has shown and as Lin intimates: "Not all persons accessed with rich social capital are expected to take advantage of or be able to mobilize social capital for the purpose of obtaining better socioeconomic status. An element of action and choice should also be significant" (2001, p. 92). Observations such as these call for a thorough examination of the social contexts that affect the likelihood of social capital activation.

#### SOCIAL CAPITAL ACTIVATION: TOWARD A SINGLE, MULTILEVEL FRAMEWORK

If we define social capital as the resources that actors have access to by dint of their connection to others in groups, networks, or organizations, social capital activation, at least within the status-attainment tradition, is the point at which these resources are shared—when one or more actors provides instrumental or expressive aid to others, beginning or continuing

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a series of nonnegotiated or reciprocal exchanges. This treatment of social capital activation is consistent with social capital conceptualizations offered by Pierre Bourdieu (1985) and James Coleman (1988, 1990), both of whom highlight the importance of reciprocal exchanges for social capital development and the facilitation of its activation. However, it is clear from earlier work that the factors favorable to social capital activation operate at multiple levels. These include, but are not limited to, properties of the individual, the dyad, the network, and the community. Thus, an important next step is to assemble relevant work into a single, multilevel framework designed to inform future research endeavors and to help refine our theories of social capital and its mobilization. Consider the following an informal sketch of a baseline model.

### Individual-Level Properties

*Reputation.*—According to social exchange theory, social capital activation is at least in part facilitated by attributes of the individuals involved in the potential exchange. Specifically, given competing alternatives—whether or not to assist and with whom to do so—reputation is critical for determining action (see Granovetter 1985). According to Robert Wilson, “Reputation is a characteristic or attribute ascribed to one person by another” (1985, p. 27). In this sense, reputation is at least in part the product of one’s network of relations. It is through the network that knowledge about how an actor behaves in the context of one relationship spreads to others with whom the actor might deal. Furthermore, the quality of social judgments is itself conditioned on embeddedness, since the accuracy with which individuals are judged is only as good as allowed by the extent and nature of one’s network of relations.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the

<sup>2</sup> Although Coleman (1988, 1990) has argued that social closure enhances the flow of information such that accurate assessments of others’ behavior exist for all, others point to the ways in which structural embeddedness characterized by network closure actually constrains information flow, making social judgments at best only rough estimates of actual quality. For instance, to explain the loose linkage between a producer’s status and the actual quality of the goods he or she produces, Podolny (1993) points to an actor’s network of relations as a mediating factor, arguing that embeddedness can inhibit access to others who are able to provide the latest information about the quality of products, creating a lag between the time the quality of the product has changed and perceptions that actors have of the product. Similarly, embeddedness in a network of relations can constrain access to up-to-date information about one’s reputation such that it may no longer correspond with one’s most recent behaviors and actions. Gould (2002), too, cautions against assuming that one’s status is an accurate reflection of his or her qualities. Instead, because actors use others’ judgments as a general guide for their own assessments of individuals of interest, socially influenced judgments are often amplified such that, as Gould explains, “actors who objectively rank above the mean on some abstract quality dimension are overvalued while

opinions and actions of those making social judgments are largely attributable to the observations they have of actors' past actions or behaviors. One's good name may be determined by others, but others' determinations originate from one's own actions, by and large. Thus, reputation largely inheres in the individual. It is up to individual actors either to cultivate or destroy their reputations (see Kreps 1996).

More important, however, is the role that reputation plays in facilitating social capital activation. Because of information asymmetries, quality is not often known before an exchange occurs (Shapiro 1982; Podolny 1993), contributing to the uncertainty of the situation. To reduce perceptions of risk associated with uncertainty, actors look to reputation on the assumption that past behavior is indicative of how individuals will act in the future. All else being equal, the greater one's reputation, the lower the perceived risk of loss and the greater others' willingness to partake in reciprocal exchanges. Reputation, then, acts as a signal, in the formal economic sense (Spence 1974). It leads to an expectation of quality from which calculations of risk can be made and decisions about whether and how to act can be determined (see Kollock [1994] for evidence of reputation's role in the formation of stable exchange relationships under conditions of uncertainty).

What I have laid out thus far assumes a two-party exchange in which the reputation of the potential beneficiary is the central focus. The effect of reputation on decisions to exchange is complicated further in three-party exchanges where one party, B, acts as an intermediary between two others, A and C. In such situations, B's decision to assist A by matching him or her with C is not only based on whether or not A is reputable; attention to short- and longer-run consequences requires that B consider the state of his or her own reputation with C as well. As Wilson states succinctly,

To be optimal, the player's strategy must take into consideration the following chain of reasoning. First, his current reputation affects others' predictions of his current behavior and thereby affects their current actions; so he must take account of his own current reputation to anticipate their

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those ranking below the mean are undervalued—relative to the baseline scenario, in which social influence does not operate" (2002, p. 1146). Although Gould's objective was to theorize about the persistence of status hierarchies, the analogue to reputation, another socially influenced judgment, is evident. Burt's (2001) bandwidth and echo discussion is also of note here as he, too, takes to task the notion that embeddedness marked by closure enhances information flow, an argument consistent with a bandwidth hypothesis. Instead he argues that closure constrains access to new and different information by encouraging only the echoing of others' social judgments such that these judgments become amplifications of original dispositions, whether positive or negative. Because of etiquette, information contrary to others' observations becomes difficult to share, and thus the accuracy of social judgments is questionable.

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current actions and therefore to determine his best response. Second, if he is likely to have choices to make in the future, then he must realize that whatever are the immediate consequences of his current decision, there will also be longer-term consequences due to the effect of his current decision to his future reputation, and others' anticipation that he will take these longer-term consequences into account affects their current actions as well. (Wilson 1985, p. 28)

The context of providing job-finding assistance is consistent with such a three-party exchange. Here, job contacts act as intermediaries—as lobbyists for job seekers and advisors to employers (see Coleman [1990] for the distinction between intermediaries as advisors, guarantors, and entrepreneurs). Based on job contacts' reputation, employers will make predictions about whether or not job contacts' referrals will pay off, and so job contacts' decisions about whether or not to act as advisors to employers—or how to approach the advisory role—will hinge on their reputations with employers. Among those with sterling reputations, employers will likely look upon their referrals favorably, assuming contacts' judgments to be sound. Job contacts, perceiving this, are more likely to refer their personal contacts. Among those with subpar reputations, employers will likely think twice, correlating contacts' past behavior and actions with those of any referrals they make. Job contacts in this position are less likely to refer their personal contacts. These are the short-term considerations.

For those concerned with the long-term consequences of their behavior, they will also consider job seekers' reputations. This is because the outcome of matches will undoubtedly affect their reputations, and thus their future opportunities. Whether or not job contacts are allowed to assist again, receive promotions, or get raises may all hinge on the reputations they develop as a result of the matches they mediate. Thus, if job seekers are of known ill repute—say they are profoundly unreliable—then job contacts will not likely refer them to their employers for employment. However, if the word is that job seekers are reliable, job contacts' willingness to assist will increase.

But interaction effects must be considered as well. Job contacts with reputations built on a long history of positive behavior may very well suffer little from a botched referral, for instance, and thus may have a greater willingness to assist job seekers whose reputations are shaky, perceiving that their future reputations, and thus future opportunities, will be unharmed by one or two blemishes. Ill-reputed job contacts concerned with long-term consequences will have a narrower range of options from which to choose, however. Bad referrals will only weaken their standing in the firm, reducing the likelihood that they will be able to take advantage of opportunities that arise in the future. To optimize outcomes, then, those

held in low regard can only hope to improve their reputations, and thus their competitive edge, by aiding those job seekers who are themselves held in high regard.

*Status.*—Social capital activation is likely also contingent on the status of both job contacts and job seekers. According to Gould, status is “the prestige accorded to individuals because of the abstract positions they occupy rather than because of immediately observable behavior” (2002, p. 1147; cf. Podolny [1993] for an alternative, network-based conception of status). It is on this last point that reputation is distinguished from status. Whereas reputation is a signal of quality and an indication of future behavior that is based largely on prior actions and behaviors, status is a signal of quality and an indication of future behavior that is based largely on the positions that occupants hold. In practical terms, it is the difference between saying, “I know this applicant will do well because she has performed well” (reputation) and saying, “I know this applicant will do well because she graduated from an elite university” (status). With status, there is an assumption that prior actions or achievements at some point led to one’s position, but it is because of the positions themselves that occupants are accorded respect or not.

There are at least two ways in which social capital activation may be contingent on the status of the individuals involved in the job search process. First, job contacts may decide whether or not to assist based on the social prestige attached to the positions that *they* hold. In *No Shame in My Game*, for instance, Newman (1999) discusses the social costs of accepting low-wage work, especially those associated with the fast-food industry. Besides wages that dwell close to the bottom of the pay scale, this type of work is stigmatized for the high level of routinization involved, the lack of autonomy, the perception of limited opportunities for upward mobility, and the notion that, with fast-food employment, workers must suppress their feelings of anger and resentment in order to tolerate mistreatment occasioned by customers who in numerous ways remind them of their low social status (Leidner 1993). “Service with a smile” can be degrading work, affording its occupants little in the way of self-respect, worth, and social prestige—a serious dilemma, especially for those who reside in communities where respect is difficult to acquire and easy to lose (Anderson 1999). As a result, Newman found that it is not unusual for occupants of positions like these to be maligned, chastised, and ridiculed by their network of relations who deem such jobs and what they stand for to be too unworthy to hold, even in the context of persistent poverty. Thus, job contacts occupying positions held in such low regard may choose not to share the information that they have nor to influence hires, perceiving that others in their network will be loath to consider their offers and indeed may take the opportunity to remind job contacts



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of their own unwise choice. Indeed, one of Newman's teenage subjects was so fearful that he would be the subject of mockery and derision by his friends that he withheld from them his place of employment.

Job seekers' status likely matters as well. Just as reputation signals to job contacts how job seekers might behave posthire, job seekers' current status also provides indications of likely future behavior if only because one's current status is perceived to be at least in part a function of the quality of one's character and past performance (Frank 1988; Gould 2002). Thus, job contacts' willingness to assist their job-seeking ties will likely depend on such factors as whether or not job seekers are currently employed, receive public assistance, have been convicted of a crime, have graduated high school, or are enrolled in college. In the minds of discriminating job contacts, each of these factors has relevance for determining the quality of character associated with their job-seeking ties, which will likely bear heavily on how they will behave in the future.

### Dyadic Properties

*Strength of tie.*—Drawing from the literature on social exchange, we might also conceptualize social capital activation in terms of properties of the dyad. This is because, independent of the status and reputations that individuals have developed outside of the context of the relationship, trust and trustworthiness can develop between potential exchange partners in such a way that facilitates instrumental aid (Burt 2001; Cook and Hardin 2001). According to Peter Blau (1964), trust and trustworthiness in dyadic relationships emerge from a history of successful reciprocal exchanges. The initiation of informal exchange relationships is typically characterized by relatively small-scale exchanges, such as borrowing or lending a book. As these smaller obligations are honored and riskier exchanges are undertaken with success, uncertainty about exchange partners' reliability declines, and trust between partners grows (Kollock 1994). Iterated exchanges also have a tendency to breed stronger, more cohesive and affective bonds (Lawler and Yoon 1996, 1998). For both of these reasons, the likelihood that future exchanges will occur increases (Molm, Takahashi, and Peterson 2000). Unpaid obligations, on the other hand, lead to distrust and erode the chances of long-term exchanges since actors whose credits go unpaid will likely withdraw from future exchanges or change the extent and nature of the exchanges to which they do commit. As Burt explains, "Where people have little history together, or an erratic history of cooperation mixed with exploitation, or a consistent history of failure to cooperate, people will distrust one another, avoiding collaborative endeavors without guarantees on the other's behavior" (2001, p. 33). Under these conditions, the likelihood of partaking in obligations of

exchange declines precipitously, and with it, too, does the likelihood of social capital activation.

#### Properties of the Network: Social Closure

In addition to properties of the individual and the dyad, social capital activation is also theorized to be affected by properties of the network.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Coleman (1988, 1990) proposed that actors are not likely to activate social capital unless embedded in networks characterized by social closure. Typically found in smaller communities, social closure describes network relations that are dense, overlapping, and close-knit. According to Coleman, closed communities facilitate social capital activation by promoting trustworthiness, or what he called “trustworthiness in structures.” Such a network structure allows for the emergence of effective social norms and sanctions that regulate behavior. Because ties are dense, overlapping, and close, everyone is either directly or indirectly connected to all others through short chains. The information channels that these connections create pass news and gossip throughout the network. As a result, there is little that anyone can do without having others in the network discover their actions. This monitoring capacity is key if sanctions are to be imposed for noncompliance, and if members are to be kept in line.

