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# A Test of Sincerity: How Black and Latino Service Workers Make Decisions about Making Referrals

By  
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The author draws from in-depth interviews with thirty-nine black and Latino custodial and food service workers at the University of California, Berkeley, to determine how workers make decisions about making job referrals. Interviews were revelatory. Drawing from widely available and institutionalized scripts about what makes a good worker, jobholders assessed jobseekers' orientation toward work as well as what effect this orientation might have on their own reputations on the job to determine whom to help and how much to do so. Because of ethno-racial differences in how unemployment was interpreted, Latinos were more likely than their black counterparts to help and to do so proactively. These findings suggest that theories of social capital mobilization must take into consideration individuals' access to and deployment of cultural resources to fully understand the circumstances under which actors are mobilized for instrumental action.

*Keywords:* social capital; job search; race and ethnicity; culture; scripts

Although the overwhelming majority of low-income jobseekers search for work through their personal contacts, they actually get jobs through friends and relatives at significantly different rates (Corcoran, Datcher, and Duncan 1980; Elliot and Sims 2001; Falcon 1995; Falcon and Melendez 2001; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999; Smith 2000). Compare the experiences of low-income blacks and Latinos. Previous research indicates that although roughly 80 percent of blacks search for work through friends and family members, fewer than half actually get matched to jobs through these informal channels. In contrast, 85 percent of Latinos search through kith and kin, and about

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75 percent find work this way. In other words, Latinos who search through personal networks are much more likely than their black counterparts to be matched to jobs this way.<sup>1</sup>

When low-income black jobseekers *are* assisted during the matching process, they are less likely than their Latino counterparts to have been assisted proactively (Elliot and Sims 2001; Falcon and Melendez 2001; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999). Roughly 60 percent of blacks job-matched by a personal contact are told about the positions for which they are hired. In sharp contrast, barely 40 percent of Latinos who receive job-matching assistance are aided in this way. Compared to blacks, however, a substantially higher percentage of Latinos report that their personal contacts talked to employers on their behalf. While roughly 40 percent of Latinos have been helped in this way, only about 20 percent of blacks have (Elliot and Sims 2001).

Why are low-income Latinos more likely than their black counterparts to find work through personal contacts and to get aided proactively?<sup>2</sup> Demand-side explanations tend to focus on low-wage employers' preference for Latino over black workers. Previous research indicates that employers perceive black workers to be less competent, productive, and dependable (Moss and Tilly 2001; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; W. J. Wilson 1996); more distracted by familial obligations (Browne and Kennelly 1999); and less pliable and obedient than workers from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Shih 2002; W. J. Wilson 1996). Because of this, the argument goes, employers are more likely to favor the referral networks of their nonblack employees.

Supply-side perspectives tend to highlight the implications of Latino workers' disproportionate foreign-born status. Because a relatively high percentage of low-income Latinos are immigrants who do not speak English well and lack working papers, they have a greater need for personal contacts to act as personal intermediaries. They may also be more likely than blacks to actually acquire jobs through personal contacts who talk to employers on their behalf because, for those without working papers and with limited English fluency, advocacy by personal intermediaries may be the only way to get employers to consider them seriously (Dohan 2003; Menjivar 2000).

While both the supply- and demand-side perspectives offer useful insights into differences between low-income blacks and Latinos in the extent and nature of social capital activation for job finding, proponents of both perspectives often fail to examine how the search process unfolds in ethnographic detail because they have also failed to identify and take seriously the role played by the third node in this trio of nodes—the jobholder. In the role of personal intermediary, the jobholder regularly makes decisions about whether to assist jobseeking relations as well as what form that assistance will take. How they do this, however, has rarely been the subject of study (but see Smith 2005, 2007). From a demand-side perspective, though, one is left to assume that a jobholder's decision-making process is solely a by-product of employers' tastes, preferences, and needs, since researchers in this vein only consider employers' motivations (Granovetter and Tilly 1988; Grieco 1987; Windolf 1986). And because studies undertaken from a supply-side

perspective tend to focus solely on how jobseekers' individual-level attributes affect access to job-relevant social capital, one must presume that jobholders' decision making is solely a function of their jobseeking relations' needs; from this perspective, social capital access appears to guarantee its mobilization. In sum, neither perspective understands jobholders' actions and behaviors as resulting independently from the set of actors that they study.

Furthermore, scholars' rather narrow attention to individual-level determinants and outcomes has made them blind to the important role that culture plays in social capital mobilization. Indeed, to my knowledge no researcher has systematically investigated the extent to which black-Latino differences in patterns of helping are at least in part a function of their access to cultural resources, including intersubjective and group-level repertoires of scripts that allow individuals to structure and give meaning to common behaviors and social situations and that provide individuals with a guide for what appropriate behavior looks like in different contexts (Swidler 1986). But we may never fully understand what appear to be very different patterns of social capital mobilization during the job-matching process without a clear understanding of the scripts that shape black and Latino jobholders' interpretations of key actors' behaviors during the job-matching process; without insight into related schemas that guide jobholders' decisions about whom to help, under what circumstances to help, and how best to do so; and without an awareness of how individuals' sociostructural embeddedness affects the cultural resources they have access to and deploy. Thus, a cultural analysis of the conditions that facilitate social capital mobilization is crucial (Lamont and Small 2008).

To fill this gap in the literature, I draw from in-depth, semistructured interviews with thirty-nine black and Latino custodial and food service workers at the University of California, Berkeley, about how they made decisions about whom they helped during the job-matching process and what type of help they provided. Interviews revealed different patterns of helping between black and Latino jobholders—black jobholders were more likely to decide *against* helping and to help passively, while Latino jobholders were more likely to assist proactively by talking to hiring personnel on behalf of their jobseeking relations. Why? Black jobholders were more likely than their Latino counterparts to be embedded in networks of “not-working people” and to live in neighborhoods where they perceived relatively few adults to be working. Although embeddedness in such networks might have increased black jobholders' willingness to help, and to do so proactively (there was great need, after all), it actually had the opposite effect. Deploying widely available and deeply held scripts that make sense of pervasive and chronic joblessness in terms of individuals' moral shortcomings—unwillingness to take personal responsibility and to strive for self-sufficiency—black jobholders often interpreted the jobseeking behaviors of their relations to be insincere expressions of work motivation. Anchored by these widely available scripts, black jobholders engaged the job-matching process in a guarded and ambivalent way, often choosing to help passively or to exclude from consideration groups or social categories of jobseekers, such as “neighbors” or “young, black men.”

