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FAMILY IN THE WORKPLACE: JOB-GETTING AND CONTACTS
AMONG RELATIVES

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Summary:

Previous research has documented the importance of personal contacts as channels for information and job-getting. The present research looks specifically at family ties and, as expected, finds that better educated and skilled employees are less likely than others to report the presence of family ties at work. These relationships, however, hold primarily for white employees. Better educated blacks are as likely to report family ties as their less well-educated counterparts. It is possible that such ties channel blacks into positions which are not commensurate with their education. If so, this may in part explain why education has a stronger impact on occupational status and income for whites than for blacks and suggests some concrete remedial policies.

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FAMILY IN THE WORKPLACE: JOB-GETTING
AND CONTACTS AMONG RELATIVES

The importance of informal personal contacts as channels for information is well documented (e.g., Katz; Lee; Coleman et al.). The significance of these contacts has been especially well established for the job search. Studies of blue-collar workers, white-collar workers and professionals unanimously find that more job contacts are made informally than by formal procedures and that informal contacts often reflect links with friends or relatives (e.g., Ullman and Taylor; Edelman et al.; Sheppard and Belitsky; Shapero et al.; Granovetter).

Despite these findings, the nature of the connections between the family and workplace remain relatively unexplored. Twenty years ago Smelser argued that industrialization had succeeded in breaking up the family as a producing unit. Subsequently, work and family life came to be viewed as being distinct and independent. Recently, however, Tilly and Scott and Oppenheimer have challenged this view. They argue that families have continued to provide the locus for employment decisions. While actual production is not carried out in the home, decisions about who will work have remained important family functions. Kanter explores the need for research on the impact of employment and particular occupations on men and women in the family context.

This paper seeks to document connections between family membership and employment. Specifically, families are viewed as mechanisms for financial as well as social support. They can help members secure occupational positions. Yet there is little research which deals specifically with the interplay between family membership and job-getting.~ Rather,

since the 1930s, research on the job search has lumped together friends and relatives as important job contacts (Lurie and Rayack: 87; Myers and MacLaurin: 47; Myers and Schultz: 48, 53; Reynolds and Shister: 39; Wilcock and Sobel: 137). And whether friends and relatives are characterized as "personal contacts" (Granovetter: 13) or as "the grapevine," (Franke and Folk: 139) distinctions are not made between social and familial contacts, either in the text of studies or in the questionnaires administered to the workers consulted. (See, for example, de Schweinitz: 86-87; Franke and Folk: 189-190; Wilcock and Franke: 314.) Given the goals of the above studies it has not been necessary or even desirable to distinguish family contacts from social contacts. However, as a result of this failure to distinguish family from social ties, we know little about the specific role which the family may play in the job search. A few studies of migrants in a new city, however, have distinguished between the role of the family and of friends in the settlement process (Anderson; Choldin; Litwak; Tilly and Brown). This paper attempts to contribute to our understanding of the family-workplace connection by identifying the types of individuals who are most likely to use family connections in their job search.

Individual Characteristics and the Use of Family Ties in Job-Getting

Lurie and Rayack (88) found that semi-skilled and unskilled workers were likely to use informal methods of job getting, including personal contacts and direct application at the job site, than were either skilled or white collar workers. It also is reasonable to infer that levels of skill and training would affect the degree to which job seekers depend

on family ties, because of differential access to other ties. For example, the college education of white collar workers and job training of skilled workers may give these people greater chances for fruitful job ties outside their families. They also may have greater access to formal channels of information such as employment bulletins of professional societies and of unions. Unskilled workers, on the other hand, have fewer opportunities to form formal or informal relationships that are linked specifically with employment opportunities.

Applicants seeking positions requiring skill or training will be selected, in part at least, on the basis of their objective qualifications. Since training is a less important criterion for hiring into low skilled jobs, factors such as the presence of family ties may become more salient. Members of families already represented in the organization would be disproportionately represented among the applicant pool, because they would have greater access to information about possible openings, about the nature of the job, and about the employer. Given their greater access to information about jobs, they also may be more likely to be selected. They also would be more likely to be hired if the organization used hiring decisions as a means for making sidepayments to those already employed or if those with influence over the decisions tended to hire their own relatives or relatives of their co-worker friends. Consequently, faced with two similar applicants, the employer would be more likely to hire the relative than the non-relative.