While not necessarily trusting others in the encapsulated-interest sense of the term (see Hardin 2002, but also Cook and Hardin 2001), embeddedness in networks characterized by social closure provides actors with community-backed assurances that potential exchange partners will honor obligations or face appropriate sanctions, such as shunning or social exclusion. These assurances reduce the risks associated with reciprocal exchanges, and they pave the way for extensive and long-term obligations, fertile ground for social capital activation (see also Granovetter 1985).<sup>4</sup> A

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that properties of the dyad and network are unrelated, however. Research by Lawler and Yoon (1996, 1998) has shown that network structures do affect the strength, cohesion, and affect of dyadic relations embedded in them. Certain network structures facilitate repeated exchanges between members of similar power. To the extent that these are successful, it leads to greater trust, cohesion, and emotional affect between them that promotes commitment to the dyad, even when superior options to exchange become available. Thus, network structures are not inconsequential to dyad cohesion or closeness. However, this relationship will not be considered in this work.

<sup>4</sup> Burt (2001) argues that although social closure may indicate when it may be safe to trust, it does not necessarily produce conditions that make trust advantageous. This is because closure does not place individuals in the optimal space for taking advantage of new opportunities in the way that embeddedness in a network rich with structural holes might.

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wonderful empirical example is Edwina Uehara's (1990) examination of the effect network structures have on the ability and willingness of recently jobless, poor, black women to mobilize their ties for instrumental aid. She discovered that women embedded in high-density, high-intensity networks were more likely to engage in generalized exchanges than women embedded in networks of low density and low intensity, because they were better able to control each others' behavior through tracking, monitoring, and sanctioning, which created an environment of trustworthiness that promoted extensive exchanges. Gerald Suttles's (1968) rich ethnographic account of racial and ethnic differences in ethnic solidarity in one "slum" community also implicates loose network structures and relatively poor monitoring capacities with pervasive distrust and noncooperation among its black residents.

### Properties of the Community: Concentrated Disadvantage

Drawing from social disorganization theory, social capital activation is also conditioned upon structural properties of communities, specifically the community's SES, the extent of its ethnic heterogeneity, and the amount of residential mobility into and out of its borders (Shaw and McKay [1942] 1969; Sampson and Groves 1989; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999). All three structural factors are theorized to affect both the density of network relations—the extent to which networks can be characterized as closed—and the links between local institutions within communities. These then shape the development and maintenance of common values and effective social controls that facilitate cooperation and community problem-solving behaviors among residents.

For the purposes of this discussion, however, the SES of communities looms largest. In his seminal work, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, William Julius Wilson (1987) argues that as a result of deindustrialization and the exodus of the black middle and working classes from what were once vertically integrated communities, the past 30 years has seen a tremendous growth in the proportion of the black urban poor who reside in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage. Not only are these communities marked by high to extreme poverty rates, but other "negative" social indicators, such as welfare receipt, unemployment, and female headship, are also at acute levels (Wacquant and Wilson 1989; Sampson et al. 1999; Sampson and Wilson 1995). In a context of concentrated disadvantage, Wilson contends, social capital activation is very unlikely because residents, lacking regular contact and sustained interaction with mainstream ties and institutions, have few social resources from which to draw. Their isolation has impeded the development of personal relationships that would otherwise serve as sources of expressive and instru-

mental aid. Thus, for instance, residents of neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage are less likely to have a current partner or a best friend (Wacquant and Wilson 1989). In addition to social resource deprivation, the general lack of material resources means that little or nothing is available to support the development or maintenance of community organizations in which residents can come together to achieve common goals, in the process of which they could forge common values and effective social controls that facilitate cooperation (Sampson et al. 1999).

Social disorganization theory also advises that, controlling for access to resources, social capital activation is also less likely to occur among residents of communities characterized by concentrated disadvantage. This is because, consistent with decades of anthropological investigation (Banfield 1958; Carstairs 1967; Foster 1967; Aguilar 1984) and some sociological accounts (Liebow 1967; Suttles 1968), concentrated disadvantage also breeds pervasive distrust. Chronic economic hardship and a history of exploitation diminishes both individual (Pearlin et al. 1981) and collective efficacy (Sampson et al. 1999; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001), leading to high rates of crime, substance abuse, violence, and neglect. The vulnerability and pervasive distrust that residents experience in this context fuel individualistic approaches to getting things done, as illustrated in more recent accounts, such as Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Street* (1999) and Furstenberg et al.'s *Managing to Make It* (1999). Thus, relative to poor residents of comparatively affluent communities, the likelihood of mobilizing one's network of social relations in the neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage is low. To the extent that residents do cooperate or assist others, it is solely within the context of close friendship ties, for, as Peter Kollock makes clear, "faced with a situation in which one can be taken advantage of, a natural response is to restrict one's transactions to those who have shown themselves to be trustworthy" (1994, p. 318).

### Summary

To sum up, based upon previous work, a baseline model of social capital activation (e.g., the probability that job seekers will receive job-finding assistance from job contacts with whom they are connected) would take into consideration properties of the community, the network, the dyad, and the individual. On the community level, we would be concerned with the extent of concentrated disadvantage, as social capital activation is theorized to be lower in communities so characterized because of the way in which the development of strong, cooperative networks is impeded and because of the ways in which concentrated disadvantage breeds vulner-

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ability and pervasive distrust. On the network level, we would be concerned with the degree of social closure, based on prior research linking social capital activation to embeddedness in networks of ties that are dense, overlapping, and close. On the dyadic level, we would be concerned with the strength of relationships between potential exchange partners. The stronger the relationship, the greater the likelihood that partners have taken part in iterated, reciprocal exchanges that build trust, emotional affect, and cohesion, thus facilitating further cooperation. And on the individual level, we would be concerned with the reputations and statuses of job contacts and job seekers. Social capital activation is more likely to occur if contacts perceive that the interaction between their reputations and that of their job-seeking ties produces little risk to their future opportunities. Finally, if job contacts' status puts them at risk of losing face, social capital activation is unlikely, and contacts are unlikely to provide assistance to job seekers whose own status indicates low character or mediocre past behavior.

### THE STUDY

This study is centrally concerned with uncovering the conditions that enable black, urban, poor job seekers to mobilize their network of relations for job-finding assistance. To this end, two basic questions are explored:

1. First, when in possession of job information and/or influence, to what extent are the black urban poor willing to assist their job-seeking ties?
2. Second, under what conditions are job contacts willing to extend job-finding assistance? Specifically, to what extent are decisions to assist affected by properties of the individual, the dyad, the network, and the community?

By addressing these central questions, I hope to advance current debates that have generally overlooked the process of activation by offering a single, multilevel conceptual framework within which to understand the context of its occurrence.

### Data

Between 1999 and 2002, data were gathered using surveys and in-depth interviews of 105 low-income African-Americans.<sup>5</sup> The primary site for

<sup>5</sup> Although 105 in-depth interviews were completed, time constraints prohibited two respondents from completing the survey as well. Thus, completed surveys total 103.

recruitment was one state social service agency (“the center”)<sup>6</sup> located in southeastern Michigan that offered a variety of programs designed to aid the transition to labor force participation from unemployment, public assistance, or a current dissatisfying job. These programs included education, training, and employment programs, including GED classes for high school dropouts, child care referral services, and transportation services. Although the center claimed to cater to all of the county’s residents, the majority of clients were black. Many single mothers on public assistance, who were required to spend several hours each week looking for work, would fulfill this requirement by browsing the employment section of the local newspapers or by accessing job bank Web sites on computers that the center provided. To increase their chances of finding work, several took advantage of the GED, job search, and career counseling classes the center offered.

Because of welfare reforms that require welfare applicants to name the fathers of their children, young men are now being held accountable for their children. Ordered by the court to pay child support, employed fathers visit the center between work shifts to find a better-paying job; unemployed fathers stop by hoping to learn about any job. Both are motivated by the desire to stop or, more realistically, slow their child support arrears. However, childless young men and women also stop by to browse local papers, surf the Internet, call employers, and submit résumés via fax or the Internet. All of the above people would also make use of staff members who recruited and screened applicants for local employers willing to hire from this low-skilled population and who encouraged job seekers to attend weekly job fairs. It is largely from this general population of center clients that this sample was drawn.<sup>7</sup>

With the assistance of center staff, subjects who fit the study criteria were recruited. Sought for participation were black men and women between the ages of 20 and 40 who resided in this southeastern Michigan city and who had no more than a high school diploma (or GED).<sup>8</sup> Re-

<sup>6</sup> The names of interviewees and institutions used throughout this article are pseudonyms.

<sup>7</sup> Two-thirds of the sample were recruited at the center. See app. A for details about all of the recruitment methods employed to complete data collection and the potential impact on results.

<sup>8</sup> Although a few participants did not match one or more of the screening criteria, every respondent can be categorized as economically marginal. Three respondents were below 20 years old; two were over 40 years old. Because the center served the entire county, the poor from other cities and townships in the immediate area also used the center. Eighteen respondents reported residences outside the community. Among high school graduates, 54% reported taking one or more courses at the local community college. Two college-educated respondents are also in the sample. However, their inclusion in analyses does not alter results.

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spondents were surveyed about their family background, networks, employment history, and job-finding methods. They were also questioned in depth about their childhood (including childhood impressions of work); marriage, relationships, and children; employment history, experiences, and impressions of work; job referral networks; philosophy of employment; and attitudes and opinions about the extent and nature of job opportunities for low-skilled workers like themselves. Questions posed to respondents regarding the process of finding work are displayed in appendix B. Interviews averaged two hours.<sup>9</sup>

Displayed in table 1 are mean sample characteristics. At roughly 28 years of age, 78% of the sample had never married, and 75% had children—2.5 on average. Of the sample, 84% were high school graduates (or had gotten a GED), and just over half were employed. On their current or most recent job, respondents' mean wages were \$9.30 per hour (median = \$8.50). Furthermore, because median tenure was only 11 months—nearly a third had not worked longer than six months—most families survived on poverty-level earnings. Indeed, one-third of the respondents were receiving public assistance at the time of the interview (17% of the working poor and 45% of the nonworking poor; 14% of men and 47% of women). Nearly half reported having ever received assistance (31% of men and 68% of women).

*Orientation to providing job-finding assistance.*—I determined contacts' general orientation toward job-finding assistance—whether and to what extent they generally assist—by examining responses to the following set of questions:

1. When you hear about job openings at your workplace or elsewhere, what do you do? In other words, do you tell the people you know about them?
2. Has anyone ever come to you for help in finding or getting a job? Who has come to you for help and why? What types of jobs did she/he/they ask about? How did you help, if at all? Would you help again? Did this/these job seeker(s) get the job(s)?
3. What do you think are the positive aspects of helping others to find work? The negative aspects?

Those who reported that they usually choose not to assist or who limited their assistance were deemed *reluctant contacts*. Comments indicative of reluctance included, “I kind of even limit my helping people out to where it won't affect me” or “First of all, I don't know a lot of people that have really looked for employment, and I question the people that I do know. I don't think they would take it as serious, and I don't want to put my

<sup>9</sup> All interviewers were African-American.

TABLE 1  
MEAN SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Variable	Mean	Range
Age .....	28.4 (5.9)	17-43
Gender (female) .....	.52	0-1
Never married .....	.78	0-1
Have children .....	.75	0-1
No. of children (if parent) .....	2.5 (1.4)	1-7
High school graduate/GED .....	.84	0-1
Employed .....	.52	0-1
Hourly wages (in dollars) .....	9.30 (3.5)	2.5-23.0
Public assistance .....		0-1
Currently receiving .....	.31	
Women .....	.47	
Men .....	.17	
Ever received .....	.46	
Women .....	.68	
Men .....	.31	
Neighborhood poverty rate .....		0-1
Low-moderate .....	.69	
High-extreme .....	.31	

NOTE.—*N* = 103.

name on it.” *Open contacts* were those who were willing to help almost anyone who asked. Comments suggestive of openness included “I never turn nobody down” or “If they come to me, of course I will tell them.”

*Properties of the individual: Reputation and status.*—To determine the extent to which properties of the individual affected social capital activation as well as what these properties might be, I looked to respondents’ responses to the question, “When people you know approach you for help finding work, how do you determine whether or not you will help?” Responses to general questions about willingness to assist were also helpful for determining whether and what individual-level properties were important. Specifically, if respondents indicated that they made decisions based on others’ prior behavior (outside the context of the relationship) and what this might mean in terms of how they might behave in the future, I coded this as an indication of respondents’ concern for others’ reputation. If respondents pointed to the positions that job seekers held as an indication of their quality as workers and a signal for how they might behave with assistance, this was coded as an indication of respondents’ concern for others’ status. For instance, some respondents were unwilling to assist job-seeking ties who were currently unemployed be-



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cause such a status indicated that they would likely be untrustworthy on the job. Others appeared far more likely to assist when presented with job seekers who were already employed but looking for a second job because this signaled a high level of commitment to the attainment of individual goals specifically, and mainstream values generally.