Latino jobholders, on the other hand, engaged more proactively. Because they were more likely to be embedded in networks of the underemployed and to reside in neighborhoods where they largely perceived adults to be working, and because they, too, drew from widely available scripts that portray the underemployed, especially immigrants, as virtuous and worthy, Latino jobholders understood their relations' patterns of work as strong evidence of Latinos' unquestioned work ethic. With these understandings as a backdrop, Latino jobholders often perceived requests for assistance from their Latino relations as sincere, and so they helped proactively when they could.

## Making Decisions about Making Referrals

Over the past two decades, we have learned a great deal about the extent to which personal contacts' assistance affects the likelihood of hire and applicants' employment outcomes (Coverdill 1998; Fernandez and Weinberg 1997; Newman and Lennon 1995; Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000; Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo 2006). According to previous research, personal contacts' involvement in the hiring process improves the quality of applicant pools, presumably because such contacts screen out unsuitable jobseekers and coach suitable ones on how to write appropriate résumés (Fernandez and Weinberg 1997; Fernandez, Castillo, and Moore 2000). Personal contacts also inform jobseekers about the least competitive times to apply, which improves referrals' chances of getting interviews over nonreferral competitors (Fernandez and Weinberg 1997). In addition to the above-mentioned benefits, referrals are also more likely to get hired (Coverdill 1998; Fernandez and Weinberg 1997; Newman and Lennon 1995; Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000; but see Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo 2006), especially when personal contacts personally vouch for the applicants they refer (Neckerman and Fernandez 2003). And once hired, referrals appear to receive more on-the-job training from personal contacts (Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Grieco 1987), and so they learn job tasks faster and stay on the job longer than nonreferrals; they are less likely to quit or to be fired (Fernandez and Weinberg 1997; Neckerman and Fernandez 2003; but see Fernandez, Castillo, and Moore 2000).

But how do jobholders, acting as personal intermediaries, make decisions about whom to help and what type of help to offer? We still know relatively little about this. My own research on the process of finding work represents one of the only systematic studies of jobholders' decision-making processes, and from this we might glean important insights (Smith 2005, 2007). Through in-depth interviews with low-income, young black men and women, I found that jobholders overwhelmingly treated requests for jobseeking help with great skepticism and distrust. Because most perceived the U.S. stratification system to be open (see Hochschild 1996; Young 2004), much like cultural deficiency theorists and conservative commentators (Mead 1986; McWhorter 2000, 2005; Patterson 1998; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1998), they largely understood black joblessness as

a function of defeatism and resistance, individual and cultural. It is through this lens that they most often made sense of jobseeking relations' unemployment and jobseeking behaviors—jobseekers they knew were too unmotivated to accept assistance, required great expenditures of time and emotional energy, or would act too irresponsibly on the job—and these interpretations shaped decision making about whether to help and what form help should take. As a result, even when they could help, many were loath to do so.

Feelings of distrust and a corresponding reluctance to assist were most intense among jobholding residents of neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage—neighborhoods marked by high to extreme rates of poverty and other “negative” social indicators, including welfare dependence, persistent joblessness, high rates of incarceration, and female headship. To explain this finding, I drew from social disorganization theory, which advises that social capital mobilization is 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 diminish both individual (Pearlin et al. 1981) and collective efficacy (Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 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, I theorized, the likelihood of mobilizing one's network of social relations for job finding in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage is low.

My theory of social capital mobilization was not without independent empirical support. Using the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality to examine the effect of neighborhood poverty status on methods of job search and job matching, Elliot and Sims (2001) found that in ghettos, as poverty rates increased, the likelihood that residents of such neighborhoods received job-matching assistance, especially of a proactive nature, declined substantially. The opposite was true, however, among Latinos. Elliot and Sims found that in barrios, as neighborhood poverty increased, so too did help from personal intermediaries, including proactive help. Thus, in ostensibly similar structural conditions, blacks and Latinos have been found to have different patterns of behavior.

“Ostensibly” is the operative term here. Predominantly black high-poverty neighborhoods tend to be neighborhoods with high rates of joblessness, of *unemployment*; predominantly Latino high-poverty neighborhoods, on the other hand, tend to be neighborhoods of low-wage workers, of *underemployment*. Many scholars point to this difference when proposing a social capital access argument—relative to Latinos, low-income black *jobseekers* lack access to working relations, and so they are less likely to get job-matched through personal

contacts. I highlight this difference to posit a somewhat different proposition informed by theories of culture (Swidler 1986)—to the extent that *jobholders* reside in communities or are embedded in networks of relations in which joblessness is common, and to the extent that *jobholders* have access to publicly available repertoires of scripts that lead them to interpret pervasive and chronic joblessness in terms of individuals' moral shortcomings, then regardless of race, jobholders will harbor serious doubts about jobseekers' motivations to work, and this skepticism will inform their strategies around job matching. In other words, individuals' access to cultural resources matters a great deal.

There are, after all, any number of ways jobholders might make sense of (and thus respond to) pervasive and chronic joblessness. Privileging scripts that highlight moral character is certainly one approach, but jobholders could also deploy scripts that privilege structural explanations for jobseekers' employment problems and jobseeking behaviors. For instance, they could locate black joblessness in pervasive employer discrimination (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Browne and Kennelly 1999; Pager 2002; Shih 2002); in the restructuring of the urban economy and the massive loss of jobs in industries that once heavily employed black men (W. J. Wilson 1987; Kasarda 1995); in the tragically poor quality of the public education system that has failed to prepare low-income residents, especially those of color (Neckerman 2007), for evolving labor market opportunities; and in the mass incarceration of young, black men whose employment chances are irrevocably damaged once they have been so "marked" (Pager 2002; Western 2007). Despite overwhelming evidence of the significance of these factors, however, jobholders infrequently deploy scripts that highlight structural constraints. Thus, that the jobholders I discussed in *Lone Pursuit* (Smith 2007) were reluctant to help, especially in contexts of concentrated disadvantage, could not be solely a function of their embeddedness in neighborhoods and networks of concentrated disadvantage; *how* jobholders made sense of this concentrated disadvantage was equally important in shaping whom they helped, how much help they provided, and under what circumstances. Again, access to cultural resources mattered greatly. Similarly, although many might argue that Latinos help more simply because they are more likely to be embedded in networks of workers, albeit underemployed workers, I contend that here, too, a cultural analysis is necessary. Until we understand the meanings that Latinos attach to the employment patterns and job-seeking behaviors of their network of relations, we will never fully understand the conditions within which social capital mobilization occurs during the job-matching process. What follows is an effort to fill this gap.