Any or all of these possibilities would result in the same outcome: low skill individuals applying for positions which require little training would be more likely to secure their jobs through family ties than

would their more trained counterparts who apply for positions requiring greater skill. Employees already in low-skill positions also may be more likely than others to play an important role in helping their relatives find jobs. They will have knowledge about other low-skill jobs for which their unskilled--or even skilled--relatives may be qualified. Employees in positions requiring skill are likely to have information primarily about other skilled job openings. Communicating this information to relatives will be useful only if the relative has the requisite training or experience.

These considerations suggest that the use of family ties for job-getting is likely to occur most frequently for those with less training or education and skill. However, this may vary substantially as a function of employees' race. Duncan, Hauser and Featherman (133-136), Siegel, and Weiss have shown that education has a larger impact on occupational status and on salary for whites than it does for blacks. It is possible that, given equal levels of education, whites have more success with non-familial channels of job-seeking than do blacks. Parnes (190) found that young black men had much less extensive information about employment opportunities than whites, even when educational levels were equal. Less successful in the use of formal channels which an education opens to whites, educated blacks may tend to fall back upon family ties, ties also used by their less-well-educated fellow workers. Education, therefore, may not discriminate among blacks who do and who do not use family ties in their job search. At least education and the use of family ties may be less strongly associated for blacks than for whites. ~

The same differences may operate to reduce the impact of skill on the use of family ties by blacks. Limited in their success with non-familial job-getting channels available for those exhibiting adequate training and/or experience, skilled blacks may have to rely on family ties as much as their less skilled fellow workers. Since blacks tend to occupy unskilled positions, these ties may channel skilled and/or educated blacks into positions not commensurate with their training.

Similarly, the impact of skill or education on use of family ties may be reduced for Mexican Americans. As a group Mexican Americans, like blacks, receive inferior benefits from education in terms of income and occupational status (see, for example, Shannon and Krass). In the 1960s, they did not keep pace with the general occupational shift to white collar and better paying positions (Moore: 64-65). Mexican Americans are generally included with whites in data on employment. They are referred to here because they are a growing segment of the American labor force and are particularly important in the five Southeastern states (Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas). In Texas, where this study took place, Mexican Americans represented over 20% of the population in 1978 (U.S. Bureau of the Census: 2).

These considerations specify a three variable model of determinants of the use of family ties in job-getting. Utilization of family ties in job getting should be inversely related to educational attainment and skill level for whites but not for blacks or Mexican Americans. In addition, employee gender and geographic origin may play a role in reliance on relatives for obtaining employment. Women may tend to rely

on informal contact networks more than men (Moch and Tilly). One type of informal contact frequently utilized by women involves extended kinship networks (Smith). It may be, therefore, that females will be more likely than males to utilize family ties in their job search. However, de Schweinitz (89) found that women were slightly less likely than men to have found jobs through personal contacts.

Rural origins also may augment the likelihood that family ties will be used in securing employment. Rural to urban migration does not appear to destroy links within the extended family (Litwak; Young and Wilmott). Ties continue to exist and can function to help the new arrival find work (Choldin; Tilly and Brown; Anderson). Migrants also may be relatively unfamiliar with and/or have few links to non-familial resources available to assist in job getting. They therefore may be more likely to use family ties than those who have lived longer and are more familiar with the job-getting resources of the community and have friendship links to jobs.

The original three variable model specifying determinants of the use of family ties, therefore, may be expanded to include rural origin and gender. The model specifies four main effects: education, skill, gender, and rural/urban origin. It also specifies two interaction effects: education and skill are seen as more important factors for whites than for blacks or Mexican Americans. In sum, we hypothesize (a) that levels of education and skill will be inversely related to utilization of family ties. We hypothesize that (b) the effects of education and skill level will be attenuated for blacks and Mexican Americans. Last, we hypothesize that (c) women and workers from rural origins will be more likely than men and workers from urban origins to use family ties. We do not

hypothesize that race or ethnic group will affect the use of family ties, except insofar as it is linked with levels of skill and education. (See Granovetter: 1 and Franke and Folk: 139.)