This line of questioning also allowed me to ascertain the importance that contacts' own reputation and status played in determining whether or not to assist. With regard to their reputations, I paid attention to how they characterized employers' perceptions of them, especially on the subject of future opportunities. I also considered contacts' reputations important if they referred to the effect that prior referrals have had on their standing in the firm. I noted concern about contacts' status whenever they referred to their own social and economic well-being as factors that either facilitated or inhibited their willingness to assist.

*Properties of the dyad: Tie strength.*—To ascertain the role of tie strength, I again examined respondents' responses to the following question: "When people you know approach you for help finding work, how do you determine whether or not you will help?" I also determined the importance of dyadic properties by examining responses to general questions about job contacts' willingness to assist. To gauge the importance of tie strength, I looked to responses that indicated that assistance was provided primarily because of an affective bond or because of a history of successful exchanges between the job contact and his or her job-seeking tie that had bred (or not) trust and trustworthiness.

*Properties of the network: Social closure.*—It is argued that social capital activation is more likely to occur among those embedded in networks that are characterized by social closure (Coleman 1988, 1990; Granovetter 1985). For instance, Uehara (1990) determined that recently jobless poor black women were more likely to mobilize their ties for assistance when embedded in networks of greater density, intensity, and encapsulation. Unfortunately, these data do not allow for such a rigorous examination. Drawing from prior research, however, it is possible to distinguish, in at least two ways, embeddedness in closed networks from embeddedness in structures in which connections are far more loose and free floating. First, within closed structures, *information* flows through an intricate communication network in the form of "gossip, slander, invective, and confidentiality" (Suttles 1968, p. 105). Within more free-floating networks, information flow is decidedly less elaborate. Individuals know of their potential exchange partners' habits and behaviors in large part because they see these themselves, or because their partners inform them in one-on-one conversations. Trusters are much less likely to have other sources to confirm or deny trustees' presentation of self and thus are less likely

to have the information they need to make well-informed decisions regarding whom to trust and assist.

Second, within closed structures, *sanctions* for noncompliance occur on the collective level, including social exclusion from all things social and economic. Outside of closed networks, sanctions take place within the dyad, in the form of withdrawal from future exchanges and/or the relationship. While examinations of information flows and sanctioning methods may not be the most ideal way of determining whether or not respondents are embedded in networks characterized by social closure, they do provide us with some sense, albeit an incomplete one, of the role that social closure plays in facilitating social capital activation vis-à-vis other factors deemed important for the same.

*Properties of the community: Concentrated disadvantage.*—Respondents' addresses were matched with corresponding census tracts to determine the family-level poverty status of their neighborhoods. Employing a variation of the categories of neighborhood poverty concentration typically used in urban poverty studies, I found that 69% of respondents lived in census tracts in which rates of family poverty were low to moderate (0%–29.9%), and 31% resided in neighborhoods with many of the features characterized by the urban underclass literature, with rates of family poverty high to extreme (30% and above). Not surprisingly, in terms of social and demographic indicators, low-to-moderate poverty neighborhoods in which respondents resided differed substantially from the neighborhoods in which poverty rates were high to extreme. In the low-to-moderate poverty neighborhoods in which two-thirds of respondents lived, 31% of residents were black, compared to 78% of the residents in high-to-extreme poverty neighborhoods; 11% of the former had not completed high school, compared to 26% of the latter; 30% of the former were not in the labor force, relative to 43% of the latter; 13% of the former lived in poverty, compared to 43% of the latter; and whereas just 5% of the former received public assistance, 23% of the latter received assistance. For this reason, from here on, I characterize high-to-extreme poverty neighborhoods as neighborhoods characteristic of concentrated disadvantage.

Finally, it should be made clear that this study examines the factors that affect decisions the black urban poor make about whether and how to assist their job-seeking ties. Given that Wilson stresses the importance of being connected to mainstream ties, however, there are some who will argue that a better test than the one presented here would be to explore how middle-class blacks assess the black urban poor's trustworthiness and make decisions about whether and how to provide job-finding assistance. While I agree that an interclass analysis is much needed, an examination of intraclass relations is essential as well. As Newman (1999)

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points out, the urban poor rely on each other most for job finding, and while the opportunities these contacts provide lead, by and large, to lateral mobility, the importance of lateral moves should not be diminished, as they represent the overwhelming majority of job moves and allow the urban poor to avoid long spells of unemployment. To the extent that these factors affect social capital activation in ways that further hinder the truly disadvantaged, an important gap in the literature is addressed.

### WHAT FACTORS ENABLE SOCIAL CAPITAL ACTIVATION?

To understand what factors enable job seekers to mobilize their job contacts for job-finding assistance, it is important to first outline the concerns that job contacts had when placed in the role of job contact. Primarily for three reasons, those with job information and influence were generally reluctant to provide the type of job-finding assistance that best facilitates employment. As shown in table 2, 20% had come to believe that those without jobs lacked the motivation and determination to follow through on offers of assistance, wasting contacts' time and frustrating them. Another 10% expressed concern that their referrals were too needy, and that by partaking in job-finding obligations, they would become responsible not only for job getting, but also for helping their referrals stay employed, compounding the stresses in their own overburdened lives. Finally, 70% feared that, once hired, those assisted would be delinquent, and that they would act inappropriately, compromising contacts' own personal reputations and labor market stability. In all, 81% expressed one or more of these concerns, having little faith that they would not be worse off by assisting job seekers in finding work.<sup>10</sup>

These concerns had consequences. Table 3 displays the percentage of job contacts who expressed reluctance to assist, by concern type. Among the one-fifth who believed that job seekers generally lacked motivation, 78% were generally reluctant to provide assistance, compared to just 56% of those who did not express this concern. While 80% of those who feared that job seekers would be too needy were reluctant to provide assistance, just 58% of those without this concern were reluctant. Finally, among those who feared that their referrals would act badly on the job, in the process ruining their reputations in the eyes of employers, 73% were reluctant to provide assistance, compared to just 35% of those who did not express this concern. In all, 71% of those who expressed one or more

<sup>10</sup> These are not mutually exclusive categories. While 19% of respondents did not express any type of distrust in job seekers, 63% of respondents expressed distrust around one of these three issues, and 19% expressed concern around two of the issues raised.

TABLE 2  
RESPONDENTS EXPRESSING CONCERNS ABOUT PROVIDING JOB-FINDING ASSISTANCE

Concern	Expressed Concern (%)
Major concerns about job seekers .....	81
Job seekers are too unmotivated .....	20
Job seekers are too needy .....	10
Job seekers are prone to delinquency .....	70

NOTE.—*N* = 103.

TABLE 3  
RELUCTANCE TO ASSIST BY CONCERN TYPE

Concern	Expressed Concern (%)	Did Not Express Concern (%)
Major concerns about job seekers .....	71	17
Job seekers are too unmotivated .....	78	56
Job seekers are too needy .....	80	58
Job seekers are prone to delinquency .....	73	35

NOTE.—*N* = 103.

of these three concerns were reluctant to provide job-finding assistance, compared to just 17% of potential contacts who expressed none of these concerns.

Given the pervasive distrust that potential job contacts felt around issues of motivation, neediness, and delinquency, it is a wonder that they assisted at all. Indeed, some 87% reported that at some point in the past they had assisted family members, friends, acquaintances, or even strangers who had approached them for job-finding assistance. The question is, What factors affected the likelihood that job contacts would assist, or that job seekers' social capital would be activated for job-finding assistance within the context of pervasive distrust?

#### PROPERTIES OF THE INDIVIDUAL: THE JOB SEEKER

##### Job Seekers' Reputations

Without question, job contacts determined whether or not to assist based on job seekers' reputations. Indeed, 75% reported that when in possession of job information and influence, they largely based their decisions on what they knew of job seekers' prior actions and behaviors both on the job and in their personal lives. These signaled to contacts the likelihood that job seekers would act appropriately throughout the employment pro-

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cess, with particular interest in whether or not job seekers would do anything to affect job contacts' own reputations negatively. However, job contacts rarely made reference to job seekers' status, such as whether or not seekers were employed. These results are displayed in table 4 and discussed below.

### *Work History, Work Ethic*

Is this person staying in a position for awhile? Is this person the type that goes from job to job to job? That's not the type of person I would want to put my name on his application.—  
Steve Jackson, age 21

Of the respondents, 38% used job seekers' work reputations to decide whether or not to assist. Like employers, they were concerned with whether or not job seekers had been stably employed, the circumstances under which they left their last job, the frequency with which they moved from one job to the next, and how they typically behaved on these jobs. As one respondent proclaimed, "You're doing the same thing an employer would do. Like a reference check." Job seekers known for having integrity on the job—by being dependable, dedicated, productive—were held in high esteem and were readily assisted. Indeed, this was the primary reason why Jessica Bernard, a 28-year-old unemployed mother of three, aided her cousin. She explained,

I have a little cousin. She's 15 or 16 years old, and when I was working for the university—you know, they have the students that do work, a couple of hours for lunch and a couple of hours for dinner—and I know she's a good worker, so I told her that they were hiring, and I talked to my supervisor, and he told me to tell her to come in, and she filled out the application, and she started working that day. She was working at [a fast-food chain], but she had been at [the fast-food chain] for a long time, so I knew that she would work, especially by her being young. I knew she would go to work every day, and she gets upset when she can't be on time, because her mom's got problems. So, I told him about her, because I knew she was somebody who was going to be there.

Jessica determined that her young cousin would be of little risk to her own reputation because, at such a young age and with enormous obstacles, her cousin had accumulated a solid record of employment. That she had been employed at the fast-food chain for some time and took great pains to arrive at work punctually, in spite of a troubled mother, was evidence enough of her strong work ethic and general trustworthiness. With a steady record of employment, job contacts calculated the risk of helping as minimal and thus were willing to do so.

TABLE 4  
 PROPERTIES OF THE JOB SEEKER OBSERVED TO DETERMINE ASSISTANCE, BY  
 GENDER

PROPERTIES OF THE JOB SEEKER	RESPONDENTS MOTIVATED BY THIS PROPERTY (%)		
	Total	Women	Men
Reputation .....	75	69	80
Work (work ethic) .....	38	50	26
Personal (ghetto behavior) .....	43	29	59
Both .....	6	10	5
Status .....	2	0	4

NOTE.—*N* = 103.

Where job seekers with stellar reputations were embraced, those deemed to have a poor work ethic—those who transitioned in and out of jobs frequently, were habitually absent or tardy, or had a poor work attitude—were summarily denied assistance or were given weak referrals to other jobs. Typical were comments such as that provided by Shirley Wyatt. A 27-year-old unemployed, single mother of four, Shirley exclaimed, “If I know what type of person they is, if I know whether they actually going to get the job and stay at the job, or they one of them people that, you know, I know after the first two little paychecks, they going to be quitting, ain’t even no need for me to be telling you because you ain’t going to be staying there.” Indeed, this was how Cynthia Wilson viewed her own brother’s relationship to employment. Because of his past behavior in the labor market, she was skeptical that he would be consistent and dependable if she were to facilitate his hire at her job. At the time, she worked full time at a calling card company making \$9 per hour and learning computer skills. She explained, “First of all, figure out what type of work history they already have, you know, versus someone like my brother, for instance. He wanted to get [a job]. I’m like no ‘cause you jump from job to job to job. Can’t do that. Well, he finally found a job that he liked. He’s been there, I think, for two years now. *Now* if he came and said ‘Well, Cynthia, is [your employer] hiring?’ No problem, no problem.” Even though the job seeker was her brother, with whom she presumably had a long history, the strength and nature of their relationship was somewhat inconsequential. Instead, the history of his behavior on the job interested Cynthia the most, providing her with precedent from which to deduce her brother’s future conduct. Once he repaired his reputation by working steadily with one employer, Cynthia was willing to provide assistance.

For whom did work history matter? Women were far more likely than

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men to assess trustworthiness by considering job seekers' history of employment experiences. Whereas only 26% of men mentioned work history, half of the women did. (Possible explanations for this gender difference are explored in the next section.) Not all contacts assessed trustworthiness in terms of work history, however. For some, job seekers' behavior in the personal realm was most significant.