## Case Study

This study is centrally concerned with the cultural resources, scripts specifically, that guide how black and Latino jobholders make decisions about whether to help their jobseeking relations and what type of help they will provide, with an eye toward better understanding why black jobseekers are less likely to be



job-matched by personal contacts than their Latino counterparts. Toward this end, trained graduate student interviewers and I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with thirty-nine custodial and food service workers at the University of California, Berkeley.<sup>2</sup> We asked respondents about the nature of and satisfaction with their current and previous work experiences,<sup>3</sup> how they perceived the climate of job-finding help that exists in their communities and on the job, how they perceived the risks and costs associated with providing job-matching help, their actual experiences providing help (or choosing not to), and how they perceived race relations on the job.

To determine how respondents made decisions about whom to help and what form that help would take, workers were specifically asked about the kinds of job opportunities at the university they had learned about in the past year.<sup>4</sup> If they had learned about job opportunities that they could recommend to people they knew, they were asked if they had made any effort to do so; those who had made an effort were asked to provide details about their most recent experiences helping someone to get a job (regardless of whether the person actually got the job). Those who had recently decided against helping were also asked about the process by which they had come to their decisions.

For participation in this study, workers were primarily recruited through two strategies. I first contacted physical plant supervisors and food service managers across campus to ask permission to describe the study during staff meetings to workers in their charge and to recruit those who expressed interest in participating. This recruitment strategy yielded approximately one-half of the interviews conducted since the study began in April 2008. The other half has been generated through respondent-driven sampling (see Heckathorn 1997, 2002).

As shown in Table 1, of the thirty-nine workers interviewed, twenty-nine were custodians (fourteen blacks and fifteen Latinos) and ten were food service workers (five blacks and five Latinas).<sup>5</sup> Among custodians, black workers were, on average, 49 years old and largely male (79 percent). No black custodial worker had failed to earn a high school diploma or its equivalent. Their average tenure on the job was roughly 12.5 years, and they earned approximately \$2,770 each month. Latino custodial workers looked little different from their black counterparts. They were, on average, 46 years old, largely male (67 percent), and high school educated with 11.5 years on the job and \$2,330 in monthly earnings.

In contrast to custodians, black and Latina food service workers looked very different from each other (although the former looked very similar to black and Latino custodial workers). Black workers were about 50 years old, while Latina workers were, on average, 28 years old. Whereas 40 percent of black food service workers were male, there were no male Latino food service workers. Blacks' tenure on the job was slightly greater than 15 years, but Latinas averaged less than 3 years (2.4). And Latinas earned roughly \$600 less per month than their black counterparts (\$1,650 vs. \$2,220).

The majority of black workers in this study were natives of California, especially the Bay Area, as were workers of Latin American ancestry. Slightly greater than half of the Latinos in this sample were immigrants, mostly from Mexico.



Table 1  
 Characteristics of the Jobholders in This Sample

	Custodial Workers		Food Service Workers	
	Blacks (N = 14)	Latinos (N = 15)	Blacks (N = 5)	Latinas (N = 5)
Average age (range)	48.9 (32-60)	45.7 (37-59)	49.2 (30-63)	28.4 (18-54)
Percentage male	79	67	40	0
Percentage high school graduate	100	73	100	100
Average job tenure (range)	12.5 (0.1-29)	11.5 (1.0-26)	15.6 (3-37)	2.4 (0.8-8)
Monthly income (\$)	2,770	2,330	2,220	1,650

*Establishing jobseekers' sincerity*

When jobholders learn about job opportunities that they can recommend to people they know, or when they learn that friends or family members are looking for the kind of job opportunities about which they may have some insight, there are multiple paths they can take. They can talk to hiring personnel on behalf of jobseekers, act as references, provide jobseekers with an abundance of information about how best to improve their chances for hire, or limit their information strictly to what jobs are available or where jobseekers might go to learn about openings. They can do some combination of all of the above, and, of course, they can also do nothing.

Interviews revealed that, regardless of race or ethnicity, the path that custodial and food service workers take is most often, though not entirely, a function of jobholders' perception of jobseekers' set of soft skills, interaction and motivation (see Moss and Tilly 2001; Holzer 1996).<sup>6</sup> Jobholders expressed sensitivity to jobseekers' perceived deficiencies in interaction skills. Inappropriate dress (pants worn well below the waist, for instance), poor speech patterns or the overreliance on colloquialisms, sour personalities, immaturity, an inability or unwillingness to take constructive criticism, loudness, and poor personal hygiene—to jobholders, these attributes and behaviors indicated that jobseekers were not prepared to assimilate relatively seamlessly on the job, and so they either chose to provide the bare minimum or not to assist at all. But jobholders were inspired to put their names on the line for those with strong interpersonal skills—those who were personable and easy to get along with; who would work well in groups; who listened well; who were honest, humble, and credible; and who had good morals. Confident that jobseekers with these characteristics would get along well with managers and supervisors, coworkers, and students, jobholders were eager to help and to do so proactively.

Jobholders who decided against helping, however, most often did so when they perceived that jobseekers lacked the motivation to work hard. They were opposed to helping if there was any evidence that jobseekers lacked determination,

stability, and credibility; if jobseekers were unreliable, untrustworthy, or irresponsible; or if jobseekers would not be hardworking. But jobholders were motivated to proactively assist jobseekers who they perceived loved to work (and in some cases *needed* to work), because they reasoned that such jobseekers would go “above and beyond,” would be responsible and stable, and would be open to growth. As one fifty-four-year-old food service worker put it, “You feel them out and say, ‘How sincere are you in your body movement, your words, your actions?’ That’s how I typically judge someone if they want to work or not.”

Ascertaining another’s sincerity to work, however, is a highly subjective affair. What movements, words, and actions would convince jobholders that jobseekers were “working material?” What convinced jobholders that jobseekers would fit in and work hard? Jobholders determined that jobseekers were sincere under the following circumstances (and in order of importance): if jobseekers had reputations or statuses indicative of a past of hard work; if they appeared to be engaged in some type of productive activity, such as working, looking for work as if job search were a full-time job, or, importantly, taking other necessary steps to get one’s life back on track; and/or if they “pressured” jobholders for help. Typically, for instance, jobholders assumed that jobseekers with a reputation for hard work were being sincere about wanting a job. A solid work reputation was often enough to motivate jobholders to help proactively. This is at least in part because individuals’ past behaviors are reasonable predictors of future behaviors (R. Wilson 1985). But jobholders’ deployment of this criterion also suggests that they are motivated to draw moral boundaries around those deemed deserving of assistance against those considered undeserving by a status hierarchy that privileges individuals with strong labor force attachments over their more weakly connected counterparts (Newman 1999; Newman and Ellis 1999). Without a solid work history, jobholders often needed to see that jobseekers were both engaged in some type of productive activity *and* were approaching and pressuring them with a sense of urgency about finding work. Anything less would be interpreted as insincerity and deemed unworthy of the type of help that advantages jobseekers during the job-matching process.