DATA AND MEASURES

This model was assessed using data gathered from a medium-size assembly and packaging plant. Five-hundred twenty-two of the 764 people employed by the plant were surveyed. They included skilled machine maintenance personnel (N=39) and the assemblers and packagers (unskilled, N=434). A majority of the employees were female (61%). Twenty-five percent were black, 12% were Mexican American and 62% were white. Thirty-seven percent of the employees were raised in a rural area, yet the plant itself was located in a very large city. The plant, therefore, offered an excellent opportunity to test the hypotheses presented above, and to assess the extent to which observed relationships vary by race and ethnic group. In particular, it was possible to distinguish between the effects of education, skill, sex and origin for whites, blacks, and Mexican Americans.

The labor force in the plant was highly stratified by sex, race, and education. Skilled workers were significantly more likely to have a high school degree than were the unskilled staff ($p \leq .0001$). Blacks and Mexican-Americans were underrepresented among skilled laborers ($p \leq .05$). In fact, the sample included only three blacks and only two Mexican Americans who were skilled laborers. Moreover, although 61% of the workers were female, none of the females sampled were skilled laborers. Employees of rural and urban origins were about proportionately represented among the skilled and the unskilled personnel.

For the most part, therefore, employees who belonged to groups generally considered to be disadvantaged tended to hold positions in the plant which required less skill and education. These jobs also had the lowest rate of compensation. Those without a high school degree, blacks, Mexican Americans and women were all disproportionately represented among unskilled workers. Moreover, education did not appear to open skilled jobs to blacks. They were underrepresented among those in skilled positions despite the fact that they had relatively more education than the other employees ($p < .05$).

As part of the survey, employees at all levels were asked to report their race or ethnic group. In addition, they reported their sex, years of schooling and size of home town. Replies were coded into dichotomous variables for gender, education (high school diploma/no high school diploma) and origins (rural/non-rural).

In addition, employees were asked to list their relatives in the plant. They were not asked whether these relatives played a role in securing their employment or whether they had helped their relatives get their jobs. However, it is reasonable to assume that relatives played a role by talking about the jobs, by passing along information that the plant was hiring, or by urging the employer to hire the relative. The presence or absence of other family members in the plant therefore was taken as an indication that relatives played a role in helping the respondent get his or her job or that the respondent played a role in helping his/her relative find work in the plant.

METHODOLOGY

The dependent variable in this analysis is a dichotomy--whether or not an employee was related to another person in the plant. The estimate of the dependent variable produced by the model may be interpreted as the probability that an individual had a relative in the plant; the mean probability of a family relationship is the percentage of group members who have a relative in the plant. In this situation, probit analysis is appropriate. The probit model assumes that the underlying probability function is the cumulative normal distribution.¹ Probit is especially appropriate for predicting a dichotomous dependent variable because it constrains the predicted probabilities to a range of 0 to 1. The probit coefficients are not directly interpretable, but do allow for comparisons across subsamples. They are not standardized with respect to the independent variables. A maximum likelihood solution is estimated through an iterative technique. This method was used to estimate the impact of education, skill, sex and origin on the probability that the employee had at least one relative working in the plant. To determine the effect of race, separate probit analyses were conducted for whites, blacks and Mexican Americans.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Employees were scored on the basis of whether they did or did not have at least one other family member in the plant. Of the 522 respondents, 34% had at least one other relative in the plant. Twenty-nine percent were related to only one other person, but 5% were related to more than one. Some of the larger family groups had as many as ten members. There was almost no difference in the likelihood of a relative

present in the plant among the three groups: 34% of the whites, 34% of the blacks, and 35% of the Mexican Americans were related to at least one other employee.

Insert Table 1 about here

The results of the probit analysis for each group are presented in Table 1. For whites, a high school diploma lowers the chances of family ties. Employment as a skilled worker in the plant also lowers the chances of family ties. The coefficients for these variables indicate that whites were less likely to have family ties at work to the extent that they were relatively well educated and occupied a skilled position. This is consistent with the thesis that education and training open alternative channels of access to jobs. Relatively uneducated or unskilled whites were more likely to report the presence of family ties at work. These ties may have been one of the few sources of information or, perhaps, leverage available for the relatively uneducated and unskilled whites.