### *Acting Ghetto: Bringing the Street to the Job*

I don't want to have nobody at work that's just obnoxious and don't have any sense and just, you know, just totally ignorant.—Martin Nevins, age 37

Of the respondents, 43% determined whether or not to assist by considering how job seekers carried themselves outside of the employment arena. Of special concern were those whom respondents described as “real ghetto,” individuals whose behavior included being loud and raucous, abusing illicit drugs and alcohol, and taking part in criminal behaviors such as robbing and stealing, because such inclinations would almost certainly destroy contacts' reputations. In the form of drug and alcohol abuse and robbing and stealing, ghetto behavior was little tolerated. As Cynthia Wilson explained in reference to another job seeker, Cornelia, “She was like real ghetto, you know. She was heavy off into drugs and I was like, I don't think so. You're not going to make me look bad.” Each time Cornelia would inquire about job openings at her place of employment, to save face, Cynthia would lie. She recounted, “I just said they're not hiring. Every time. I know one point in time that job got to be hiring, but I was like ‘They're not hiring.’ [She laughs.] It's a freeze!” Because of Cornelia's drug addiction, Cynthia could not bring herself to inform her friend that her employer was hiring. Since that time, Cynthia and Cornelia have become best friends, and Cornelia now knows that Cynthia misled her about past job opportunities. However, Cynthia still refuses to assist her best friend, who has yet to conquer her addiction.

In situations where contacts were embedded in networks of relations in which a number of people had problematic reputations, the thought of providing job-finding assistance caused great concern. This was Robert Randolph's issue. Robert was a 32-year-old unmarried and unemployed father of three. When asked how he determined whether or not to assist his job-seeking ties, he explained, “You know, because I know a lot of people that smoke rocks, you know and do drugs and not really serious about getting out here and finding a job. Those are the people that, you know, I would say ‘Well, there's a person out here that may have something for you, you know, you go talk to.’ I will put him in contact with

somebody, you know, but I wouldn't put my name out there and recommend 'em, you know. I wouldn't do that, no." Since so many of his own friends regularly committed theft and larceny, Monroe Laschley expressed similar concerns. A 35-year-old single father of three, Monroe justified, "I got friends, you know, that's thieves, that want to rob and steal, you know what I'm saying? How would I be like trying to get them a job where I'm working at, you know what I'm saying? Then, the boss's car come up missing or something, or you know a computer come up missing." In these situations, the prospect of providing assistance was inherently risky, because so many of their friends, family members, and acquaintances were known to be of such ill repute that job contacts felt that they could not trust them to behave appropriately.

Lee Boswell had very similar concerns. At 37 years of age, Lee had recently completed a five-year sentence for assault with intent to do great bodily harm. He explained that multiple factors—drug and alcohol abuse, immaturity, and jealousy—converged into murderous rage one evening in which he had beaten his girlfriend until she was close to death. Since his release, he had committed a great deal of time to his own rehabilitation. He was in therapy and had been taking part in alcoholics and narcotics programs, and, through a temporary employment agency, was working. His primary goal, he explained, was to learn how to spend time with himself and to make himself happy. So, when asked how he determined whether or not to assist his job-seeking ties—several of the inmates with whom he had been incarcerated had contacted him to gain job-finding assistance upon their release—he explained, "I would know they character and what they doing, and if I know they still messing around or drinking and stuff, then I wouldn't be able to do it and I would let 'em know, you know, once you get yourself together, holler at me then. But if I know that they using or got sticky fingers and stuff like that, I wouldn't give no recommendation." These job seekers constituted huge risks to job contacts' reputations and labor market stability. As a result, they garnered little or no consideration among job contacts.

When expressed as raucous behavior, however, job seekers were afforded slightly more latitude. Some, like Henry Wilson, found ghetto behavior offensive at all times, a sure sign that the offender did not share his values and attitudes and thus could not be counted on to represent them well on the job. At 32 years of age, Henry was married with two children, steadily employed, and a churchgoer. He was proud of the various roles that he played and took his responsibilities very seriously. When asked why he was reluctant to provide assistance to job seekers in his network, he explained,

The conversations that they have. Uh, I'm a very entrepreneurial-minded



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person, try to be a spiritual person, responsible. [This is] not to say that you gotta be like me, but when you're talking outside . . . I'm a married man. I like to look at a beautiful woman—you're an attractive woman. I like looking at you, but, you know, I don't feel like going beyond that. [Mocking those in question] 'Oh, let me see if I can sneak around,' and, you know, and these people that are consistently talking about drinking, partying. And I talk about investments or things of that nature or just general family stuff. They don't get it, so. It's over their head, so I just leave it alone.

Similarly, Gary Hanson, a 31-year-old unemployed, single father of seven, expressed concern about how job seekers would represent him, explaining, "If they would be the type of person [to say], 'Oh man, fuck that bitch, man!' you know, that's not the person I would want to put my name on the line for." Statements such as the one Gary quoted, while far from innocuous, in the context of a private conversation might be interpreted as such. However, for respondents making decisions about whom to trust with their names and reputations in the labor market, statements such as these are a sure sign of job seekers' vulgarity and boorishness, attributes that contacts do not want associated with their names. And this was of no small consequence for Gary. He had once assisted a good friend only to have his employers dismiss the friend for his absenteeism, cursing, and intimidation of others. As Gary understood it, "He brought the street to the job, you know, and you don't just bring the street to the job. That's a total separation." While they have remained friends, Gary would not contemplate working with his friend again.

Other contacts were offended only when individuals seemed oblivious to context. For these contacts, acting ghetto itself was not to be scorned. Indeed, when socializing with kith and kin, it was quite enjoyable. Problems would arise, however, when individuals did not take their social context into consideration. Acting ghetto was fine in private settings, but one should be very cautious about taking it outside. Job seekers' inability to discern the proper context for acting ghetto was the primary reason Brenda Bowen gave for refusing assistance. So, like Cynthia Wilson, she often lied to job-seeking ties so characterized about job openings at her place of employment in order to save face—theirs and her own—as well as to preserve opportunities to receive assistance in the future. A 36-year-old separated and unemployed mother of two, Brenda explained,

I hate to be judgmental, but I look at the way this person is reacting. If you can't control yourself in public, no matter that you're not at a job, you're out in public and these are people that you really don't know and they're judging you and the only thing they can judge you by is what they see and you don't know how to act, you know, you're speaking ignorant, you know. Because I been around people like that, you know. Say, for

instance, I don't know you and you're walking past and I'm standing here with this girl and she's just cussing and just saying all kinds of ignorant things. I might say it, but when you're walking past, I'll stop.

Contacts like Brenda fear that by assisting job seekers who appear unable to appreciate the significance of context, once hired, these job seekers would undoubtedly reveal something about contacts' private lives that they would prefer to remain private.

Interestingly, a higher percentage of men looked to these personal habits outside of the work arena for signs of trustworthiness; women prioritized work history as a criterion for assessing trustworthiness. Compared to only 29% of women, 59% of men considered the extent to which job seekers acted ghetto when deciding whether and how to assist. While it is difficult to determine with these data why men and women diverge in the criteria they use to assess reputation, and thus trustworthiness, this gender difference may be attributable to the frequency with which male contacts are presented with these issues relative to their female counterparts. Given the extent to which networks, particularly job referral networks, are segregated by gender (Drentea 1998; Hanson and Pratt 1991; Smith 2000), male contacts likely encounter male job seekers with greater frequency and thus run a higher risk of assisting those who are known for deviant and/or criminal behavior. Female contacts, on the other hand, likely come into contact more often with female job seekers and thus run a higher risk of assisting those for whom family responsibility and the like make it more difficult to get to work regularly and punctually. This explanation is consistent with prior research that has revealed the different ways in which inner-city employers perceive black men relative to black women. Whereas employers often fear that black men will rob and steal from their businesses, and thus are less willing to hire them relative to men of other racial and ethnic groups, inner-city employers' concerns about hiring black women appear largely around the pattern of absences and tardiness that they attribute to women's extensive familial responsibilities (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Wilson 1996). Gender differences in assessment of trustworthiness, then, may be linked to differences in the types of risks that male and female job seekers present to job contacts.

#### PROPERTIES OF THE INDIVIDUAL: THE JOB CONTACT

Although job contacts relied heavily upon the attributes and positions of their job-seeking ties to decide whether or not to assist, their own attributes and positions also affected the likelihood that they would be mobilized

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as well. In other words, independent of the job seekers' properties, their own reputations, experiences, and status mattered a great deal. Specifically, they were far less likely to assist anyone if their own reputations were sullied or if they had accumulated a history of assisting unmotivated job seekers. Their assistance was also contingent on their own social and economic stability, or lack thereof. These results are displayed in table 5.

### Job Contact's Reputation

Because if they going to use my name, I don't want them messing around. I don't want nobody messing up under my name.—Belinda Canty, age 39

Why were job contacts so concerned about job seekers' reputations? Overwhelmingly, respondents were fearful of making bad referrals that might tarnish their own reputations and threaten their labor market stability. Roughly 70% (62% of women and 80% of men) feared that if they personally vouched for referrals, there was no way to assure that their referrals would show up to work, work beyond the first paycheck, be prompt and regular, be productive on the job, and/or not steal, curse, fight, or disrespect authority. At the very least, contacts would experience embarrassment for having provided a disreputable referral; at most, they could lose their jobs as well as future employment opportunities.

Jackie York, a 27-year-old single mother of five children, is one such example. Although receiving public assistance, she supplemented her income by caring for other children in her home, one of only a few positions she could envision, given that she had small children of her own. She had recently become certified by the state to provide in-home day care and hoped to obtain an advanced license in order to open her own center.

Previously, Jackie had a year-long part-time position making \$10 per hour supervising a cleaning crew. As supervisor, she could influence hiring, and she described how she helped three friends get jobs. Unfortunately, none worked out. She first assisted her eldest son's granduncle. Although she suspected he had a drug habit, she believed that employment would get him on the track to recovery. At the very least, she reasoned, it would do no harm because there was nothing on the job site that he could steal. Hired on a Tuesday, the uncle worked Wednesday and Thursday, but he did not arrive to work on Friday, nor did he call. Because he had worked so well his first two days, helping the crew to complete their tasks one hour earlier than the norm, Jackie gave him the benefit of a doubt and decided to guarantee his presence by picking him up before work. On Monday and Tuesday, this approach worked; by Wednesday, however, it did not. Within one week of his hire, the uncle was let go, and Jackie

TABLE 5  
 PROPERTIES OF THE JOB CONTACT MOTIVATING DECISIONS ABOUT PROVIDING  
 ASSISTANCE, BY GENDER

PROPERTIES OF THE JOB CONTACT	RESPONDENTS MOTIVATED BY THIS PROPERTY (%)		
	Total	Women	Men
Work reputation .....	70	62	80
Status (social and economic stability) ....	8	8	9
History of providing assistance .....	20	17	23

NOTE.—*N* = 103.

described herself as “looking a little foolish.” In trying to assist the uncle in getting to work on time, she had arrived to work late as well. In the process, she began to lose her employer’s trust. She explained, “She’s looking at me like you ain’t picking up your pieces too well.”

Her employer’s perception only worsened with Jackie’s next two referrals. She then aided the girlfriend of her eldest son’s father, reasoning that because their sons were half brothers, the extended family would benefit. However, her ex’s girlfriend was also unreliable. She worked the first day, arrived out of uniform the second day (which meant that she could not work), and did not show at all the third day or thereafter. Although Jackie believed her third referral, an ex-boyfriend, was a good worker, her employer found him too slow and fired him without her knowledge, confirming that her employer had lost confidence in her.

To get job seekers to see these consequences, she reminded them of her own poor SES and pleaded with them to behave appropriately so as not to harm her reputation. Perceiving this approach as ineffective, however, she changed tactics. “I did get smart. I did get a little bit smart. I said, ‘Look, don’t tell them you know me. Just go on in there and get the job.’” However, Jackie now declines to partake in obligations of exchange around job finding at all. When asked about the positive aspects of helping others to find work, she explained, “I’m not the right one to ask that question. I would just have to say that that’s something you got to do on your own. I don’t see anything positive right now. I can’t be objective anymore. ‘No, I ain’t heard nothing about no job.’ You know, I have to say that because if I say, ‘Well I do know some.’ ‘Oh, for real, girl!’ ‘I ain’t heard nothing, you know, about your situation.’” Self-preservation now dictates that she remove herself from the process, which, as with Cynthia Wilson and Brenda Bowen, includes lying about job opportunities about which she is aware.

Terrance Blackburn, a 22-year-old high school graduate, also refuses to vouch for job seekers after getting burned by several referrals, a pattern

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that ruined his reputation in the eyes of his employer. When justifying why he would not help a previous referral again, he explained, “Because I got a bad reputation from that guy. You know, my manager said, ‘You bringing me all these people and they don’t want to work.’ So, no, I wouldn’t stick my neck out there. I’m going to get my head chopped off. I mean, if they ain’t going to stay, why not put your two weeks in. I mean, just so I won’t look bad. So [you] quit on the people, [and] they asking me, ‘Where your friend at?’ It’s just . . . I don’t know.”