### *Forsaking jobseekers: When jobholders decide not to help at all*

When custodians and food service workers learned about job opportunities at the university and also knew of family members, friends, or even acquaintances who could benefit, most reported taking some action, even if minimal in effort and effect. Most also reported with relative ease, however, at least one or two jobseekers who did not make their cut. When jobholders decided against helping, the primary reason was that jobseekers were thought to lack motivation and so were unworthy of assistance. Maria Hernandez was typical in this regard. During her decade as a university custodial worker, Maria made numerous attempts to get friends and family members jobs. For jobseekers she deemed responsible, the forty-seven-year-old immigrant from Mexico took them to her supervisor to make introductions and to speak positively on their behalf. Indeed, it was in good

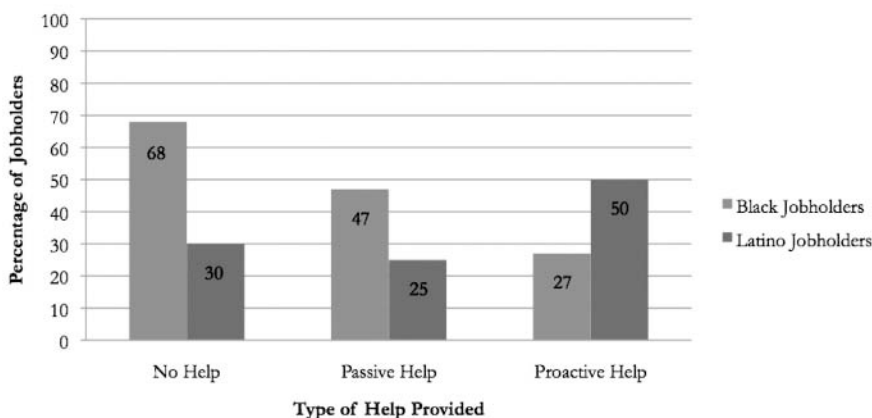
part because of her proactive involvement in the process, she believes, that her own son was hired for a temporary position as a custodial worker at the university.

Just as Maria expressed unequivocal support for “responsible” jobseekers, she expressed with equal vehemence her unwillingness to help those she perceived to have motivation deficiencies. Not even her closest intimates were spared. Having deemed him lazy, Maria was adamant in her unwillingness to help *her husband*. According to Maria, “My husband has always told me: ‘Hey, I want to work there. Come on. Lend me a hand so I can get in and work there.’” But Maria had learned from her experiences with him at home. She reasoned, “If at home I will tell him: ‘Let’s start cleaning,’ he does not want to help or he does it badly. He doesn’t know how to sweep, how to mop, so how will you come here to do a job?” In her mind, then, her husband, a musician, lacked the skills, and more importantly *the motivation*, to do custodial work properly. Certain that he would perform badly and sully her good name, when pressed to help, Maria would respond, “No, because in this case I will feel ashamed that you don’t do your job and that they will say: ‘Maria’s husband is very lazy.’ No, I would not like to be told this.” For Maria, her husband’s poor performance cleaning at home helped to establish his work reputation and became a proxy for how he would perform on the job. Given that he approached his chores at home with indifference, and fearful of how his lethargy on the job would affect her coworkers’ and supervisor’s perception of her, Maria considered his declaration “I want to work there” to be insincere and refused to help.

Recently, Shaniqua Woodard had been approached by five jobseekers seeking help to get hired at the university. The thirty-year-old senior cook agreed to help three. What distinguished those she helped from those who were forsaken? According to Shaniqua, in her world, there were the “working people” and the “not-working people.” Shaniqua identified with the working people. These were the jobseekers who kept “pressuring” her with, “Hey! I need to work,” a sure sign to Shaniqua that they were motivated to get a job and to keep it. But “[the] ones that I didn’t [help] are the ones that have a long history of working for two weeks and quitting. Or calling in. Or just really don’t want to work. You want to work, but you don’t want to work. [Most] of them, they *say* they want to work, but they really don’t want to work. They’d rather sit home and wait on their checks on the first [of the month].” These were the “not-working people,” and according to Shaniqua, they were well represented among her neighbors. Indeed, she could barely think of an employed male in her neighborhood (most, she thought, were in prison), and she thought that most of her female neighbors were on public assistance. Her sister fell in the latter category and was the most recent jobseeker Shaniqua decided against helping. “She always *says* she wants to work. But my opinion with her, she’s just lazy. And I would hate for her to get this job here and don’t come to work. So that’s what kind of detours me with that.” Thus, because she had a spotty work history and was neither working nor conducting what Shaniqua thought was a serious job search, Shaniqua considered her sister’s requests to be insincere and so refused to help her.

Sensing neighborhood-wide insincerity, fifty-four-year-old Celeste Henderson forsook her neighbors. When asked if she had recently decided against helping

FIGURE 1  
Patterns of Helping among Black and Latino Jobholders



someone to get a job at the university, the twenty-nine-year custodial veteran replied, “Yeah. Some people in my neighborhood. I wouldn’t tell them about it, because I know they don’t mean to come up here and work. Do no good.” When asked who, specifically, she responded in the following way:

It’s just people in my neighborhood. They just might know you work at UC Berkeley; they heard you talking about your job and they say, “Oh, is your job hiring?” Or something like that. They will just be talking to you or something and say, “Is your job hiring?” And some of them are not even sincere. They just want to know is your job hiring, *and act like they want to work* [emphasis added]. You can kind of tell that kind of people, and if they’re sincere about if they really want a job or not. . . . So that’s what made me decide against it. I’m not going to tell them about my job, because they’re not going to go up there and do right anyway.

When asked how she had come to realize that they were not being sincere and would not be good workers, Celeste responded, “Because you see them in the neighborhood. You know their character and their behavior. Some of them will just see you, and they know you work. And they say, ‘Is your job hiring? Where do you work?’ Something like that. No, they don’t want no job.”