Neither gender nor origin had a statistically significant effect on family ties for whites. White females do not appear to utilize family links much more frequently than their male counterparts. White employees who migrated from a rural area were just about as likely as other whites to follow family connections into the workplace. There is no evidence, therefore, that, for whites migration increases the importance of family ties as devices for securing employment.

Coefficients reported in Table 1 for blacks are quite different from those reported for whites. First, there were too few blacks in skilled positions to warrant including skill as an independent variable.

Second, as predicted, relatively well educated blacks were as likely to have family ties at work as were less well educated black workers. A high school diploma lowered the chances of family ties by an insignificant amount. This supports the argument that education does not provide blacks with the access to successful formal or to non-familial informal mechanisms of job-getting that it affords to whites. If this is the case, it could help to explain why education does not have the effect on occupational status and salary for blacks that it has for whites (Duncan; Hauser and Featherman; Siegel; Weiss). Constrained in their success with other channels, even relatively well-educated blacks may resort to family ties for securing work, ties which channel them into the relatively low-status, low-salary jobs occupied by those who helped the employee secure them. Interestingly, however, blacks were no more likely to have family ties at work than were whites. Thirty-four percent of the employees of both races reported having at least one other relative in the plant. Family ties, therefore, do not compensate blacks or provide blacks with a job-getting resource not available to and/or used by whites. The sole impact of race involves the relative impact of education on the use of family ties. Skill also did not decrease the use of family ties by blacks, but this was because too few blacks had been put in the positions required to receive the skill which might have given them access to non-familial job-getting resources.

Sex and origin were not significantly associated with the presence of family ties for blacks. For blacks, being male increased the chances of family ties; the relationship between sex and family ties is in the reverse direction than hypothesized but it is not statistically significant.

The difference among blacks from rural and non-rural origins also was insignificant.

Mexican Americans, like blacks, were so underrepresented among skilled personnel that it was not feasible to include this variable in the analysis. Like whites, however, Mexican Americans with relatively more education were less likely than others to report the presence of family ties in the workplace. It appears that education gives Mexican Americans the access to viable non-familial channels of job-getting that it gives to whites. Relatively well educated Mexican Americans, moreover, appear to be even less likely to use family ties than their well educated white coworkers. The coefficient relating education and family ties for Mexican Americans is more than twice that observed for whites.

Sex had a substantial association with family ties for Mexican Americans. It also was in the expected direction: Mexican American females were more likely than their male counterparts to have family ties at work. This supports the thesis that women are more intimately tied into kinship networks than are men; however, the data suggest that this relationship is moderated by culture.

Finally, Mexican Americans from a rural area were less likely than others to report the presence of family ties at work. This is not statistically significant; however, it suggests that family links for job-getting may be more available to members of established families than they are to relative newcomers. The fact that this association only occurred for Mexican Americans also indicates that it may be culturally specific.

In sum, the patterns of association were different for each racial group. For whites, education and skill level were significantly and inversely related to the presence of family ties. Neither gender nor origins were of importance. For blacks neither a high school diploma, rural origins nor gender had a significant impact; although black males appeared to be relatively likely to have family ties in the plant. For Mexican Americans both education and gender were significant predictors and even origins seemed to be relatively important. Only for blacks did a high school diploma not reduce the chances of family ties at work.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The data provide support for the thesis that family networks are most frequently used by those who have the least education, and that this relationship is moderated substantially by race. Also, family links overall did not aid blacks or Mexican-Americans more or less than whites. About one-third of the employees of all three races reported the presence of family ties. This is consistent with data presented by Lurie and Rayack (86-88) and by Parnes et al. (102-104) who found no differential use of informal contacts by race. In these studies, however, contacts were not limited to family ties, and Parnes's sample was limited to males between the ages of 14 and 24 years of age. The data reported here indicate that race does not have a main effect on the tendency for adult employees to utilize family networks in the job search process. They also indicate that sex and origin do not, in general, affect the likelihood that family contacts will be used in the job search. The fact that Mexican American females are more likely to report family

ties than are Mexican American males suggests that any tendency for females to be more tightly integrated than males into kinship networks--and therefore more likely to use them in the job search process--may be culturally specific.