Although contacts like Jackie and Terrance were not at risk of losing their jobs, developing a pattern of bad referrals did diminish their reputations with employers. A pattern of bad referrals indicates that one has had poor judgment regarding the assessment of others’ character, and this limits the possibility that employers will consider future referrals. It may also reduce prospects for promotions. By distancing themselves from job seekers during the matching process, contacts shield themselves from the stain of bad behavior and the stigma associated with common, negative stereotypes of the black urban poor, what several respondents described as “ghetto” behavior.

Job loss is possible, however. In the case of referrals who steal or who are very unproductive, for example, contacts may become implicated by association, diminishing the trust that employers have in their employees. Such was the case for Jeremy Jessup. Jeremy was 42 years old, and although unemployed when interviewed, he survived by making roughly \$7.50 to \$8.00 an hour working short stints through temporary employment agencies. When asked about the importance of using friends, relatives, and acquaintances during this process, Jeremy appeared unimpressed. Although he thought personal contacts were helpful for job finding, he explained that he preferred to find employment on his own, because if he failed, his actions would not reflect badly on the person who had assisted him. He did not want anyone to be held accountable for his actions. However, Jeremy’s hesitancy to provide job-finding assistance was not based on having abused the trust of previous contacts; he had been burned by previous referrals himself. As a supervisor for a construction company contracted to build several homes in the area, Jeremy was in the position to hire many friends he thought needed employment. However, as he explained,

I had worked for [the construction company], and they’re building brand new houses, and I hired a couple of my friends, and when they came to work, all they wanted to do was sit down and get paid for it. They felt like they didn’t have to work. They figured, like, you know, instead of taking a half-hour lunch, you could take an hour-and-a-half lunch and everything was okay. I was supposed to just let that go. [But] we all got fired because the work wasn’t getting done. I couldn’t do it all by myself.

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So, no thanks. No thanks. Now I call [the construction company] trying to get back and they won't even return my calls.

Jeremy has since assisted a nephew in getting a job, but he is wary of assisting others. Neglecting to determine the reliability of his friends cost him his job as supervisor of the construction company and any future employment opportunities with that firm.

The disinclination expressed by Jackie, Terrance, and Jeremy contrasts sharply with the orientation of job contacts like Wilson Smith, whose reputations were still very much untarnished. Wilson, a 21-year-old high school dropout, linked his ability and willingness to assist in the past to his good standing on the job. As he explained it, "The jobs that I did work at, like you know, the ones that I was doing good at like [a fast-food chain] or the one with [another fast-food chain], I could just pull people in there, because either the boss was cool with me or I just was taking care of business." With an unsullied reputation, he was willing to act on his job-seeking ties' behalf knowing that his own positive standing in the firm would facilitate the hiring of any referrals he made. However, once job contacts ceased "taking care of business," making referrals that led to their own loss in status, the likelihood that job contacts would provide job-finding assistance diminished substantially. First, as with Jackie, Terrance, and Jeremy, employers were less likely to allow contacts with tarnished reputations to make referrals, questioning their ability to discern trustworthy and employable job seekers. Second, contacts began to question their own ability to discern the trustworthy from the negligent and unreliable. With little confidence that their job matches would turn out well, contacts with tarnished reputations either avoided providing assistance altogether or only offered assistance that did not link them to the applicant in the minds of employers. For instance, while they may have passed along information about job openings, they often provided the caveat, "But don't put my name on it," so that job seekers were clear that they could not refer to their relationships as a signal of their credibility on the job.

## Social and Economic Stability

. . . always thinking that this might be the one.—Jackie York,  
age 27

There were circumstances under which contacts would assist job seekers of ill repute. Indeed, roughly 8% of respondents indicated that they would assist almost anyone, regardless of reputation, because they could not afford to do otherwise, a finding that differed little by gender. Their social

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and economic circumstances were so dire, they felt they could not shun any opportunity to partake in obligations of exchange that might serve them in the future. Take Laura Odoms, for instance. Laura was a 33-year-old single mother of four, who, at the time of the interview, supported her children with public assistance. When asked about prior occasions in which she helped others secure employment at her job, she recounted the following experience,

I used to work at [a motel chain], and I helped a friend of mine get a job. But instead of her wanting to help to clean the room, she knew people that stayed in the room where she wanted to go and just sit around and hang out. And you can't do that. So the lady, the supervisor kept saying, "Well, I'm going to let you handle this. You brought her in; . . . I'm going to let you either handle it or fire her." And I had to let her go because it was either me or her, and I had to keep my little job.

Prehire, Laura had counseled the referral, her best friend, about appropriate workplace behavior. However, her best friend broke the rules anyway and suffered the consequences, at Laura's hands. This incident, in and of itself, is hardly unique given the accounts that other respondents relayed of their referrals' betrayals. What is unusual about this situation is that Laura explained that she was still willing to assist her best friend—she remained her best friend even after Laura fired her—if presented with a future opportunity to do so. The overwhelming majority of respondents in similar situations were adamant that, at the very least, they would not assist the particular tie who had acted inappropriately.

Is Laura's response not irrational? Why continue to assist another, even a best friend, who seems to show little interest in respecting the terms, in this case clearly stated, of the exchange? Laura explained her willingness to assist her best friend in the future, indeed her willingness to help anyone, by pointing to her own precarious economic situation. Because she herself was struggling to care for her family and would almost certainly require assistance from others, her friend included, for various tasks in the future, she refused to close any door to a potential future exchange. When asked why she would be willing to provide her best friend job-finding assistance in the future, she explained, "Because the majority of my friends are in situations like me, and we try to help each other. Besides, if I need the help as far as money or a ride or if I need her to watch my 10-year-old, she's there. And I feel people, especially in my situation, I don't have much, and I'm trying to get much because I want my kids to be dependable. That is, when you get old enough to be on your own, this is what you got to do." Laura's explanation indicates that her willingness to assist is intricately tied to her own social and economic vulnerability. Would her disposition toward providing future job-finding assistance sur-

vive if she had access to stable and safe child care, a steady income, and reliable transportation? It seems very unlikely. Lacking these, however, she feels that she cannot burn the bridges she does have, even if her friends' behavior is unpredictable and often irresponsible.

For those who struggled with less desperation, however, providing job-finding assistance was less often a treasure hunt than a chore, requiring more time and energy than they wished to expend, given their already overburdened lives. Such was the case for Steve Jackson. Downwardly mobile at 21, Steve earned \$7.50 per hour working full time as a delivery truck driver. Both of his parents received advanced degrees, and they raised their two children in middle-class, racially mixed neighborhoods. Steve himself was working toward a college degree at a major state university when he learned that he had impregnated his girlfriend. He then returned home, planning to work full time to support his child while taking classes at a local university. Overwhelmed by his responsibilities, however, his grades suffered, and he dropped out. After leaving school, he worked as a sales representative with a telecommunications company, earning \$15 per hour. In his next two positions he earned \$12 per hour selling cellular phones. Because of conflicts with management, however, he quit. With a downturn in the economy, there were few jobs at his preferred wage rate, and pressed to pay off \$2,500 in rising child-support arrears, he settled for \$7.50 per hour driving a delivery truck.

Given the major stresses in his own life, Steve found the task of helping others emotionally daunting, particularly when close friends were involved. He explained, "It could be a lot of stress, and if you take it seriously to the point where you're really trying to get this person some help, it could be stressful for you. You might meet with them and give them some ideas and that could be extra things to do, and you know, you got your own problems without dealing with someone else's job problems." This was especially true because the majority of job seekers who had approached Steve had few marketable skills. He now refuses to assist unless job seekers have résumés in hand with which to work. To Steve, résumés signal that job seekers will not require more time and emotional energy than he can afford. After all, he, too, was struggling to keep his head above water. Absent assurances that job seekers would not overburden him, assistance was unlikely. This was especially the case since he could conceive of making it without the help of others, particularly those who sought help from him. Although struggling, he was far from the level of desperation that Laura experienced constantly. In his position, he was sure that assistance was more a hindrance than a possible help.



## Social Capital and Job-Finding Assistance

### History of Providing Job-Finding Assistance

My friend once came to me, but when I got him an application, he never did fill it out. So I said I wasn't going to do that anymore.—Richard Byron, age 19

Before turning our focus to properties of the dyad, there is an additional finding related to job contacts that merits consideration, one that the greater part of the existing literature has ignored. Specifically, I found that respondents' willingness to assist was decisively shaped by their histories of prior referrals. Indeed, one-fifth of respondents suggested that they were less likely to provide assistance having all too often come across job seekers they perceived to be unmotivated—17% of women and 23% of men. They described situations in which their job-seeking relatives, friends, and associates would complain about their labor market detachment and would ask for help finding work. Once presented with assistance, typically information about job openings, job seekers would express interest but not follow through. They would either fail to call the contact person or neglect to complete the application. A few days later, the cycle of complaining and requests for assistance would continue.

Many, like Leah Arnold, found this cycle of requests and inaction vexing. At the time of the interview, Leah was 25 years old and working full time, earning roughly \$8.25 providing client assistance in a disabled care facility. When asked about the negative aspects of trying to help others to find work, she explained,

It's their enthusiasm. The negative aspects is, you tell them about it, they sound like "Oh, for real!" like that, and then the next thing you know, two weeks later you done told them about five jobs. Two weeks later, "Girl, I still need a job." You're like, okay. "Girl, you better look. You better go look cause I done told you, and after so many times, hey." So that's the negative aspect is when they don't have the motivation or the enthusiasm to go out there and get it even after [it is] right there.

Rolanda Douglass was a 39-year-old mother of four who had recently been hired full time as a dietary aide at a convalescent home. Having been employed at six different jobs over the past three years in various service occupations, she knew the low-wage labor market fairly well. Furthermore, she remained actively engaged in her job referral network, hoping to learn about "the job" that would take her into retirement. Her most recent job, although fine for the moment, did not offer benefits and only paid \$7.50 per hour, a sum roughly \$4 per hour less than she estimated needing for financial security. Constantly searching newspapers and working her network, she had learned of many opportunities and passed these on to those in need. As a result, Rolanda fashioned herself as a major

source of job information and influence for her network of family and friends.

However, Rolanda had begun to feel that her efforts at dissemination and offers to intercede were in vain, because all too often, job seekers would not follow through. She recounted a recent conversation with a neighbor, a young single mother on public assistance, who was on her way to the welfare office to find work. Rolanda informed her neighbor that her employer was hiring and provided a job description, including the hours needed, the type of work required, and the wage rate. She strongly encouraged her neighbor to apply, offering to provide an application and to return it when completed. And she did so with great incentive. Her employer paid at least \$200 for every referral brought in, and given her low wages, Rolanda had hoped to augment her annual income through the referral process. However, days after that conversation, her neighbor had still not initiated further contact. Rolanda explained disappointedly, "Even though you tell 'em about it and they be like 'okay,' it's like I'm wasting my breath." Although her disappointment was mostly caused by the loss of potential bonuses, she also felt less valuable. If few wanted the resources she had to offer, why bother?

Another respondent collected rental and job applications to supply to those she deemed in need. Tylea Bond was a 25-year-old mother of an eight-year-old and an infant daughter. Although she had first given birth when she was just 17 years old and had been on public assistance within a year, by the time of the interview, she had accumulated four years of full-time work experience. She was earning almost \$9 per hour at the local university working in student services; having worked her way up to what she considered a "pretty good" job with "good benefits," Tylea believed that anyone could find a good job, with patience and resolve. With this in mind, she was keen on assisting others. She collected information about housing and jobs and would offer it, oftentimes unsolicited, in the hopes that other women would use it to better their own lives. However, she complained that more often than not, recipients of her attention would not respond, and their inaction infuriated her. She reported,

I told this girl at my church, she has six kids, and I don't know what her living is like, but I keep telling her about this housing up here and stuff. I don't like my area that I live in now, but there are low-income housing areas that are nice in this area, and she will not come up here. And so I just got totally mad. I got mad, because I'm like, "You're just stupid," you know what I'm saying, "because I'm trying to help you out. I'm trying to get you ahead, expose you to some things, and you're not even thinking about none of that stuff. I'm telling you how much money you could be making, and you're not even going to try." So, it's just frustrating.