A greater percentage of blacks than Latinos had recently decided against helping. As shown in Figure 1, whereas 30 percent of Latino jobholders had recently decided against helping, 68 percent of black jobholders had.<sup>7</sup> Differences in patterns of helping, however, did not end there. Among Latino jobholders, such as Maria, it was typical to list just one jobseeking relation they had recently decided against helping. Among black jobholders, such as Shaniqua and Celeste, the routine was to provide lists of two or more jobseekers (“Brother, nephew, nephew, and cousin” or “My godbrother, my niece, my nephew, and a friend”),

general estimates of the number of jobseekers they had decided against helping (“Wow! I would say maybe between five and ten, something around there”), groups (“Just people in my neighborhood” or “members of my church”), or social categories of people (“Young, black men”).

Furthermore, although both black and Latino jobholders provided a variety of reasons why they decided against helping, among black jobholders, decisions appeared strongly motivated by jobholders’ concerns about jobseekers’ motivation. Of the thirteen black jobholders who had recently decided against helping, one was concerned about his friends’ physical fitness, another shared concerns about his relations’ ability to pass required screening tests, and two pointed to jobseekers’ drug dependencies. But the overwhelming majority of black jobholders (nine) pointed squarely to jobseekers’ motivation (or lack thereof), variously explaining their decision not to assist in terms of jobseekers’ laziness, apparent disinterest in work, unreliability, and weak drive. And it was not unusual for them to do so in racialized terms. As more than one black jobholder explained, “We [blacks] got a lot of issues. And a lot of it is work ethic. A lot of us don’t want to work.” This view—part of a widely available and strongly held set of scripts deployed by employers (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Browne and Kennelly 1999), social theorists (Mead 1986), public intellectuals (McWhorter 2000, 2005), and famous black personalities (Cosby and Poussaint 2007)—informed jobholders’ decisions to forsake not only one or two jobseekers they found wanting but also numerous family members and friends, groups of people, and even social categories of jobseekers.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, these jobholders helped to produce and sustain a general status hierarchy that privileges workers over non-workers, those presumed to be motivated over those deemed lazy (Newman 1999; Newman and Ellis 1999). They also validated related moral boundaries that justify some jobseekers’ access to job-matching assistance and others’ exclusion from the same (Lamont 1992). Jobholders’ strategies of action may help to explain why black jobseekers are more likely to search through labor market intermediaries than are jobseekers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Elliot and Sims 2001; Falcon and Melendez 2001; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999).

*Passive resistance and passive assistance: When jobholders do the bare minimum*

Since 2003, all applicants for staff positions at the university have had to apply through the university’s online application system, and so providing the bare minimum help usually consisted of informing jobseekers about the status of hiring at the university and providing jobseekers with the Web address for the online application system. Passing along this basic information was one of the ways that jobholders assisted jobseeking relations. To date, much of the research on job search and job finding would explain this type of passive involvement on the part of jobholders in terms of the structural constraints that make more proactive assistance difficult if not impossible (Granovetter [1974] 1995). And indeed, two

jobholders explained the limited assistance they provided in terms of their *inability* to act more proactively; they would have loved nothing more than to act as a reference and/or to talk to hiring personnel on behalf of their jobseeking relations, but their own positions at the university did not afford them opportunities to establish the kinds of relationships with managers and supervisors that might have helped them to influence the hiring process more directly on behalf of their jobseeking relations.

It turns out, however, that when jobholders did the bare minimum, they also did so *because they had little to no interest at all in influencing the process directly*. But providing the bare minimum could be understood in two ways—as passive assistance or passive resistance. When jobholders assisted passively, they were generally receptive to helping; but because they did not know jobseekers well enough to determine whether they would work hard and fit in well, they adopted this strategy. As one Latina jobholder explained, “I wouldn’t dare to recommend someone I don’t know. For example, if they ask me if there is a job opening, I tell them: ‘Yes, you can go into the Web page and apply.’ But for me to personally, I would not go and recommend them if I don’t know them. If I know someone I will recommend them, but if not, I won’t.”

The conditions under which passive resistance occurred, however, were little different from those that led jobholders not to help at all. When jobholders perceived jobseekers to lack the requisite soft skills, they were wary of helping. In response, they might reject jobseekers’ requests outright (as Maria Hernandez did) or, as in the case of another respondent, they might lie to conceal their unwillingness to help. However, when jobholders did not want to help but felt too uncomfortable to adopt these strategies, or when they wanted to help but did not want to do so in such a way that would implicate them directly in the hiring process, they did the next best thing—they avoided conflict and saved face by providing jobseekers with information about the status of university hiring and directing them to the online application system. By doing so, they avoided rejecting jobseekers whose sincerity they questioned, but they did so in a way that did not directly implicate them in the hiring process or substantially improve jobseekers’ chances of hire. As evidence that some jobholders did not perceive this to be “real” help, it is worth noting that many jobholders who adopted this approach provided this explanation after being asked about a time *when they had decided against helping someone to find a job at their workplace*.

Freddy Jefferson is a prime example. The thirty-four-year-old custodial worker, employed four years at the university, reported that when jobseekers had approached him for job-finding assistance, he usually responded by doing the bare minimum. Freddy had recently decided against helping between five and ten jobseekers because he thought their requests for help were not based in a sincere desire to work. He refused to do more in most cases, he explained, because jobseekers failed to show him that they were really interested in working. About his most recent rejection, a young man from his neighborhood, Freddy explained, “[He] hangs out just all day, wasting his time all day. And he don’t have himself together, and every time I see him, he’s either drinking or just doing nothing. And



the only thing he just ask most of the time is, ‘Is they hiring? How could I get hooked up?’ You know?’ In response, Freddy informed the jobseeker that the university was hiring and wrote down the Web address for the online application system. When asked why he decided against helping him, Freddy responded,

Well, I consider that help. [Recall, however, that Freddy was responding to an initial set of questions about when he had most recently decided against helping someone.] I decided not to go the extra mile like I did with some of the other individuals that I’ve helped because [the other individuals] call me or they ask constantly, you know, or either they’re out somewhere trying to find another job, or just constantly looking for work; I help those individuals. The one that’s sitting there like this, “Hey, what’s up, can I get a job?” I don’t tend to really help those. Well, I’ll give them the Web site and everything and let them know they need a e-mail and go from there.