The interaction effects of education, skill, and race suggest alternative causal explanations. On the one hand, prejudicial treatment may explain why blacks are underrepresented among skilled positions and why education does not seem to reduce the extent to which blacks rely on family ties for job-getting. An alternative explanation is that social patterns persist even after employers' policies change. The plant studied desegregated its facilities over twenty years ago, long before it was required to do so by law. Hiring practices also have changed, and there is considerable emphasis on--and some modest success with--increasing the proportion of blacks even among skilled personnel. It may be that blacks' levels of education are not associated with the presence or absence of family ties because family connections represent a traditional pattern of job-getting for blacks at all levels of education.

Such a pattern may maintain itself long after alternative job-getting resources have been made available. The relatives who provide blacks with information about job openings have had--and therefore would know about--primarily low status jobs. This is consistent with Lurie and Rayack, who find that ethnic ties lead new employees into selected industries and jobs. They also note that "informal search... operates more effectively for white workers, since their friends and relatives are already integrated within all levels of the occupational

structure (92)." The jobs over which blacks have influence are likely to be primarily those requiring little skill or training. To the extent that they follow traditional patterns of job-getting, therefore, blacks are likely to be channeled into jobs which are not commensurate with their level of education or training.

The impact of education on occupational status and salary eventually may be the same for blacks as for whites. To help this happen, however, it may not be enough to eliminate discrimination in access to job-getting resources. Traditional informal patterns of job-getting may also have to be utilized or changed. The plant studied here is making an attempt to hire and train skilled black laborers. Prejudicial employment practices--even those overtly practiced in the past--therefore do not account entirely for the data reported here. Rather, the networks of contacts through which people find out about and secure employment appear to function to channel prospective employees along well-established--and racially biased--routes.

This finding suggests that affirmative action programs might attempt to short circuit these networks. Formal posting procedures undoubtedly help; however, they are likely to be inadequate. Perhaps employers should consciously go about using the family connections of those few blacks currently in high-status positions. Ironically, such a policy would support at least selective nepotism at a time when more universalistic hiring criteria are being emphasized. Reducing nepotism, however, is likely only to prevent qualified--and over-qualified--blacks as well as whites and others from gaining even low-status positions.

Family connections are clearly important in this plant where a third of the employees surveyed are related to at least one other worker. Unfortunately, we do not know if the family connections that were found are unusually frequent or infrequent, because they have not been investigated on a national basis. Our findings suggest, however, that family relationships among coworkers may be quite common. Moreover, they can be common outside the situations in which they might be expected, such as in coal mines or factories located in rural communities and small towns.

The frequency, nature and mechanics of these relations warrant further research. How closely related are coworkers? If they are members of the same nuclear family it would be interesting to assess the impact of a common employer on family relations. This would be enlightening whether the employees are parent and offspring, husband and wife or siblings. Here we investigated family connections as aids in job-getting, but more complete information on contacts among relatives would help to identify the impact of these connections on other aspects of life at work. Of course, the American labor force of the 1970's remains quite different from that of preindustrial society when families frequently worked together in a common agricultural or artisanal enterprise. The family-workplace connection, however, continues to have a significant impact on workers' lives.

Footnote

¹An alternative, logit, assumes a logistic distribution. These two functions are similar, with small differences in the tails of the distributions (Hanusheck and Jackson: 204).

Table 1

Unstandardized Probit Coefficients Relating Presence of Family Ties at Work to Education, Skill, Gender and Rural Origins of Worker for Whites, Blacks and Mexican Americans

Race	Predictors				N
	Education 1=No High School Diploma 2=High School Diploma	Skill 1=Not Skilled Labor 2=Skilled Labor	Sex 1=Female 2=Male	Origin 1=Not From Rural Area 2=From Rural Area	
White	-.19*	-.58**	-.07	-.02	313
Black	-.07	--	.25	-.06	126
Mexican American	-.48*	--	-.68*	-.46	60

*Coefficient ≤ 1.5 x standard deviation.

**Coefficient ≤ 2 x standard deviation.

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