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Frustrated by their perception that the persistently jobless were unwilling to better their circumstances by drawing from the resources contacts had offered, these contacts had become discouraged. Similar to the discouraged worker who had had such difficulty finding work that she or he stopped searching altogether, the discouraged contact was no longer willing to help because the jobless did not partake in obligations of exchange around job information and influence. Tylea had thrown away her folder of job and housing information. Rolanda had come to believe that job seekers so lacked initiative that she now requires evidence that job seekers are committed to employment before she partakes in obligations of exchange. Leah now denies her associates' requests for job-finding assistance, instructing them to look for work themselves. Thus, as with reputational concerns, job contacts' inclination to assist was historically constructed. The likelihood of social capital activation appeared reduced as the number of failed attempts accumulated.

### THE STRENGTH OF TIES

It's gotta be a family member.—Mary DuBois, age 27

In addition to attributes and positions of job contacts and job seekers, social capital activation was also contingent on properties of the dyad. Roughly one-tenth of respondents determined whether or not to assist primarily based on the strength of their relationships with job seekers. Typical were comments such as the following: "It's gotta be a family member." "I think I'd keep it in the family." Or, conversely, "It depends on how much I know the person. If I don't know them, then I don't really care too much about them." Contacts had greater motivation to assist those with whom they had longstanding relationships, such as relatives and close friends, for two reasons. First, these relationships tended to be founded on a history of successful exchanges that reduced contacts' uncertainty about their exchange partners' reliability, thereby nurturing feelings of deep mutual trust. Second, with a history of successful exchanges, stronger, more cohesive, and affective bonds developed that further facilitated reciprocal exchanges.

In part, these two reasons explain why Yvonne O'Neill, a 30-year-old single mother of two, devoted so much time and energy to securing employment for her best friend, Danielle. At the time of the interview, Yvonne was making \$190 every two weeks working part time at a family-owned portrait studio. Over the previous six years, she had held five jobs averaging 10 months each, most often in health care, assisting with and monitoring clients' personal care. Even with her spotty work history, she

had gained quite a bit of work experience. When asked how she had helped job seekers, Yvonne provided the following example:

I helped [my best friend] get a job through [a health care center] I used to work. She was not too familiar with more technical medical things, far as personal life care. Like she is not comfortable with bathing a person's private areas and things of that nature, so they try to get her things that didn't require that. But at times some of her assignments required that she bathe this person or clean their ostomy bags, and things of that nature. She'll call me. For example, we are going to go out for the evening or whatever, and she had to do a client, and she told me who it was, and I already done that client, and I knew what this entailed. So, what I did, I said, "I will meet you over there, and I will give her a bath and shower, you can cook and we'll be out of there in half the time." I helped in that manner. Or, sometimes I've had to talk her through ostomy care or urine ostomy bag. "I don't know how to change it. I'm going to kill him." "Oh, no you're not. What you do, put your gloves on, make your sterile field, dah . . . dah . . . dah . . . dah . . . dah." So, I've talked her through it over the phone. Still had to go over there, make sure she didn't put the bag on wrong, but it seems like that helps her become more comfortable with it, and now she can do it if she has to.

Essentially, Yvonne provided a recommendation, and then trained her unskilled friend, performed some of her work tasks, encouraged her regularly, and likely shielded her from job loss. However, even with such a high level of involvement, Yvonne never spoke about assisting Danielle as a sacrifice or a burden. Instead, it was a continuation of a series of material and symbolic exchanges between the two that helped to reproduce the long-term obligations of support and encouragement they provided each other. During Yvonne's own spells of unemployment, Danielle would call Yvonne regularly with reports of employment opportunities after having scoured local newspapers for job listings that matched Yvonne's skill set. She would also provide encouragement to ensure that Yvonne would act. Yvonne continued,

When I am looking for work and I already have a job . . . like say now, I have like three or four little things I do, keep me busy. If I am looking for something else, she'll call me up. She works for YCUA, midnight [shift]. She'll call me at 3:00 in the morning. "I'm looking through the paper. I want you to write this down. Okay, call this person in the morning, they're doing office work, or they're doing housecleaning work, or they're doing private care. This, that, and the other. They will need some help. Call." You know, she will go down the list, and I'm like, "Danielle, it's 4:00 in the morning." [Danielle replies] "I don't care. Write it down." You know, she is very helpful. If I see something, I'll leave it on her answering machine or her voice mail, or I'll call her up and, you know, always whether it be looking for a better car, looking for an apartment, or see something in the paper far as like household items, you know, like a garage sale.

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Evident is the mutual trust and affection that Yvonne and Danielle share as a result of their history of successful reciprocal exchanges. Furthermore, the fact that their exchanges were not limited to the realm of work likely cemented the strength of their tie and facilitated Yvonne's willingness to aid Danielle in the ways that she did. In other words, in the context of relationships characterized by such mutual trust and affection, social capital activation, oftentimes unsolicited, is undertaken with little forethought, even at the relatively high levels of time, energy, and commitment that Yvonne described.

Close relationships hardly guaranteed that job contacts would assist their job-seeking ties, however. Job contacts frequently denied assistance to job seekers they considered close. Cynthia Wilson, the 29-year-old married mother of three, declined to aid her brother and her best friend, judging both to be unfit for employment. Monroe Laschley, the 35-year-old single father of three, refused to provide assistance to his close friends, fearing that his employer would inevitably become victim to their relentless thievery. And although he was very sympathetic about his close friends' plight of joblessness, Steve Jackson, the 21-year-old downwardly mobile university dropout, avoided requests for assistance because he was overwhelmed by the extent and nature of the assistance often required. Even Yvonne, who without forethought did more than most job contacts would probably do to aid her best friend, intimated that properties of individuals mattered most. In other words, overwhelmingly, those in possession of job information and influence were influenced most by individual-level attributes, and less so by properties of the dyad, when determining whether or not to assist.

This is not to negate the significance of close ties, specifically, and properties of the dyad, generally. Instead, what this suggests is that tie strength serves another function. As Vincent Roberts explained when asked how he determines whether or not to assist, "I would say family members, you know, because I know them better. Be around them. You know, it's more easier, okay." In other words, job contacts most preferred to assist close relations not so much because of the reciprocity that occurred in the past between them, but because closeness provided access to firsthand knowledge about job seekers' past actions and behaviors outside the context of the relationship, reducing information asymmetries that made it difficult to ascertain the level of risk to which they were exposing themselves by providing assistance. Thus, although important, properties of the dyad were secondary. Decisions to assist were overwhelmingly based on how job contacts perceived the individual-level attributes of their job-seeking ties.

## SOCIAL CLOSURE

Based upon prior research, it is possible to distinguish, in at least two ways, whether or not contacts are embedded in networks of relations characterized by social closure. The first way is through information flows, and the second is through sanctioning methods.

### Information Flow

Within network structures characterized by social closure, information flows through an intricate communication network in the form of “gossip, slander, invective, and confidentiality” (Suttles 1968, p. 105). However, within structures of relations that are less effective at facilitating cooperation, information flow is decidedly less elaborate. Individuals know of their potential exchange partners’ habits and behaviors in large part because they either see these behaviors and actions themselves or their potential partners inform them in one-on-one conversations. Trusters are much less likely to have other sources to confirm or deny trustees’ presentation of self, and thus are less likely to have the information they need to make well-informed decisions regarding who to trust and to assist.

Interestingly, there was very little variation in how job contacts received information concerning their job-seeking ties’ reputations. The overwhelming majority based their decisions on information they had gleaned in two ways. They either knew of job seekers’ past behaviors and actions because they had observed these firsthand, or, in cases where contacts had little information to go on, they would engage job seekers in lengthy conversations in order to gather bits of information they believed would provide a more accurate picture of their job seekers’ character. In other words, through one-on-one encounters, contacts sought to reduce information asymmetries. In these data, information about job seekers’ reputation rarely filtered through an intricate communication system. When queried about how they knew what they did or how they would go about finding the information they needed, just one other respondent replied in the way that Yvonne O’Neill did. Yvonne explained that her information was “based on knowing them personally. Or, uh, asking about them, like ‘Does she go to work? What does she do? What did she do all day? What did she do with her time?’” In other words, she would refer to others in her network for information about job seekers’ past actions and behaviors, if she lacked firsthand knowledge.

This was not the case for the overwhelming majority of contacts, however. Instead, the majority most often limited their assistance to close friends and family members, because these were the people about whom they had firsthand knowledge upon which to make reasonable assessments

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of trustworthiness. Recall Vincent Roberts's declaration, "I would say family members, you know, because I know them better. Be around them. You know, it's more easier, okay." Job contacts most preferred to assist close relations because closeness provided access to firsthand knowledge about job seekers' past actions and behaviors outside the context of the relationship, thus reducing information asymmetries that made it difficult to ascertain the level of risk to which they were exposing themselves by providing assistance.

When contacts did not have firsthand knowledge of their job-seeking ties' reputations, they would seek out information they needed to determine trustworthiness—and thus, whether or not to assist—not by contacting interconnected trusted friends, family members, and acquaintances, but by engaging job seekers in lengthy conversations. Typical were comments such as, "Ask the person," and "I just asked a lot of questions [of job seekers]." By engaging job seekers in lengthy conversations that resembled, in many ways, a job interview, contacts believed that they could ascertain job seekers' trustworthiness and thus accurately calculate the risk they might incur if they were to assist.

This is how Annette Charles approached this dilemma. At the time of her interview, Annette was 28 years old, unmarried, without children, and working part time doing clerical work at a community college. Not only was Annette concerned about the effect that a bad referral might have on her reputation, she was also concerned about whether or not she would enjoy having the job seeker on the job with her. For both of these reasons, she felt it important to ascertain as much about job seekers' reputation as possible, and she did so by engaging them in conversations that would elicit bits of information that would provide her with a more accurate picture of job seekers' character and intentions. She explained, "I'll get to talking to them, and if they have a good, you know, standing, then, you know, I'll go up to somebody and say, 'You know, for this position, I know somebody who can do this.'"

Similarly, Sally Lowe, a 24-year-old high school dropout and single mother of a toddler, was very concerned about job seekers' reputations, especially after having been burned by a previous referral, the sister of her son's father. After this experience, she reported, "I'm still going to help people, [but] I'll get into your background a little more and all that." When asked how she planned to delve more into job seekers' backgrounds, she did not refer to others in her network as a primary source of information. Instead, she said the following,

Just talk, openly talk to them, and open the conversation, you know. Talk about myself, and hey, if you got something similar to it, open your mouth and let me know. Let me know what's going on with you, because I'd

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rather know if you're my friend, or you're my buddy, I'd rather know how your life was and how your life is now, than to be trying to go and guess, you know. Because, a friend, if you're my friend and I'm trying to be your friend, I need to know as much as I can about you because we have this friendship. And, if something goes wrong, I want to be able, if you don't have anybody else, to come and say, 'Yeah, you know, this is my friend. I'm here to help her. I'm here to give her the strength she needs, you know.' I would rather you open up to me than for me to have to wait and see and find out later on that you're just not right.

Here again one is struck by the lack of reference to a network of ties that could potentially provide Sally with the information she requires in order to make determinations about who to assist. Instead, she makes assessments based on one-on-one conversations with potential exchange partners, conversations that while potentially illuminating, are also potentially rife with disingenuousness and exploitation. Indeed, this is why one seeks the counsel of others, so as to gain additional information that either confirms or disproves characterizations that people make of themselves. However, like Sally, contacts in this position rarely mentioned the counsel they received from others in their network.

What this pattern indicates is that contacts are largely determining the trustworthiness of others in isolation, to a great extent, outside of the context of a vibrant or intricate information network. What rarely showed up in these data were references to knowing or determining others' reputations by chatting, gossiping, or sharing information with others in their network or community. Instead, communication most often occurred within the dyad. The sheer absence of intricate communication networks was most salient, indicating that people relied relatively little on others to monitor the behavior of those with whom they had dealings. This is not indicative of embeddedness in closed networks, as there was little evidence of a flow of information from dense, overlapping, or close-knit relations.

### Sanctions

Without an intricate communication network, community- or network-backed sanctions were unlikely, and this is what the data suggest as well. Within closed structures, sanctions for noncompliance occur on the collective level, including social exclusion from all things social and economic. Outside of closed networks, sanctions take place within the dyad, in the form of withdrawal from future exchanges and/or the relationship. While these data provide overwhelming evidence that sanctioning occurred within the dyad, there was absolutely no indication that sanctioning was backed by the collective, be that the network of relations or the community



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of relations. When job seekers failed to fulfill their obligations, as happened frequently, contacts most often responded by withdrawing from future exchanges of that type, refusing to provide job-finding assistance to job seekers who had forsaken them, and, as with Jackie York and Terrance Blackburn, eventually refusing to assist anyone at all. As evidence, one-fourth of contacts reported having been burned by previous referrals—referrals failed to show after a few days, acted boorishly on the job, and/or stole from employers, for instance. For all but one of these job contacts—Laura Odom—referrals' transgressions were managed by pledging not to assist these particular job seekers again with job information and influence. However, most maintained relations on some terms, even if to a lesser degree than before—no contacts reported ending relationships for their ties' misdeeds. After his referral “brought the street to the job,” for instance, Gary Hanson shared that while he would no longer consider working with his former co-worker, they were still good friends.