If nothing else, asking Freddy for a “hookup” probably doomed his neighbor’s chance to receive proactive assistance. A “hookup” is a colloquialism for a favor.<sup>9</sup> But the term is loaded with negative connotations. Whenever jobholders described being asked for a “hookup,” they did so with some measure of disdain because they interpreted requests made in this way to mean that the jobseekers before them were lazy, wanted something for nothing, and were little interested in achieving self-sufficiency. These jobseekers were deemed unworthy because they did not seem to comprehend that among the workers they approached, “work equals dignity and no one deserves a free ride” (Newman and Ellis 1999, 163).<sup>10</sup>

As shown in Figure 1, 25 percent of Latinos and 47 percent of blacks reported doing the bare minimum by providing help in the form of information and influence. But this difference is amplified by the following finding. By and large, Latino jobholders acted as passive *assisters*. When they did the bare minimum, they explained doing so in terms of the lack of information they had to determine whether jobseekers, often only acquaintances, would work out. Their black counterparts, however, were passive *resisters*. They were not often keen on helping at all because, based on what they knew about the jobseekers before them, many of whom they knew well, they were certain that these jobseekers would not work out. To avoid conflict and save face, they provided the bare minimum.

### *Helping proactively: When jobholders put their names on the line*

Jobholders discussed the jobseekers they helped proactively—those for whom they acted as a reference or whom they personally and directly vouched for—in glowing terms. Whether these were acquaintances or close, intimate relations, they drew moral boundaries that defined as worthy those deemed to have a strong work ethic, great character, and admirable interpersonal skills. Jobholders’ perceptions of jobseekers’ strong skill sets convinced them that these jobseekers would be good bets for employment and great contributions to the workplace. And just as jobholders were disinclined to assist, especially proactively, those they deemed to be insincere, for those who signified motivation well, help came quickly and proactively.



This was certainly the case for Jose Garcia, a forty-five-year-old Mexican American custodial worker who had been employed at the university for twenty-three years. Most recently, Jose had proactively helped a gas station attendant get a job as a custodian at the university. He did not know her well, but their daily interactions and his daily observations of her behavior at the gas station were instructive. Through these he learned that she was interested in working at the university. He also came to admire her work ethic. According to Jose, “She seemed like a hard worker. She was there every day keeping busy, doing stuff. . . . She was a cashier. I would see her mopping and I would see her cleaning out stuff and cashiering at the same time.” Impressed by her work ethic, Jose not only informed the gas station attendant when he learned of job openings at the university, he also gave her the appropriate job number to facilitate the application process, explained where she should go to apply online, and spoke to his supervisor on her behalf. “I just said, you know, ‘She’s a hard worker; she works hard.’” At the time of his interview for this project, Jose did not know if she had gotten hired, but hiring personnel had called her once to follow up.

In addition to jobseekers’ reputation for hard work, jobholders also looked to jobseekers’ marital and parental statuses to determine sincerity to work. For instance, when Enrique Vargas was asked how he decided to help a friend get a job at the university, in addition to highlighting his referral’s experience, the Mexican immigrant with eight years on the job explained, “He has a good marriage, he is a good husband, worker, and responsible.” Similarly, fifty-five-year-old Oakland native John Mann had recently urged an old friend to list him as a reference of close relation, “a cousin or good friend,” because, as he explained, he “always knew that [his friend] wanted to work, and he’s always looking for work. . . . And plus, he’s got family. He’s a family man. He’s dedicated to his family, so that made me feel like he needed a job; something that he could depend on every day and come to.” And Jacinto Castillo, an immigrant from Guatemala, explained that he helped a compatriot to get a custodial position at the university “because of the fact that she has kids and she also knows how to do the work. But also the fact that she wants to make more than she’s making.” In all three instances, one is taken by how jobholders’ perceptions of jobseekers’ sincerity, and thus worth, were affected not only by jobseekers’ ability to do the job but by jobseekers’ status as mothers and fathers, husbands and wives. In these roles, jobseekers were honored for being responsible and dedicated, but they were also assumed to be in great need. In the minds of jobholders who stressed these traits, this need had to be a significant motivating factor for jobseekers. After all, they reasoned, with such family obligations, jobseekers would not likely behave irresponsibly. Interestingly, in describing the criteria around which they drew moral boundaries—responsible, dedicated to family, hardworking—my respondents revealed strikingly similar criteria to those of the blue-collar workers in Michèle Lamont’s *The Dignity of Working Men* (2000). This similarity, too, suggests that workers are drawing from widely available scripts that define moral character in relation to individuals’ status as workers and providers. And these scripts are being deployed to inform jobholders’ decisions about whom to help.

Jobholders were not only motivated to put their names on the line for jobseekers with solid work reputations or impressive status, but they also reported proactively helping those with a troubled past. Under these circumstances, however, jobholders were even more sensitive to the question of sincerity. Without a solid work history to convince them, jobseekers' motivation was much more difficult to determine, but jobholders needed to be just as certain that jobseekers were "working material." To gauge sincerity in this context, then, jobholders paid close attention to whether jobseekers appeared to be engaged in some type of productive activity, such as working, looking for work as if jobseeking were a full-time job, or, importantly, taking other necessary steps to get one's life back on track. Jobholders were also motivated to respond proactively if jobseekers pressured them for help and acted on the information that jobholders provided on earlier occasions. The combination of the two was often enough to get jobholders to pressure their own bosses to consider these applicants seriously.

Although Freddy Jefferson (discussed earlier) had been unwilling to "go the extra mile" for jobseekers who did not appear intensely engaged in productive activity, including job search, he did proactively help those who met these criteria. Freddy, who reported that he most often passively *resisted* jobseekers who approached him, recently introduced a jobseeking friend to some of the supervisors in an effort to influence the hiring process in his favor. Explaining how the opportunity to help arose, Freddy stated,

He's unemployed at the moment. He went through some things with his ex-wife and stuff like that, and he's getting back on his feet. His mom been helping him out, so he just recently got his own apartment. So he want to get back independent, like he should be. And so he's out looking for jobs, and he asked me, "Hey Freddy, is they doing any hiring at Cal?" And I was like, "Well, yeah, you know, go to the Web site and dadada."

Freddy was inspired to help because his friend appeared to be working toward "getting back on his feet." But his assistance did not become proactive until *after* his friend made frequent requests for information about the status of hiring at the university. According to Freddy,

Well, what made me decide to help him is because he was eager, you know, he's very eager to find work and want to work, and he asked me several times in a week about Cal Berkeley. So, you know, when you have someone that's constantly like, "Hey, you know, what's up?" that's what made me want to help him out, because he was eager.