This form of sanctioning is consistent with that which occurs within the dyad, not in communities in which norms of cooperativeness prevail. If the latter were true, we would expect contacts to discuss how the job seeker had been excluded from social functions and economic opportunities by the network or the community. No one shared this type of information. There appeared to be no sanctions backed by the community that the debtor had to bear. Only the less severe sanctions of withdrawal from contacts were enforced. Here again, informal structures supporting trustworthiness appear weak, if not absent.

In summary, these data indicate that in the context of job finding, social capital activation among the black urban poor is not a function of social closure. That there was so little variation in how job contacts learned of their job-seeking ties' reputations, and the way they appeared to sanction those who failed to behave as expected—both indications of the extent to which contacts were embedded in closed networks—strongly suggest that social closure was not a defining factor in whether or not job contacts would provide assistance. The question is, Does this also negate the significance of residing in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage? This is a pertinent question because social disorganization theory posits that concentrated disadvantage acts through network structures to affect outcomes like cooperation.

### CONCENTRATED DISADVANTAGE

Community SES was related to orientation to and concerns about providing job-finding assistance (see table 6). While 47% of contacts from

TABLE 6  
JOB-FINDING ASSISTANCE ORIENTATION AND CONCERNS, BY COMMUNITY SES

Orientation/Concern	Total	Low-Moderate Poverty	Concentrated Disadvantage
% open to providing assistance .....	40	47	21
% will help all .....	16	17	8
% concerned with job seekers' reputation .....	70	67	82
% concerned with work reputation .....	38	39	42
% concerned with ghetto reputation .....	43	37	54
% burned by previous referral .....	26	21	41

NOTE.—*N* = 103.

low-to-moderate (low) poverty neighborhoods expressed a general openness to providing job-finding assistance, just 21% of contacts from high-to-extreme (high) poverty neighborhoods did. Indeed, while 17% of contacts from low-poverty neighborhoods reported that they would be willing to help all who requested job-finding assistance, just 8% of contacts from high-poverty neighborhoods did.

What explains this difference in orientation? Examining properties of the network, the difference cannot be explained by variation in network embeddedness. Using information flow and sanctioning approaches as proxies for embeddedness in closed networks, I discovered that residents of neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage were not less likely than residents of less disadvantaged neighborhoods to be embedded in closed networks. Indeed, so few contacts—two—appeared embedded in closed networks that it could not explain differences in the likelihood of assisting. Residents of low-poverty neighborhoods appeared to be just as embedded in loosely connected networks of relations in which information flow was disjointed and sanctioning took place within the dyad. Thus, in these data, the relationship between concentrated disadvantage and job-finding assistance is not mediated by variations in the degree of social closure.

There are important correlations to consider, however. First, 70% of all respondents expressed distrust regarding job seekers' use of their names, and thus their reputations, to gain employment at their place of work. However, a noticeably higher percentage of contacts who resided in a context of concentrated disadvantage expressed this fear than did those from low-poverty neighborhoods—82% versus 67%. Furthermore, contacts who feared that their job-seeking ties would behave badly and ruin their reputations expressed far greater reluctance, generally, to provide job-finding assistance. While 73% of contacts who distrusted how others would perform in the job generally took a reluctant approach to

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providing assistance, just 35% of those without this concern were as reluctant.

Second, contacts residing in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage had good reason to be reluctant. Compared to those living in low-poverty neighborhoods, a higher percentage of the former had been burned by their referrals. Indeed, although roughly one-fifth of residents of low-poverty neighborhoods had been negatively affected by providing assistance, almost half of residents from neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage had had a similar negative experience. This is noteworthy because whereas residents of neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage represented less than one-third of the sample, they were almost 46% of those who had been burned by prior referrals.

Consistent with concerns of being burned, when asked how they determined whether or not to assist their job-seeking ties, a higher percentage of contacts from high-poverty neighborhoods made determinations based on job seekers' personal reputation—specifically, whether or not job seekers were deemed to be ghetto. Whereas 54% assessed whether or not they would assist using this criterion, just 37% of those from low-poverty neighborhoods did the same. However, they were no more concerned than were residents of low-poverty neighborhoods about job-seekers' reputation. Whereas 39% of the latter used this criterion to judge their job-seeking ties, 42% of the former did.

That residents of neighborhoods of concentrated poverty were far more concerned about “ghetto” behavior is likely attributable less to any inherent differences in how people assess trustworthiness than to differences in the types of issues that arise for contacts whose socio-structural positions differ. In neighborhoods in which rates of poverty are high to extreme, and in which a significant minority of residents are unemployed or out of the labor market altogether, “ghetto behavior” is more prevalent and perceived to be so. And while the majority of residents in such neighborhoods do not act ghetto, residents undoubtedly employ this distinction to ferret out, in various contexts, those who can and cannot be trusted. Indeed, this is what Elijah Anderson's (1990, 1999) work shows. Thus, residents of neighborhoods in which rates of poverty were low to moderate likely encountered these behaviors to a lesser extent and thus were less likely to employ this criterion to assess whether or not they would assist. In other words, because they reside in less risky social environments, they were less likely to perceive job-finding assistance as a risky endeavor.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The employment problems of the black urban poor have largely been attributed to a lack of jobs (Kasarda 1995; Wilson 1987), to cultural deficiencies (Mead 1992, 1985; Murray 1984), and to employer discrimination (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2002; Pager 2002; Turner et al. 1991). This study implicates another factor that has not yet been fully considered. Personal contacts represent a major conduit of employment information and influence in the United States, matching roughly half of all job seekers to employers. Conventional wisdom now has it that the black urban poor are less efficacious in this regard because job seekers, suffering from social isolation, have very limited access to ties of social worth. However the findings of this study suggest that access explains only one part of the puzzle, at best. Instead, the social capital deficiencies apparent among the black urban poor seem to have to do more with activation or mobilization than with access. In other words, even when information is available and contacts can influence hires, they often do not. That job contacts express such great reluctance to provide the type of job-finding assistance that facilitates employment adds an additional layer of understanding to this complex and persistent problem. The following quotation illustrates this point: "If they get the job, in the first couple of weeks or so, everything seems to be fine, or maybe even the first 90 days but somehow when they get past that, you see a definite, a marked difference. . . . They tend to laziness or there's something there. I've seen this pattern over and over again, you know. I think people are willing to give them a chance and then they get the chance and then it's like they really don't want to work." Although strikingly similar to the views expressed by my job contacts, this statement was made by an employer interviewed for the Urban Poverty and Family Life Study's survey of Chicago-area employers, quoted by William Julius Wilson in *When Work Disappears* (1996, p. 118). Resembling the distrusting job contacts described in this study, employers expected from black job seekers, especially males, tardiness and absenteeism, unreliability, and an unwillingness to work when on the job. Furthermore, they believed that the probability of theft, cursing, fighting, and disrespecting authority were greatly enhanced with black hires relative to other racial and ethnic groups (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Wilson 1996).

Given these similarities in perspective, it should come as no surprise that job contacts expressed great reluctance to assist their job-seeking ties. Nor should it come as a surprise that the factors that facilitated assistance among job contacts were very similar to those that affected employers' decisions about who to hire. As with employers, contacts were displeased by job seekers who transitioned in and out of jobs frequently, who were

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habitually absent or tardy, or who had poor work attitudes. Furthermore, they were also concerned about whether or not their job-seeking ties would “bring the street to the job,” which included, among other things, showing the effects of alcohol and drug abuse, acting raucously and boisterously, stealing, and intimidating authority figures and co-workers. As a result, job contacts overwhelmingly made determinations about whether or not to assist based on their job-seeking ties’ reputations, both at work and home, as these provided contacts with some indication of how their job-seeking ties might behave on the job. Job seekers’ status mattered little, however. Contacts were far less concerned that a job-seeking tie was unemployed, for instance, than they were about the reason behind the unemployment, reasons that time and again implicated job seekers’ reputations.

Another factor mattered less than anticipated. Drawing from social exchange theory, one could have expected that tie strength would be of greater importance than it was. However, when deciding whether and how much to assist, contacts based the bulk of their decision not on their history of past exchanges with potential exchange partners or what they might gain from job seekers in the future, but on job seekers’ history of work and personal habits. Thus, contacts’ close relations—siblings, best friends, and others with whom contacts presumably had extensive exchanges—were often forsaken if evidence existed that they were either not up to the task or would not represent their contacts well. These decisions had little to do with the history of relations between contact and job seeker, except that it provided contacts with the information they needed to assess trustworthiness and thus the risk they might undertake by providing assistance.

Job contacts paid so much attention to the reputations of their job-seeking ties because of the potential damage job seekers might do to their own reputations. Indeed, it was the interaction between the two—job contacts’ and job seekers’ reputations—that seemed to matter most in their determinations, consistent with Robert Wilson’s (1985) treatment of the concept. It was noteworthy that contacts with stellar reputations on the job, like Wilson Smith, were generally open to providing job-finding assistance, while those who had tarnished their reputations in the eyes of their employers, like Terrance Blackburn, were patently against providing assistance. What was striking, however, were the narratives provided by contacts like Jackie York and Jeremy Jessup. Both began providing referrals while in good standing with their employers, and because they were held in high regard initially, they were willing to influence a few questionable hires. As these hires failed to work out, both of their reputations became tarnished, and they became increasingly reluctant to recommend any of their friends for jobs, deeming the process inherently

risky. Jackie eventually lost the confidence of her employer; Jeremy lost his job. As a result of potential outcomes like these, both job seekers' and job contacts' reputations dominated contacts' concerns about whether or not to assist.

There was a contingency to reputational concerns, however. Even for job seekers of ill repute, job contacts could be mobilized if their levels of social and economic stability were very low. Those who perceived their situations to be dire, like Laura and, initially, Jackie, were willing to provide assistance to anyone who came along, regardless of reputation, hoping that those assisted would quickly become sources of social and material support. Contacts less overwhelmed by their circumstances because they had greater personal, social, or material sources to draw upon were less likely to come to the aid of others without regard to reputation. However, status did not affect social capital activation in the way that we might expect. There was no indication in the data that job contacts were reluctant to assist because they were too ashamed to admit that they were employed in positions of low status and esteem.

Other individual-level properties of the job contact mattered as well. Whether or not job contacts could be mobilized for job-finding assistance was also affected by their history of prior attempts to assist. Specifically, job contacts for whom attempts to intercede were met with job seekers' disengagement were far less open to providing assistance than those whose history of assistance included successful matches of motivated job seekers. After a time, the former became like discouraged workers—they eventually stopped trying to assist, perceiving the activity to be a waste of time because they deemed job seekers too unmotivated to take advantage of the information they had to offer or the influence they could wield.

Job contacts were similar to employers in at least one other way. Previous research indicates that to avoid black job seekers (employers' proxy for poor-quality workers), inner-city employers selectively recruited by advertising job vacancies in neighborhood newspapers that were not widely distributed in poor black communities (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Wilson 1996). Likewise, distrusting job contacts in this study avoided potential bad referrals by informing only those whom they deemed "worthy" of their information and influence, while deceiving the "unworthy" about vacancies or routing them to employment opportunities at other firms. Just as employers reported spending a great deal of time interviewing black job seekers to assess their commitment to employment (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991),<sup>11</sup> so too did job contacts engage job

<sup>11</sup> Although employers in the Chicago-area study indicated that they take extra time and care to interview black job applicants to assess their willingness to work, audit studies suggest that employers actually take less time and are less engaged with black

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seekers in long conversations, hoping to elicit information that would help them determine whether or not job seekers were resolute, with some contacts requiring job seekers to supply résumés as evidence of their resolve before they agreed to assist. Given prior research, there is little doubt that employers are skeptical of the work ethic of the black urban poor, question their motivation, and fear the ghetto among them. At the very least, this is the rationale they provide for their great reluctance to hire from this pool of applicants. Until this study, however, no treatment has examined systematically the extent to which these same perceptions prevail among the black urban poor and inform the decisions that they make about whether and how to assist their job-seeking ties. As such, this study represents an important empirical contribution.