I cannot overstate the extent to which "being constantly asked" signified sincerity. During the course of his interview, Freddy made reference to being "asked constantly" at least three times—once to explain why he refused to go the extra mile (because jobseekers did not ask enough) and twice to explain why he did help proactively ("He kept asking me and asking me about the job"). And this was a common refrain for other black jobholders as well. Fifty-year-old Southern-born food service worker Denise George explained that she would not help unless she knew that jobseekers were "ready to work." How did she decide that they were ready? "Because if they're ready, they're going to constantly ask me, 'When the

job is going to call? When they're going to call? When you talk to your supervisor?" With this level of intensity, Denise was certain that jobseekers did want to work, and then she was willing to put the pressure on her own supervisor to seriously consider hiring her jobseeking relations. And recall, too, that being pressured at least in part convinced Shaniqua Woodard that jobseekers were sincere enough about their desire to work that she would be willing to talk to her manager on their behalf. This persistent behavior, alone and in combination with the other performances of sincerity, assured jobholders that the jobseekers before them were not just "acting like they wanted to work," as Celeste Henderson put it; they really did want to work.

As shown in Figure 1, 50 percent of Latinos recently helped proactively compared to just 27 percent of blacks. Differences, however, did not end here. When Latino jobholders discussed how they had come to help, they almost always spoke of jobseekers' reputation for hard work, and just as often, they remarked on how jobseekers' marital and/or parental status indicated both a *want* and a *need* to work. This latter insight is not a minor one as it helps us to make sense of the internal logic in operation. By and large, Latino jobholders perceived Latinos to be very good workers, if not the best. They sensed that the university appreciated and preferred Latinos to workers from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, and it was their sense, too, that in general, employers sought a Latino workforce whenever they could get one. When asked to explain why Latinos were viewed so positively, Latino jobholders explained that because many had family to support in their countries of origin, they did not have the luxury to slack off or complain about working conditions.<sup>11</sup> As Carlos Jimenez, an immigrant from Guatemala, explained,

When we come here, for example, from places like Central America, we come with the need to work and we have people back in our countries. So people work harder, like what I was telling you before, they are not going to put up a big stink about what you make them do. And, if you are born here, you know more about your rights and you are going to say: "That's not for me to do. I don't do that." So then we [Latinos] have to go and do it. So these are things that I see like . . . and people who come from other places have to do it, that's the reality.

Thus, among Latinos, especially immigrant Latinos, jobseekers' marital and parental statuses were important markers because they were certain that jobseekers in these roles had a built-in motivation to work hard.

Furthermore, it was widely perceived that Latinos' need to work and to work harder than the next helped to establish the groups' reputation as hard workers on campus. As forty-four-year-old custodial worker Alberto Martinez explained, "Well . . . to tell you the truth—not because I'm Mexican, but most of the Mexican workers are the hardest and the best workers on the campus as far as the custodial department. Because they'll go out and get everything clean and detail it. Whereas other ones will just run through it. . . ." And as Carlos explained,

Okay, look, from the experiences that I have heard about, in food services and in other places, they really like Latinos a lot and give them a lot. But it is because they are hard

workers and I am not saying that there is anyone that doesn't work equally, you know what I mean, but the majority. . . . I have seen that in many departments they appreciate you for your way of working, because the supervisors, I'll be honest, if you are a supervisor and you see a group working better than another group that is causing problems, you aren't going to want them. But yes, I have seen that many of them . . . in many areas in the university, they really appreciate Latinos.

Thus, given their embeddedness in networks of working relations, and given prevailing scripts that promote the virtuousness of working, especially in the most exploitative circumstances, in service of one's family, Latino jobholders entered social interactions with their jobseeking relations with far less skepticism about their relations' sincerity to work. Instead, often presuming trustworthiness, dependability, stability, and determination, especially if jobseekers before them were married with children, Latino jobholders were willing to help and to do so proactively. Importantly, the dramatic displays of sincerity that seemed critical for black jobholders were far less necessary among Latinos.

Black jobholders like John Mann also made distinctions based on jobseekers' marital and parental status, deploying a similar logic about why these roles ensured built-in motivation. But to a far greater extent, black jobholders highlighted how much effort their jobseeking relations put into searching for work (including constantly asking for help) and getting their lives back on track. And while none of the Latino jobholders who helped proactively did so because jobseekers "asked constantly" or "pressured" them for help, this was a common (if not "the" common) refrain among black jobholders who put their names on the line. Black jobholders were more likely to be embedded in networks abundant with *nonworkers*, and they had ready access to cultural resources, widely available and deeply held scripts that explain pervasive and chronic joblessness in terms of the moral shortcomings of individuals. Willingness to help, then, and to do so proactively, surfaces only after jobseekers prove themselves motivated and thus worthy of assistance. In this context, then, proof of sincerity most often came in the form of jobseekers' dramatic displays of interest: asking jobholders several days in a row about job vacancies at the university or inquiring regularly and passionately about the status of their submitted applications. Such displays signaled to jobholders that jobseekers were not just "acting like they want to work."

## Is Reluctance to Help a Symptom or a Cause?

Why should we care that there are racial and ethnic differences in the extent and nature of personal contact use during job search? For more than twenty-five years, urban poverty and joblessness scholars have sought to understand the causes of chronic black joblessness from a social network and social capital perspective. The conventional wisdom that emerged from this collective project was that persistent black joblessness was at least in part a function of blacks' relatively poor access to working (and mainstream) relations, jobholders well positioned to inform jobseekers about job opportunities and influence their hire. What I offer

as a complement is that even when disadvantaged blacks have access to working (and mainstream) relations, these relations might have little motivation or incentive to inform or influence. The implication of this proposition is that jobholders' reluctance to help and to do so proactively is a contributing factor in disadvantaged blacks' chronic joblessness.

Assuming black jobholders' reluctance, the question remains as to whether such reluctance, fueled by widely available and deeply held understandings of joblessness, is a contributing cause or a symptom of the underlying factors that feed black joblessness. There are strong arguments in support of both perspectives. For some black jobholders in this study, reluctance to help extended to groups or social categories of people. Recall jobholders like Celeste Henderson, who would not consider helping people who lived in her neighborhood, judging them all to be insincere about their desire to work. And then there was Tyrone Baxter, a forty-seven-year-old custodial worker and small business owner who has categorically refused to hire young black men because, after a number of bad experiences, he was convinced that, as a group, they lacked a work ethic. Whenever Tyrone had small, temporary jobs, he was willing to hire older, more mature black men like himself, but his preference for permanent labor was Latino workers, because, according to Tyrone, "they make it happen." Decisions like these to exclude categories of people from consideration, I would argue, do contribute to problems of joblessness because they also exclude from consideration individuals within those groups who, by jobholders' own criteria, would be worthy and deserving of assistance. And through amplification, these decisions also function to perpetuate negative stereotypes about low-income blacks that justify blacks' continued stigmatization and exclusion from access to society's valued resources.