This study contributes conceptually as well. While there exists a wide variety of earlier investigations that suggest that the factors favorable to social capital activation operate at multiple levels, to date there has been no single, multilevel conceptual framework within which to understand social capital activation. In addition to the individual- and dyadic-level properties mentioned above, decisions to assist were also contingent on the SES of contacts' community of residence. Residents of neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage were more concerned about the reputations of their job-seeking ties than were residents of low-poverty neighborhoods. Consistent with this trend, they were generally less open to providing job-finding assistance as well, perceiving greater risk in assisting for at least two reasons. First, residence in communities of concentrated disadvantage put them into much more regular and frequent contact with individuals whose reputations would be called into question—those whose behavior would be deemed ghetto. Second, they were more likely to have been burned in the past by job-seeking ties who, in different ways, behaved offensively. Thus, for them, job seekers were generally seen as untrustworthy, and providing job-finding assistance was more likely socially constructed as a risky endeavor.

However, there was little evidence to implicate social closure, as proposed by James Coleman (1988, 1990) and others. Far from dense, overlapping, and close-knit, networks were, by and large, open and free-floating structures. This trend varied little, regardless of contacts' orientation to providing job-finding assistance, a point that is somewhat surprising for two reasons. First, prior work has shown that structures of embeddedness have important effects on cooperative efforts among those sharing a network of relations. As an example, Uehara (1990) showed that network structures affect the ability and willingness of recently job-

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applicants than with comparable white applicants at every stage of the recruitment and screening process (Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991).

less, poor, black women to mobilize their ties for instrumental aid, with network structures characterized by social closure facilitating this type of assistance. Second, to the extent that community SES is believed to matter, structures of embeddedness are theorized to be the mediating factor. Social disorganization theory informs us that community SES affects both the density of network relations—the extent to which networks can be characterized as closed—and the links between local institutions within communities, and that these then shape the development and maintenance of common values and effective social controls that facilitate cooperation and community problem-solving behaviors among residents.

Because of proxies that I used to determine social closure, I cannot say with certainty that these particular findings are beyond dispute. However, there is reason to believe that what I report is accurate, without disputing the larger claim that network structures can either facilitate or inhibit cooperation among those who share network relations. First, although previous research finds that greater closure leads to greater cooperation, we also know that residents of urban communities are far less likely to be embedded in closed networks—those that are dense, overlapping, and close-knit—than are residents of small towns or rural communities (Amato 1993; Cook and Hardin 2001; Fischer 1982). In other words, we would not expect a great deal of social closure among residents of urban communities. This does not mean, however, that cooperation does not occur among residents of urban communities. Instead, as Cook and Hardin explain, “In more urban settings the networks individuals form to establish relationships of social exchange and cooperation (or merely to coordinate joint activity) tend to be more specialized, less multiplex, more sparsely connected, and more numerous” (2001, p. 336). Thus, while I would not exclude measures of social closure from a model of social capital activation, I would argue that its relevance would be highly contingent on the social context within which cooperation is predicted to occur—urban or rural, for instance.

Second, although community social organization theory assumes that “locality-based social networks constitute the core social fabric of human ecological communities” (Sampson and Groves 1989, p. 779), the growing complexity of modern life increasingly calls this assumption into question. Nowadays, individuals’ close relations, whether close friends or family members, are far less likely than in the past to reside in the same neighborhood (Amato 1993). Indeed, some would argue that the suburbs have thrived in part because, when given the option, people opt out of such dense, overlapping, and close-knit relations whose obligations once encumbered them (Sennett and Cobb 1972). What this means is that community social organization can and probably does act on outcomes like cooperation and collective efficacy through some other mechanism than



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dense networks of relations. Indeed, I would argue that even though the residents of low-poverty neighborhoods in my sample were similarly embedded in open, free-floating networks of relations, because they lived in neighborhoods in which crime and deviance were less prevalent, they perceived themselves to be in less risky circumstances and thus were generally more likely to be mobilized for assistance. Thus, controlling for network closure, community SES can act on cooperation and collective efficacy by affecting residents' perceptions of the risk that they face at the hands of those around them because of the environment in which they live.

Finally, although this project does not speak directly to racial and ethnic differences in the efficaciousness of social capital, it does motivate future research centered on this question. What the findings reported here suggest is that relative to other racial and ethnic groups, poor, urban blacks are less likely to benefit from their network of relations, not so much because they lack access than because their networks are less likely to be mobilized for assistance. This work lays the groundwork for future research designed to test such hypotheses rigorously. Thus, not only may we wish to explain racial and ethnic differences in status attainment in terms of accessed and mobilized models of social capital, as has been done quite extensively to date; we may also explain these differences in terms of the likelihood of activating the contacts to whom individuals are connected, problematizing properties of the individuals involved in the exchange, such as the reputation (work and personal) and motivation of the job seeker, and the reputation, status, and general inclination to assist of the job contact. Properties of the dyad should not be ignored either. Instead, we may consider the strength and length of job contacts' relationships with their job-seeking ties. We would also problematize properties of the community, taking into consideration the community's SES, and, consistent with Coleman's (1990) approach, the size of the community as well. And, despite the lack of evidence in this study, we may also problematize properties of the network, taking into consideration such measures as density, intensity, and encapsulation. This multilevel approach to understanding social capital activation provides a fruitful avenue for future research and promises to fill many empirical and conceptual gaps that currently exist in the literature.

Indeed, the findings reported here encourage a different and potentially instructive interpretation of findings from prior work. I employ two studies as examples. First, Green, Tigges, and Diaz (1999) compared three methods of assistance employed by job contacts—informing job seekers about vacancies, talking to employers on job seekers' behalf, or hiring job seekers—and found that blacks were significantly less likely to have job contacts assist proactively during the matching process. Second, Hol-

zer (1987) found that roughly one-fifth of the black-white racial difference in the probability of a young person gaining employment could be explained by differences in receiving offers after having searched through friends and relatives. When black youths searched through friends and relatives, they were less likely to be offered employment than were their white counterparts. In the former case, blacks' relative lack of access was implicated. In the latter, no clear explanation was offered. However, in both studies, it may be that properties of the individual, dyad, network, and community may further disadvantage those in low-wage labor markets where employers rely heavily on contacts for recruitment and screening. Indeed, this perspective may help to explain why, among African-Americans, social support networks often lag behind those of other racial and ethnic groups in terms of expressive aid, such as advice giving, and instrumental aid, such as money lending or giving (Eggebeen 1992; Eggebeen and Hogan 1990; Green, Hammer, and Tigges 2000; Hofferth 1984; Morgan 1982; Parish, Hao, and Hogan 1991), despite research from the 1970s describing strong obligations of exchange within poor black communities (McAdoo 1980; Stack 1974).

## APPENDIX A

### Data Collection Strategies

As is often the case when studying low-income populations, the principal investigators of this project had great difficulty recruiting participants through random sampling techniques, although great effort was made to do so (Edin and Lein 1997). In the summer of 1999, we contacted GENESYS Sampling Systems, a service that provided us with publicly listed names, addresses, and telephone numbers of 350 randomly selected residents from a poor census tract. Although we had initially thought to restrict the sampling to those ages 25–34 (the 1990 census indicated that there were 379 residents in this census tract ages 25–34), because there were so few listings for residents in this age group (48 records), we broadened our criteria. From GENESYS, we received the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of 350 residents. We attempted to contact residents with the phone numbers we had been given, but found ourselves facing three major obstacles: many lines were no longer in service, residents had moved, and many households did not have a resident matching our criteria. Thus, from August to December 1999, we had a yield of only nine interviews.

Our next approach involved canvassing the community and recording every address for every housing structure. We then mailed recruitment letters asking respondents to participate and promised to provide a \$25

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incentive for participation. This method generated only two additional interviews.

Our third strategy involved canvassing the community, by going door-to-door and requesting participation. We began canvassing the area's housing projects with the intent of working our way through all of the housing projects in this community. Canvassing usually took place between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Although few people who fit the criteria refused to participate when asked, we were presented with some challenges. The projects that housed the most disadvantaged residents were relatively unsafe. Gang activity, including drug dealing, occurred conspicuously. Violent crime was so prevalent that few residents that we spoke with would allow their children to play outside or would venture outside themselves except to leave the neighborhood. Furthermore, residents would often refuse to answer their doors. Many had eviction notices posted on their doors and may have thought that we were bill collectors. We also believed that some did not want interviewers to see their homes. Self-conscious of her dwelling, one respondent requested that we conduct the interview in her barely functioning car.

Because we perceived ourselves to be in some danger, and because many residents clearly had issues of trust where interviewers were concerned, we then decided to recruit residents from social service agencies, where the more semi-public arena would reassure interviewers who feared for their safety, as well as reassure residents who feared for their own well-being. From contacts in the area, we discovered two social service agencies—one catered to residents experiencing various housing issues and provided some employment assistance as well; the other agency (the center) was most fruitful, yielding the bulk of our 105 interviews conducted (71) between August 2000 and June 2002. In all, 72% were recruited at both social service agencies. During this time, interviewers took up residence at the center's office during regular business hours. With the assistance of center staff, they approached prospective subjects who fit the study's criteria and requested their participation. The response rate was fairly high—roughly 80%.

There may be some concern that respondents recruited in the early stages of the project differed from those recruited through the social service agencies. Comparing the full sample to center-recruited respondents, I found minor differences in terms of mean age, number of children, and hourly wages (see app. table A1). There were also minor differences in the percentage who had children and received public assistance. However, a lower percentage of the center-recruited sample was female, was ever married, graduated from high school, was employed, and was a resident of a high-to-extreme poverty neighborhood. A higher percentage was currently on public assistance, but a lower percentage had ever received

TABLE A1  
MEAN SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS BY DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

Variable	Full Sample ( <i>N</i> = 103)	Random Sample ( <i>N</i> = 27)	Center-Recruited Sample ( <i>N</i> = 76)
Age .....	28.4 (5.9)	30.1 (5.5)	27.8 (6.0)
Gender (female) .....	.52	.67	.46
Never married .....	.78	.67	.83
Have children .....	.75	.74	.75
No. of children (if parent) .....	2.5 (1.4)	2.6 (1.1)	2.5 (1.5)
High school graduate/GED .....	.84	1.0	.78
Employed .....	.50	.89	.36
Hourly wages (in dollars) .....	9.30 (3.5)	8.57 (2.8)	9.57 (3.7)
Public assistance:			
Currently receiving .....	.31	.19	.36
Ever received .....	.46	.58	.40
Neighborhood poverty rate:			
Low-moderate poverty .....	.67	.37	.78
High-extreme poverty .....	.33	.63	.22

TABLE A2  
PERCENTAGE OF CENTER-RECRUITED EXPRESSING CONCERNS ABOUT PROVIDING JOB-FINDING ASSISTANCE

Concern	Full Sample	Center-Recruited Sample
Major concerns about job seekers .....	81	84
Job seekers are too unmotivated .....	20	13
Job seekers are too needy .....	10	11
Job seekers are prone to delinquency .....	70	71

NOTE.—*N* = 76.

assistance. Thus, these different sampling methods yielded individuals from somewhat different populations.

To determine whether this influences findings, I recalculated the mean percentage of respondents who distrust, by demographic characteristics, for the center-recruited sample only. Results are displayed in appendix table A2. However, differences were minor, changing in no substantive way the findings reported in the main text.

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### APPENDIX B

#### Job-Finding Questions

Now I'd like to ask a few questions about finding work.

1. In general, how difficult would you say it is to find a job, any job?
  - a. How difficult would you say it is now to find a good job?
2. What obstacles have *you* had finding work?
3. How important is it to use friends, relatives, and acquaintances to find out about job opportunities?
4. When you hear about job openings at your workplace or elsewhere, what do you do? In other words, do you tell the people you know about them? Explain.
5. Have you ever gone to anyone you know to ask about job opportunities for yourself or anyone else you know? (If no, go to question no. 6.)
  - a. Who did you ask and why did you ask this person?
  - b. What does she/he do for a living and what types of jobs could she/he help you find?
  - c. Would you say that she/he has influence or power on the job?
  - d. Has this person helped you on more than one occasion?
  - e. How did this person help?
  - f. Did you get the job?
  - g. Would you have been able to get this job without the help of this person?
6. Has anyone ever come to you for help in finding or getting a job?
  - a. Who has come to you for help and why?
  - b. What types of jobs did she/he/they ask about?
  - c. How did you help, if at all?
  - d. Would you help again?
  - e. Did this/these job seeker(s) get the job(s)?
7. Now I want you to think about situations in which you have helped someone to find a job. Once the job seeker has been hired for the job, to what extent have you helped them get accustomed to the job?
8. When people you know approach you for help in finding work, how do you determine whether you will help or not?
9. What do you think are the positive aspects of helping others to find work?
10. What do you think are the negative aspects of trying to help others to find work?

11. I want you to think about all of your family, friends, and acquaintances. Is there a specific person that you know who is helpful in finding work for others?
  - a. Who is this person?
  - b. What types of jobs?
  - c. What does she/he do for a living?
12. Finally, for young adults moving from school to work, what advice would you give about how to find jobs?

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