But jobholders' reluctance may also be a symptom of larger forces that make finding and keeping work among the truly disadvantaged a daunting affair; in which case, even if black jobholders helped more, blacks' problems of joblessness likely will remain chronic. Among the truly disadvantaged, there are multiple barriers to employment, including, to name a few, low proficiency in basic skills, limited human capital, lack of transportation, lack of safe and affordable child care and other familial obligations, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues including depression. Many must contend with a number of these barriers, and each additional barrier substantially reduces the likelihood that those bearing its burden will find and keep work. To the extent that jobholders interpret jobseekers' inability to effectively cope with these barriers as evidence of the jobseekers' lacking motivation and choose not to help, even if they are incorrect about why the jobseekers should not be seriously considered, they are probably correct in assuming that the match will not work because the multiple barriers that make finding and keeping work for some have not been dismantled. Thus, jobholders' reluctance is likely both a symptom and a contributing factor in persistent black joblessness, but only through future research that focuses on the role that cultural resources play in the mobilization of social capital will we be able to sort out these complex relationships.

## Notes

1. Low-income blacks, on the other hand, are substantially more likely to search for and find work through formal intermediaries than are their low-income Latino counterparts (Elliot and Sims 2001; Falcon and Melendez 2001; Green, Tigges, and Diaz 1999).

2. This article is part of a larger project examining the mechanisms generating racial and ethnic differences in the perceived costs and risks associated with providing job-finding assistance. For the larger project, Asian and white custodial and food service workers have also been interviewed; and for a class comparison, my team and I have also interviewed white-collar workers employed in administrative support occupations.

3. In a previous study of UC Berkeley workers' experiences of work in the context of the university's corporatization (Purser, Schalet, and Sharone 2004), it was reported that although workers rarely complained about their work conditions, they were thoroughly dissatisfied with their wages, which had not kept up with inflation and were significantly lower than those offered at similar institutions in the area; with their working conditions, which were often perceived as "unacceptably dangerous"; and with supervisors, who treated workers with disrespect. It was not unusual for the workers interviewed for this study to communicate similar grievances. Most, however, also reported that because the university's benefits were so generous and the work relatively easy to do, they had no intention of leaving the university. The overwhelming majority also shared that for these reasons, they would not hesitate to recommend jobs at the university to their friends, relatives, and acquaintances. Indeed, many acted as gatekeepers, protecting *the university* from jobseekers they deemed inadequate to be Cal employees.

4. An important factor that would affect jobholders' likelihood of providing job-matching assistance is whether or how quickly they learn about job vacancies. In the staff common areas of the various work units on campus, current job openings are posted every two weeks. These postings provide tips on how to apply for positions and where to call to receive further assistance. Most important, the regular postings list the positions for which the university is hiring, including the job title, the number corresponding with the job, the unit offering employment, the type of position (career or limited), and the date at which applications will no longer be accepted. Every worker we interviewed indicated that these postings were the primary means by which he or she learned about new job opportunities at the university. Thus, it appears that among custodial and food service workers, few were systematically advantaged in gaining access to information about job opportunities. To the extent that there were differences in the likelihood of providing assistance among the workers interviewed for this study, it was not because information diffusion privileged some jobholders over others.

5. Within occupational categories, the tasks for which custodial and food service workers were responsible did not differ by race/ethnicity. Food service workers often worked side by side doing the same task, and although custodial workers were assigned to different buildings, the tasks they were expected to complete were the same.

6. When asked how they decided against helping, few mentioned hard skills or work experience. This is not surprising given that their positions require few skills that cannot be easily learned on the job. According to custodial workers, it takes roughly eight weeks to become completely proficient at their job. Among food service workers, it takes less than four weeks to do so.

7. Two points are worth mentioning. First, although there are three categories listed—no help, passive help, and proactive help—there are actually four categories of action. The fourth category includes those who had chosen not to take part in the job-matching process at all. These jobholders claimed to not know about recent job openings or to not know anyone who was looking for work recently, and so they neither decided to help nor decided against helping. Three black jobholders and three Latino jobholders fall into this category. Second, the three categories that are accounted for and discussed in detail are not mutually exclusive. Jobholders could both decide against helping one or more jobseeking relations while also deciding to help, either proactively or passively, one or more other jobseeking relations. Indeed, sixteen jobholders (eleven black and five Latino) decided not to help some while also providing assistance to others.

8. Jobholders could have also deployed scripts that privilege structural explanations for jobseekers' employment problems and jobseeking behaviors. Overwhelmingly, they did not. Assuming that these, too, are in their repertoire of scripts (and previous research suggests that they are—see Smith 2007; Young 2004), the question is why they choose not to. Although it is unclear from these data why certain scripts



are preferred over others, I speculate that in this context, jobholders' script preferences may be a function of one or more of the following: these scripts absolve jobholders of responsibility for the more vulnerable members of their network of relations (see Gans [1995] on the functions of undeservingness), who often face multiple barriers to employment (Danziger et al. 2000); jobholders support status hierarchies that privilege stable workers like themselves over those with more tenuous labor market links (Gans 1995); and, relatedly, as jobholders struggle to make ends meet, these scripts allow them to feel justified in the choices they have made to work in low-level service jobs—cleaning and food service. There are, after all, limits to the dignity of low-wage, low-skilled work (Newman 1999; Lamont 2000).

9. It is also a colloquialism for engaging in any type of sex act with another ([www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com)).

10. Because the jobseekers' perspective is not a focus of study here, I cannot say with certainty why some jobseekers did not approach jobholders in ways that would have increased the likelihood of social capital mobilization. Jobholders contend that these behaviors are indicative of jobseekers' insincerity, and they might be correct. But another motivation might be operating. It might be the case as well that jobseekers reject the boundaries around which jobholders determine moral worth and thumb their noses at a status hierarchy that places them at the bottom. Some jobseekers might interpret "asking constantly" or "pressuring" jobholders for help as behaviors of the undeserving and tacit acceptance of their place in that hierarchy.

11. Even naturalized citizens expressed fear that as immigrants, they did not have the same rights as their native-born counterparts; and even if they did, they were often ignorant of these rights. As a result, they sought to make themselves indispensable to employers, even accepting hazardous or unacceptable working conditions if doing so would preserve their jobs.

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